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Cooperation and Conflict 2011 46: 185

DOI: 10.1177/0010836711406377

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Cooperation and Conflict

46(2) 185–200

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DOI: 10.1177/0010836711406377

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Abstract

The conceptualization of international community presents important challenges for the study of international relations. This article suggests that it is best considered as an attempt to build a universalistic framework through transnational practices that however remains challenged by particularistic dynamics, even though it is supposed to be common to all international actors. The article addresses both the complexity and the normative implications of community-building at the international level through the example of the Alliance of Civilizations, a programme of the United Nations which aims to promote intercultural understanding and thus to counter tendencies towards a 'clash of civilizations'. Among similar attempts, the late-1990s and early-2000s Dialogue among Civilizations appears both as a blueprint and as a measure of difference of outlook and development. The universalistic outlook of such efforts is challenged by the essential place of states, the singling out of tensions between the 'West' and the 'Muslim world' which points to exclusionary tendencies, and the reliance on security references to favour stakeholderhood by international actors in the community-building attempt.

Keywords

inter-cultural relations, international community, universalism

Introduction

This article conceptualizes international community as a framework built by a substantial group of international actors with universalistic aspirations and a reliance on the development of transnational practices. Through this argument, the article aims to address a concept that theories about international relations have been difficult to grasp (see Linklater, 1990). The conceptualization of international community is exemplified through the case of the Alliance of Civilizations (AoC) programme at the United Nations

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(UN), the goal of which is ‘to improve understanding and cooperative relations among nations and peoples across cultures and, in the process, to help counter the forces that fuel polarisation and extremism’ and that claims ‘a global scope underpinned by a universal perspective, while placing a priority on addressing relations between Western and Muslim societies’ (UN, 2007: 5). It has a negative blueprint in the ‘clash of civilizations’ (Huntington, 1993) like other initiatives aiming to counter the idea of inevitable international conflict triggered by cultural divergences (see Balci, 2009: 99–103). Among these, the Dialogue among Civilizations (DaC) initiated by then Iranian President Mohammad Khatami in the late 1990s stands out.

The article proceeds in four steps. First, it discusses more in depth the theoretical background of conceptualizing international community as an attempt relying on practices to extend the universalistic claims of a substantive group of international actors. The next section then discusses how the AoC’s search for relevance and participation at the international level leads to the singling out of relations between the ‘West’ and the ‘Muslim world’, triggering security-centred stakeholdership and exclusionary dynamics which run counter to a universalistic perspective. The difficulties of according universalistic outlooks with the involvement of international actors as stakeholders in the community are then fleshed out by comparing the AoC to the DaC. The last section, however, points to other dynamics of community-building, notably the ties between universalistic outlook and non-state-centred practices within the AoC, which is thus a multilayered community framework.

International community as a category of international order

Conceptualizing international community as an attempt to build a universalistic framework, supported by a group of international actors and based on the emergence and development of transnational practices, sets the notion apart from the essentially self-serving references in international politics and the frequently unsubstantiated and contradictory mentions by scholars (Ellis, 2009: 2–5). More thorough reflections have been in short supply, notwithstanding former British Prime Minister Tony Blair’s 1999 ‘doctrine of international community’ on the one hand (Blair, 1999) and recent attempts to clarify the notion on the other (Buzan and González-Peláez, 2005; Ellis, 2009; Bliesemann de Guevara and Kühn, 2009).

Studying the case of the AoC addresses the three main issues that conceptualizations of community at the international level have to tackle. First, ‘it is not altogether clear that all the necessary requirements for an international community exist’ (Ellis, 2009: 9) if it is supposed to be a unitary actor tackling global challenges through an organization such as the UN. The conceptualization exemplified here through the study of the AoC is accordingly more modest when it comes to the degree of unity and formalization. It presumes, however, that there is an international community, be it only in light of E. H. Carr’s observation:

[...] that there is in fact a widespread assumption of the existence of a worldwide community of which states are the units and that the conception of the moral obligations of states is closely

bound up with this assumption. There is a world community for the reason (and for no other) that people talk, and within certain limits behave, as if there were a world community. (2001: 147)

Second, international community might refer both to large-scale international actors such as a coalition of states or multilateral organizations, on the one hand, and smaller-scale communities on the other (Buzan and González-Peláez, 2005: 34). While not discounting the former notion, community-building gains relevance among international actors when it leads to a 'community of practice', a group of actors brought together around a certain domain to which they have a social commitment and not defined by clear-cut criteria of organizational affiliation or membership (see Adler, 2005: 15). Importantly, the AoC as a framework for building international community is a transnational community of practice, and participation extends beyond UN members or international organizations. This is expressed by its officials referring to 'members, partners and stakeholders' (Sampaio, 2010: 4) when they talk about participants.

But third, reflecting the use by political leaders, and also in international treaties, international community appears as 'a discursively formed group of agents who interact in the international political realm' and even a 'rhetorical device' (Bliesemann de Guevara and Kühn, 2009: 74). The ensuing epistemological and normative doubts are exemplified by Carr's warning that while an international community could be held to exist through references to it and associated behaviour, equality in it is 'difficult to define' and has hardly ever been attempted, as the prevalence of a common good over particular interests 'is not generally accepted' (Carr, 2001: 147–51). Accordingly, the case of the AoC confirms the normative ambiguity of community, which:

[...] is not intrinsically nice. Community sounds warm and fuzzy, but, especially if it is not universal, may well be constructed around an identity and shared values that those outside it find questionable or even abhorrent. (Buzan and González-Peláez, 2005: 38)

While communities with a universalistic outlook could be thought of as being less concerned by this dilemma, a major difficulty of building them is in fact that 'while a world community must be based on some set of universal values, every effort to impose such values is likely to be met with resistance on the grounds of its particularity' (Bartelson, 2009: 171). This is an issue of strong relevance for the AoC, since it is committed both to universalism and to respect for particularities, as its slogan 'One World. Many Cultures' suggests.

The conceptualization of international community presented here distinguishes it clearly from other concepts of international order. Its basic assumption is that community at the international level is not a given, even though political leaders' statements or treaties would have it referring to the 'international community of states as a whole', for example the 1969 Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties (UN, 1969: 18).¹ This perspective is also at odds with the view of international community as an expression of a 'world community' encompassing all humankind recognized in their shared humanity, which is an implicit or explicit background for the use of references to community, if not as a mere rhetorical tool, then at least a 'legitimation device' (Bliesemann de Guevara and Kühn, 2009: 75–6). Quite the contrary, the relation between international

community-building and world community is facing important challenges and contradictions already at the conceptual level (see Bartelson, 2009). This tension is reflected by the UN, the framework closest to being 'the' international community in which a unitary actor deals with global challenges, currently appearing to be 'an' international community of states whose action is multilaterally coordinated (Ellis, 2009: 9–13).

More conceptual traction is likely to be provided by the English School's triad of 'international system', 'international society' and 'world society' as forms of international order (see Buzan, 2004: 6–10). An international system would be constituted by states that interact but whose actions are not constrained by any social ties between them; thus, no type of action can be ruled out, raising the prospect of wars of extinction. An 'international society', in contrast, brings together states that 'conceive themselves to be bound by a common set of rules in their relations with one another, and share in the working of common institutions' (Bull, 2002: 13). 'World society' in turn 'broadly encompasses the non-state domain' and has taken meanings 'ranging from the moral community of humankind, through oppositional voices and global civil society, to a post-Westphalian world politics' (Buzan and González-Peláez, 2005: 35).

The implicit world society-international community analogy, however, is problematic. The broad range of uses of the former notion by scholars has meant that it has become an 'analytical dustbin' for all sorts of relationships between non-state actors (Buzan, 2004) in a manner not so much different from the blurriness of international community. Also, the underlying premise would be that since relations between non-state actors do not have the agreed-upon and formalized characteristics of states reunited in international society, close relationships between them have to be grounded on other elements, foremost the 'shared values and, up to a point, shared identity' in international community (Buzan and González-Peláez, 2005: 33). Arguing for a 'world society' based on 'communitarian' ties implies assuming that non-state relationships are of different essence from inter-state relations, which blurs and even contradicts the classical distinction between 'society' and 'community'.

In contrast, to some scholars in the tradition of the English School, international community is foremost about a specific kind of relationship between states as members of the international society (Ellis, 2009). They are referring to 'thicker, more solidaristic forms of interstate society, specifically those in which the members share significant elements of identity' (Buzan and González-Peláez, 2005: 35). A particularly telling example of a state-centred community relying on multilateralism is the North Atlantic relationship between the North American and European states and multilateral organizations such as the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the European Union (EU). It is a 'pluralistic' security community, which is 'a transnational region comprised of sovereign states whose people maintain dependable expectations of peaceful change' (Adler and Barnett, 1998: 30). Security communities are at their core communities of practice in that they are 'marked by a domain of knowledge, a community of people, shared practices, and a sense of joint enterprise' related to peaceful relations (Adler, 2005: 17). Significantly, the North Atlantic security community is held to be the foremost example of an international community whose participants would share identity and values (Buzan and González-Peláez, 2005) – up to the point where it even tends to interfere with claims by the UN to represent the international community (Ellis, 2009: 11–12).

While the state-centred perspective highlights the important distinction between international community as a political enterprise of an ultimately limited range of actors and a world community comprising humanity as a whole, it encounters several problems. First, as suggested by the importance of NATO and the EU for the North Atlantic security community, the range of relevant actors needs to be broadened since, for such a form of international community, multilateralism is often essential (see Ellis, 2009: 16–20). Second, even this extended definition is not unproblematic, since it leads to a focus exclusively on large-scale actors and the organization of their relations rather than taking into account the importance of a community of practice. Third, the state-centred perspective either gives up on the universalistic outlook of a world community referring to humanity as a whole that yet is an essential background of attempts at international community-building, or leaves the relationship between both unquestioned.

The normative challenge of such lack of questioning is exemplified by Prime Minister Blair's speech about the doctrine of international community in 1999, which justified the military action led by NATO against Serbia in the context of the Kosovo crisis, thus referring to the North Atlantic security community's supposedly universal values (Blair, 1999). More than being just a case of rhetorical use, this example illustrates how such references point to political legitimization efforts with notable effects on exclusionary and even violent action towards actors that could be considered parts of a world community.

Thus, cosmopolitan scholars who claim that there is a moral community of humankind have objected to states being considered as the essential reference for community at the international level and advocate rather a 'post-Westphalian' framework (Linklater, 1998). Less opposed to state-centrism, Alexander Wendt still argues that non-state-level dynamics also make a world state inevitable: for example, at the third of five stages of the process, a 'world society' will tie a 'universal pluralistic security community' among states to the assurance for individuals that their wish for recognition is fulfilled (Wendt, 2003: 520–21). These approaches suggest that community at the international level with universalistic aspirations is not grasped by sticking to formal criteria such as membership.

What matters more about international community is the effort to build it and the way it addresses the challenge of 'a common identity and ethos among disparate and diverse cultures, with different moral and ethical codes, and with different perceptions of socio-cultural necessities' (Ellis, 2009: 8). It appears hence almost inevitable that a programme of universalistic aspiration such as the AoC is affected by the ensuing tension. In its case, they appear in a specific framework tying together state importance, universalistic agenda and the endeavour to include many different international actors in practices and thus to make them stakeholders in the community's development.

The Alliance of Civilizations: Security references as triggers of stakeholderhip

The AoC was put on the international agenda in September 2004 through a speech of Spanish President of Government José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero before the UN General Assembly, in which he called for 'an Alliance of Civilisations between the Western and the Arab and Muslim worlds' (2004: 26; see Boulaich and Dosenrode, 2009). Spain was

soon joined by Turkey as sponsor of the initiative, which quickly received backing from UN Secretary General Kofi Annan. The Spanish government also lobbied successfully the members of the League of Arab States and enlisted the support of the Organization of the Islamic Conference and the EU before handing over the project to Annan, who then nominated a High Level Group (HLG) tasked with establishing the guidelines of the programme and later on serving as a board of advisers. After the HLG report's submission in November 2006, former Portuguese President Jorge Sampaio was appointed High Representative for the AoC and an office was set up at the UN headquarters in New York.

Simultaneously, the AoC has to some extent gone beyond the focus on relations between the 'West' and the 'Muslim world' in Zapatero's initial proposal, as more than a hundred states and international organizations have now confirmed their commitment by becoming members of the Group of Friends, including all permanent members of the UN Security Council after the United States (US) joined in May 2010. The programme is now deemed to be in a phase of implementation through both high-profile activities such as the annual Forum with attendance by heads of state and government and support of grassroots initiatives. Yet, recent statements by Sampaio have included criticism of 'what we have achieved so far' and, furthermore, that lack of funding had now laid 'the option between to be or not to be' on the table, raising the prospect of going into liquidation (2010: 6 and 8).

The future of the AoC is thus not necessarily bright. This uncertainty reflects that it is an attempt at community-building at the international level that does not rely on international-society-related criteria such as states making legal commitments by becoming members of international organizations or by signing treaties. Participation in the AoC does not have these mandatory features and there are no clear-cut distinctions between who, among international actors, is eligible and who is not. Such a framework resembles more the outlook of communities at the international level that rely on practices, such as security communities. The issue then becomes to get actors to participate actively, since there is no solid organizational fallback structure in case of lack of commitment.

In appearance, though, the lobbying of states and international organizations in which the Spanish government took the forefront has provided the AoC with a reliable base of participants. The EU through the European Commission and also its members all joined the Group of Friends, as did the League of Arab States and the Organization of the Islamic Conference and their members, and even Russia, China, India and, lastly, the US. Up to now, the community-building attempt of the AoC has thus not fallen short of the threshold that such attempts need to pass in order to be relevant. Yet the stage in which acceptance and relevance is achieved is more elusive in this case than in other circumstances when 'international community' is evoked, such as treaties. The recent statements of High Representative Sampaio about the financial problems of the AoC indicate that favourable gestures and declarations are frequently disconnected from practised stakeholdership in the programme's development and thus the commitment of a participant in a community of practice. Thus, it is not certain whether it will meet the fate of the DaC in which hardly any international actor now takes stake.

One particularly problematic way to address the challenge of attracting stakeholdership in the AoC as a community of practice has been the reliance on security references.

This starts with the name of the programme. The use of the notion of 'civilization' has raised doubts about whether the AoC is not based on the assumption that there actually exist such unified cultural communities that the clash of civilizations outlook presupposes, and that they can be considered to have rather conflict-prone relations (Riordan, 2006: 1–2). The DaC, in contrast, built more on the premise that plurality could be managed peacefully once actors took a dialogical posture (see Lynch, 2000). Hence, it relied on the idea that cultural diversity was to be highlighted rather than channelled towards an alliance. More striking even is the contrast between 'dialogue among' and 'alliance of' in the names of the two frameworks. The AoC appears to carry 'a conflictive connotation, implying there was a confrontation with an enemy against whom allies must be sought' (Kausch and Barreñada, 2005: 17). It is then liable to relay a politically oriented understanding of its universalistic outlook, while the DaC was more inclined toward the assumption that such a perspective would emerge out of the dialogue among actors who had acknowledged the plurality of their views.

The study in depth of the AoC suggests that it would be too narrow a view to consider the international community reference in it merely as a rhetorical tool of political actors and to consider it as a sort of post-9/11 distortion of previous more dialogical frameworks aiming to foster intercultural relations. But it remains that its build-up of relevance among international actors came along mainly through an anti-terrorist reading by states and multilateral organizations. The UN's and the EU's anti-terrorist strategies refer to the AoC as a helpful instrument in the fight against terrorism (UN, 2006: 4; EU, 2009: 6). Furthermore, when the US joined the Group of Friends in 2010, the State Department referred to the programme's mission 'to help counter the forces that fuel polarisation and extremism', so that supporting it was in line with the 'engagement with other nations and international organisations to advance American security interests and meet the global challenges of the twenty-first century' (US Department of State, 2010). Even for Spain, it is debatable how much initiating the AoC was a 'proactive' step reflecting a cosmopolitan outlook or whether this was not mostly a reaction to the terrorist attacks in Madrid on 11 March 2004 (Kausch and Barreñada, 2005: 3).

This anti-terrorist reading has strengthened tendencies that challenge the programme's universalistic outlook. Persistent references to a clash of civilization outlook both rejected and accepted as a possibility, as well as the incorporation in the anti-terrorist post-9/11 agenda, have tended to narrow the focus of the AoC on the relations between the 'West' and the 'Muslim world' (Balci, 2009: 102–5). Or, as Sampaio stated: 'Although it has a global scope, its urgent task is to build bridges and promote dialogue and understanding, in particular between Western and Muslim societies' (2010: 4). The AoC has thus been considered by most international actors to be another case of an international community 'composed in relation to the policy issue concerned' (Bliesemann de Guevara and Kühn, 2009: 74). These would-be participants have then been inclined to become bystanders to the development of what aspires to be a transversal framework of communities of practice. The main argument for its existence has become its security utility, such that representatives tend to stress the growth of intercultural tensions rather than less alarming developments that would also make the programme meaningful.

In relation to these claims that leave the AoC conflict-centred, the question of who defines the standards for participating in the universalistic-inspired international

community in the making has become a central feature of critiques of the framework's development. Some elements suggest a very 'Western' definition of participation (see Riordan, 2006). For example, it is questionable whether the Spanish government's presentation of the programme as a contribution to the fight against terrorism was not linked to the consideration 'that terrorism originated from the other side, i.e., the Muslim world' (Balci, 2009: 104).

The AoC draws a line between its participants and the 'extremists' unfit to join. This might conform to the inside–outside and inclusion–exclusion perspective of community, yet raises questions not only about the universalistic outlook but about the willingness of the programme to reach out to would-be participants. The AoC appears to drift towards involving only moderates 'who will have no problems with each other in any situation', while among Muslims it 'excludes, almost by definition, those who are not already friends of the West and to whom any useful alliance ought to reach out. Their exclusion in this way can only reinforce any clash or conflict' (Riordan, 2006: 4). Put differently, in this case, it would pit an 'us' against extremists considered as 'them', while pretending to speak to an in-between 'you' group of people, to which it offers membership of a community of universalistic-minded people. Yet, hesitancy or passivity can lead to a withdrawal of the offer and potentially to consideration 'of the non-involved as supporters of extremism. In the case of the AoC, both the distinction between definitely excluded and potentially or actually included actors, as well as the strong presence of security concerns, lead then to 'a paradoxical situation in which actors are morally excluded from the community' (Bliesemann de Guevara and Kühn, 2009: 76) while having a great influence on it.

The Dialogue among Civilizations: A blueprint for the Alliance of Civilizations as international community?

The study of how actors committed to the AoC attempt to build stakeholdership in a would-be community at the international level thus suggests scepticism about its correspondence to a universalistic world community. While it remains questionable whether it will not be emptied of its relevance because of lack of both political and financial sponsorship for continuation or even expansion of its activities, relevant observations about what kind of building international community it is appear by taking into account the many similarities to the DaC. Beyond their shared ambition to negate relevance to the idea of a clash of civilizations and the highlighting of the transnational and supranational cultural dimension of world politics, both raise similar questions deriving from such aspirations.

Like the AoC, the DaC was a government-initiated attempt to implement a framework within the UN that would foster intercultural dialogue. Then Iranian President Khatami took it before the General Assembly in 1998 and succeeded with his proposal to make 2001 the 'Year of Dialogue among Civilizations'. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) supported DaC-related activities for a further five years, yet since then it has shrunk back to the very limited action of a foundation presided over by Khatami. The AoC, in turn, has become for the time being the main reference within the UN for fostering intercultural understanding in complementarity to already existing frameworks. Khatami himself currently is prominently involved in it as a member of the HLG.

The DaC was handled within the UN as a programme supposed to fit in with UNESCO's specific tasks. This handling reflected the emphasis that Khatami put on his initiative being about encounters between cultural and religious leaders, rather than about diplomacy and the commitment of political leaders (see Lynch, 2000). It is not surprising therefore that the Global Agenda of the DaC voted by the UN General Assembly in November 2001 did not foresee steps which would put specific requests on governments (see UN, 2001), such as the national implementation plans that are now elaborated for the AoC. And even less was there an interest in activities such as the AoC Forums attended by heads of state and government. Such exhibitions of support and recognition of relevance by political leaders highlight that the AoC presents itself as a transversal framework, as shown by its five 'priority areas': 'politics', 'migration and integration', 'youth', 'media' and 'education'. Notwithstanding that there is a small bureaucratic structure tasked to keep it afloat, it is thus considered to be essentially a programme lasting as long as it is relevant. This sets it apart both from fully-fledged organizational structures and from being a time-limited activity of an organization like the DaC became at UNESCO after the Year of Dialogue among Civilisations in 2001.

The AoC's transversal outlook has raised the prospect of it stepping on the turf of other organizational frameworks inside and outside the UN. Inside the organization, the fears of overstepping have mainly concerned UNESCO, but a Memorandum of Understanding signed in May 2010 is supposed to avoid this problem. Outside, the AoC appears to focus on the Mediterranean and the Middle East at the expense of other regions or cultures. The Mediterranean bias of the AoC is exemplified by a Spaniard in former UNESCO director-general Federico Mayor Zaragoza and a member of the Turkish government, Mehmet Aydin, serving as chairs of the HLG, and High Representative Sampaio also coming from a Mediterranean country. This has led to questions about whether it is not merely a 'further adding to what is already a rather confusing array of initiatives' in the region (Kausch and Barreñada, 2005: 16).

Yet, compared to the AoC, the DaC suffered even more from difficulties to engage enough participants to uphold and develop the dialogical framework in a community of practice. The diverging perspectives of the Iranian and US governments in the late 1990s on how to extend the proposal of the DaC to bilateral dialogue foretold this to a certain extent. While Khatami considered engaging intellectuals, the US stuck to meetings of representative officials (Lynch, 2000: 325–7).

Security dynamics at first sight appear to have had a strong impact on the demise of the DaC in favour of the AoC within the UN. In Khatami's words:

Unfortunately, the 2001 Year of Dialogue coincided with the most horrific tragedy of September 11, which in turn securitised the global environment and triggered the war on terror, as well as military campaigns in Iraq and Afghanistan – in a word, the exact opposite of what the Dialogue among Civilisations stood for. (Afrasiabi, 2006: 69)

This would be to assume that an apparently non-security initiative such as the DaC was unable to withstand the onslaught of security concerns on the international agenda after 9/11. But this would be to overlook that Khatami's initiative was not without security implications itself. Conceptually, it was supposed to negate the clash of civilizations

outlook, even though this ambition was stated implicitly – unlike the near-obsessive references within the AoC (see Balci, 2009). Yet, it was a framework available for post-9/11 efforts to counter the idea that the fight against terrorism put the ‘West’ and the ‘Muslim world’ against each other.

Another implicitly security-related aspect of the DaC was its linkage with the ‘dialogue’ that Khatami aimed at in relations with the US so as to move away from the inherited conflictive stance (see Lynch, 2000). This meant also that there had to be some kind of convergence with the priorities of the US government, among which anti-terrorism took a highly significant place at the time that the Iranian President presented his initiative to the UN General Assembly in September 1998. Earlier in the same session, President Bill Clinton had dedicated his speech to a call to fight terrorism, which should be considered:

[...] not as a clash of cultures, or political action by other means, or a divine calling, but a clash between the forces of the past and the forces of the future, between those who tear down and those who build up, between chaos and community. (Clinton, 1998: 12)

In presenting the DaC, Khatami included an anti-terrorist reference by stating that ‘required by our religious, moral and cultural values and norms, we unequivocally oppose all forms and manifestations of terrorism’ (1998: 7). Arguably, in his proposal of dialogue, anti-terrorism was not an explicit concern nor did he tie it clearly to expectations of fighting terrorism, unlike what occurred in the case of the AoC. But the anti-terrorist implications of the DaC, especially through its stress on the illegitimacy of religious justifications for terrorism, presented a potential diplomatic ground of encounter between Iran and the US. Similarly, anti-terrorism becoming the apparently foremost topic on the international agenda after 9/11 need not have led to a waning of Khatami’s initiative.

However, 2001 eventually marked the turning point for the DaC towards irrelevance, since the issue of sponsorship became relevant again. It concerned the prospects of a follow-up on the Year of Dialogue among Civilizations that would extend beyond the limited range of activities at UNESCO. Such a development would have been possible if a range of international actors had considered having a stake in the DaC. After all, it tackled concerns that after 9/11 ranked high on the international agenda as terrorism-related challenges. Yet, no sustained attempts to engage it in this direction appeared for example in the UN General Assembly’s Global Agenda voted in November 2001 (UN, 2001).

This left the DaC highly vulnerable to the interference of the state relations in an attempt to build an international community framework, and notably to the issues raised by Iranian sponsorship. Khatami’s commitment had been more than just a rhetorical use of international community-related references, and was not limited to the idea of using it as a legitimization device for changing the view that notably the US held of Iran (see Lynch, 2000). But when the Year of the Dialogue among Civilizations in 2001 came to its term, it was apparent that he had not been able to ensure continuity of support for his policies by other Iranian power-holders, with their stance rather moving towards a hard-line rollback. With Iran dubbed in the wake of 9/11 as part of the ‘Axis of Evil’ by the US President, few international actors considered that they had any stake in the DaC.

Spain and Turkey as co-sponsors of the AoC also started out in a position of tension with the US, the former having just withdrawn its troops from Iraq in a brusque manner, the latter having withheld support for the US-led intervention. And their proposal not only appeared directed against the idea of a clash of civilizations, but also as a challenge to the 'war on terror' as means to fighting terrorism. Yet, as participants in the North Atlantic security community,² they could still count on the support of their peers more easily than an Iranian-sponsored DaC. They also benefited from divisions about the 'war on terror' having lost some significance by the time the initiative was proposed in September 2004. And, significantly, to representatives of the UN the AoC appeared more broadly relevant, and also more practically oriented, than the DaC (Kausch and Barreñada, 2005: 16). As the next section shows, this view has some merit, even though attempts to foster stakeholdership through security references and the importance of coalition-building in order to meet a threshold of relevance would suggest international community to be a legitimization device.

The Alliance of Civilizations as a multilayered community

The international community that the AoC relates to is clearly multilayered, and therefore it is relevant to take into consideration that it concerns a domain held to be beyond the level of states, the interaction between cultures. Accordingly, and similar to the DaC, the AoC builds on the premise of a world community of people who both in spite of and through their different cultural references can be expected to share certain rights and values on the grounds of belonging to humankind. There would be 'international interest' in the community-building attempt, a common interest among international actors grounded on shared identity and values (see Ellis, 2009: 7–8). This is also suggested by the insistence on a 'partnership with states, international and regional organisations, civil society groups, foundations, and the private sector to mobilise concerted efforts to promote cross-cultural relations among diverse nations' (UN, 2007: 2). Accordingly, those involved in AoC are not defined in an exclusive way – rather, all sorts of international actors are considered to be potential participants in the community-building attempt. Nor is there a clear inside–outside divide as in international organizations according recognition exclusively through membership.

Participation in the would-be community is of course partly formal and defined through membership in the Group of Friends. But as the reference to stakeholders being participants along with members and partners suggests, practical commitment is at least of equal importance to formally acknowledged partnership and membership to the community-building attempt. Actors' participation in the community reflects that they are committed to universalism concerning intercultural relations; that their identity comprises cultural or religious elements; and that they consider themselves as actors with a stake in international developments. These concerns are supposed to lead to their involvement in a community of practice framework such as that of the AoC.

The practical element is supposed to set the AoC apart from both mainly conceptual attempts to foster intercultural understanding, like the DaC and UNESCO as a full-fledged international organization which gains visibility in part through conventions

among governments. The practice-oriented approach was highlighted during the Spanish lobbying by then Minister of Foreign Affairs Miguel Ángel Moratinos as a commitment 'to go beyond dialogue to concentrate on shaping a large-scale international political consensus based on a number of specific actions' (Moratinos, 2004: 31).

While such a statement can be considered rhetorical, several elements point to how the AoC is actually articulated around the building of communities of practice. One example is the way its special attention to media representation is channelled. This is relevant, since the attention to media representations is among the most important particularities of the AoC in relation to other programmes concerned with intercultural relations and aiming to negate the clash of civilizations outlook (Käser, 2008). The Rapid Response Media Mechanism was designed to bring media representatives into contact with experts who then would 'help frame contentious issues in less polarising terms and offer insightful and nuanced perspectives on complex debates', thereby building 'a "community of interest" among journalists, editors, commentators and opinion formers worldwide (...) to explore ways in which a greater diversity of views can be introduced in the media coverage of intercultural issues' (UN, current). Because of the reference to expertise, this might be considered as an epistemic community, which is 'a special form of community of practice' (Adler, 2005: 19). Yet, even though it is claimed that the experts' opinions 'represent a wide range of cultural, political, sociological, linguistic and regional backgrounds' (Global Experts, current), as a community of practice, this group has essential traits of a transnational advocacy network for intercultural dialogue, with participants brought together by 'their like-mindedness and practices' (Adler, 2005: 18).

More generally, in line with the AoC's objective to 'establish relations and facilitate dialogue among groups that can act as a force of moderation and understanding during times of heightened cross-cultural tensions', it is significant that its main functions are to be 'a bridge builder and convener', 'a catalyst and facilitator', 'an advocate', 'a platform to increase visibility' and 'a resource' for actions favouring intercultural understanding (UN, 2007: 5–6). The programme thus aims to build cross-cultural communities of practice by providing an appropriate space in the UN framework.

The link between universalistic aspirations and practical developments outside an inter-state perspective shows through the statement of the AoC's first implementation plan that it:

[...] will not operate at the level of political decision making processes themselves, but will act upstream and downstream, in order to help develop the conditions for greater knowledge and understanding among decision makers coming from different cultural and religious backgrounds and to mobilise groups that can act as forces of moderation. (UN, 2007: 2)

While the programme's attempt at community-building at the international level becomes clear through value and identity-based references, the 'upstream' and 'downstream' images already suggest that its articulation with states as decision-makers is not clear-cut.

Extending over different levels, the programme also shows striking similarities to the 'concentric circles' of the individuals' moral and political duties, which extend beyond

particularism to universalism (see Linklater, 1990: 141–3). The members of the presumed international community are supposed to let themselves be guided by universal concerns like the prevention and easing of intercultural tensions rather than by particular interests of, notably, states (see Linklater, 1998). The non-state perspective of matching the universalistic outlook with supranational activity through the build-up of transnational communities of practices fits in well with the criticism of states by cosmopolitan scholarship on community at the international level. Claims that the AoC is linked to a ‘cosmopolitan democracy’ (Archibugi, 2006) are thus not surprising. The dilemma of cosmopolitanism, however, is that it transposes national frameworks to the universal level and thus draws on a particularistic perspective (see Bartelson, 2009).

One ironic twist of this paradox is that cosmopolitan views might be captured by state actors, as exemplified by Spain’s sponsorship of the AoC.³ The Socialist government channelled as a guideline for Spanish external action ideas of a ‘cosmopolitan foreign policy’ that analysts close to the party had elaborated before they took office (Palacio de Oteyza, 2003). Zapatero himself had argued in the wake of 9/11 that responses to the new threats had to be multilateral and extend beyond the security domain (2001). The AoC fitted this conception and was even meant to be handed over to the UN so as to drive the point about multi-lateralization home (Kausch and Barreñada, 2005: 31). Against this background, during lobbying for the initiative Moratinos could finger-point at the ‘government offices and political standpoints, proclaiming unconscionable political goals, which only take into account short-sighted national interest’ (2004: 30).

However, the outlook of cosmopolitan democracy came under challenge in relation to the strong criticism of how the ‘Muslim world’ was represented in media outlets in the ‘West’, and of ‘Western’ politics (see Kausch and Barreñada, 2005: 4–11). While the programme had not yet become operational in February 2006 during the crisis of the Mohamed drawings, the Spanish and Turkish heads of government as co-sponsors published a call for calm (Erdogan and Zapatero, 2006) and other EU representatives’ statements apparently weighed the avoidance of intercultural conflict against the liberty of the press (Riordan, 2006: 3).

Hence, the relationship between the different layers raises the question about ‘the policy independence from its constituent units’ that an international community needs for actorness (Ellis, 2009: 14–15). In light of the AoC’s state-sponsored and UN-anchored development, it would be an overstatement to depict it as a case where supranationally capped transnational communities of practice have successfully sidelined, so as to defend the universalistic outlook, state actors liable to use the reference to international community in the making as a rhetorical or legitimization device. Rather, it reflects how an attempted world community in an international framework is bedevilled by particularistic dynamics (see Bartelson, 2009).

Conclusion

The AoC is multilayered and, on each level, the question of who can be considered a contributor to intercultural dialogue leads to choices about who is excluded and who is included. The programme also has to manage the tension between its universalistic, non-exclusive scope and its avoidance of traditional security domains, on the one hand, and

the strong stress on the relationship between the 'West' and the 'Muslim world' with references to terrorism and even war, on the other. As a proposal sponsored by states – Spain and Turkey – activated after lobbying of states and multilateral organizations, the AoC is now strongly shaped by the security dynamics of the post-9/11 international politics, with the 'us vs them' tendencies that such a background may provoke. Thus, its universalistic outlook is accompanied by exclusionary dynamics and self-serving governmental references, and the way it has taken shape points out the importance of coalition-building by governmental actors with a focus on states and multilateral organizations. This would favour the idea that the more or less extensive community exists only at that level.

These observations also challenge the cosmopolitan appearance of the programme. The idea of cosmopolitan democracy has been found to be problematic since '[t]here is simply no corresponding conception of world community to match the universalistic aspirations of cosmopolitan democrats' (Bartelson, 2009: 28). The stato-centrism in the AoC's implementation can be held to mirror this failure to get away from analogies with the state in the attempt to build a community at the international level. Significantly, it is the development of communities of practice among non-state actors that is supposed to lessen these contradictions and allow the programme to become a practised alternative to the clash of civilizations rather than just a statement of opposition (Balci, 2009: 106). Current practice at the AoC actually fosters transnational community-building among small-scale groups of people, including those involved in grassroots activities. Studying it thus does not merely confirm international community to be a rhetorical tool or a legitimization device.

For the time being, however, the AoC does not provide an exception to the pattern of international community generally, which 'instead of being an all-encompassing description of international politics' constituents', 'helps to construct in-group/out-group relations and may be an exclusive concept', including 'labelling and demarcating actors as deviant' (Bliesemann de Guevara and Kühn, 2009: 74). It is thus not a world community framework. Rather, it shows how international community is essentially about the difficulty to move from such a commitment by several actors through the development of stakeholdership in practices to the fulfilment of universalistic aspirations.

Notes

Many thanks to Jakob Sinding Skött, Frédéric Mérand and Vincent Pouliot, as well as to the anonymous reviewers and the editors of *Cooperation and Conflict*. Previous drafts were presented at the 2010 ECPR-SGIR Conference in Stockholm and, with funding provided by the Université catholique de l'Ouest-Bretagne Nord, at a workshop in Bordeaux in 2008.

1. Thanks go to Lucie Laithier for providing this example.
2. The Turkish case is less clear-cut, given the conflict-prone triad it forms with Greece and Cyprus. Yet, beyond the relationship with these two participants in the North Atlantic security community, there are, arguably, dependable expectations of peaceful change between Turkey and the other North American and European states or NATO.
3. See Boulaich and Dosenrode, 2009. In the case of Turkey, similar conceptual dynamics were also at work, although not related to cosmopolitanism. Notably, Ahmet Davutoglu, then the Prime Minister's chief adviser on foreign policy and later on Minister of Foreign Affairs, had been among the most outspoken critics of the 'clash of civilizations' (see Balci, 2009: 98–9).

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