CAN THE SOUTH BE HEARD? A STUDY OF THE SOUTH’S REPRESENTATIVE AT THE UNITED NATIONS

A thesis presented

By

Juan Sebastian Restrepo

to
The Department of Political Science

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts

in the field of
Political Science

Northeastern University
Boston, Massachusetts
May, 2014
CAN THE SOUTH BE HEARD? A STUDY OF THE SOUTH’S REPRESENTATIVE AT THE UNITED NATIONS

By

Juan Sebastian Restrepo

ABSTRACT OF THESIS

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Political Science in the College of Social Sciences and Humanities of Northeastern University

May, 2014
Abstract

This thesis uses historic and autoethnographic accounts of Group of 77 (G77) interactions to explore its effects, or lack thereof, within the UN system. First, it argues that the South, as everything that is uncivilized, subordinate, etc., has always existed through an identity built in relation to the North. But the South wants to be heard. Through historical processes, the South has condensed its efforts for emancipation from Northern rule into what became known as the G77, which is now the South’s representative and voice at the UN. Yet, it is through the UN and the G77 where the South limits its voice and rule. International constructivist theory is used as a guide to analyze how the South’s commitment to the UN, through its hierarchical organization, and bureaucratic nature, constrict Southern action. Moreover, as consequence of the constructed generalizations of North and South within the UN, new initiatives (energy, human rights, etc.) are precluded from penetrating the inner-ranks of order, and thus impeded from making an impact on the work of the organization.
Acknowledgements

The study of international relations, and social relations in general, is a thrilling, yet at times daunting task. As a student at Northeastern University, within the Department of Political Science, I have had the opportunity to work with wonderful professors that have given me fresh perspectives in the subject area—perspectives that may at times be sidelined at other institutions. To this extent, I am indebted to Professor Natalie Bormann for the patience and diligence in advancing this work and for bringing guidance and sense to the many ideas and hypotheticals that ran my mind. I wish to also acknowledge the efforts of Professor William Miles, whose courses and thoughts launch a new generation of enthusiastic international development students. Through their courses and counsel, they encourage many students, like me, to think broadly about development and international issues, to be critical of our actions and that of others. In addition, I thank Professor John Portz, Logan Wangsgard, Lyle Ring, Barbara Chin, and Amy Killeen for the technical and administrative insights and help through my studies and in the process of completing this thesis. Lastly, this work would carry no meaning without my personal experiences at the Group of 77 and the United Nations. These institutions, even when restrained by their peculiar ways of working, do try to thrust noble causes for the benefit of humanity. I am grateful for the support and knowledge of the people I have met there. Even after this work, I still remain hopeful.

To my friends, family, and all those who have influenced me in known and unknown ways,

“Nothing of me is original. I am the combined effort of everybody I’ve ever known”
-Chuck Palahniuk, Invisible Monsters
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract 2

Acknowledgements 4

Table of Contents 5

List Abbreviations 6

Section 1: Introduction 7

Section 3: The Story of the South 10

Section 4: The Global South 15

Section 5: The UN as the Home of the South 18

Section 6: Case Study 22-46

Diplomatic Culture 24
Same Statements, Same Positions 28
Powerless Budget 34
Experts, Bureaucracies 42

Section 7: Can Anyone Hear the South? 46

References 48
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Full Form</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DESA</td>
<td>Department of Economic and Social Affairs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DPA</td>
<td>Department of Political Affairs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DPI</td>
<td>Department of Public Information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ECOSOC</td>
<td>Economic and Social Council of the UN</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FAO</td>
<td>Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FDI</td>
<td>Foreign Direct Investment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G77/Group</td>
<td>Group of 77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GA</td>
<td>UN General Assembly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MDG</td>
<td>Millennium Development Goals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NAM</td>
<td>Non-Aligned Movement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NIEO</td>
<td>New International Economic Order</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ODA</td>
<td>Official Development Assistance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OECD</td>
<td>Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PGA</td>
<td>President of the UN General Assembly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SG</td>
<td>UN Secretary General</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UN</td>
<td>United Nations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNCTAD</td>
<td>UN Conference on Trade and Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNDP</td>
<td>UN Development Programme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNECLA</td>
<td>UN Economic Commission for Latin America</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNEP</td>
<td>UN Environmental Programme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNESCO</td>
<td>UN Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNICEF</td>
<td>UN Children’s Fund</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNIDO</td>
<td>UN Industrial Development Organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WEOG</td>
<td>UN Western Europeans and Others Group</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The UN intern enters, as I did, with hopes of making an impact in the world. There is a feeling of accomplishment, of belonging to a greater cause, and to an institution that places the world within your reach. It is the hallmark of the student of international politics. If one has heard of criticism of the UN before, it is suppressed by the enthusiasm, and by an active mind of hypotheticals that make the possibilities of making that impact—of attaining peace and socio-economic development—a tangible opportunity. This expectation is only strengthened by calls from staff claiming that “we need more young people” who arrive with contagious “excitement and new ideas” to the organization. Yet it is this same call that should give the student pause, especially to critically analyze the journey they embark in. That, through all their excitement, they are able to understand what the UN innately does within its social structures, and ask themselves how this can exactly encourage or discourage its potential.

I began my internship in the summer of 2013 in the Group of 77 at the United Nations Headquarters in New York. Ironically, I had always been a student of realism, a reader of Machiavelli, an admirer of Waltz and follower of E. H. Carr. As realists go, I was cynical of uninterested, power-less multilateralism. I believed in an unequivocal truth behind human nature and states, of interest in terms of power. Yet, it was not with this mentality that I entered the UN. Prior to my internship I began shifting my realist ideologies to a more ‘centrist’ approach which began combining liberal and functionalist ideas, perhaps as a reaction to my internship expectations. Maybe the world was different than how I had envisioned it through my realist academic upbringing. As it turned out, for me, the world through the UN was different. And it was through my experience there that I began to understand how this reality was actually socially constructed.
Perhaps unsurprisingly are the pronouncements by some staff members who have experienced the realities of the UN and can conclude that, through the span of their 20-year careers, “not much has changed.” Even with just six months of exposure, I can start to conclude the same. That there is an air of longing for the natural state of things: to work in accordance with an everlasting protocol—of an identity—because that is the reality of how things work. To the student, this exists as a virtual reality only studied and analyzed through the thoughts and extrapolations of others, of scholars, on top of their ivory towers. My objective with the present work differs in that sense. I seek to break down for the reader the constructions with which we understand this niche of international relations through direct observations of the working patterns of the UN, specifically as a case study of the work of the G77 as ambassador of the South. That my observations may serve as evidence of the enigmas that the South in the UN faces, and that these can enlighten the reader by providing her with the tools to understand these constructions, and, if possible, seek positive structural change.

Accordingly, the purpose of this work is to analyze the marked effects that culture, identity formation, and ideas have on the G77, and by extension, its ability to accomplish the task it embodies as the representative of Southern interest within the UN. As such, I make the following hypothesis:

1. As a consequence of the formation of North-South identities, as institutionalized via the G77, the Southern political agenda within the UN system has become homeostatic. In this sense, new initiatives (energy, trade, etc.) are precluded from thriving and making an impact in the work of the organization. Essentially, the South as G77 is trapped within the UN system.
It remains difficult to quantify culture, identities or ideas, let alone the ones of states or its representatives. Providing ‘proof’ of this through quantifiable means could require long interviews and surveys, especially ones that could not have been done in my relatively short-term position as intern in the G77 at the UN. Fortunately, constructivism provides us with the tools to make observations of rules and actor behavior, in order to describe the processes, ideas and cultures that shape this exact behavior. By analyzing the behavior of state actors, I hope to ascertain that states do act as though certain norms exist (Wendt 1999), and that these norms have particular effects on the South. Thus, this venture is based on a qualitative, autoethnographic (Doty 2010)\(^1\) account derived from first hand connections, experiences, and observations as were presented to me during my internship at the UN. These experiences are not meant to be a secret of the UN. I contend that many inside and out know them. But this culture is so second nature, so known, that they it is actually not known. They have become a natural habit—quotidian diplomacy that goes unnoticed and unquestioned. For this reason, it becomes the work of the researcher to unravel and analyze these cultures. To this end I will:

1. Emphasize that the North and the South exist outside of the UN.
2. Describe the diplomatic hierarchical culture that permeates throughout the UN.
3. Provide a descriptive analysis, with narrations of my experience that describe the process through which the drafting of statements and resolutions of the G77 takes place, and how they tend to create the same documents—the same positions—overtime. Moreover, by acknowledging the G77 as a main player in UN politics, I assert that the political role played by the UN in terms of norms and principles for development becomes stagnant.

\(^1\) My conception of autoethnography follows Doty’s (2010), in which autoethnography “makes
4. Describe how the advancement of Southern initiatives and programmes within UN reach a relative homeostatic state, as a result of the work of the G77 within the budgetary and administrative committee.

The Story of the South

The story of the South is an extension to the story of the North. The South has always existed. It has existed in the hearts of the colonized Americas, in the minds of medieval Europe, and in the bodies of any human who has been marginalized, repressed and oppressed. The South exists because the North exists. It is the ontology of the have and the have nots, but most of all, it is a reality based on ideas.

It is ideas, yet the material realities that delineate some of their differences cannot be denied. The North could be characterized by wealth, coercive power, and technological dominance. This reality has been constituted by an idealism that parallels the North with civility, nobility, and superiority. Alternatively, then, the South is essentially everything that the North is not, materially and ideally. That is to say that the South is economically atrophied and militarily weak, which in relation to the North is translated to subordinate, and practically uncivilized. These ideas have opened the path for possible collective identities between Souths and Norths. Every Northern and Southern economic and military action, then, entails an opposite reaction, in accordance with their material facts, identities and interests.

To this extent, I follow the rationale of Edward Said (1978), as expressed in his work on Orientalism, to conclude that the North’s experience, and representations of the South enables generalizations of a world that is exotic, yet equally traumatic, unhealthy, undemocratic and

---

2 Wendt (1999) shows us that ideas are not “all the way down.” That “interests are beliefs [ideas] about how to meet [material or social] needs” (p. 126).
uncivilized. And as a matter of the North’s material empowerment, and the categorization of ‘us’ and ‘them’, the North pushes a hegemonic agenda that wishes to cleanse the South of its evils, yet only if the South can become and act like the North.

The South is not the same as it was, however, as it has been through centuries. As has been signaled above, its composition has changed through the years even if its identity, perhaps as uncivilized, or subordinate to the North, remains intact. The US under colonialism was the South, medieval serfs were the South, and now the poor and disenfranchised are our global South. What is curious about the process of history—about culture in particular—is that it tends to repeat itself; it is self-perpetuating (Wendt 1992). It is ideas that define, and materially maintain, subordination, inequality, capitalism and exploitation, and it is ideas that tend to place a constraining barrier on the way of cooperation, or friendship.

It is in this sense that the North enjoys favorable flows and acquisition of capital, dominance over value-added and terms of trade, as well as technological and military prowess. The South, on the other hand, is mainly an exporter of commodities, lacks equivalent technological presence, and maintains poor inflows of capital for investment and growth. Placing the capitalist state structure aside, which constitutes ideas of the relations of production (Wendt 1992), this remains the physical, material reality of the situation. With these material facts the North has second-placed the South through shared (or not) ideas, without much self-judgment or repercussion. Its identity, as law-abiding, just and civilized, helps to legitimize this transaction, and in this manner, environmental atrocities, human rights violations, and global

---

3 Wendt (1992) emphasizes that there is a reinforcement mechanism in which “interaction rewards actors for holding certain ideas about each other and discourages them from holding others. If repeated enough, these ‘reciprocal typifications’ will create relatively stable concepts of self and other” (p. 405).
trade injustices continue to occur (Veitch 2007). People die of hunger, of disease, and they also do not live optimal lives for a 21st century world.

The story of the South has been well documented by the North and its affiliates. UN reports document homicide rates in countries, concentration of guns, HIV rates, etc. The North watches commercials from Amnesty International, images of starving children next to vultures, of slums dwellers in India and AIDS victims in Africa, and wonders if their torment will ever see an end. They know that money and resources are being transported, but the South’s plight does not seem to be stopped. The media is restless, and the images are continuous. Every war, every plague, every corruption scandal, revolt and coup are streamed through a 24-hour news cycle. Nothing positive, nothing that may show the good side of the South. Each story lacks thorough explanations—just images and tales of the misery of the South. The North becomes fatigued.

The existence of the G77 at the UN seems to serve as a reminder of that painful reality. The G77 has become the institutionalized form of the Global South, acting through the UN. For the South, the UN is hope and expectations, and for them its role cannot be understated. From the outset, this South, through the G77, framed their identity and interests vis-à-vis the North, enlightened by the physical realities that also constitute their peril. With the acknowledgment of

---

4 Photograph by Kevin Carter in 1993 portraying a vulture watching a starving child in Somalia (NPR 2006).
its physical reality, and a portfolio full of accusations, the G77 stipulates its demands to the North. These demands directed to their Northern counterparts, though at times seen as radical, have included, inter alia, the establishment of a NIEO, liberation from colonialism, and environmental protection (Swart & Lund 2010). However, the G77, as the representative body of the Southern coalition, becomes a victim of, and at the same time maintains, Northern generalizations of the South. For instance, the G77 insists that there are “common but differentiated responsibilities” in combating climate change (Swart & Lund 2010). Yet the North compares its cities and environmental vitality with a bombardment of images of smog in cities, and polluted rivers in China and Mexico, creating a perception that the South does not comply with its responsibilities compared with North. The G77 exhorts the North to comply with the promised ODA of 0.7% of GNI (Swart & Lund 2010), but the Northerners see images (below) of the Basilica of Our Lady of Peace of Yamoussoukro in Côte d’Ivoire, the largest church in the world at a cost of $300 million (Ostling 1989), which is surrounded by unpaved roads, shanty houses and overall poverty. The G77 claims potential for economic growth, but Northern businesses see images of corrupt officials, stringent regulations and business nationalization.

And, the G77 preaches “full respect for the principles of sovereign equality among independent States, non intervention in internal affairs, respect for different economic and social systems and the right of each State to exercise full and permanent control over its own natural resources” (Swart & Lund 2010, p. 175). The North, however, sees the revolts, the genocides, people slayed by machetes, and leaders who commit human rights violations and hide behind non-intervention principles and sovereignty. Unfortunately for the South, to the North this can translate into “we

---

5 For an overview of G77 positions, see Swart & Lund (2010), _The Group of 77: Perspectives on its Role at the UN General Assembly_, pp.170-181
6 See Transparency International’s _Corruption Perceptions Index_, Freedom House’s _Freedom in the World Index_, Heritage Foundation’s _Economic Freedom Index_, or the news.
want your money to maintain our opulent lifestyles, without regard to the lives of the people who we are supposed to protect.”

That the North has behaved apprehensively to these demands reflects exactly the role that ideas play in deriving interest. How our vision is blurred by stereotypes, and stigmas. How we whimsically attack and defend what we think is correct. We can easily maintain the current structure, but it is more difficult to change it, to change our ideas, and consequently to change the lives of people. The G77 falters in this respect. To the North, the G77 can be described as everything that might be wrong with the world. After all, it ‘is’ a Group conformed by the ‘radical’ Arabs, by the helpless, extremely impoverished Africans and their bloodthirsty dictators, and by Asian and Latin American commies and socialists. By aggregating all this extreme variety, the G77 may be installing an image it does not want of itself. There are countries in the South that the North sees in a more favorable light, and seems willing to help them on an individual basis. Yet, why can’t they act together? Why can’t there be an overhaul of climate change policies, NIEOs, etc.? By acting as a group, and placing demands as a whole, the North cannot help but see a collection of problems that are only solvable by becoming more like ‘us’ and less like ‘them’. Although the South remains gigantically diverse, the lines that

7 Impoverished conditions and the Basilica of Our Lady of Peace of Yamoussoukro in background, Côte d’Ivoire (Wikimedia 2006).
differentiate what is ‘good’ and ‘bad’ become blurred and conjoined into the simple differentiation of how ‘you’ are and how ‘we’ are. The collective South becomes a threat to the power and stability of what the North is and what it deems as the correct path to development, and as a consequence, the North does not listen.

Televisions, computers, and reports cannot serve as a constant reminder of what happens in the South. It seems in our ‘nature’ to tune out the facts, and to turn a blind eye on the context in which they live in. And, even harder, to view our old rivals and enemies under a different light. Yet, this might be the promise of international life, of our world community. The first answer for the South was the UN, but its real answer might lie above and beyond, through a change in culture of international life. A change that may be best arrived at by the elimination of the institutional lines that differentiate us, and stereotypes us. It all begins somewhere.

The Global South

Shortly after the inception of the UN, the world became fractured by the forces of East and West, of the friends of capitalism and democracy against the Soviet communists and their allies. This division, however, did not encompass a number of states that for economic, materialistic and idealistic reasons would not be recognized as significant players in the international arena. During this early history of the Cold War, the South had not yet formed a true collective identity as a result of the centripetal forces that were trying pull some states to the communist sphere of influence and others to the western capitalist sphere. Yet, by differentiating between East and West, First and Second, Self and Other, along with all the identities that came with these categories (capitalist/communist, democratic/undemocratic), the identification of another was made possible: the Third World, the poor and underdeveloped, and what is now known as the Global South.
The experience of colonialism was a factor that united the many of the newly independent African states. The Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), which was established in 1961, was the institutionalization of the “struggle against imperialism, colonialism, neo-colonialism, racism, and all forms of foreign aggression, occupation, domination, interference or hegemony as well as against great power and bloc politics” (NAM 1979, p. 8). Most Latin American countries, which did not share the recent colonial experience, and were under the paternalistic ‘protection’ of the US, were more skeptical of uniting against their Uncle Sam (Swart & Lund 2010). The institutionalization of the South needed a push in order to seek Latin American unity.

Raúl Prebisch was the entrepreneurial of a decade of crisis, and most importantly, of a young and blooming UN organization seeking to extend its potential in the area of development. Thrusting the UN development agenda required the political support of member states. As aforementioned, and unlike African states, Latin Americans lacked a concrete force that could drive them together. Prebisch’s structuralist economic theory became that gravitational pull for Latin America, and many other developing countries. The principal idea is that there are structures in the international economic order that place developing countries (the periphery) at a disadvantage when compared to the North (the core) (Dosman 2008). His theory became the predominant thought of the time, and provided an identity for their material realities. Structural Theory provides a view of the world economy that compares developing against developed, while administering prescriptions for developing countries to escape the structures that put them at a disadvantage. Yet, as Prebisch insisted for most of his career, governments have to take

---

8 For a highly descriptive biographical account on the life of Raul Prebisch, which is used extensively within this section, see Dorman (2008), The Life and Times of Raul Prebisch 1901-1986.
economic initiatives of their own to promote industrialization (Dosman 2008). In fact, Prebisch was highly critical of the internal problems developing countries faced. He was a skeptic of governments and politicians, especially those dissenting his recommendations and was an ardent proponent of national measures.

Prebisch, as an influential figure within the UN, sought to realign the terms of trade, placing special attention to the international system and possible mechanisms that could ameliorate the standing of developing countries. He worked under the auspices of UNECLA to promote these ideas, draft country reports that delineated the economic circumstances faced by Latin American countries and finally derive solutions to these problems. As revolutionist feelings rose, and with the ‘fall’ of Cuba to a communist regime, Latin Americans began envisioning a world without dependence and interventions of the US. They became more receptive to communist ideas and Che Guevara’s romanticism of a united Latin America. His, and others revolutionary stance and affirmation of communism, was an influential discourse that sought to end the dependency from the West. Marxist-leaning economist developed a variant of structuralist economic theory that would identify with the social struggles, the class divisions and calls of revolution that were influencing that epoch. Dependency became that theory. It was based on the foundations of structuralist theory, but with an added emphasis on the dependency of developing countries to the power of the North. Given that the US’ relationship with Latin America in that era remained patronizing and interventionist for many in the region, it did not promote a constant image of the US that was friendly enough to support American thoughts and actions. Consequently, cohesion among the Latins increased.

Prebisch moved in and away from the dependency discourse. He knew that development required some structural changes, but also national transformations that encouraged
industrialization. Yet, Prebisch took opportunities as they came. With the efforts of fellow diplomats and economists, UNCTAD was established in 1964 to provide a platform for rearranging the terms of trade on a global scale. Prebisch was elected as the Secretary-General of UNCTAD. As can be expected, UNCTAD was highly influenced by the discourse of dependency that had been developed by UNECLA, communist leaders and anti-neocolonialists. The developing countries were receptive to the dependency discourse. There was a recognition by developing countries of their material conditions and their interest in gaining concessions from the North. As a result, 77 developing countries signed a declaration to work together under the auspices of UNCTAD to break this cycle of dependency, especially as a cause of inequalities in the terms of trade. This is what became known as the Group of 77.

The notion that developing countries were dependent economically on the North through trade, along with recent experiences of colonialism, and ideas of imperialism and neo-colonialism, culminated in the creation of a global Southern identity that until now has a resounding voice within its institutionalized ambassador—the G77. As it is discussed below, the G77 has decided to base its operations within the UN structure, because it is there where it believes it can assert its influence. Since its establishment, the G77 has expanded its membership, as well as its program of work beyond trade and an NIEO. Its agenda now includes climate change, science and technology, water, among other social and political issues.

Foreshadowing to the substantial portion of the present work, Prebisch became so frustrated with the politics and inner-workings of the UN that he quit his position as Secretary-General of UNCTAD. He was always adamant as to the politics of the institution and felt constrained by it. Some of his works, the potentially polemic ones, remained unpublished to
prevent undesirable reactions by the diplomats he was trying to convince to act. Prebisch thought that this was the ‘price of engagement’ to get anything done at the UN. (Dosman 2008)

**The UN as the Home of the South**

The GA, as the “main deliberative policymaking and representative organ of the UN” (Mission of Switzerland 2011, p. 13) is the temple of democratic rule in international relations. The one state one vote principle that differentiates not between nuclear capabilities, nor economic prowess, but by the exclusive accomplishment of having an integrated arrangement of peoples—a nation—and a legitimate, recognized government as representative of that people. The strong and the weak are all, in principle, the same. The country of Nauru, with a population of around 10,000 people (CIA 2014), has the same voting privileges as the US, China or India. This runs in polar opposite to the voting mechanisms of the Bretton Woods institutions, the IMF and the World Bank, which use sophisticated weighted voting to account for a state’s international economic influence (Paloni & Zanardi 2012). Given its lack of influence in these forums, the South has been the GA’s most outspoken defendant, and it is here where it exerts most of its influence.

The General Assembly (GA) is limited by its rules and regulations\(^9\), but its work is also limited to the level of cooperation that is attained for items in the agenda. It is a body that, due to its organizational structure, requires agreement from the majority of the international community for resolutions to be adopted. The UN Charter mandates a simple majority for any resolution, including those of economic, development, institutional, and political nature. In cases where “important questions” are to be resolved, the GA is required to attain a two-thirds majority.

---

for passage of resolutions. These super majorities are expected for elections, UN membership, matters of peace and security, as well as the UN budget.

The GA does not have a traditional party structure. However, it is a body that favors the use of party-like structures, or voting blocs, for purposes of efficient decision-making. Coordinating the positions of 193 countries with no previously established structure would be very difficult. Since its inception, the UN has been divided by five informal, though well-established, regional groups: Asia-Pacific, Latin American and the Caribbean, the African Group, the Western European and Others Group, and the Eastern European Group. This division has two main organizational aims within the UN. First, it provides a structure for the division of posts, especially high-post such as presidents of committees, the PGA, Security Council memberships, etc., which are highly coveted by UN diplomats. And, secondly, it provides a foundation of potentially similar interests, based on the mutual experiences of certain regions, which can lead to a more efficient division of labor among interested parts.

The Western European and Others Group serves as evidence of the more idealistic side of the grouping arrangements. Israel, for instance, as part of the Middle East should, geographically, be part of the Asian Group as are its neighbors Lebanon, Jordan, Syria and Saudi Arabia. As Israel identifies its interest and values with those of the West, it has opted to become part of the WEOG. This trend is not reserved for Israel, however. Australia and Turkey, which identify themselves with their Northern partners in economical and political lines, are also part of the WEOG. Interestingly, Japan and the Republic of Korea, highly developed countries, members of the OECD, and with tight relations with the West, nevertheless remain part of the Asian Group and have not shown interest to enter the WEOG. This is likely born out a desire to maintain their (hard) political influence in Asia, as they are dominant players in the region and
may want to keep an eye on China and North Korea when negotiating hard political resolutions. Excluding Japan and North Korea, these divisions along geographical lines effectively create cleavages through North-South lines. Three out of the six groups are conformed by states that are all members of the G77. Moreover, with a membership of 133 countries, and an assured two-thirds majority when fully united, the G77 becomes the most dominant player in the GA. The GA, therefore, becomes the most logical location for the institutional establishment that is the G77. As a result of its massive membership, it arranges around 400 meetings per year, mainly to negotiate resolution language and coordinate the work of the Group. Most meetings on development matters are covered by at least one G77 member who usually delivers statements, totaling more than 150 statements per year. It is not presumptuous to assert that the G77 is a remarkable piece of machinery, and it is with that authority that its Chairman in 2013 once stated that, “the G77 never runs out of people.”

It is crucial to comprehend the consequences of legitimizing the GA’s one state, one vote rule. Becoming a member of this system exposes a fundamental aspect of international relations, which, based on Nicholas Onuf’s (1989) analysis, can be termed heteronomy. The UN is a heteronomous apparatus to the extent that it enables states, in this sense, to submit themselves to its rule—the UN rule. This comes as a result of commissive acts that commit agents, such as the G77, to act in particular ways that in actuality place constrains in state behavior to a determined, and at times predictable, set of actions. For instance, the G77 will not incite war on the North over inequalities on the terms of trade, or the devastating effects of natural disasters on Southern peoples as a consequence of Northern-led climate change. Millions may die, a billion may be impoverished, but the UN Charter restrains the G77—a document enshrined “to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war” and that seeks to” practice tolerance and live together in
peace” (p. 3). This type of rule, then, differs from a condition of autonomy, although states like to claim that they are sovereign, self-determining agents. It differs because, just as the word entails, it is rule, ‘nomé’, by others, ‘hetero’. Because the G77 seeks material and normative gains for its development, it seeks more engagement by all parties within the UN system, as it believes that it carries the power of numbers to make assertions and directives that will be in its benefit. This may be partly the case, as the G77 can initiate certain rules of assertion and direction that advance its preferences within the provided policy space, and which, in the long-run, may evoke action by the North. Unfortunately for the South, this desired dynamism, with its correlated effects on Northern policy, is glacial-paced, at best. And, moreover, as the G77 becomes ever more involved and engrained in this exact system, it is placing constraints in itself—it is placing its autonomy, its future, and its rule, on the rule of others. The North, on the other hand, containing the material power desired by the South for its development, looks to move away from—to escape—this exact system that could further entangle it in norms that are not viewed as asserting its interest.

**Case Study:**

The purpose of this brief background on the origins of the North-South and its consequent institutionalization was to acquaint the reader, and contextualize my observations. First, we affirm that the North-South has existed, and continues to exist as a result of material differences and identity. Then, we admit that through a historical process, the Global South was created and became institutionalized within the body that helps it achieve greater influence through the power of numbers. The UN is that body and the G77 is that institution. As I see it, the UN has two general purposes. The first one is to expose the political interests of member states and to find political solutions by establishing agreements, norms and rules. Second, aside
from serving as a norm-setting mechanism, the UN acts through its initiatives and programmes to promote development, human rights, etc. In the following case study, it will be argued that the creation of new norms, and of new positions for the types of ambitious deals that are sought and are needed to prevent climate change, to end global poverty, etc., are arduously hard to attain at the UN. This claim is made in virtue of the stagnant discussions and positions of the North and the South at the UN. At the national level, this results as diplomats at ministries of foreign affairs ‘don’t create anything new’ (Neumann 2007) and consequentially, UN diplomats, as subordinates of their ministries of foreign affairs, seldom create anything new either. It can be argued that, as they actually act within a different institution than their ministries, with differing rules and regulations, interests and organizational possibilities, that UN diplomats do actually produce something different, something new. Nevertheless, as I have experienced, UN diplomats are constantly consulting with their capitals, which give them direction and instructions on which actions to take. Lastly, I claim that, for the most part, the UN’s funds and programmes do not fully work for the South, but rather for the interests of the North and for the benefit of the leaders of the South. For this purpose I analyze the G77’s influence within the budgetary and administrative committee of the UN. I contend that the G77 currently lacks the influence the South seeks within the Committee and falls victim of its own invention.

What follows are the observations that I can document as part of my experience interning at the UN and the G77. With these objectives, I keep in mind a useful lesson:

If we are the products of modern power, then all of our behaviors, gestures, and thoughts, including our normative intuitions, are expressive of that power. If we draw upon our norms and moral codes to place limits upon what forms resistance and self-creation can take, we will actually be entrapping ourselves in the very system we are trying to escape because it will be rebellion in the name of ideals drawn from modern power. (Pickett 2005, p. 49)
Diplomatic Culture

What I first noticed upon the start of my internship was the effects of hierarchy within an organization such as the UN. It was something that was expected, but at the time I had not realized the way in which it presented itself, and how it could affect the institution. Through time, people have been socialized to have an admiration or respect for elders, for experienced-men, and government officials. In the developed world this seems to be less the case, perhaps because there are more opportunities and resources to gain influence through money and attain the materialistic equality of nobility. Or, because the experience of oppression by monarchical rule, along with inculcated and internalized sentiments of freedom and equality, let people understand that officials are people, too. It is not perfect, but long are days of divine rights, where officials faced no questions and were not, to a certain degree, accountable to the people they served. The US Constitution, for instance, embodies this sentiment of equality of persons by a clause that negates titles of nobility. In 1775 Thomas Paine, the revolutionary of the colonial American era, expressed this sentiment:

Dignities and high-sounding names have different effects on different beholders. The luster of the Star and the title of My Lord, over-awe the superstitious vulgar, and forbid them to inquire into the character of the possessor: Nay more, they are, as it were, bewitched to admire in the great, the vices they would honestly condemn in themselves. This sacrifice of common sense is the certain badge which distinguishes slavery from freedom; for when men yield up the privilege of thinking, the last shadow of liberty quits the horizon. (Foner 1945, p. 33)

In developing countries, titles remain very much engrained in every-day association. As a curious example from my internship, a colleague originating from West Africa had the habit of standing from her desk as a sign of respect towards officials who came to the office for meetings. She also maintained that touching the head of elders was offensive and could be gravely punished in her country. In Africa, she admits along with other colleagues, there is a reification of
elders, of officials with elegant titles and high-level functionaries. In countries where inequality and poverty are vast, titles may become an ordering principle that can dictate between those who die of starvation and those who live opulently in comparison. Thus titles are as religion, they are heaven for those who have them (and their cousins) and the opium for those who do not.

The UN follows a similar pattern. It is a culture that highly regards the use of titles, which exist in the colloquial parlance of staffers and delegations. The highest representatives of the heads of state are not just Ambassadors, but carry with them the formal titles of Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary. These titles specify the extent of their abilities and potential functions, but its necessity can be questioned when, in modernity, many decisions require constant consultations with capitals. Nevertheless, diplomatic immunity and privilege is zealously guarded. As a result of this immunity, high-ranking diplomats are protected from criminal and civil charges, and, curiously, they are also protected from being evicted from their homes for not having paid rent. At a G77 Ambassadorial meeting where many expressed their frustration in regards to the closure of bank accounts by Chase Bank, a diplomat informed the body that “it is bad enough for U.N. diplomats to be lumped together in the company of dogs and cats in the city’s high-rise buildings…but now ‘the banking sector is treating us as criminals’.

This could just be taken as a statement of frustration to the banking issues that they are now facing, but they can also be seen as a reflection of how diplomats portray their positions in relation to ordinary people on the ground, those who mingle with animals—people who, at the end of the day, they affect.

Many are surprised by titles at the UN. When superiors sought to speak to ambassadors, the custom rule was to ‘put them through together’. I would have to call the mission and tell the ambassador’s secretary that my supervisor wanted to speak to them. Once the ambassador
accepted, the secretary would come back and we would agree to ‘put them through together’ so neither one of us would have the pleasure, or for them the displeasure, to speak to their superiors. It was not apt for a low rank staff member, or ‘mere’ secretary, to be transferred to an Ambassador’s telephone extension to announce to them directly. One of my colleagues had been reprimanded for having a secretary speak to our head of office directly—simply for not ‘putting them through together’. It is protocol that ambassadors meet ambassadors or heads of organization, that deputies meet with deputies and that experts meet other experts. Flexibility beyond that comes at the imperative of the parties concerned, but as it was the case in my experience, this is seldom the case. Titles become so much a part of the culture. There have been superiors who have asked their staff to call them ambassador, even when their former title does not transfer to their current position. Moreover, there are also those who place every title they have earned on a card. Imagine the following post-nominal letters on a business card: BA, MA, Ph.D. As a colleague jokingly mentioned, “you might as well put kindergarten, elementary, high school.” And, there have been those who, without any credentials and holding irrelevant positions, still present themselves as ambassadors on the phone in order to sound more prestigious, to catch the attention of the listener and accomplish their intended purpose. From what I have heard, they feel that, to be taken seriously, they need to have an honorific title of sorts.

What can further be noticed in this culture is the manner in which titles prevent a communicative work environment. ‘Excellency’ is a high-level government official’s honorific title, and its use is ubiquitous in UN meetings. For instance, most speeches at this year’s G77 Ministerial Meeting began with, “Your Excellency, President of the General Assembly, Mr. John Ashe; Your Excellency, Secretary-General of the United Nations, Mr. Ban Ki-moon; Executive
Secretary of the Group of 77; Honorable Ministers; Excellencies; Distinguished Delegates; Ladies and Gentlemen.” It is not only that they take time away from substantive, meaningful dialogues, but it also prevents conversations between people, staffers and diplomats who are not at the same level, and whose conversations would be valuable in increasing the efficiency of the process—everyone knows what happens when playing the telephone game.

While working in marathon, end-of-year budgetary negotiations, I overheard very candid conversations among lower-level diplomats that were quite critical of the way in which certain aspects of the negotiations were being run. During an ambassadorial meeting of the G77 to report on the progress of the negotiations, the diplomat who was critical of the negotiation process raised the flag to speak. What this diplomat communicated was a warped, ‘diplomatic’ version of this person’s original thoughts, almost a lie of what they thought to be the actual truth. As another example, when the Vice President of Bolivia attended an ambassadorial meeting to present the progress of the preparations for the 50th Anniversary Summit of the G77, there were no questions asked by any ambassadors regarding the logistics, the planning, or the official outcome document. Days after this meeting, the office received numerous calls inquiring as to the logistics, the planning and the official outcome document. These were questions which we could not answer ourselves because the decisions on the Summit were being made by La Paz, the Bolivian capital. Even if the ambassadors had these questions, they felt uncomfortable questioning the vice president, of putting him in the spot, although it is regarding a matter of great importance to them and to the Group. This is not to say that experience and knowledge should not be admired and respected. However, the maintenance of a ‘diplomatic’ way of expressing one’s thoughts for the sake of respect, hierarchy and immunity, runs a high risk of generating miscommunications, and misconceptions that further replicate and continue a process
that harms the South; a process that does not advance the agenda of the poor and underdeveloped. And, it is in this exact same way that the South becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. The G77, as an inter-governmental apparatus that depends on the membership of its governments, cannot deny the respect, the hierarchy and immunity of any of its components for the sake of efficiency, communication, etc., because by doing so it would be denying itself of the same privileges. Therefore, the G77 becomes an institution that legitimizes the state, the authorities that represent the state, and the international order from which it has been established. This is not dissimilar to the way in which the GA, as previously discussed through Onuf’s insights, limits the actions of the G77. To this extent, the G77 contributes to the plight of its own global poor—of the South, by member states’ commitments to act within the G77. Thomas Pogge is effective in highlighting the process in which current international norms recognize de facto rulers, the highest in the hierarchy, and confer on them resource privileges, borrowing privileges, and arms privileges:

> It is a central feature of our global institutional order that any group controlling a preponderance of the means of coercion within a country is internationally recognized as the legitimate government of the country’s territory and people—regardless of how this group came to power, of how it exercises power and of how much popular support it has. International recognition means not merely that we engage such a group in negotiations, but also that we accept its right to act for the people it rules and thereby authorize it to sell the country’s resources and to dispose of the proceeds of such sales to borrow the country’s name and thereby to impose debt service obligations upon it, to sign treaties on the country’s behalf and thus to bind its present and future population, and to use state revenues to buy the means of internal repression. This global practice goes a long way toward explaining why so many countries are so badly governed. (Pogge 2010, p. 27)

**Same Statements, Same Positions**

Politically, then, the G77, and by association the UN and all its member states, almost unquestionably legitimize rulers as capable individuals who are more interested in attaining the welfare of their citizens than their own. Yet the question remains: How is the G77 complicit in ensuring a North-South divide? The G77 is an active player by the numbers. Personalities such
as Ban Ki-moon have acknowledged the role played by G77 in negotiation processes. They note with full assurance that nothing could get done at the UN without the G77. It is certainly difficult to deny the role the G77 plays in making UN work. With a membership of two-thirds of all UN Member States, the G77 aids in organizing the various interests of its membership under one main theme: development. The G77 exerts most of its influence in the 2\textsuperscript{nd}, 3\textsuperscript{rd} and, most importantly, the 5\textsuperscript{th} Main Committees of the GA. Its platform is shaped by multiple group negotiations that are held every year, and its two-thirds majority can ensure that many of its initiatives are passed.

The G77 defines its platform through in-group negotiations at the expert, ambassadorial, ministerial and head of state level. There have been two head-of-state level meetings, called South Summits. In addition, to keep abreast of affairs and occurrences, the G77 holds numerous expert level and ambassadorial meetings through the year. Once a year, however, the Group convenes a ministerial meeting to set the Group’s agenda for that session of the GA, and as such serves as point of reference for the positions the Group will take in GA negotiations. The Thirty-eighth Annual Meeting of Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the Group of 77, as well as its preparation, was a pinnacle of my experience. It exposed the unequivocal importance that diplomats place on speeches. The ministerial meeting is held during UN Week, which marks the opening of a GA session for a particular year, when heads of state inundate the streets of New York City and crowd the halls of the UN. Each year, the ministerial meeting is presided by the Chairman of the G77, which at this time was Fiji, represented by the Minister of Foreign Affairs. The Chair asked for the meeting to be a ‘dialogue’, i.e. not a time to read long prepared statements as most formal functions of the UN tend to be. Nevertheless, it became just that. The ‘dialogue’ only became much more engaging when Cuba’s Minister of Foreign Affairs took
advantage of his allotted time to reflect, and therefore constructively criticize, on the effectiveness with which the G77 used to address subjects. When compared to the past, his remark went, the present G77 has not been as effective in promoting the issues of developing countries. A couple of other ministers made off the cuff remarks of the same caliber, but after a few speakers, the conversation reverted back to being monotonous and quotidian. Even Kiribati, which on that occasion became the 133rd state to join the Group, was merely thankful. A few days prior I had read an article by Bloomberg Businessweek with a headline that read, “This entire country [Kiribati] is about to be wiped out by climate change. It won’t be the last” (Goldberg 2013). From Kiribati, nothing was said about climate change, nothing seeking to raise alarm, or awareness of this situation.

A reason why ministers are not as engaged in discussion is because the outcome document of the meeting, the Ministerial Declaration of the Group of 77, is a document that is negotiated by delegates for weeks prior to the meeting. This is done so as to not have any, or diminish the change of having, altercations at such a high-level. After all, the thought is, as Phillipe de Comynnes once said, that “two great princes who wish to establish good personal relations should never meet each other face to face, but ought to communicate through good and wise emissaries” (Wetzel 1997, p. 6) The Ministerial Declaration of the G77 is a document that contains the full range of positions that the G77 supports and has supported over the years. This document is expected to serve as a guideline for delegations to base their negotiations during that year’s meetings in the assembly, and others such as climate change. However, the Declaration has become a stagnant document over time; it does not see much substantive change from year to year.
During the preparative negotiations of the Declaration, some delegates brought to attention the striking similarity, and redundancy, that can be found in many parts of the text of this 150 paragraph declaration. When compared to previous declarations, some of the paragraphs within this declaration seem to repeated or recycled in someway or another. Aside from the addition of paragraphs after important thematic discussions that are held during UN Week, as was the case this year with meetings on Disability and Development and Immigration and Development, the declaration is static. The Executive Secretariat and the Chairman place the first negotiable proposal of the Ministerial Declaration, which is essentially a slightly modified version of the declaration from the previous year. It is a repetitive document, and its main goal is to assert the Group’s position on issues where it has consensus, not necessarily to create anything new. Consequently, the move by some delegates to ‘renew’ the declaration was met with challenge by the bureaucracy who regarded each of the paragraphs as having corresponding justifications. The response was taken as an attack, and one of my colleagues exclaimed, “I can meet with him and explain to him the history and the reasons behind each one of those paragraphs. They are trying to weaken the Group!” What he failed to realize was that the Group is essentially weak.

Through the use of statements and declarations, the G77 engages in assertive and directive speech acts that seek to impose rules upon the North. By asserting that “we believe that restrictive business practices and monopoly rights exercised by global corporations and other entities often impede innovation, flow of information and technology”, the G77 seeks to impose a belief, that if listened by the North, will create rules that attempt to regulate business practices and monopoly rights for development. Similarly, by “call[ing] upon the Government of the United States to put an end to the economic, commercial and financial embargo against Cuba”
(G77 2005, p.19), the G77 seeks to place a directive-rule by demanding the United States to perform this action. That the United States responds with the same position generation after generation, in which it asserts the suffering of the Cuban people by acts of the Cuban Government and directs the government to change, has a lot to do with the illocutionary force and meaning that G77 statements might have for the United States. This, however, does not stop the G77 from continuously, and relentlessly asserting the same positions over time, with the hopes that they will be internalized by the North. But, if compliance with rules help maintain rule (Onuf 1989), then noncompliance by the North entails weak rule by the G77, leading to unfavorable conditions for the South.

Statements made on behalf of the Group follow this trajectory. In 2013, more than 150 interventions were made by the Group, each to delineate its position in regards to agenda items of interest. Take the following as an example of how statements are recycled and positions reiterated. In the some committees of the GA, delegates who are members of the mission that acts as Chair of the Group for a particular year write the statements for their committee. These statements are written, and then circulated via email to all G77 delegations. Once circulated, delegations are given a deadline (usually 1 hour before speech is made) to submit amendments that they would like the Group to consider. In other committees where the G77 acts, this procedure differs slightly. G77 delegates who act as coordinators for the Group within those bodies write the statements in collaboration with other members of the Group. Essentially, they negotiate the language of the statement with other Group members. To aid all delegates in this task, the G77 website has a thorough list that contains the text of all statements that have been made since 1997. These texts serve as foundation for statements that are made in the present, and which will be made in the future. It becomes a good point of reference for many of the young,
inexperienced diplomats to base their views and work. At the end of the day, everyone has a stake at placing their amendments, their thoughts, and finally delivering a statement that is in accordance with their positions—the position of the Group. Taking from Neuman (2007), the end result is a statement that the G77 can stand for. It is a statement that has gone through so many hands that have, at the end, eroded any sense of originality or new, and emerging positions.

Speeches at special events, such as Ministerial Meetings, Handover Ceremonies, among other invitations outside the UN System, follow are similarly crafted. For these meetings, the G77 secretariat prepares the speeches that will be delivered by the Chairman on behalf of the Group. Through my time at the G77, I have witnessed and have helped prepared some of these statements. Knowing the subject of the meeting, the staff member preparing the statement will use as foundation the statement that was made at this particular meeting a year before. If this happens to be a new meeting that has never been attended before by the G77, the staff member will gather (copy and paste) paragraphs from speeches made in other occasions but which pertain to the theme of the meeting at hand. This is not problematic as the G77 draws upon the same subjects (climate change, trade, financing for development, technology transfer, etc.) and has negotiated positions on most of these issues. If the G77 does not have text on an issue, it could be due to the simple possibility that the Group does not have a position on it because of a lack of consensus among members due to cultural, economic or political differences. When the G77 does not hold a position on the particular issue, it is not discussed. Upon completion, the statement is presented to the executive secretary, where it is modified through a series of style edits and additions. The secretariat remains weary of making any recommendations, or molding the substance of documents. Thus the outcome is a document that feels recycled, where originality is limited to style and prose and where substance remains untouched.
Diplomats at the UN become ‘experts’ in the specified subjects covered by the organs they are assigned to. Yet, it is this expertise that leads to the internalization and naturalization of protocol, and ideas. It is how these realities become the diplomat and essentially how the diplomat does not ‘produce anything new.’ This is specially the case when the diplomatic corps trains, gains expertise, and experience on the realities of international relations at their ministries of foreign affairs. In this sense, it is unlikely for them to be the prosecutors of change without input from their capitals—their ministries—or high-level politicians who can take responsibility for the change. The G77’s main recourse is to continue this trend—to repeat and repeat the same utterances, and the same statements. It believes it fortifies its position through this behavior, but in actuality, it maintains an already weakened position through the non-compliance by the North.

Powerless Budget

My experience during 5th Committee budgetary negotiations was not atypical from what seems to be tradition through world capitals: negotiations on budgetary issues are contentious; they are source of drama, pain-staking negotiations, and the perception that time is eternal. The importance of the 5th Committee cannot be overstated. It has the mandate to negotiate budget and administrative questions, appropriate funding for departments and programmes and assess contributions. It does so by renewing existing UN mandates, and also by the appropriation of funding on new resolutions that entail programme budget implications. This funding affects the activities and proposals of the Secretariat of the UN, and, to an extent, its funds and programmes. Within the Secretariat, departments such as DESA, DPA, or DPI, are funded by the core budget. These departments are influential voices in respects to the national politics and economic conditions of its member states, as well as the collection and divulgation of information for the benefit of UN members. The budget also confers funding for the quotidian activities (e.g.
conference and interpretation services) of the different decision-making bodies of the UN such as the Security Council, the ECOSOC, and the GA. As described by an experienced G77 ambassador, familiar with the 5th Committee process, at a G77 meeting:

You don’t put a dollar amount for the Secretary General to do what he wants, but what we as member states have collectively decided. You are adopting many things many times when you accept UN budget. You accept the dollar amount to be spent. You adopt also the level of the human resources, which we call staffing table. And you adopt the administrative structure, when looking at the secretariat, divisions, units, and bureaus. When you adopt the budget you are also adopting those administrative charts. When you adopt the budget you also adopt the programmatic content. The programmatic content is very important, because you don’t put dollar amounts at the disposal of the Secretary General to do whatever he wants, you put it in order to do what we, member states have collectively decided. Then one of the tasks during the negotiations is to make sure that the programmatic content is exactly what we want—what derives from decisions on resolutions adopted by deliberative organs, and then we double check that, otherwise we will put the dollar amount at the disposal of the SG and later on we will find out that he will do whatever he will do. Finally, when we adopt the budget we adopt a set of procedures, a set of policies, tell how the SG will spend the money, and tell the member states what they will pay.

With this purpose in mind, it is simple to see the relevance of the 5th Committee as a body of centripetal importance to the UN. By virtue of its numerous membership, the G77 is thought to have direct budgetary influence on UN Core funding, as well as influence on the programme of work of UN development funds and programmes. If the South had full control of the budget and administrative questions, it could channel most of its energies and programmes in a matter that would benefit its agenda, in a way that makes the UN work for the South. In that sense, the 5th Committee is the South’s final frontier within the UN. As previously argued, the South’s position is stagnant at the UN. Moreover, it might not have the leverage to impose on the North international norms and principles, or force them to sign grand trade, and climate conventions. But, if the South has the force in numbers to impose itself in 5th Committee negotiations, it can at least make the UN work for the South.
For purposes of comprehending the impact of G77 actions on UN activities, it is necessary to have a clear depiction of the factors affecting UN Financing. Adopting the UN budget requires, as per the UN Charter, a two-thirds majority. It is, then, in the best interest of the G77 to maintain cohesion and cooperation, because as a union it achieves majority status and displaces the status quo in its favor. With its remarkable membership and attainable unity, it is less a matter of probability than one of certainty that the Group could always attain a two-thirds majority. Each country’s incentive is never to break ranks, or expose weak links within the Group, and by doing so they will have control of budget and administrative questions. It is in the best interest of the Group to increase funding for UN development activities, contrary to the developed country posture of wanting more efficiency, and fewer funds.

Unfortunately for the South, in 1986 the North achieved a concession in which both parties agreed, “to continue to make all possible efforts with a view to establishing the broadest possible agreement [on budgetary matters]” (Swart & Lund 2010, p. 81). Developed countries, particularly the US, aware of their inability to gather enough votes to achieve majority status and control of a budget they mainly fund (assessments of developed countries fund about 80% of the UN: US 20%, EU ~40%) (Swart & Lund 2010), pushed for an agreement that sought to implement a unanimous consensus rule on all 5th Committee decisions. In this particular instance where the South had a considerable advantage with its two-thirds majority, and where it could be said that it was not trapped within the UN and had vast liberties to generate initiatives for its own development, the North once again managed to turn its material dominion into its advantage. The result became the increased dilution of whatever influence the G77 initially had.

Through my coverage of the final budget negotiations for the 2014-2015 biennium, I have been able to observe the way in which the G77 has diluted its influence within the 5th
Committee. These negotiations are especially arduous. Even when they have many weeks to compromise and come to an agreement, decisions are delayed until the final days of the year. For both parties, the negotiating tactic is to delay final decisions with the hopes of placing more pressure upon the negotiating partner to accede to their demands. Last year’s budgetary negotiations culminated a day before new year’s eve, even though they usually end the morning of Christmas eve. The negotiations are all one can imagine. Delegates from the G77 and the ‘partners’, as countries of the North are called, crowd office space and small conference rooms where they set up camp for days and nights. A conference room is assigned as mutual meeting point where both parties will meet to decipher the language of texts, the jobs that will be cut, the initiatives that will be defunded, the management reforms, etc. Resolution writing and compromising is no effortless process. A proposed paragraph can entail hours upon hours of negotiating, each sentence being scrutinized, each dollar amount is checked, because even an innocent comma could place unwanted responsibilities or burdens on certain parties. Ambassadors usually stay on the sidelines and let the experts negotiate the final text. When experts hit a block, ambassadors are called in to make political decisions, to strategize. It becomes a tit-for-tat strategy, where one side neglects a proposal from the opposition unless they receive something in return. Each side comes in with certain assumptions of what the other side wants, and it is in their discussions that they must iron out their differences.

The G77 seems already trapped by the essential fact that it has to negotiate, or iron out its differences with the North, when it originally had the full advantage of attaining a two-thirds majority and passing its desired budget. To note, is the fact that there are budget items that, even after the passage of the abovementioned resolution, have been passed by vote and not consensus, as agreed by the resolution. The resolution places normative, not constitutional, restrictions that
can be circumvented in particular circumstances. This occurrence is seldom the case, however, as parties to the negotiations do seek to comply with this commitment rule. Moreover, the North is eager to do all it can within its normative and material powers to make sure that this resolution is enforced. By committing to the rule, however, the G77 places itself in a weakened position in relation to the North.

In the midst of this semi-chaotic atmosphere, I was advised to hide, or make sure that all extra copies of the draft resolutions on the budget were thrown out. What a delegate confided to me was that the negotiators did not want the drafts to be leaked to their capitals. They wanted to prevent their capitals from intervening, or instructing missions in a negotiation process that was already complex, and threatened by the hardline position taken by the North. In this way, capitals were removed from a process that they are likely most interested in. Assuming that capitals will harden their position with prior knowledge of the intentions of their own delegates, the South actually puts itself in a position of lower gain prior from the start. It places itself at a weaker position as a reaction, or for fear, that the North might not accede to the demands of their capitals.

At an ambassadorial meeting on the night of Christmas Eve, the Chairman of the Group described the negotiations as a delicately constructed house of playing cards, and discouraged ambassadors from making any attempts to push, or reject, any of the decisions that have been made. To him, any disruption could easily collapse the work they had achieved at that time. It is worth noting that only a few members participate in the proceedings of the 5th Committee and the rest of the group entrust them—gives them the mandate—to finalize actions on these subjects. Negotiations are very much dependent on the work of these coordinators and the Chair. As a result, at the end of the meeting, ambassadors made declarations in support of the progress
that had been made in the face of such opposition by the North. The Group accepted a brief
verbal summary of the work that had been done, and a half-page document with a few bullet
points delineating the main decisions made in the negotiation. The quote that appears above by a
G77 ambassador explaining the negotiating process of the 5th Committee was delivered at this
meeting. Although he was not part of the coordinators, he was providing advice to them through
the process. His statement served as an explanation, almost a justification, for the actions and
decisions that were being made by the coordinators. This ambassador had been a chair of this
committee in the past. He knew how things worked—how the negotiations in the committee
operated. It seemed to me that questioning the coordinators would be taken as an attack on the
experience, the hierarchy, and the imaginative diplomatic immunity bubble that protected this
ambassador. As expected, none of the ambassadors wanted to question, or inquire further into the
actions of the coordinating group. They took it for what it was. They cut their losses and moved
on. Similarly, by not approaching the coordinating group, by taking their word at face value,
either as a form of diplomatic respect and hierarchy, the South was placing itself in a weaker
position.

In one statement, an ambassador did subtly suggest that it would be beneficial if in future
negotiations the Group could gather consensus on the demands that will be presented to the
partners in 5th Committee negotiations to ensure a strong position by the Group. The Chairman
‘noted’ the request. I place this approach in doubt, however. Each year there is a different Chair
of the Group, and there can also be many changes in the composition of the group of negotiators
of the committee. Each Chairman has a particular way of addressing the challenges they face, but
they are guided by what protocol, rules, hierarchy, tells them to do, which can distract them from
following recommendations made by previous coordinators. It would be surprising for the Group
if it in its 50 years of history, this particular recommendation had not been made before, but has been pushed aside and forgotten as an anomaly. Because, at the end of the day, its just not how things work.

We can then suspect that the South’s influence within the 5th Committee has been diluted greatly. However, the UN does have agencies, programmes and funds that work outside the boundaries of influence of the GA, and which could be another point of influence for the South. Does the G77 have any influence over these agencies, funds and programmes, for which minimal amounts (or non for agencies) of the core budget are channeled? Funds and programmes, which inter alia include UNICEF, UNFPA, UNDP, gather most of their funding through voluntary annual contributions that are made at the UN Pledging Conference for Development Activities. As they are voluntary, the G77 lacks the capacity to control the contributions by member states, especially when they arrive as earmarked funding. Notwithstanding, these funds and programmes, as part of the UN Development Group, are responsive and liable to the mandates of the GA, specifically the 2nd and 5th Committees, and the enforcement mechanism of the ECOSOC. Consequently, the G77 has a certain influence over them. Nevertheless, because it is big donor Northern countries that fund most of these funds and programmes, and who mostly place Northeners as directors of these organizations, their activities fall at the mercy of their directives.

The UN specialized agencies serve some of the most essential roles within the UN system. Agencies such as the UNIDO and the FAO have succinct mandates, directed by the guidance of their member states. It is not the prerogative of the GA to provide monetary assistance to any of the UN specialized agencies. Nevertheless, agencies are constantly collaborating throughout all levels of the UN system, and adhere to the recommendations and
assignments that may be requested by the GA. Memberships within these agencies differs from that of the UN; states join and withdraw memberships to these agencies depending on its appeal, the issue covered (i.e. health, agriculture, industrialization), or for national or political reasons. Similar to the UN core budget, UN Agencies’ budget and programme of work is approved biannually through a conference of member states. As the G77 is the main propeller for development issues, it is solely interested in collaborating with agencies that contribute greatly to the development agenda. For this reason, the G77 has chapters in the FAO, UNIDO, UNCTAD, UNESCO and UNEP headquarters. Their goal is to promote the developing country agenda within these forums, which also entails the preparation of budgets, and their program of work. As I have not been exposed to the budgeting, administrative and negotiating processes of these organizations, I cannot come to a proper conclusion of the entrapment of the South within them. Notwithstanding, the present work should provide a good idea as to the conclusions of that query. After all, “…it is the nature of the job to leave initiative up to the political leadership. A diplomat is, among other things, a bureaucrat who implements and maintains the policy of the political leadership at any given time. If one cannot accept that, one has to leave” (Neumann 2007, p. 196).

This bureaucratization is substantial reason for homeostasis within the UN system. Bureaucracies, as framed by Max Weber, act as mere cogs in governmental machinery. They simply follow processes within a set of boundaries to generate programmed outcomes. As such, they are constructions that are self-sustaining and self-perpetuating. Within the UN, the statements, the positions, the diplomatic culture, are all part of the bureaucracy. The 5th Committee becomes the head clog through its influence of administrative and budgetary questions, and it is there where the iron cage begins and spreads through the ranks of the UN
System. The budget negotiations and their outcomes are, then, an iron cage from which the South finds hard to escape.

“As long as the politicians themselves do not intervene, nothing new will emanate from the Foreign Ministry. From the point of view of the bureaucrat, it is thus only when the system does not work that something new is produced, because the fact that something new is produced means precisely that the system has failed.” (Neumann 2007, p. 196)

Experts, Bureaucracies

If the South is really trapped within the UN, if the bureaucracy doesn’t work for the South, if these norms and principles are merely sidelined by the power of the North, then what is the purpose of all these UN dialogues, seemingly infinite talks, and questionable initiatives? Bono, it is rumored, once proclaimed to the participants at a UN meeting to stop talking—to act instead. Frankly, most of discussions seem to just serve as a way to ‘set the ball rolling,’ to create an understanding of the links and nexuses between issues, such as that of sports and development, in the hope of mobilizing action. Most of the time, they provide a forum to exchange and promote ideas. A delegate of a country that has not yet been exposed to some of the benefits of micro-financing for development, for instance, and who has just attended a meeting on this subject, could relay the information and ideas to his capital for further consideration.

These discussions can also be used to mobilize certain resolutions that are pending in the UN. They place issues under different frameworks to increase the effectiveness in which UN departments follow their mandates. However, discussions with UN staff members of other departments cast a shadow of doubt as to the UN’s effectiveness in this regard. Their sentiments
for the level of bureaucracy at the UN are beyond negative. “Burrocracia!” one staffer stated in Spanish (burrocracia is a twist on bureaucracy where ‘burro’ means ‘donkey’ or ‘ass’).

The UN’s initiatives and programmes are exemplarary of the bureaucracy. William Easterly (2006) gives us an idea of how to think of UN bureaucrats. Easterly distinguishes the ‘planners’ from the ‘searchers’ who try to eradicate poverty. Planners, such as Western aid agencies and international organizations, including the UN, generate blueprints with prescriptions on how to solve the dilemmas of the ‘rest’. Their main fallacies tend to lie in their political correctness and their hierarchical organization. Planners remain in many ways detached from the world—not connected to the people they make plans for. Planners do not have the proper expertise to understand local dynamics, and to grasp how those dynamics vary considerably from one locality to another. Essentially, planners make plans for planners. The international planner, gathering with his expert counterparts, will discuss themes, nexuses, and all the issues that are thought to be integral part of the development paradigm. The national planner will, in turn, receive these plans and plan accordingly. Namely, they practice what Jeffrey Sachs would entitle clinical economics, in which, as a doctor would, countries have to choose the best treatment or prescription for the ‘illness’ that prevents their development. Fifteen years ago the MDGs and the Millennium Project became brainchildren of this mode of thinking.

And this year, the Post-2015 Development Agenda with its famed SDGs will commence a new fifteen-year journey from which we can expect a similar result. These general prescriptions fall into the same category; they are plans—plans that mainstream a certain standard of development.

The MDGs are commendable causes: to eradicate extreme poverty; to achieve universal primary education; to improve maternal health; to promote gender equality; etc. Notwithstanding, they prioritize certain segments of development, while leaving others behind. It
is hard to deny a link between education and development. But, how can education be a key to
development if a state cannot provide jobs to its citizens? Education has other ends. It can
encourage self-direction, criticism, and knowledge of practices that might avoid disease,
encourage eating habits, etc. But, economically, how can education be a key to development if
government corruption and instability limit FDI and entrepreneurship—a source of job markets.
Take Côte d’Ivoire\(^\text{10}\) as an example. The country used to have a highly educated youth who saw,
from a Northern standpoint, education as an escape from the agricultural labor faced by their
parents and ancestors. Upon graduating, many were not able to find jobs in the country. They
would go back to the same farms where their parents had worked for years. The economy was
not diversified and relied mainly on its dominance of cocoa in the international market for
subsistence. Disillusioned, many refused to accept this reality and took onto the streets. Another
civil war lurked in and threatened the livelihoods and past achievements of the people of Côte
d’Ivoire.

By planning, bureaucrats are generating categories of development from previously
upheld development norms. Yet, they are excluding focus on factors that may be more relevant
to development. For instance, the MDGs lack focus on energy, even when 1.6 billion do not have
access to electricity. Access to energy, especially from renewable sources, can, inter alia,
contribute to education, reduction of pollution and disease, provide fresh water for drinking and
agriculture.\(^\text{11}\) If a lack of energy “entrenches poverty, constrains the delivery of social services,

\(^{10}\) See McGovern (2011), *Making War in Côte D’Ivoire*.

\(^{11}\) According to a report, renewable energy can contribute “by providing electricity to schools, improving
attendance, retaining teachers, and empowering educational media. Renewable energy for cooking and heating can
reduce the time that children, especially girls, spend out of school collecting fuel. In addition, the displacement of
traditional fuel reduces the health problems from indoor air pollution produced by burning those fuels. Renewable
energy can also contribute to improved health by providing energy to refrigerate medicine, sterilize medical
equipment and incinerate medical waste. And it can provide power for supplying the fresh water and sewer services
needed to reduce the burden of infectious disease.” (Flavin 2012, p. 7)
limits opportunities for women, and erodes environmental sustainability at the local, national, and global levels” (Flavin 2012, p. 8), and if “much greater access to energy services is essential to address this situation and to support the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals” (Flavin 2012, p. 8), then why could not they place energy as a goal itself? Energy, an instrument so essential for development, has been left at the margins of development planning.

This, however, might come to no surprise after all. It is the diplomats from the North and the South who make the political decisions in compiling these goals. The G77 is not free from responsibility. It was the G77 who blocked an initiative to have reproductive health appear as a goal in the MDGs (Hulme 2009). In addition, as a consequence of a lack of consensus on energy issues by the G77, with Middle Eastern countries tending to support oil-based initiatives and deny renewable energy resources, energy may have dictated the same fate, it was sidelined from a broader development agenda. Lastly, as I have observed through recent G77 ambassadorial meetings, it is Southern diplomats who are blocking efforts to link human rights to development. What some of these ambassadors have said is that they believe in the “human right to development,” but not in human rights as a condition for development. Of course, this sentiment is not shared by all members of the G77, especially in Latin America where they tend to be more supportive of human rights. However, because the G77 does require consensus by all members to achieve a ‘Southern’ position, it generalizes about the South, in regards to what the South is and what is good or bad for it.

Looking at the bureaucracy provides an extended view of the ramifications of the same statements, the same positions, as well as the constrained mobility on budget and administrative issues. Energy was not placed in the MDGs because it was the same statements and same positions that prevented it from being so. In the same manner, as a consequence of the same
statements, and the same positions, human rights were not, and will not be part of the development agenda for sometime to come. The ideas that are shared, the initiatives that are driven, are all made under a previously established order, which has been established under the umbrella of the North, with the G77 as its institutional accomplice. In this sense, it perpetuates a Southern position of inferiority, as the North is what is developed and defines how development should be, and how to attain it. However, it is the South, through the G77, which places itself in an identity that is not definitive of every member in the group. Many members of the G77 are pro-energy, and pro-human rights. But, because of these generalizations, this stance is hardly posited in the UN agenda, and affects the way in which the UN acts towards development.

It is the heads of state and the diplomats of international organizations who make the plans for the world. Unfortunately, these prescriptions can be damaging by conceptualizing ignoramus ideas on what the world is or how it should be. And, ironically, it was these officials who at the UN Conference on Sustainable Development in 2012 came out with a new plan, which is entitled “The future we want,” because they know what they want.

Can Anyone Hear the South?

“If a tree falls in a forest but there is no one around to hear it, does it make a sound?”

Throughout this paper, I have tried to delineate the boundaries and limits that the South is faced with by acting through the G77 within the UN. Prior to analysis, its options are hopeful as a consequence of its ‘force’ by the numbers. However, the South remains trapped. First, by acting through the G77 within the UN, the South legitimizes a system that constricts its choices of action. It is a system that reifies a hierarchical organization that worries more about the niceties of diplomatic culture and the maintenance of positions of power, even of dictators and mass-
murderers, than the protection and development of the South. Moreover, in areas where it could enact considerable force, such as the 5th Committee, the G77 has waned its influence to the directives and material power of the North. Lastly, the South as G77 does not deviate from its position. It cares about generating the same statements and positions on development issues time and time again. If the G77 was truly heard, if the G77 could effect compliance on the rules it projects, would it be necessary to engage in this cycle of repetitive statements that has continued for the past fifty years? The pleas of the South fall to the deaf ears of the North. It is certainly difficult to see where progress can be made in this respect, especially because “to imagine another system is to extend our participation in the present system” (Foucault & Bouchard 1980, p. 230).
WORKS CITED


United Nations (1945), Charter of the United Nations, UNTS XVI


