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ON THE ANTHROPOLOGY OF THE  
UNITED NATIONS SYSTEM

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## 1. Introduction

To describe and analyse a system like the UN system organizational charts etc. are, of course insufficient. Knowledge of the basic characteristics of its structure as it really functions and its underlying culture (ethos, Weltanschauung) is indispensable, as they largely determine both what kinds of inputs the system will accept and what kinds of outputs it will produce. This applies both to the UN as a

political organization, trying to process inputs about "situations" (problems, conflicts) into such outputs as resolutions, actions

research organization, trying to process inputs about the empirical world (data, theories, values) into such outputs as background papers, documents, etc.

As the outputs from the UN as a research organizations often are used as inputs to the UN as a political organization (but not as the only inputs) most parts of the system will be a mixture of the two. Concretely this means that in the UN - as an enormous research conglomerate<sup>1</sup> - research has some impact on political outputs. But it also means, conversely, that the range of political outputs considered feasible/desirable will have an impact on the type of research being done. To steer this complex relationship most UN organizations will be a mixture of political and research organizations, with UNGA/UNSC clearly more purely political, and smaller components such as the UNU/UNITAR/UNRISD clearly more purely research organizations. In between are all (or most) of the other components of the system, each specialized agency, for instance, having its own research branch built into the organization - often producing some of the best research in the world in some fields of specialization<sup>2</sup> - on an in-house and/or contract basis.

## 2. On the structure of the UN system

The structure of the UN system derives from the basic fact about the system, that members are states and its converse, that "states are members", increasingly becoming true as the UN now is nearly universal (it was not when the UN was founded). That the world to a large extent is a state system, and that it is the task of the UN to reflect this, will be considered beyond dispute here. The problem is that much of the world is non-state. There are all the non-governmental actors, national and international, formal and non-formal. Then there are human beings and other parts of nature. There is a limit to the extent to which human beings are state citizens, and nature is state territory - there is also something universal about either. The problem is: are there sufficiently non-state aspects of the UN system to reflect this? And the other problem is what consequences in general follow from the statocratic<sup>3</sup> aspect of the UN, precisely for the only absolute goods there are: nature in general, and human beings as a part of it?

One basic consequence is governmentalism: the UN not so much as a trade union of states, as, in concretu, a trade union of governments. This brings in the sacred aspect of governments, promulgated by governments themselves<sup>4</sup>. Governments in countries that benefit from political freedom may be criticized, internally, by their own citizens. In the international system, and in international organizations, governments may criticize other governments. But it is sacrilegious for citizens of any country, when working in intergovernmental organizations, to criticize governments by name, particularly their own (it can be done indirectly if sufficiently general categories are used)<sup>5</sup>. This also holds outside the organizations, to some extent: "right or wrong, my country". The consequence of this is the extreme verticality in international bureaucracies, found inside most UN organizations, with an aura of the untouchable given to the general conferences/assemblies or the executive boards/boards of governors where governments are participating directly, precisely because they are inter-governmental rather than inter-state. When, at the same time, one considers the wealth of experience and insight accumulated and possessed by the professionals in the secretariats,

some of the malaise and the frustration in the UN system can be understood among those thinking beyond the inter-state world. The frustration can be considerably reduced if the organization has as its head a person capable of articulating beyond what governments are willing to/capable of articulating, and that person also is able to mobilize his staff accordingly. But only very rarely will both of these conditions be fulfilled. The frustration will be aggravated further if the head of the organization sees himself merely as an executive secretary, exercising no independent leadership, of the governmental body. In that case he is nothing but an executive trying to alleviate tensions and regulating inter-state interaction, not going beyond that, into spheres of cooperation at the global level (eg running joint projects, such as "Health for All by the Year 2000"), assuming responsibilities by all governments for human beings everywhere - not only "their own".

As many governments can be assumed to want their citizens as client citizens (of an état-providence), and governments of bigger states in addition want some other states as client states, many, perhaps most, governments will not in general support

strong intergovernmental organizations that could compete from above with strong governments in meeting the demands of citizens and lesser states

strong subnational/ local organizations that could compete from below with the government of the state in being the provider

Phrased in other terms: movements for local self-reliance will be opposed by most governments; movements for national self-reliance will be opposed by the stronger states; and movements for regional self-reliance by stronger regions. And movements more in the direction of a world government will be particularly strongly opposed by these strong regions. At all levels self-reliance will be seen as "unnecessary" because demands are said to be better met by the existing system, or are already adequately taken care of by the level immediately above<sup>6</sup>

Thus, a system like the UN system, putting all states, formally speaking, on an equal footing, is already a challenge to the stronger states and a golden opportunity as a setting for the smaller ones to organize their interest group trade unions, such as the Group of 77, and the Non-aligned. To move some steps in the direction of political and economic democracy in the world system of states is already an historical achievement, and an expression at the inter-state level of what social democracy has been doing in some countries, trying to control global, not only national capitalist and repressive forces, trying to reduce inequality, if not inequity.<sup>7</sup> By reducing these power differentials in the inter-state system some of the power basis of strong states may be eroded. But this affects negatively only some states. Penetration from above by strong intergovernmental organizations, and from below by strong local organizations - however much this might be in the objective interests of both human beings and of nature - will reduce the power of any government, in states strong or weak, and is, hence, likely to be resisted by the parts of the UN system most dominated by governments.

This defines a long lasting contradiction and battle-front within the system, particularly between strong secretariats and strong governments, and much of what happens can be seen in the light of that contradiction. Thus, most governments will probably, one way or the other, try to use the system to strengthen their own position within their own country, to build strong states or at least strong governments - for instance in the field of technology, in a broad sense.<sup>8</sup> The UN system becomes a resource that governments can use to strengthen their own position - whether or not there is a trickle-down effect to the people. It provides a setting that weaker governments or governments of weaker states may use to rally against the stronger ones. But it is also a setting where governments and states, weak or strong, may agree both on limiting the power of the secretariat and on limiting the power of subnational groups. Moreover, it is a setting that will favor not only state'ism but interstate'ism - the notion of proceeding on the basis of inter-state agreements, multilaterally rather than unilaterally. So far as it works so good. But it should be noted that this also means that states can postpone unilateral action on a problem till multilateral agreement is obtained - long time hence, if ever (as in the

These are some of the contradictions built into the system, between governments and the secretariats, between strong and weak governments, between governments and their people - sometimes more, sometimes less sharply articulated. Let us then introduce one more actor and call him the Executive Director, as a generic term. The system equips him with a formidable status, if not necessarily with power - but status can to some extent be converted into power (and vice versa). The selection and election process is long, cumbersome and painful to most people involved<sup>9</sup>, in itself serving as a filter: "is he (because it seems always to be a he, so far at least) able to take this and that humiliation and politicking, then he may probably take quite a lot later, too". There are all the perquisites of power, such as an extremely high salary,<sup>10</sup> the black, chauffeur-driven car, the access to governments and to other inter-governmental organizations, and an almost absolute command over the secretariat. They actually work in his name, papers are published in his name (or at least circulated in his name); his stamp of approval is what matters inside the organization although he may sometimes delegate it to lesser officials. Thus the secretariats tend to become extremely vertical and very steeply so, with just one point at the top: He. If he in addition comes from a tradition of absolute executive rule, such as might be the case with a former chief from a traditional setting or a bureaucrat, corporate or university head in a very authoritarian setting (or both, or more!), then the UN setting will make him feel at home. It gives him that type of prerogatives being essentially feudal, "pre-Napoléonic" one might add.<sup>11</sup>

But this is not the case for the external setting, relative to the governmental (or other) assembly to which he is responsible. They will prefer this vertical internal setting in order to be able to control the whole secretariat through the executive director. He may play several strategies depending on what he wants. If he just wants to survive, possibly also to be reappointed, the safest course would be to take his leads from the governing board/assembly and simply be its secretary, not the director. If he wants to direct, he has to have allies, and above is an indication of his possibilities:

- (1) all governments, against the secretariat
- (2) strong governments against the weaker (threatening money withdrawal)
- (3) weak governments against the stronger (threatening vote withdrawal)
- (4) people (i. g. non-governmental groups) against governments
- (5) secretariat against governments

The latter cannot possibly work alone, but together with nos. (3) and (4) may become something of a force. In other words, the active executive director would be the one who plays on existing contradictions and uses them to promote the type of policies he prefers. But that game, of course, can also be played by his adversaries, whoever they are. And they may play it from the very beginning, in the very selection process of an executive director, seeing to it that the person is "predictable", "reliable", even "amenable".

There are also certain habits carried into the structure of the UN system that do not stem from the governmentalism of the member states, but more from their bureaucratism. Its major features are hierarchisation: a certain vertical way of organizing work, with decisions taken at the higher levels and implementation (as studies or as actions) by the lower levels, in a relatively unquestioning manner. Then there is the specialization, the segmentation of problems into sub-problems etc. mirrored in the fragmentation of complex organizations into sub-units, handling sub-problems, etc. As a result of this not only does one hand not know what the other hand is doing (or one finger what the other finger is doing), but there is hardly any place where all the knowledge or images produced come together forming some kind of a whole.<sup>12</sup> That there may be duplication in the work is not so serious for if a reasonably complex study is done under different circumstances there will never really be duplication. There will be replication, always revealing interesting differences.

What is troublesome is that the UN system does not seem sufficiently to benefit from this replication by comparing the work that is being done on the same or similar subjects, in similar or different ways, elsewhere in the system. In other words, it does not benefit sufficiently from the diversity in its own sprawling organization by comparing, integrating, synthesizing at higher

levels. Instead there may be efforts to impose holistic images, such as the New International Economic Order, on the work done, thereby building compatibility into the results from the very beginning. In many cases, however, all of this is of little significance as a true bureaucracy (in the pejorative sense of that word) will never be interested in the validity of the results, but in the validity of the process producing the results. It will be the number of studies and meetings, the geographical distribution of participants and venues, the ability to spend the money allotted in a way satisfactory to the auditors, within the time allotted, that will be the indicator of success, not the results. Just to the contrary, a well greased process will serve as an incentive to do the study once again, meaning that any study has to be seen as "exploratory" so that it does not pre-empt further studies in the same field but only prepares the ground for them. Very rare is the UN bureaucrat who reads the study he has commissioned, meaning really reads it.

It follows from all of this that the style of the organization will be more similar to a ministry than to a research institute in an academic setting. There will be pledges of loyalty and confidentiality. More importantly, the work product of the researchers will be seen as belonging to the organization, not to s/he who produced it. Some parts of the system will also have a claim on the staff member after s/he leaves the organization, at least for a certain time period - experiences gained, particularly about the inner life of the organization, still belongs to the organization. In short, the setting for an intelligentsia rather than for intellectuals.<sup>13</sup>

An important aspect of bureaucratization is the tendency of any bureaucracy to engage in "coordination": negative and positive. The negative co-ordination, under the general heading of "avoidance of duplication", will take the form of drawing demarcation lines in the functional space in which the parts of the UN system is operating: "you take the health aspect, you the cultural aspect, I the economic aspect", etc. For particularly contested border areas joint commissions may be set up - sometimes an elegant solution much beyond what states are able to do in territorial (geographical) space. But this is also a setting in which the stronger organizations may prevail upon the weaker ones, depriving them of interesting



topics that may have a direct bearing on key items on the political agendas. Moreover, as mentioned, to cut out "duplication" is to cut out a source of enrichment, particularly in as much as the older views will prevail. By definition it is the newcomer who commits the sin of "duplication", not the old organization/division/section that was there before - and continues its work within the same paradigm of thinking.<sup>14</sup> Thus, a major function of the negative coordination is to protect vested political and intellectual interests against potentially new thinking. Obviously, what is needed would be much more positive coordination, and not only in the sense of directives from above but of integration from below. An obvious way of doing this would be by having working groups and workshops across sections, divisions and organizations tying together loose ends coming out of their particular, often highly fragmented, concerns. There is much of that in the UN system,<sup>15</sup> some of it without the knowledge of the higher ranking officials - simply out of curiosity and idealism.

Still another way in which bureaucratization shows up is in the tendency of the top of an organization to try to plan and control down to the smallest detail the lower levels. Time factors and budgetary constraints, as well as auditing practices, are used more than what would seem legitimate to steer lower levels. In the fields of research this takes the form, sometimes, of planning conclusions in advance, if not with pinpoint precision, at least indicating the range of findings that would be "realistic" - usually given by the terms of reference of a study/project. Much time will be spent by the lower levels either conforming to this, or devising counter-tactics. The pattern of time-limited contracts works either way: staff members may overconform lest the contract will not be renewed; choose a line of dissent if they think the contract will (probably) not be renewed anyhow; or work very slowly so that the contract has to be renewed lest the study be lost. At any rate the freedom of the lower levels is so seriously curtailed by being bogged down with administrative paper-work that not much creative, innovative work will be forthcoming anyhow. The bureaucratic response will be that originality is not demanded either, but to implement decisions taken at higher levels. They may be right. Within the logic of the system, the task is to deliver the rationale for high level decisions, not the background for other decisions. And yet much of the latter is going on, and the system is caught in the middle.

### 3. On the culture of the UN system

The culture of the UN system derives from its origin in the Western, or occidental, part of the world.<sup>15</sup> What it means is basically that some people - Westerners and Westernized non-Westerners - will feel more at home in the organization than will others. The languages most used as working languages has something to do with that, especially because the English and the French (particularly the latter) still see themselves - and are seen by most others - as the legitimate owners of their languages, with a near-monopoly on defining what is the correct use of the language. Any other users become, ipso facto, servants of these language-masters, following their rules. Russian and Spanish also being Western languages, this means that whatever cultural code is embedded in the languages the Western bias is obvious.<sup>17</sup>

But the linguistic bias is only partially accounted for in terms of national languages. Probably much more important are the non-national categories defining and forming linguistic practices: the language used in the UN is adult rather than adolescent, male rather than female, intellectual rather than emotive, bureaucratic rather than the language of scientific discourse. Only very specially shaped minds will derive any feeling of linguistic delight from reading a UN document.<sup>18</sup> A wider range of comprehensibility, hence, is certainly not only a question of translating into other national languages, but also of translating into the natural languages of other social groups and classes than those populating the UN system. Of course, the system is aware of this and efforts have been made in recent years to overcome this problem - as it is also attempted done by national governments <sup>when</sup> they discover that "their" citizens are unmoved by what the governments say, simply do not understand what they try to communicate. However, as this western bureaucratic language of adult, male intellectuals<sup>19</sup> is now fairly universal, being more or less the language of the international professional class, those who use it will tend to believe they are understood all over because others with different skin colors, ideology and/or national tongue seem to understand it so perfectly. And what other people can there be in the world than adult, male, intellectuals?

Just as there is a linguistic bias in the UN system, there is also a bias in intellectual style.<sup>20</sup> More particularly, the UN intellectual style is the saxonian rather than the gallic or teutonic style; the intellectual style predominant in the UK and the US rather than the style dominant in, for instance France and Germany. The emphasis is on data and documentation, with relatively simplistic interpretation, not on elegant or cumbersome interpretation with relatively little data. There is a scepticism bordering on horror about theorizing, presumably because deeper interpretations are the monopoly of those higher up, the governmental levels, <sup>maybe the Executive Director,</sup> not of the secretariat. The task of the secretariat is to deliver the empirical raw material for others to interpret; one form of raw material, incidentally, being documentation of "recent trends", in developing thinking, etc.<sup>21</sup> A higher level of theory-formation might strengthen the power of the secretariat but might also lead to deeper cleavages even at the secretariate level, because of a higher level of intellectual and political discourse.

This point is so important in understanding the UN that it has to be spelt out. One particular aspect of the Saxonian intellectual style, as mentioned, is its empiricism, its emphasis on documentation and empirical evidence in general. There is, in general, a scepticism concerning "theory", which is often opposed to "practice" in the UN culture. Well documented practice is the substance around which a good UN background paper is supposed to be constructed. Theory, if any, should recede into the background and appear only implicitly in the organization of the paper or in some very careful and very tentative remarks towards the end. As mentioned this intellectual style is compatible with the division of labor between governing bodies and secretariat staff, with the former defining the distant goals and the broad outlines of empirical reality, and the latter providing raw materials for understanding that reality as well as raw material in the form of well selected case studies for glimpses of a potential reality. As indicated above this may make UK and US professionals feel more at home in the UN research conglomerate than the French and the Germans - not to mention genuine non-Westerners.<sup>22</sup>

The advantage of this approach is obvious: it is more easy to build consensus on the basis of good data than on the basis of theory, however attractive to the adherents. Many would also add that data offer a more solid basis for action than theory: what has worked once may work again. But that is not so obvious; the conditions may be different. In fact, underlying the assumption that "what has worked once may work again" is a theory of ceteris paribus, that other factors will be equal, or unimportant. But in the real world they usually are not, meaning that this is simply a bad theory.<sup>23</sup>

The disadvantage of the approach is also obvious. All famous cases systematically mined by UN agencies and others for their empirical content,<sup>24</sup> in order to serve as underpinning for action, were once only potential reality, not empirical reality, only existing in some people's dreams, as values, theories or both, wrapped together in an ideology. To achieve the transition from potential to empirical reality considerable fight was needed, in most cases against those defending status quo with the type of implicit theory appropriately called "conventional wisdom". They also had to fight the conventional wisdom inside themselves to think new and audacious thoughts, and/or engage in new and path-breaking practice. Within an intellectual style insisting on some empirical "evidence" before any proposition/proposal can be made one has to build on those who do not insist on this but go ahead, guided by intuitions. An organization basing its actions on "findings" is riding piggy-back on those who did not hide behind predecessors in their practice. In short, the empiricist intellectual style is compatible with lack of audacity, even with cowardice. This can be defended by reference to the universal character of the UN to be: actions all over the world have to be well founded. And data do constitute a more solid base than promises, however well inspired by theories and values.

But for actions all over the world to be meaningful they have to be different because the conditions are structurally and culturally different. One thing is the universal character of the UN in the sense that not only are the members states but practically all states are members - quite another thing is universalism as an ideological position. An anti-universalist position, fully cognizant of the diversity of this world, might be inspired by a case study, but nothing more. What is

called for lies more in the direction of general principles, highly flexible in their application - and fruitful dialogues among systems and civilisations, about concrete application of those principles. But this calls for a different intellectual style, not instead of, but in addition to the positivism implicit in the drive towards documentation. Whereas documentation is often done in a highly professional manner by professionals, this other approach becomes a more amateurish, less systematic work of politicians (in late hours) and officials, themselves intellectual amateurs. In the division of labor between governing bodies and the secretariats the latter tend to be left out of that type of process, giving them less chance to develop the approach further and also to develop themselves professionally in drawing deeper conclusions from their findings. To the loss both to the organization and its staff, both to the secretariate and the governing body/assembly, not to mention to people around the world served by the organizations.

One might also talk about a bias in political style in the UN system. The Western political style is highly verbal. Conflicts are articulated as fully as the protagonists are able to, and in the process antagonists tend to depersonalize their relation to each other. Styles of mediation/arbitration, voting according to the formula one person/state - one vote, and rules of abiding by the result tend to reinforce this depersonalization and social distance. As opposed to this would be an other family of approaches: less verbal, more based on direct personal relations (and if it is verbal more based on oral than on written communication); consensus-building after lengthy debates where issues are not so explicitly articulated. An indicator of a possible dewesternization process in the UN system would be the extent to which there is a transition towards this second family of approaches - of course also known in the West, but then as the "informal system", the party lounge/corridor system parallel to the formal system.<sup>25</sup> As usual it is a question of relative weight rather than on any absolute choice in favor of one or the other. More concretely, it would take the form of a more oral approach, not leaving written traces behind. And when a conflict comes up the basic point would be never to bring it to a vote, but try to settle it in a non-confrontational manner - including not settling it at all, just putting it aside, possibly to be taken up again when the "situation" has "matured". This does not mean that language may not be quite powerful. But it will be behind the scenes, off

A problem worth attention is a (possibly very) high level of homogeneity of the UN staff. The professional staff is mainly male. It is middle-aged; young people will not have achieved sufficient visibility to be recruited, and the strict rules of retirement (at the age of 60) precludes older people from being staff members. It is university-educated, and to a large extent (it is assumed) in Western style universities.<sup>26</sup> Its maleness will tend to make it blind to how society and life in general are experienced by the female half of humankind. Its middle-aged character will not only create similar borders towards the young and the old, making not only the decade of "years" of the women, but also of the children and the (coming) "year" of the old passing experiences that will leave no major impact on the UN system.<sup>27</sup> The more narrow the age bracket in an organization, the more will they tend to have a shared perception of the world. If we assume that the most formative years in terms of world images are in the period, say, of 15-25 years, then a system run by, say, people in their 50s will be dominated by thinking and events 25-35 years earlier - when they were students and had their Weltanschauung formed. As very few people are even aware of the depth and extent of the closure of their own mind major changes will only be brought about by collectively shared major events (such as the Cuba conflict 1962, the oil conflict 1973, the Indo-China wars 1964-1975, the peace movement.

At one point, however, has the homogeneity of the UN staff been considerably reduced: nationality. This heterogeneity is, of course, a necessary condition for the system to function. But a question - only answerable through complicated empirical research - is whether homogeneity is recovered through an even higher concentration on the MAMU (middle-aged males with university education) complex, where it should be noted the three variables of age, sex and education come together in a package, not separably. From the point of view of social justice the quota system for nationality is the only possible one. But from the point of view of the ability of the system as a whole to articulate the concerns of a highly heterogeneous humankind it is not obvious that so much has been gained since age, sex and education may determine which networks one belong to in the international class of professionals even more than nationality. Consequently, quota systems favoring the women, the young and the old, and people without university degrees, might be considered so that the UN system could have a variety that corresponds better to the humankind it is supposed to reflect and articu-

#### 4. Some consequences of UN structural and cultural biases

The structural and cultural biases referred to above would have as their consequence an overselection of some and underselection of other issues for "processing" by the system.

Some hypotheses in this connection:

(1) The system will articulate, even overarticulate, and process, conflicts that are reflected within the system, such as

- the East-West conflict, between "socialist" and "capitalist" countries-
- the North-South conflict, between rich and poor countries, dominant - dominated, exploiting - exploited
- landlocked - not landlocked countries

and so on. In these cases the governments and their representatives, by articulating what they see as their interests, will ipso facto also articulate the conflict.

(2) The system will not be so good at articulating and particularly not at processing conflicts that are not reflected at the governmental level, such as

- class conflicts in general, and conflicts between the government (and the groups it best represents) on the one hand, and the rest of the population on the other.
- conflicts of age and gender; between age groups and the two sexes

and so on. The UN is an inter-state, not an intra-state system; hence much is needed for such issues to be articulated in the system.

The instrument of a specially designed "year" serves this purpose partly, but also shows how easily the system may see the end of the year as the end <sup>even</sup> of articulation, <sup>not to mention processing.</sup> The exception would be when and if a transformation of the issue from intra-state to inter-state can take place, as in the fields of human rights where one group of countries uses the intra-state situation in an other group of countries politically, in inter-state conflicts.

(3) The UN system will tend to prefer associative, not dissociative solutions to conflicts

Total or partial expulsion/exclusion of one or a few members as pariah states may be possible, but not the recommendation of, say, high level of delinking North-South in international economic relations, or high

level of mutual isolation in the East-West system. The UN system will seek integrative solutions like any organization seeking to extend its membership base and promote harmonious solutions and relations.

(4) The system will be even too good at mobilising consensus in the fields where governments have identical and compatible interests, such as

- relative to strong supernational (supergovernmental) organizations
- relative to strong transnational organizations (many TNCs, NGOs)
- relative to strong subnational groups (irredentist movements, groups going in for local self-reliance, etc.)

In such cases there may be a "gentleman's agreement" not to touch the issues; there may be resolutions in favor of status quo, warnings in the form of commissions, studies, projects, etc. The same "muffling of the issue" approach may apply to (2) above.

But apart from these and similar constraints, the range of issues articulated by the UN system is astounding, provided they can be formulated intellectually in the Anglo-saxon framework and ideologically within a soft liberal to social-democratic tradition, thereby making the UN system an agent of socialization in these two cultures.

Of course, the parts of the UN systems are not similar, and there is no scarcity of comments within the UN system as to what characterizes the components of the system. The newcomer in need of an elementary guide to the system might find two dimensions particularly useful:<sup>28</sup>

- political flexibility/rigidity, meaning the extent to which the organization is able to overcome some of the structural biases in the UN system as described above
- intellectual flexibility/rigidity, meaning the extent to which the organization is able to overcome some of the cultural biases in the UN system as described above

Neither should be confused with a conventional right-left distinction, particularly not when taken in the narrow sense of state vs. corporate control. One factor leading to political rigidity would be



- the concept thus moves from birth via adolescence to maturity, meaning that it has been changed sufficiently to become structure and culture compatible. It will not threaten states except states singled out by the majority to be threatened. The idiom will be that of the saxonian intellectual style, rich in documentation and poor in theory and insight, very precise but limited in connotations and emotive overtones, "politically adequate" meaning that it can be used to build consensus or dissent, depending on what is wanted where and when and by whom.
- from maturity to senescence and death is but a short step: the concept thus emasculated can no longer serve the purpose of renewal as what was new has largely been taken away and what was old has been added in its place - except, possibly, the term itself. Even the word will then, after a period of grace, tend to disappear. Those who believed in it no longer identify with it; those who did not get tired of saying "we knew it would not work, it did not stand the test of reality" will have their day. In this phase outside originators of the concept may be called in for last ditch efforts of resuscitation, usually in vain. There is no official funeral ceremony as the concept will linger on in some resolutions, but there will be a feeling of a void, of bereavement. Consequently, the search will be on, by concept scouts, for new concepts to kindle frustrated and sluggish consciences. And as a result -
- a fresh concept is co-opted into the system from the outside, eg. one that has already been through its life cycle in another part of the UN system. For the rest read the story once more.

Nevertheless, each concept leaves some trace behind, more than its denigrators would like to believe, less than the protagonists might have hoped for. If this were not the case the cognitive framework for the system would have undergone no change during the 40 years of its existence. But the system could benefit much from new ideas, sometimes by twisting the ideas less and itself more in order to obtain a higher level of adequacy.

##### 5. Conclusion

One may then ask the question: is this system likely to contribute to such end goals as peace and human and social development? That it will strengthen the position of governments through the exchange of information and make the inter-state system more social democratic, contributing to the strengthening of some weak states and sometimes the weakening of some of the strong seems likely. That it will be used as an instrument by the new international class of professionals in promulgating their class interests also seems likely. But the system is so many steps away from the spaces where true human and social development take place - the inner human spaces,

the micro space surrounding any one of us, the local space - that at least any positive, direct effect would seem unlikely. The more indirect effects, however, can still be considerable, under the heading of "removing obstacles to development". The UN system operates above all in the macro social and world spaces, sometimes trying to blunt the edges of the economic, political and military power of the very strong, patiently trying to strengthen the hand of the weak - also inside countries. But then encountering the obvious resistances alluded to above. This is the governments' private territory!

From the point of view of the countless small groups around the world, however, fighting for human and social development as they see it, and at the expense of no one else, the UN system as such does and can do much more. By establishing some links to such groups (e. g. by asking them to do a study), the UN system in fact

- offers them a certain protection and legitimacy
- makes it possible for them to articulate their concerns in an international setting and for the UN better to identify problems
- makes for mutual visibility of such groups if the UN system brings them together for workshops, in the many journals and magazines of the system, etc. so that they can build networks.

These aspects of the system could be strengthened much further if the UN saw itself more as a medium in which not only governments and their representatives could meet, articulate concerns and arrive at some mutual accommodation or at least exchange of information. The UN could also be something of the same for non-governments, and is in fact moving in that direction in many fields, making it possible for oppressed groups, indeed oppressed peoples, to act and interact in a UN setting. In so doing the UN might increasingly develop people directly, not only hoping that this will come about as a consequence of developing states/governments.

1. I am indebted to Volker Rittberger for this felicitous expression, as I am also indebted to him for many good discussions of this theme of mutual concern. For some of Volker Rittberger's analyses of the UN system see his "Global Conference Diplomacy and International Policy-making: The Case of UN-sponsored World Conferences", European Journal of Political Research, 1983, pp. 167-182, and "U.N. Conference Politics and the New International Order in the Field of Science and Technology", Journal of International Affairs, spring/summer 1979, pp. 63-76.

2. As examples may serve some of the WHO research in epidemiology and UNESCO studies in world history.

3. As opposed to, for instance, democratic, peoples' rule, as a perspective on the world system.

And successfully so - to a large extent accepted by the peoples who tend to relate to cabinets like they related to the courts, and to prime ministers/presidents like kings - largely because these are the successors institutions.

5. In my own experience to compare North and South Korea is not legitimate - to say "Imagine somewhere in the world a country divided into a socialist Northern and a capitalist Southern part " is.

6. For one exploration of the concept, theory and politics of self-reliance, see Galtung, Preisker, O'Brien, eds., Self-Reliance, Bogle d'Quverture, London, 1980.

7. "Inequality" refers to a distribution with much difference between high and low, "inequity" refers to a structure that generates much difference between high and low. In other words, inequity is structure-induced inequality.

For one exploration of the function of technology in creating differences between elite and people see Johan Galtung, Development, Environment and Technology, United Nations (UNCTAD), 1979.

9. As an example may serve the selection of the Rector of the United Nations University, a process I have witnessed three times. It actually takes about one year before the long list is reduced to the short list and the short list is trimmed down to one person who is then appointed. The total amount of working time wasted by the candidates just waiting must be considerable, not to mention the amount of mental agony. However, it belongs to the mystique of the UN system that it considers this waste and agony justified.

10. The Rector of the United Nations University, just to use that example again, made above \$ 120.000 tax free, plus a number of perquisites, in 1980 - about three times the salary of the Norwegian prime minister (who has to pay taxes like all other Norwegians).

4. I am thinking of the internal adjudication processes in the UN system, where international civil servants may not plead their own cases when they have grievances, and the outcome, if positive, comes to by grace rather than because it is right.
5. Being a consultant 1975/76 to both UNCTAD and WHO, on technology transfer and mental disorder theory respectively, it was interesting to compare the technology-optimism of one division of an organization with the technology-pessimism of a division of another organization. See my article in Development Forum, 1976, pp.
6. "Intellectual" refers to a person producing some type of understanding (even a form of understanding) but retains control over the product; "intelligentsia" refers to a person who sells that product, no longer retaining any control. The product belongs to the organization that has paid for it.
7. As an example may serve the relation between UNESCO and UNU, the former regarding herself as the mother institution. Actually, the problem is hardly that the younger institution duplicates; the older organization may be more worried if it does not but blazes some new trails in the research enterprise, leaving the older organization behind.
8. Perhaps more at the P (professional) than the D (director) level, the former having more of an urge to produce, the latter being there to control that urge.
9. After all, the United Nations started as an organization of allies in the fight against the axis powers in general, and Nazi-Germany in particular, in the Second world war, meaning "world" in general, but Europe in particular. It did not start as an organization to fight, for instance, racism and colonialism - to the contrary, it was headed by countries with heavy records of colonialism and/or racism.
10. For an exploration of what this means in practice, see Johan Galtung and Fumiko Nishimura, "Culture, structure and languages: A comparison between Indo-European, Chinese and Japanese languages", Social Science Information, 1983, pp.
11. Even just the name of a conference may be a little trying, like "United Nations Seminar on the Existing Unjust International Economic Order on the Economics of the Developing Countries and the Obstacle that this Represents for the Implementation of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms", a conference which actually took place summer 1980 (see article by Geoffrey Steves, "The Palaver Capital of the Western world", Globe and Mail, September 1 1980).
12. The result of linguistic socialization in the university culture.
13. For an exploration of what this means in practice, see Johan Galtung, "Culture, structure and languages: A comparison between Indo-European, Teutonic, Gallic and Nipponic approaches".

21. Another formula, much beloved by UN bureaucrats, is what they call a "State of the Art" report in a field, hoping thereby to have some professionals do some reading. For them, summarizing literature and bringing the international civil servant - at minimum expense - to the research frontier.

22. Of course, anybody can learn western intellectual style, for instance in the sense of atomistic and deductive thinking - but to feel well and be creative in that framework is another matter - not to mention what the world loses by not also cultivating other intellectual styles (eg more holistic, more dialectical).

23. This is the problem of positivism more than <sup>empiric</sup>empiricism if we assume positivism to imply that what is also, by and large be - that (even social) time is continuous/homogeneous. Empiricism focuses on what is, with no assumption whatsoever as to what will be.

24. At the peak of interest in ujama'a in Tanzania there is said to have been villages with more researchers than villagers.

25. Thus, in a truly oral culture one would not expect delegates to read documents at all, but to pay much attention to what is said and the way it is said.

26. As is well known universities in the non-West tend to be more Western than in the West, reflecting Western university style a generation or two ago rather than today with all the undercurrents, including curiosity about non-Western cultures.

27. Which is not the same as saying that they leave no imprint on the world outside the UN - this impact is probably even considerable. There is focused attention, over a certain period - some statistics and concepts and political ideas are around long enough to be picked up. But for the UN system these may even be mechanisms of avoidance, secluding a debate in a certain slot in time and space.

28. See my article "A Typology of UN Organizations".