

Beyond the Market: The Global South and the WTO's Normative Dimension

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Abstract

Negotiators expect the World Trade Organization (WTO) to be an arena for states to pursue their material gain. However, the WTO also reflects symbolic aspects of international politics, in particular the notion of multilateralism. Although such a principle, in part, expresses Western dominance, Global South states have also benefited from multilateral regimes, and thus have incentives to legitimize them and behave according to their rules. Will the pattern of multilateralism change as other trade arrangements potentially gain more prominence? This article analyzes actions taken by Brazil and India in WTO's Doha Development Agenda (DDA) and concludes that the multilateral system of trade will survive as Global South states participate in the organization to seek not just material gains but also to commit themselves to the international normative dimension.

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Keywords

trade negotiations – World Trade Organization – Doha Development Agenda – international norms – Brazil – India – English School – constructivism

The World Trade Organization (WTO) serves as a global forum for trade-related issues.² Therefore, its members are expected to pursue their material interests within that international institution. However, the multilateral system of trade and the WTO itself both reflect normative values shared by sovereign states. Although the multilateral order has mainly reflected Western dominance in international affairs since the end of World War II, the Global South has also joined multilateral regimes, in recognition of their legitimacy. Will such a pattern change in a world that prefers preferential and regional trade agreements (PTAs/RTAs) (Lindberg & Alvstam 2012; Hartman 2013)? Will the WTO be able to survive the relative decline of the established powers – that is, members of the European Union (EU), along with Japan and the United States (US) – which have been negotiating the creation of mega-trade agreements (Baldwin 2014)?

This article contends that the multilateral system of trade and the WTO will not vanish as states participate in regimes and intergovernmental organizations (IGOs) not only for the sake of material interests, but also because of normative factors. More than expressing the material needs of states, regimes – which in Krasner's (1983) definition comprise a set of norms that contribute to a convergence of expectations – deal with politics. In addition, the normative dimension of global affairs, and not just material needs and market processes, also influence these politics. This normative dimension constitutes the symbolic face of the community of sovereign states. In opposition to rationalist cannons, I argue that not only the immediate issue-linkage within a given foreign policy area – in this case, trade – affects a state's decisions in that realm. As non-market principles also drive economic-related IGOs and regimes, trade and other market-related agreements also reflect the normative elements of

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international society, such as the commitment to solve disputes through diplomacy. The WTO and the agreements under its scope express the main international norm of multilateralism by virtue of their existence, regardless of the actual effectiveness of the global trade regime and the organization itself. Based upon non-discrimination (Ruggie 1992: 566) and consensual decisions, multilateralism in the WTO is perhaps the international mechanism that in the post-Cold War age best expresses the ideal of a global democratic world order with the imperatives of state sovereignty.

Based on a dataset of 99 elite interviews with bureaucrats and non-state actors, we argue that the pursuit of international prestige rather than economic gains drove most of Brazil's and India's action over the last 15 years. This argument is built upon an analysis of Brazilian and Indian participation in WTO's Doha Development Agenda (DDA) negotiations, which were launched in 2001. Brazil and India led coalitions (Da Conceição-Heldt 2013) from the Global South, such as the chiefly agricultural G-20 (focused on the reduction of mechanisms of price distortion in farm-related activities) and the G-33 (which had Indian diplomacy at its forefront and fought for special and differential treatment for states that still have large numbers of farmers). Moreover, both states were leaders of the developing world in the multilateral system of trade even before the foundation of the WTO in 1995 (Narlikar 2003; Vickers 2012: 4). Along with China, Russia and South Africa, they also comprise BRICS – the group of prominent emerging powers in the global economy. These facts, along with the nations' historical commitments to multilateralism outside of trade, make them critical cases for developing the argument.³ Despite the fact that each has less than two percent of world merchandise trade (WTO 2015a), both countries managed to pull as much weight as the EU and the US in the multilateral system of trade.

Brazil embraced the defense of liberalization despite its protectionist interests in manufacturing, whereas India remained active in the negotiations notwithstanding its pursuit of PTAs/RTAs. Being at the forefront of DDA negotiations, therefore, contradicted their immediate economic interests. Both countries also confer to trade multilateralism an intrinsic value regardless of the economic outcomes that could arise from the conclusion of the round, especially as the WTO faces relative decline as a forum for trade liberalization. In participating in a multilateral institution, Brazil and India signal to the Global North that they agree to play according to the rules of the game, avoiding the epithet of “irresponsible stakeholders” (Patrick 2010). In the meantime, they

3 Following Patton (2001: 236), for whom critical cases are the ones that “yield the most information and have the greatest impact on the development of knowledge.”

are able to claim leadership for Global South countries, giving the developing world a voice in world politics. Thus, although established powers may downplay the role of the WTO through establishment of mega-agreements (Baldwin 2014), such as the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) and the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), emerging powers and other states from the Global South may keep it alive by showing their commitment to world order through participation in multilateral negotiations.

The contribution of this article is twofold. First, it aims to provide a theoretical framework to tie the state's diplomatic action to material and symbolic factors. This represents a contribution in understanding the impact of symbolic elements, which are often considered as being exogenous in international economic negotiations. Second, the article attempts to explain the persistence of the multilateral system of trade, even though it may no longer meet states' immediate economic interests. More than institutional inertia, the persistence of a regime and/or an IGO expresses a normative commitment that cannot be explained only as a series of rational decisions by policymakers. In fact, multilateralism – particularly on economic issues such as DDA and trade remains a puzzling phenomenon outside of the context of hegemonic stability (Kindleberger 1974). Moreover, according to the logic of collective action, multilateralism would hardly hold: the larger the group, the less likely it is to adopt an optimal provision of a collective good (Olson 1968: 35). A well-known argument for explaining the persistence of international institutions lies in the incentives states have to cooperate (Keohane 1984; Snidal 1985). However, international institutions do not only reflect power or solve collective action problems. They “also matter because they help explain how new norms emerge and are diffused across the international system and how state interests change and evolve” (Hurrell 2006: 78). Hence, the normative dimension represented in the societal arena matters as much as the material one, the market, for understanding states' choices with regard to a regime or IGO, and therefore, the very existence of such institutions when they are less likely to satisfy immediate material interests.

We begin by reviewing the literature on the expansion of the multilateral system of trade, including the impact of other negotiations in the same issue-area. Given the insufficiency of accounts focused on economic/material gains, we then explore constructivist works related to the WTO and its predecessor, the General Agreement on Trade and Tariffs (GATT). We finish the section with a framework based on elements of the English School, to disentangle the economic and normative dimensions at the international level. This framework informs the analysis of Brazilian and Indian action in the DDA

negotiations, where we devote special attention to the developments after the Bali Ministerial Meeting of 2013. The conclusion reassesses our core argument and suggests possible avenues of research based on the framework and in the light of symbolic motivations states have to participate in other regimes and IGOs that policymakers and scholars conceive as mainly focused on material gains.

The WTO: From Materially-based Accounts to Symbolic Motivations

Current explanations for the origin, expansion and endurance of the multilateral system of trade emphasize the analysis of material/economic factors over symbolic/normative ones.

From a Global North perspective, multilateralism emerged and expanded in support of the interests of advanced industrialized economies in the post-World War II order. Kahler (1992: 707) argues that post-war multilateralism, including the governance of trade, arose from “minilateral” great power collaboration, in particular between the US and the European Economic Community (EEC). This, however, did not preclude the participation of other countries in the multilateral trade regime, notwithstanding the fact that it reproduces asymmetries of power (Kahler 1992: 681). Ruggie (1992: 568) and liberal theorists such as Ikenberry (2003) suggest that the expansion of multilateralism after 1945 is related to the democratic political values that the U.S. as the post-War hegemon espoused, and does not result from hegemonic stability per se. Therefore, a multilateral order, reflecting material and economic needs, would exist even in a scenario of hegemonic decline (Keohane 1984).

A second group of authors suggests that the multilateral system of trade and the WTO change according to issue linkages with other domains of international negotiation. Zahrnt (2007: 382) finds that developing countries are subject to political pressure and threats to their reputation if they act too autonomously in the multilateral system of trade. Crump (2011) argues that the context within which a negotiation is conducted matters for its outcome. He analyzes four negotiations that took place along with WTO's DDA: the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA, which was multilateral, yet comprising the Western Hemisphere only), EU–Mercosur (in which the two blocs rather than individual member-states negotiate a FTA), EU–Chile, and US–Chile. The author concludes that global multilateral negotiations “are super-ordinate to negotiations conducted at other levels” (Crump 2011: 223). Moreover, non-trade

related factors can impact the strategic behavior of the negotiating states.⁴ Although Crump contributes to an understanding of how different trade negotiations have linkages to one another, the work falls short of accounting for the impact of symbolic factors in such processes. For him, linkages and context are related to states' strategies regarding material gains.

Similar problems are found in other literature, which focuses on the role of the Global South in multilateral regimes. According to Cooper (1997), an emphasis on multilateralism has been identified as a typical strategy of middle powers – few of them from the developing world – since the Cold War. For instance, as Hurrell and Narlikar (2006: 431) argue, after 2003, Brazil saw in the DDA not only an opportunity to maximize economic gains, but also a way of increasing its international prestige by attempting to erode the central position of the EU and US in the multilateral trade system while advancing its leadership of the Global South. However, they only account for policymakers' rational calculations or opposition to the Global North's interests. Instead, it is the pursuit of recognition by the Global South from the Global North that may matter the most in understanding the participation of the developing world in Western-organized institutions.

Regimes and IGOs in Constructivism and the English School

The literature that deals with the WTO through a constructivist lens goes beyond a mere accounting of strategic choices, but restricts the application of norms to economic rules, and does not deal with symbolic factors. Ford (2003) conceives the transition from the GATT to the WTO as a social process in which developing countries created a new conception of self within the multilateral system of trade that implied an expanding participation in the regime (Ford 2003: 133–135). The Uruguay Round (1986–1994) is known for the consolidation of the transition from the embedded liberal order (Ruggie 1982) that had prevailed from the end of World War II to the 1970s to a neoliberal global economic environment. Such a transition, as Ford (2003: 144) argues, resulted from a shift in perception toward the legitimacy of international norms.

Deregulation of market relations became fashionable again after the end of the Keynesian consensus that prevailed between the 1930s and the 1970s (Hall

4 In 2003, during the u.s.-Chile bilateral negotiations, "... the US began to delay the negotiation process to purposely pressure Chile to vote (as a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council [UNSC]) in support of a US proposal to initiate war against Iraq. Chile was unwilling to link their trade negotiations to this US initiative, but still had to manage US attempts to link these issues" (Crump 2011: 198).

1986). This normative view is restricted to economic issues. Eagleton-Pierce (2013) adopts an analogous theoretical stance when he argues that less powerful member-states used symbolic power and played with the norms of the organization in order to subvert them in their favor. He defines symbolic power as “the political meanings ascribed to issues and actors” (Eagleton-Pierce 2013: 48). Yet, such an account of symbolic power has a limited scope, in much the same way as Ford’s argument. Certainly, power involves the capacity to define concepts and norms (Eagleton-Pierce 2013: 44–45), but it remains important to identify the constraints states have on their will to reframe those norms and institutions in general, including regimes and IGOs. For market-related issues, including the organization of trade at the multilateral level, limits are not only economic. Non-economic factors may matter in explaining limitations to state power.

We then have to look beyond the WTO-related literature to unfold the normative dimension of the organization and the multilateral system of trade. Studies on the evolution of the European Union may provide a basis for exploring the impact of non-economic concerns on the evolution of regimes and IGOs. After World War II, the European project attempted to preserve the continent’s weight in global affairs, even though the evolution also stemmed from a series of bargains among its member-states as well as their respective domestic constituencies (Moravcsik 1998). With the creation of the EU in 1993, the symbolic dimension of the project became more evident, epitomized in the concept of normative power. Manners (2002: 239–40) defines normative power as power over opinion, an ideological force that enables an actor to shape conceptions of normality in world affairs. However, authors who later debated the practical implications of the EU’s normative power restricted their analysis to security (Manners 2006), human rights regimes (Youngs 2004), and the development of common cultural artifacts shared by those who live in the bloc (McNamara 2015). Thus, the EU’s normative dimension is analyzed separately from the organization of the bloc’s market.

We can then turn our attention to the English School and its notion of international society. Although this school of thought has not dealt much with economic phenomena in IR or the multilateral system of trade itself, it offers theoretical elements to understand the interaction between the market and international society in the creation and reframing of institutions. Alderson and Hurrell’s (2000: 33) analysis of Hedley Bull’s thought further develops the rejection of the separation between the symbolic/normative and the material/economic in IR as a core tenet. Nonetheless, the English School does not problematize the behavior of states in relation to those two dimensions and,

therefore, to regimes and IGOs. That is the case because, in practice, international society treats power mainly as a normative issue.

Bull refrains from discussing economic processes in his works, including in *The Anarchical Society* (1977, 1995). One may legitimately assume that states' power comes from their status in international society. In turn, this status depends upon attachments to the dominant values in the society of nations, which are shaped by long-term trends, in particular, the centrality of European/Western states at the international level. However, is there room for economic factors in such a framework? Another well-known English School theorist, Buzan (2004: 184) lists trade as one of the master primary institutions of international society, with the market as a derivative of it.⁵ In his definition, the market "is a principle of organization and legitimation that affects both how states define and constitute themselves, what kind of other actors they give standing to, and how they interpret sovereignty and territoriality" (Buzan 2004: 191). Trade became a true global institution only with the collapse of communism after the late 1980s. Since then, with a few exceptions, states have embraced – in different degrees – market principles in the regulation of the economy. This adoption accompanied the support of what the English School defines as secondary institutions in the international level, among them the WTO. Nevertheless, Buzan does not offer a concept of power that accounts for both material and normative aspects.

Despite the English School's failure to consider economic phenomena, deeper integration between the material and the normative dimensions is needed to explain why both affect the action of states and the limits they face in reframing regimes and IGOs, including the multilateral trade system and the WTO. The constructivist and English schools provide some guidance, but there is a lack of theory concerning how the normative/symbolic dimension interacts with economic/material issues in regimes and IGOs.

Integrating the Material and Normative Dimensions

The fact that the English School assumes that dominant states shape international society offers a starting point to conceive of power without losing sight of economic/material factors, as Wendtian constructivism does.⁶ On the one

5 Trade "... becomes an institution when there is shared practice for granting particular rights to merchants, which was common even in ancient and classical times" (Buzan 2004: 191).

6 As Wendt himself recognizes, ideational factors, such as norms, are not "alone" in the social world. There is also "rump materialism", a residual category of elements, such as geographical and natural factors (Wendt 1999: 130–131, 136). In spite of being socially shared, those

hand, a state hardly has power by relying only on economic resources.⁷ On the other hand, power is also the key to defining predominant values in international society. Therefore, a country's stance in relation to dominant norms matters in explaining its capacity to influence outcomes in world politics.

Market and society represent the material and normative dimensions at the international level. The market involves exchanges of material resources between states and social actors – such as companies involved in foreign trade – that operate from within them. This is the space where states accumulate material wealth and power. Society is not the same as civil society: it is about identification, whereas civil society is a space of association. Thus, at the international level, society corresponds to the arena where states seek prestige according to their attachment to ideas defining the boundaries of good behavior, or what constructivists would call constitutive norms (Finnemore & Sikkink 2001: 402). The position of states within the international market and society confers power to them. While the latter determines the limits of a state's symbolic power, the former relates to a sovereign actor's material capacity.

For the purposes of this article, we assume that the market and society can be conceived as being the two main arenas that form the international level. Those arenas also include institutions, such as regimes and IGOs, which facilitate interactions among states. However, rather than defining the market and society as primary institutions in line with the English School of thought, we prefer to use the term “arena” insofar as it denotes a socially-constructed space that is subject to more frequent changes than institutions, which are often associated with stability.

To understand the relationship between market-material capacity and societal symbolic power, we make a brief historical digression. The state system was not created upon a *tabula rasa*. Underexplored by ideational approaches in IR, from Wendtian constructivism to the English School, the market preceded the creation of states. Buzan (2004: 191) sees trade as preceding the market as an international institution. In addition, O'Brien (1984: 60) claims that those connections did not configure a world economy, as most economic progress depended on domestic markets. Yet, the ancient trade connections between distant regions configured patterns of production and commerce that could already be conceived as a market in creating expectations and procedures among social actors. This corresponds to the definition of institutions.

elements are not based on culture. The problem, though, lies in the fact that it is still unclear how “rump materialism” interacts with beliefs and norms.

7 This definition follows Dahl (1957: 202–203).

Such patterns generated incentives to the formation and expansion of forms of political organization, including sovereign states.

In addition, elements that contributed to the formation of international society also existed before the establishment of the notion of sovereignty. The existence of society depends on conceptions of collective identity. At the beginning of the formation of the state system, in the aftermath of the Peace of Westphalia in 1648, most if not all, sovereign states were European. Before they were created, social actors associated themselves for non-mercantile purposes, espousing norms that later impacted the normative dimension of the international level. Perhaps the best example is the idea of minority rights. As Almeida (2006: 56) contends, tolerance for Catholics and Protestants in Western European countries are the roots of cosmopolitanism within international society.⁸ Thus, given that international society has its origins in Western Europe, attachment to the values and cultural legacies that emanated from this part of the world imply an adherence to that which is considered civilized and legitimate (Gong 1984).⁹

However, the facts mentioned above are ignored or taken for granted by major schools of thought in IR. Even Wendt's (1999: 9) social theory of international politics repeats classical realism and is state-centric in its assumptions. Perhaps this assumption is common among IR theorists because they usually derive their analytical models from cases involving mainly Western countries. Conventional narratives from these countries place the state at the beginning, with the development of market, society, and international norms following later. Under this account, there is no need to problematize the origins of state power and, therefore, of the elements that precede the development of sovereignty.

Ontologically, market, society, and states are mutually constitutive. This implies that the relative power of states cannot be defined without considering the impact of the arenas of market and society in creating asymmetries in relationships among sovereign states. Academic branches in IR other than the

8 "At the international level, religious pluralism and toleration were accepted; and at the domestic level, religious issues gradually became part of the private sphere of individual lives. In this regard, the religious clauses of the Peace of Westphalia constituted a break with the doctrine of 'confessional absolutism'. The 'confessional neutral state' replaced the 'confessional state', and the result was 'a decoupling of confession and politics' . . . To a certain extent, the recognition of the rights of religious minorities demonstrated that universal values were integrated, from the emergence of modern international order, in the constitutional structures of the sovereign state and the normative structure of international society" (Almeida 2006: 56).

9 See Hobson (2012) for a history of the IR Western thought that supports this claim.

TABLE 1 *Arenas and dimensions in the international level and impact in the WTO*

| Arena | Dimension | State Power | Impact in the WTO |
|---------|-----------|-------------|---------------------------|
| Market | Economic | Material | Pursuit of Economic Gains |
| Society | Normative | Symbolic | Multilateralism as a Norm |

SOURCE: AUTHOR

English School have already explored the impact of power differences in economic terms among states in the establishment of hierarchies at the international level. Furthermore, the rationalist perspective conceives asymmetries in economic and security terms (Lake 2009). Nonetheless, these works fall short of accounting for ideational factors.¹⁰ The contribution of this article's framework is in underlining that power does have an economic and a normative dimension with potentially equal impacts on state action. Table 1 depicts the association between the two arenas and their corresponding dimensions of state power, and the respective impact of each upon the multilateral system of trade and the WTO.

The model proposed here implies that regimes and IGOs are institutions that, regardless of their scope, always overlap with the arenas of market and society at the international level, and are thus part of the logic that creates hierarchies among states. For instance, an IGO such as the WTO is concerned with trade-related issues but also reproduces hierarchical relationships among states, becoming a space for the contestation of those hierarchies. States comply with the normative dimension because they are embedded within it and, hence, identify with its dominant values and norms as a means of avoiding the epithet of "irresponsible stakeholders" (Patrick 2010). Consequently, sovereign entities cannot avoid dealing with the consequences of socialization at the international level and the institutions that mediate foreign relations, among them regimes and IGOs. Among those consequences, there is the fact that power comprises both material and symbolic factors, in the resources and norms that define the boundaries for legitimate state action in the international level. Therefore, whenever acting within a regime or IGO, states actions are never circumscribed by the immediate scope of action of such institutions

10 Recently, perhaps only Khong (2012) has dealt with it in his analysis of the role of the emulation of norms by subordinate states in the context of American hegemony. However, the argument is not developed to the point of including the study of regimes and IGOs.

(for example, trade), but with the constitution of the international level as a whole.

To illustrate the impact of the economic and normative dimensions acting upon a sovereign state, a hypothetical state that is economically strong yet has a damaged reputation (as is the case of pariah states or nations that refuse to join mainstream norms) will not be able to influence reform.¹¹ As demonstrated in Table 1, embeddedness in the market arena leads the WTO and the multilateral system of trade to have an obvious economic dimension in which states seek to enhance material power. The insertion of regimes and the IGO in the societal arena comprise a normative dimension where members pursue symbolic power (Eagleton-Pierce 2013). They do so by recognizing and legitimizing core principles or constitutive norms of the community of states (Finnemore & Sikkink 2001) whose origins lie in Europe (Bull & Watson 1984).

The pursuit of material power is thus not the only reason why a state attempts to influence an international institution. Patterns of international socialization and the quest for status through the normative dimension also matter for explaining state action. Therefore, the position of states in the market and society arenas affects the existence of regimes and IGOs. States, in turn, can enhance their power as they act through them, thus legitimizing the principles that regimes and IGOs embody, such as multilateralism.

Empirical Analysis

Having defined a theoretical framework that accounts for the existence of a normative/symbolic dimension that impacts state action toward economically/materially-focused regimes and IGOs such as the multilateral system of trade and the WTO, we now turn to an empirical analysis. Patterns of international socialization and the goal of improving their positions or symbolic power, motivate Brazilian and Indian participation in the WTO's DDA negotiations. Regardless of the material gains that may arise if the negotiations are ever concluded, those two countries tend to foresee this IGO as a relevant space that reproduces the normative dimension of the international level. This

11 Here I follow Harkavy's (1981: 136) definition, which includes countries that engage in the pursuit of nuclear capabilities in the 1970s that could eventually be employed for military purposes. Examples are countries with relatively high economic capabilities, such as South Africa and South Korea. However, due to their behavior, they had by then a low standing in the arena of society and, according to the argument advanced in this article, low symbolic power.

holds despite the WTO's relative decline in importance in trade-related affairs due to the growing number of PTAs/RTAs and the establishment of mega-trade agreements, such as the TTIP and the TPP.

Brazil and India are the most engaged states from the Global South in the WTO and the multilateral system of trade since its onset.¹² Apart from being emerging powers with strong economic interests they have the potential to contribute to reforming global economic governance in this century. As discussed earlier, the multilateral system of trade was a creation first and foremost of countries with high levels of both material and symbolic power, such as the US and the EU. Emerging powers – Brazil and India included – have been gaining economic strength, but have not yet reached the social status of Western countries in the international arena. Emerging powers achieve higher levels of symbolic power at the international level in demonstrating commitment to a regime and/or IGO that represents dominant values.

Material and strategic motivations cannot be downplayed in such a process. In putting their eggs in the DDA basket, Brazil and India aimed to have stronger voices in world politics. Brazil and India replaced Canada and Japan in the Quad group, which led the DDA talks.¹³ At the beginning of the Uruguay Round of the GATT (1986), which eventually led to the formation of the WTO in 1995, Brazil and India had not fully embraced economic liberalization. Thus, in spite of being participants of the multilateral system of trade since its foundation in 1947, they had lost influence even among their developing world partners. On average, in the 1980s, Brazil and India avoided adherence to dominant international norms (Rodrigues Vieira 2014). With the expansion of market economies and the decline of communism, both Brazil and India started to change their strategies in the 1990s. They also left aside the strategy of distancing themselves from the Global North and refraining from contesting existing international institutions. With these changes, these states became active participants in regimes and IGOs, including the multilateral system of trade and the then just-created WTO (Rodrigues Vieira 2015). Brazil and India started to

12 With the fall of the old Quad, China also gained more prominence in the talks. The comparison made here could also be a relevant case for assessing whether Beijing uses the multilateral system of trade as a means for achieving higher status in world politics. However, given that China only joined the WTO in 2001, its lack of experience in multilateral trade talks constrains its participation in the IGO, as compared with Brazil and India (An & Huiping 2010).

13 Canada and Japan's power nowadays stem more from their symbolic status than their material power. Japan, in fact, is perhaps the only non-Western member of international society recognized as having high status by the USA and the European powers (Bull & Watson 1984: 427).

use Western-based international institutions to pursue material interests and demonstrate their willingness to contribute to a stable world order, thus building confidence with the Global North. In addition, through their actions in the DDA negotiations, Brazil and India behaved as leaders of the Global South, contributing to their international empowerment.

This article suggests that when an economic regime or IGO do not yield immediate material gains, a state may opt to persist in supporting the institution as a means of acquiring higher status in the societal arena at the international level. When the DDA was launched in 2001, Brazil and India had already gained more material power: they were heralded as emerging powers due to their improved economic situation and the growing capacity of their diplomacy. In 2001, both countries, along with other states of the Global South, successfully limited full application of the intellectual property regime to medicines considered essential to public health, as with the case of AIDS treatment. In September 2003, Brazilian and Indian strength also became evident as both countries led a coalition of large agricultural producers (the Agricultural G-20) to fight subsidies in the developed world. The Agricultural G-20 was not a blocking coalition. Rather, it had a very proactive agenda (Narlikar & Tussie 2004: 962). India also integrated another alliance, the G-33, which gathered countries concerned with protecting their peasants rather than increasing the Global North's market access for agriculture (see, Singh & Gupta, this issue). However, as the round went beyond its original timeframe (2001–2005), the prospects of yielding actual economic gains from the DDA diminished. The following evidence strongly supports the argument that the round and the WTO itself received attention from Brazilian and Indian diplomacy also as a means of consolidating a higher status at the international level.¹⁴

Brazil and the Pursuit of Status through Multilateralism

Brazil did not make the decision to launch the Doha round. Hence, the country had no other option but to try to achieve as much as possible from it in both economic and political (and hence symbolic) terms. In economic terms, Brazilian negotiators foresaw an opportunity to conclude what a former experienced negotiator called the “unfinished business” of the Uruguay Round: the lack of substantial gains for agricultural exporters.¹⁵ This goal, however, contradicted the defensive positions of most industrial sectors in the country,

14 To capture each state's position in relation to the WTO's normative dimensions, we rely primarily on national documents rather than the statements India and Brazil produced in the coalitions that they formed with other Global South nations.

15 Interview with Rubens Ricupero, Ambassador in Geneva, 1987–1991, São Paulo, 25 July 2011.

although, as a senior negotiator contended, it was easier to accommodate defensive demands in a multilateral deal than with second-best options. Bilateral agreements, for instance, have more coercive bargains than multilateral deals. In political terms, the negotiations became – in particular after 2003, when the center-left administration of President Lula came to power – a strategy to express Brazil's ambitions on the world stage. As a government report on Lula's international actions summarizes:

The foreign policy between 2003 and 2010 was based on the idea that Brazil should have a more and more prominent role in the international scenario, projecting a strong and sovereign external image (Ministério das Relações Exteriores 2011: 18).

Nonetheless, these ambitions were more related to the pursuit of prestige in the international political arena as a signal of empowerment than to conventional materialist conceptions of power. In the words of a senior negotiator,

The DDA negotiations offered a unique scenario for Brazil in the multilateral system of trade since its creation. We could be offensive in agriculture without facing a drawback due to a restrictive position of industry . . . The context thus opened a window of opportunity for Brazil's action in the multilateral system . . . On the other side of the table, the EU and the US were already showing signals of declining economic competitiveness and with a smaller degree of domestic consensus than us . . . In domestic terms, Lula's government built upon the positive aspects of the previous economic reforms, demonstrating more negotiating audacity than previous administrations, espousing even anti-American positions. The circumstances allowed ourselves to oppose the EU and the US . . . In sum, it was a magic moment which allowed us to project ourselves abroad.¹⁶

Certainly, Brazilian negotiators envisioned in the DDA negotiations an opportunity to increase the country's strength in material terms, as agricultural exports would have grown had market access in the Global North actually been granted.¹⁷ Yet such an outcome would also impose costs on the industrial sector, which opposed liberalization to thwart competition from imported goods with lower tariffs. Thus, negotiators' willingness to increase Brazil's weight in the arena of society, not its material interests, explains the country's active participation in the DDA talks. In the words of an official of the Ministry

16 Interview with a senior bureaucrat, Brasília, June 15, 2012.

17 Interviews with bureaucrats, Brasília, June–July 2012.

of Foreign Relations, known as the *Itamaraty*, Brazil sought to increase its international prestige and its weight in international society through participation in the DDA.¹⁸

Despite growing opposition from industrial groups against multilateral liberalization, Brazil kept offensive stances as the DDA talks evolved.¹⁹ This position became evident in the preparations for the July 2008 Mini-Ministerial Meeting in Geneva. With the goal of finalizing the round, Brazilian negotiators, with the consent of authorities in Brasilia, accepted a coefficient of 20 for the Swiss formula that would determine the tariff cuts in NAMA.²⁰ The lower the coefficient, the deeper the cuts would be. As a senior bureaucrat based at a ministry that contributed to the elaboration of negotiating positions in Brazil reports,

The decision to accept a coefficient below 23 [the limit interest groups had set] was a political decision made by the president and the *Itamaraty*. The decision was taken considering that the conclusion of the round would enhance Brazil's diplomatic prestige in the world.²¹

This prestige would stem from the country's leadership in changing the multilateral rules of the game within the WTO. Without the goal of acquiring political prestige and therefore symbolic power at the international level, Brazil would hardly have kept the Agricultural G-20 united throughout the DDA negotiations, in particular after 2005, when the G-33 gained more relevance. In fact, even in 2010, the government stated that it would make all necessary efforts to conclude the round (Presidência da República 2010: 302). This statement came in the context of growing protectionism in both Brazil and the world in the aftermath of the 2008 crisis. These efforts were in fact put into practice as the WTO attempted to revive the DDA.

India: Multilateralism and Leadership in the Global South

Initially, India did not want a new round of liberalization, given its opposition to the Singapore Issues, including transparency in government procurement, trade facilitation, trade and investment, and trade and competition (Narlikar &

18 Interview with Christian Lohbauer, Federation of the Industries of São Paulo State officer between 2002 and 2005, São Paulo, June 6, 2012.

19 Interviews with members of industrial interest groups, Brasilia and São Paulo, May–July 2012.

20 Interviews, Brazil, May–Aug 2012.

21 Interview with a senior bureaucrat, Brasília, July 6, 2012.

Wilkinson 2004: 450). Once those topics were removed from the table, the country consented to the launch of the round. However, India's engagement within the multilateral system of trade, particularly during the DDA negotiations, sharply contrasts with its historical image as the country that says "no" (Narlikar 2010: 22). In the aftermath of the Cold War, the country shifted its positioning at the international level from "nonalignment to multi-alignment" (Jaffrelot & Sidhu 2013: 319). Within the multilateral system of trade, this move meant accepting liberal ideas in economic relationships – a new trading culture in Ford's previously explained definition (2003). As Narlikar (2006a: 59) argues, a rising India developed greater engagement with economic partners while de-emphasizing Third World rhetoric. India moved from being a leader of the nonaligned movement to progressively embracing a self-conception at the international level of an emerging power (Rodrigues Vieira 2015).

A state's international identity (Abdelal 2009: 72) affects its views on international institutions from a constructivist perspective. However, a given identity tends to carry elements of the previous ones (Rodrigues Vieira 2015). India's insertion into the arena of international society suggests that the country preserved the historical traits of state identity linked to the developing world, but committed to multilateralism.²² By this I mean that India did not have to leave aside its Global South allies to improve relations with the systemic core – including the Global North and the regimes and IGOs it shaped – in order to gain both material and symbolic power in world politics.

On the one hand, most Indian negotiators in the WTO are not career diplomats, but members of the civil service based at the Ministry of Commerce. This fact casts doubt upon the argument that the country's positions in the DDA negotiations were guided at least in part by normative/symbolic concerns. On the other hand, evidence demonstrates that the DDA did represent an opportunity for the country to demonstrate international leadership, not only through the defense of other Global South countries, but also by demonstrating its willingness to play within the rules of the game. As a senior bureaucrat says:

It is difficult to say here that we were going to be swamped by a Malaysian, a Thai, or even by a diplomat from Korea, which is an advanced country. So it is easier to establish regional agreements – although we are much more likely to be swamped by them rather than by the US ... However, opening up to the West looks like opening up to the former colonial

22 Interviews with bureaucrats and members of interests groups, Delhi, August–October 2011.

empires. Opening up to the rest of East Asia looks like opening for regional integration.²³

Following the argument above, one can conclude that if the West loses strength in a given international institution, that institution tends to be better regarded by constituencies in India. As a former Indian negotiator summarizes:

Brazil and India, in spite of differences in their respective interests, should ultimately compromise to meet the aggressive attitude of the US and the EU . . . The Agricultural G-20 had a number of meetings before the Cancun Ministerial in 2003, and they contained the US/EU proposal, which was not acceptable to the developing world. So countries with strong exporting interests, such as Brazil, and with a large agricultural population, like India, joined together. Many countries were even net agricultural importers. In the Agricultural G-20, there were countries with so many divergent interests . . . Those who know the game in Geneva know that if developing countries want to promote their interest they have to organize a united front . . . That is what they have tried to do in agriculture. Therefore, India and Brazil, as old members of the GATT and the WTO, know how the game is played in Geneva. They realized how to do that and to become stronger.²⁴

The key to gaining power therefore lies in acting through the existing configuration of the multilateral system of trade, rather than circumventing it. This choice is more a consequence of the Global South's socialization in the societal arena at the international level than a mere strategy to advance economic interests. This socialization precedes strategy to the extent that trade expansion could have been satisfied through other mechanisms, such as PTAs/RTAs only.²⁵ However, material interests also matter for explaining India's and other partners' participation in the DDA negotiations. As Kamal Nath, then Minister of Commerce of India, declared in July 2006,

Developing countries cannot allow their subsistence farmers to lose their livelihood security and food security to provide market access to agricultural products from developed countries. That is the rationale for Special

23 Interview with a senior bureaucrat, Delhi, October 7, 2011.

24 Interview with a former senior bureaucrat, Delhi, September 26, 2011.

25 Interview with researchers from think tanks, Delhi, August–October 2011.

Products (SP) and Special Safeguard Mechanism (SSM) for which the G-33 has been negotiating (Ministry of Commerce 2006).

India heralded itself as the champion of the poor farmers of the world, notwithstanding the existence of export interests among its farmers (WTO 2002; Lok Sabha 2012) and the demand for liberalization in services (Da Conceição-Heldt 2013: 435), which could have led the country to adopt more offensive stances. Through this rhetoric, India gained prestige on two counts. On the one hand, the Global North faced limits in portraying India and other G-33 members as irresponsible. On the other hand, the states of the Global South could see India as a reliable partner in the pursuit of a more fair and equitable world order, not only on economic issues, but at the international level as a whole, including its normative dimensions.²⁶ The growing involvement of the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) in trade negotiations, particularly at the bilateral level, furnishes further evidence of the impact of this dimension on the WTO.²⁷ Consequently, normative/symbolic issues are crucial to understanding the endurance of the multilateral system of trade in a scenario in which other arrangements might provide more optimal solutions in economic exchange for both developed and developing nations.

After Bali: The Odd Persistence of Multilateralism in Trade

Recent developments in the WTO system reinforce the aforementioned conclusions about the impact of the normative dimension upon the actions of Brazil and India in coping with changes within the organization. The Bali Ministerial Meeting in December 2013 attempted to revive the DDA negotiations by delivering a package of measures, the Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA). Nevertheless, Brazil, in addition to India, was at the forefront of the negotiations: their defense of public stockpiling of food was justified not only as a defense of the country's poor farmers, but also as a demand of peasantry from the developing world. This stance decisively shaped the final agreement (Donnan 2013). Also, the election the previous May of the Brazilian diplomat Roberto Azevêdo as WTO's Director-General with extensive support from the Global South, against the Global North-backed candidate Herminio Blanco of Mexico, suggests that the Global South gained more power within the WTO.

The TFA has strong symbolism as the first agreement ever successfully concluded by the WTO. The agreement comprises rules for accelerating the transit

26 Interviews with bureaucrats and members of interest groups, Delhi, August–October 2011.

27 Interviews with MEA bureaucrats, Delhi, September 2011.

of goods, as well as for cooperation and mutual technical assistance between states in customs procedures (WTO 2015b). The TFA did not yield many material gains for the Global South. As Wilkinson and colleagues argue (2014: 1034), “[d]eveloping countries were unable to secure any legally binding outcomes on the issues that are most important to them. Instead, they accepted another set of best endeavor promises in exchange for a legally binding agreement on trade facilitation.” This indicates that Global South states keep playing the normative card in world politics through the WTO; normative factors precede their economic interests and even frame the pursuit of their interests in the multilateral system of trade. For instance, the BRICS “agreed that in line with the Bali Ministerial Conference, multilateral negotiations should prioritize efforts to create a level playing field” among producers located in different member-states of the WTO (BRICS 2015). Achieving such a goal would be possible by substantially improving market access, eliminating export subsidies, and significantly reducing the level of domestic support that distorts prices and, hence, international trade.

In addition, the BRICS expressed willingness to sort out the rules for public stockpiling. Initial provisions in this issue-area faced India’s opposition, and the WTO aimed to solve it by the end of 2015. Given the different stances of the BRICS on the issue, including Brazil’s pursuit of liberalization of agricultural markets and India’s defensive stance in spite of its export interests, the bloc’s actions cannot be understood unless one considers the broader picture of world politics. The pursuit of deeper fairness in trade through the WTO led these emerging powers to acquire more status in the arena of society, in this case, mostly vis-à-vis the Global South, but also by demonstrating responsibility to the Global North. Such a twofold approach is possible as long as new normative concerns are brought within an existing regime of IGOs rather than the creation of alternative institutions. Normative issues, thus, parallel strict material bargaining in the diplomatic actions of emerging powers.

Rather than cheap talk, the commitment to issues of fairness cannot be disentangled from the normative dimension and echo genuine concerns in foreign policy, notwithstanding the lack of economic gains.²⁸ In March 2015, the Brazilian Minister of Foreign Affairs Mauro Vieira stated that the defense of multilateralism itself is very important. He implied that this principle would be expressed not only through Brazil’s commitment to the WTO, but also in support of reform efforts of other multilateral IGOs shaped first and foremost by the Global North, such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF)

28 For a discussion on fairness in the WTO focused on trade/economic rules, see Narlikar (2006b).

and the World Bank (Vieira 2015). The Bali agreement was thus an opportunity to advance the DDA negotiations while defending multilateralism itself. The WTO, as he argued, is the forum in which the Global South can set clear and known norms for trade. This goal would not be possible in plurilateral settings, a clear reference to mega-agreements such as the TTIP and TPP, as their rules could later be imposed upon weaker states (Vieira 2015). In fact, had Brazil been considering purely economic calculations, the country would have found it worth negotiating participation in those agreements rather than insisting on multilateral liberalization (Thorstensen & Ferraz 2014).

India also played a decisive role in shaping the Bali agreement (Wilkinson et al., 2014: 1033) having used the symbolic card along with advancing its material interests. As Indian Minister of Commerce Anand Sharma, who represented the country in the Ministerial meeting, reported before the Indian parliament, “India’s consistent position in the WTO has been that matters pertaining to livelihood, food security and rural development are of vital importance. Special and differential treatment [SDT] is a must for developing countries” (Sharma 2013: 2). He underscored the support the country and its G-33 partners received from other Global South states in defending the postponement of a final decision on the right to implement public stockholding for food security purposes. In fact, before the Bali meeting, India already called for “a balanced outcome . . . , with the interest of so-called least developed countries (LDCs) and developing nations” to be placed at the heart of the negotiations, particularly on food security and duty free, quota free market access for them (Mishra 2013).

However, developments since the Bali Ministerial cast doubt on the Indian normative commitment to multilateralism. Right after winning the General Elections of May 2014, the Bharatya Janata Party (BJP) made a surprising move under the leadership of then just-elected Prime-Minister Narendra Modi, who rejected the previous government’s commitments in Bali. Modi’s administration argued that the agreed upon provisions on public stockpiling of food were insufficient to meet the needs of its population. As that issue was a condition for implementing the TFA, the agreement did not come into effect in its original timeframe, by August 2014. Thus, India singlehandedly blocked the TFA, which, as mentioned above, had paramount symbolic meaning for the WTO’s endurance, as well as for the multilateral system of trade. Modi’s government eventually agreed, once India’s new demands were met.

Would such developments contradict the argument that India’s actions in the WTO also reflect the normative dimension? Certainly economic interests linked to the country’s position in the market arena prevailed in this specific case (blockage of the TFA). However, the broader picture still confers relevance

to matters related to the societal arena in understanding India's stance in the multilateral system of trade. Despite the fact that more than half of the Indian population still depends on farming to survive, the country's offensive interests in trade could lead its negotiators to be more flexible in dealing with agriculture in the multilateral system (WTO 2002). The conventional explanation for such a lack of flexibility is often associated to the political power of India's small farmers (Narlikar & Tussie 2004, 961). Moreover, as our findings suggest, symbolic factors cannot be downplayed in the analysis of India's hard stances in the WTO. In fact, the Modi government's first comprehensive report on foreign policy states that "multilateral engagements provided platforms to bring the economic underpinnings of our foreign policy to the forefront" (Ministry of External Affairs 2015: 7).

Factors other than issue-specific calculations of material gains affect decision-making about foreign economic policy. Multilateralism is not always an end in itself but without demonstrating a commitment to the normative dimension, a state runs the risk of losing symbolic power and reducing its ability to advance its interests in the market arena. As it is subject to change, a commitment to multilateralism is a useful card in the game of world politics. Owning that card implies not using it instrumentally, but rather valorizing it regardless of immediate economic/material needs. Hence, multilateralism's normative dimension and corresponding symbolic power emerge as the most prominent factors: without committing themselves to the WTO, Brazil and India would probably not have the weight they hold today in the multilateral system of trade and in world politics.

Conclusion

Based on the Brazil and India cases in the DDA negotiations, we argue that the Global South tends to participate in the multilateral system of trade even when the system does not satisfy their immediate material interests. This expectation stems from the fact that international institutions, including regimes and IGOs, are embedded in the societal arena as much as in the market, both of which form the international level. The arena of society comprises a normative dimension through which states may enhance their power in world politics symbolically as they socialize themselves vis-à-vis their counterparts and institutions. The deeper a state's adherence to dominant global norms and institutions, the more likely it is to have symbolic power, as it avoids behavior regarded as irresponsible. Participation in the WTO is therefore a means of enhancing state status at the international level and, thus, in world politics.

There are two extensions to considering the full dynamics between material and symbolic needs of a country in a regime or IGO. One consists of studying cases other than Brazil and India on trade-related issues to corroborate the argument advanced here. As former South African Ambassador to the WTO Faizel Ismail says, developing countries “have maintained strong commitment for multilateral solutions” in the DDA and the WTO (Fries 2014). Studying other Global South countries under the framework developed here would be helpful to enhance knowledge of why the WTO may persist even given a lack of effectiveness in delivering trade liberalization. Another agenda item emerges in comparing WTO’s fate vis-à-vis the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) over the long term. After intense activism in the decolonization era, UNCTAD has lost relevance with the rise of neoliberalism in the world economy by the end of the 1970s. More recently, the U.S. and the EU plan to create the TTIP indicates, in part, that the established powers do not perceive the emerging ones as equal actors, even when rising states accept the dominant norms in international society. Hence, institutional erosion may still be a possibility if the world political scenario changes.

The second extension welcomes the analysis of normative issues on regimes and IGOs that are not focused on trade or exclusively devoted to such issue-areas, but contribute to global economic governance. In this vein, we include the study of how the normative dimension impacts on possibilities for reforming multilateral institutions in which the Global North still has more power than the Global South. The emerging powers have been engaged in reforming the IMF and the World Bank, notwithstanding the creation of complementary organizations, notably the New Development Bank (NDB) and the Contingency Reserve Arrangement (CRA) by the BRICS Bloc. Regional organizations are another set of institutions worth studying. For instance, the EU seems to place strong emphasis on its normative dimension as long as discussions on the Greek Debt Crisis – an economic issue – are permeated by considerations of how symbolic it would be if the birthplace of representative democracy leaves the Eurozone or the union itself.

In closing, one cannot discard the hypothesis that, with the continued economic rise of states such as the BRICS, there will be a dispute about redefining the parameters of the normative dimension, which are still arguably Western-centric. In this scenario, fragmented perspectives on world politics may arise, bringing instability insofar as states will lack a common denominator for setting normative dimensions. This state of flux, in turn, represents an opportunity to reframe the normative dimension that holds together states and international institutions, setting the limits for cooperation and competition in world politics.

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