

*UNITED NATIONS INTELLECTUAL HISTORY PROJECT*  
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**TRANSCRIPT OF INTERVIEW OF**

**GERT ROSENTHAL**

**BY**

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THOMAS G. WEISS: This is Tom Weiss interviewing Gert Rosenthal in the offices of the UN Intellectual History Project in the Graduate Center on 3 January 2001. This is the beginning of tape number one. Gert, I wondered if we could begin at the beginning, and whether you might tell me something about your family's background and how you think any of this influenced the person who you became, and whether or not there was a link between any of this and your own interest in international affairs and, in particular, international economic cooperation.

GERT ROSENTHAL: Well, what can I tell you? My grandfather on my mother's side is the one who immigrated to Guatemala. I was told he got there in 1891. It seems that he immigrated first to the United States and met somebody in Chicago who told him about the remote and unknown place called Guatemala, where they were going to go and make a fortune. He set up a partnership with this person. The person is the one who went to Guatemala. My grandfather stayed in Chicago, and he never heard from that person again, according to what I was told. So he went after him and arrived in Guatemala—not even in Guatemala City but in Quetzaltenango, 1891. It seems he liked the place, and he started bringing the rest of his family over. He had four brothers and one sister. Most of them went over still at the end of the last century.

He set up a hardware store in Quetzaltenango, and then at some point he went back to the old country to get married. So he came back to Guatemala with his newfound bride in the early part of the last century, I guess in 1901 or so. And my mother was born in Guatemala in 1903. So that is my Guatemala connection. My mother was sent to high school here, in New York, so she must have been a pretty worldly figure for somebody living in the backwoods of Guatemala

in her time. And she went back to the old country in the 1920s, where she got married to my father. And I guess if Hitler would not have intervened, I would have been born in Germany.

My father was a lawyer—actually, he was a judge—and he was barred from being a judge in 1933. So my mother, who was not used to the type of anti-Semitism that she saw in Germany, insisted that they go back to Guatemala, at least to sit things out while it blew over. First they went to Amsterdam, where I was born. And when things got worse, they went to Guatemala. I have no recollection of Amsterdam. So, for all practical purposes, I was born in Guatemala. At least my first recollections are from Guatemala.

So that is the background of why somebody with the name of Rosenthal is from Guatemala. My father settled in there, in the family business of my grandfather. I think he was probably a little unhappy in the early years because he had come from a very sophisticated city—Frankfurt am Main—in Germany. And he went to this little backwater which was Guatemala City in the 1930s, into a business he knew nothing about—a hardware store. And he bought himself a small coffee farm in the late 1930s. They spent the whole war years in Guatemala. By then, they had settled in.

I often ask myself why they didn't leave Guatemala after the war. But probably by then they had become comfortable living there. They stayed there the rest of their lives. My father passed away ten years ago, and my mother passed away one year ago. So they stayed in Guatemala a long time.

I was raised in Guatemala, although I finished high school in the United States. I was sent there for a year to perfect my English, prior to going to college. I ended up at the University of California at Berkeley. And I felt some sort of commitment to development in general, and to Guatemala in particular, trying to make sense of my life. So I went into development economics.

That is what I studied at Berkeley. The idea was to go back to Guatemala and make some contribution. I had that idea even before I went into college, and I kept it all through college. I did both my undergraduate and graduate training in Berkeley.

When I went back to Guatemala at the end of the 1950s, my family was quite keen on bringing me into the family business, and I obliged. I went into the family business, but simultaneously I took a half-day job at the Ministry of Planning, trying to capitalize on my education in development economics. So over the next ten years, I went deeper and deeper into the public sector, and became less and less attached to the family business. Finally, by 1967, I left the family business and dedicated myself full-time to my profession. So that is how I got involved in what I do today.

TGW: Was there an effort to maintain numerous cultures, simultaneously, in Guatemala, in particular, and the German one? You said your mother had been educated in the United States. They wanted you to learn English. What did it feel like to have basically three linguistic or cultural influences going on simultaneously?

GT: It was natural to me. I didn't find it anything exceptional. But of course it was. I was brought up in a tri-cultural home. My parents spoke German to each other, which I understood fluently but did not speak. They never spoke to me in German. My mother spoke to me in Spanish and English, and my father spoke to me in English. And I was sent to a bilingual grade school, in English and Spanish. So I functioned in two languages, in English and in Spanish. I did not find it unusual to be living in what must have been a very sophisticated environment for Guatemala at that time.

TGW: Being born in the Great Depression, and growing up during the Second World War, what do you recall of those events, and what kind of impact did this have upon your own thinking about international cooperation?

GT: I have no recollection of the Great Depression, obviously. Nor did it touch my family, as far as I know. I did not come from a very affluent home, but it was a comfortable one. And I think the family business in Guatemala provided adequately. So I don't have any recollection of economic hardships at any time. I do recall, as a child, the enormous impact the war had in my home. Obviously, my parents being immigrants or refugees, I would say, from the war, they followed events very closely. And it was a constant source of conversation. They often were listening to the radio, to the news. I remember they kept a map with little pins on it to identify where the Allied army was and where the Axis army was. And I remember enormous excitement when the war was over. Of course I did not understand the meaning of any of this. But I realized that it must have been something of overwhelming importance.

TGW: Do you recall—I suppose this is too early for grade school, but let's say high school, and certainly when you get to your freshman year at Berkeley in the early 1950s—what kind of image was projected of the League of Nations? Or what kind of image was projected of the founding of the United Nations or the Bretton Woods institutions? Was this a subject that was in the curriculum? Did anyone talk about it? Was this at all present in your education?

GT: Yes it was. The League of Nations was not. I don't think I had even heard of the League of Nations until I came to Berkeley and studied international relations. But the United Nations was something that evoked a lot of sympathy. As a very young person, I was brought up in a world of black and white, of good and evil. The Nazis were evil. The Allied armies were good. And the United Nations was the result of the good coming out on top of evil. So it

belonged to the good part. And it was an organization that was to be admired, that was noble—a very positive reaction. Even as a very young person, I do recall that, even in high school. I recall Eleanor Roosevelt being somehow connected to the UN.

I remember also that my parents, who had not left Guatemala during all the war, the first trip they made away from Guatemala—it must have been 1947 or 1948—was to New York and they visited the United Nations, with a well-known Guatemalan diplomat, called Jorge Garcia Granados, who took them there. That made a big impression on them. They talked about that when they came back to Guatemala, about their visit to the UN, the impressions they had of the organization. I think it was still in Lake Success at the time, I am not sure.

TGW: What preoccupied students in the cafeteria at Berkeley in the 1950s? Obviously the free speech movement was later, after you left. I am just trying to figure out what happened in the coffee bar, if there was one, or in the regular bar, if there was one. What animated students, American and foreign students?

GR: I do not have any recollection of any of the type of political sensibility that appeared there after I left. It was perceived as sort of a radical campus in the 1960s. I did not have that impression when I was there. In undergraduate school, students discussed football, sports, beer busts. They were not particularly concerned with political events or even less about international events. At least I don't have any recollection of that.

I think if one had to put an ideological tag on the place, most people I came into contact with were fairly liberal. Then when I was in graduate school, I had a lot of contact with international students, who obviously were more interested in international relations. They discussed the United States a lot, as seen from the international perspective. But, again, it was by no means a hotbed of radicalism or anything of the sort. My first contact with more radical

thinking was in Guatemala in the late 1950s, when I came back from university—not particularly at Berkeley.

TGW: What was radical thinking in Guatemala at the time?

GR: Well, Guatemala had, in the early 1950s, a very progressive regime which the United States branded as communist, which was finally overthrown in 1954, with the covert assistance of the CIA. So that polarized Guatemalan society. And you found radicals on both sides of the ideological spectrum. And I came in contact with both. Unfortunately, Guatemala was a victim of the Cold War, and very few people understood exactly—I never met somebody who was properly versed in Marxist or Leninist theory. But you had a lot of people who were proposing the socialist revolution, on the one hand, and you had a lot of forces who perceived any change of any kind as the “antesala,” the preview of communism.

Guatemala, in the late 1950s and 1960s, was a very polarized place. To a degree, it still is today. And I felt a little more comfortable with the progressive elements than with the rightist elements. But I felt a very strong rejection toward fanaticism and dogmatism on both sides of the political spectrum. You still have that today. It is a very polarized society.

TGW: If we could just go back a minute. At Berkeley, the McCarthy events or the Korean War, were not preoccupations either among American or foreign students?

GR: I remember seeing it on television, the era of McCarthyism. It was not a topic of everyday conversation among the students. Few supported the ideas of McCarthy but, on the other hand, I don't recall anyone being outraged either. I was living in a university dorm at the time. We watched the proceedings on the television. I was not a politically aware person at the time, frankly.

TGW: In graduate school, was there what one would call a foreign students' union or a Third World conclave or anything like that? I know that in England the Commonwealth students used to get together. Was there any sort of grouping of either exchange students or regular students who were from abroad?

GR: Yes. I was living at the International House at the time, which was almost 100 percent foreign students. So I came in contact with people from all over the world, some of whom I am still in contact with today. In their discussions I would say there was more awareness. But, still, it seemed like a very tranquil era compared to later years. I really don't know whether it was that I was not politically aware or whether it just was a more tranquil time.

TGW: Obviously the Americas had been independent on paper, whatever their actual relationship with the United States. But during the 1950s, one of the big ideas of the United Nations for Africa and Asia was decolonization. Do you recall whether, for example, Bandung (African-Asian Conference) was perceived as a critical event? Or whether the coming of age of the first wave of African countries—Ghana, for example—while you were in graduate school? Did this seem to students as if there was an inevitable march, and a fast march, toward decolonization?

GR: Yes. There were a lot of African students, and there were a lot of Indonesian students at Berkeley. And there was an awakening. The whole idea of nonalignment took flight around that time. Now that I am thinking of it, because I have not thought about this for many, many years, among most foreign students there was a rejection of McCarthyism. And there was a rejection of the whole concept of the Cold War, among the people that I saw anyway. And the searching for some kind of synthesis in the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) was watched with interest among the people that were at least studying international relations.



TGW: What made you go toward economics as opposed to politics or history?

GR: Two things. When I started university, I still was with the idea of going into the family business. So, a combination of business and economics seemed to be the proper training for that. But second, I had this idealist notion that I wanted to help my country, and economics seemed to be the way to do that.

TGW: Did you think about going on and doing a Ph.D.?

GR: Yes, I did. And, in fact, I went back to Berkeley in the early 1970s and, at that time, I was doing a one-year fellowship with a foundation called the Adlai Stevenson Institute for International Affairs. I was writing a book on direct foreign investment in Central America. And I went to Berkeley to talk to Al Fishlow, who was head of the Department of Economics. I told him that I wanted to go back to Berkeley to finish my Ph.D. and asked whether I could use the work I was doing at that time for my dissertation. He said, "Yes." So I enrolled.

And I would have gone back at that time to get my Ph.D., except that I got a very attractive job offer from UNCTAD (UN Conference on Trade and Development) to head a research project in Central America on economic integration. And I really agonized over the decision. Practically, I had packed my bags to go to Berkeley. I had paid my fees and everything when I got this job offer. Finally, I decided to postpone going to Berkeley, because this job offer was for one year, which later was extended. I spent two years on it. By then, other things intervened. I never went back to get my Ph.D.

TGW: Would it have been useful, or would it not have made a difference?

GR: Career wise, it would not have made any difference, except I think it would have been nice to have finished my coursework. I virtually did my dissertation. It is one of the things I regret that I did not do. It just would have been nice in terms of completing my formal

academic education. But I don't think that it had any practical consequence in terms of my career, at least in the United Nations.

TGW: Before we actually get to UNCTAD, I just wanted to move back to the period in Guatemala. Actually, I have always wanted to run a hardware store, so I wish I could have done it. I would like to go back and visit the notion of planning, and how it was perceived in Guatemala or throughout Latin America. It seems to me that, subsequently, the notion was painted with a kind of anti-Soviet brush, even though the notion originally grew out of the corporate sector. I am just trying to go back and revisit the notion of approaching the development of Guatemala through the lens of planning and how the notion of planning was seen at the time.

GR: First of all, there were only two technocratic enclaves in the government at that time, or three, maybe. The main one was the central bank, which had developed its staff through offering scholarships. And they were very eager to recruit me, except that they would not accept me on a half-time basis. I would have had to go there full-time. The second was the Ministry of Finance, and the third was this newly formed thing called the Planning Office, which did not have any particular ideological connotation. It was actually fostered by the World Bank. The World Bank was trying to create institutions in developing countries, which would have a notion of setting priorities for public investments and which would develop a capacity to develop projects and which would also have some idea of financial programming.

The planning offices at that time were organizations that tried to put some order into the realm of public expenditures. And they received a very large boost in the early 1960s, when the United States promoted the Alliance for Progress. They did not have any particular ideological bias. They had nothing to do with centralized planning, *à la* the Soviet Union. They had more to

do with putting some order into the public sector, and financing projects. Maybe the name “planning” was not the adequate one. It was a very small office, I remember. There must have been twenty-five or thirty people there, of which half, fifteen, were professionals.

TGW: If we can go back to that period, the so-called Non-Aligned Movement takes form by the early 1960s. How would you characterize Latin American relationships with the notion of nonalignment? How nonaligned were Latin American countries? I am particularly thinking about Cuba’s role in the movement.

GR: The Latin American countries, by and large, were aligned with the United States. Nonalignment was a concept more for India, Indonesia, Yugoslavia. The Latin Americans were not. The only country that kept sort of an arm’s length from an American-led coalition against Cuba was Mexico. Cuba had a very big impact, both in Latin America and in U.S.–Latin American relations, but this is in the early 1960s.

TGW: Did the Group of 77 (G-77), and its founding in 1962 to 1964, and the first UNCTAD conference, enter into your own work in Guatemala at the time?

GR: Yes. Maybe not that early, but later on. What was pretty strong, at least in my personal experience, was Central American economic integration. The idea of cooperation between developing countries, or South-South cooperation, was quite strong in Central America and very successful. The Central Americans created a common market in the early 1960s. Actually, it was my first professional experience, or one of my first professional experiences. Already working in the Planning Office, I was delegated to work on Central American issues. So I was very sympathetic to the idea, or the potential, of cooperation between developing countries. And it was not difficult to extend that concept to other Latin American countries and, in general, to South-South cooperation. It was something very important in my professional life.

TGW: So it was the possibility of going to work with the UN or UNCTAD, linked to this interest in regional integration?

GR: Yes, totally. First, because very early on, in the early 1960s, I started traveling in Central America and interacting with Central American partners in doing something constructive, which actually worked. It had tangible results, if you measure economic interdependence in Central America through trade flows. Trade grew spectacularly between 1960 and 1970. Second of all, ECLAC (Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean) had a very important role to play in Central American economic integration, because in the 1950s, the commission created an office in Mexico City, whose main role was to promote development in Central America. That office became the secretariat of the Central American Common Market, until the Central Americans created their own secretariat in 1960. After that, the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean played a backstopping role. So I was in frequent contact with people from the ECLAC Mexico office, when I was participating in this ground work for the Central American Common Market. And I must have been very much influenced by the economic thinking of the commission at the time.

TGW: What was the economic thinking of the commission at the time?

GR: Industrialization, if you want to put it in its simplest terms. Economic integration, as a way to facilitate industrialization, especially among small countries. It was one way of widening the market horizontally. Also, a more proactive role for the public sector. Again, economic planning. Again, some type of intervention in the market. So ECLAC came across as an organization which was concerned about development, which was concerned about industrialization and which was concerned about the role of the public sector in fostering development. And that must have had a pretty big influence on me.

TGW: And those same topics, actually, you probably could put under UNCTAD's label as well. Was this the sort of flavor of your introduction to the UN through the UNCTAD project at that time in Guatemala City?

GR: No. It was UNCTAD in name only, because it was really an extension of what I was doing at the time. I had had about ten years of practical experience in the creation of a free trade zone in Central America by then. And what happened is that there was a nasty little war between Honduras and El Salvador in 1969, which was a result of a border dispute. But it is called the "Football War" because there was a famous football game, which El Salvador lost to Honduras. And rumor has it that the incensed fans of Salvador demanded an invasion of their neighbor to avenge the loss.

This little war between Honduras and El Salvador created havoc in the Central American Common Market. So it occurred to UNCTAD in the early 1970s to revisit Central American economic integration and see what could be done to recoup the success story up to 1969. And I was hired as a team leader to do this work. It was based in Guatemala City. But it had very little to do with UNCTAD as a global organization.

TGW: It was a UNDP (UN Development Programme)-financed, UNCTAD-executed project?

GR: Probably it was a UNDP-financed activity. UNCTAD had, as one of their divisions, an area that was concerned about economic integration worldwide. And at that time they had enough money to be fostering activities all over the world. But I had very little contact with UNCTAD before that, although I had been there a couple of times. Actually, UNCTAD is sort of an extension of ECLAC globally, which is no accident, because when [Raúl] Prebisch had had

his fill with ECLAC, he went on and in effect, created a global ECLAC, which was called UNCTAD.

TGW: When did you meet Prebisch for the first time?

GR: It must have been in the mid-1960s. My first permanent job in a regional organization was in the Central American Common Market secretariat. It's called SIECA (*Secretaría Permanente del Tratado General de Integración Económica Centroamericana*). And the secretary-general of SIECA was a person who turned out to be one of my best friends, Carlos Manuel Castillo. And he was a product of ECLAC, a very interesting person. He was a Costa Rican who studied at the University of Wisconsin, at the Land Tenure Center. He got his Ph.D. there in agricultural economics. And then he went to work for the ECLAC office in Mexico and became head of ECLAC Mexico. And he was a disciple of Prebisch.

So, when he moved from Mexico to Guatemala to take over the secretariat of the Common Market, I went to work with him as his personal assistant. And he went to an ECLAC meeting in Lima, I remember. He took me along and there I met Prebisch. It must have been in April of 1969.

TGW: So he was head of UNCTAD at that point?

GR: Yes, he was either head of UNCTAD or had recently left (I don't remember). But Prebisch never missed an ECLAC meeting. Every time ECLAC met, until he died in 1986, he used to go. He was put on the rostrum to speak. I remember the Lima meeting. And I remember that not only did I meet him, but we went out to lunch together. I still remember that very well—Carlos Manuel Castillo, Prebisch, myself, and one other person who I don't remember. But I still remember the lunch. And I remember that I was very impressed by Prebisch.

TGW: Why?

GR: Prebisch was like an oracle. He was a man who spoke from the mountaintop. I was less awed with him later, when I was a little more savvy and established a personal relationship with him. But, at that time, he was an outstanding public speaker and a very interesting person. I was also influenced by Castillo, who also thought Prebisch was something next to God.

TGW: The disciple. What kind of intellectual culture did he manage to initiate at ECLA, and eventually UNCTAD. Was it open to new ideas? Was it confrontational? Was it tolerant? What was it like as a place to work, and which, I assume, reflected his operating styles at one point or another?

GR: There I cannot talk to you about my own personal experiences, but only hearsay because I only joined ECLAC way after he left. By the way, I knew of Prebisch already from Berkeley. When I was in Berkeley in the mid-1950s, they were teaching ideas that Prebisch had promoted. I remember I had a professor called Sanford Mosk, who taught Latin American studies. He used to talk about Prebisch. So I knew about Prebisch even while being in Berkeley. But going back to your question, I have heard from people who worked with Prebisch that he was quite authoritarian and disciplined. I don't know how tolerant he was to new ideas. But he was a man who commanded a lot of respect. He exerted unquestioned leadership. Somebody like Victor Urquidi could give you a lot more insights about that era.

TGW: He did.

GR: While a great admirer of Prebisch, I personally am a little turned off by this cult of Prebisch. I think it is a very bad thing for the organization. Even bringing Prebisch to the biennial meetings, I thought, was a bit excessive. He had outlived his usefulness and it was like putting him on display over and over and over. I don't have too much sympathy for the cult that

was made of Prebisch. But I recognize that he was a very forceful personality, an outstanding personality. He was an institution-builder. He was a great communicator. I don't think he was a rigorous academic. I know that Victor Urquidi tried many times to propose him for a Nobel Prize in economics, but he doesn't have that profile. That is not what he did best. On the other hand, it is not what ECLAC does best either.

ECLAC is very much a reflection of Prebisch. It is a halfway house between academia and the practice of development economics. At that time, the secretariat did not do high level sophisticated research at ECLAC, nor was Prebisch particularly original in everything he did. The innovation was applying fairly conventional thinking in economics to the practical setting of Latin America and to connecting with policymakers. So I don't think it was a brilliant idea to propose him for a Nobel Prize in economics. That was not his *forté*.

TGW: Actually, Victor's interview contains a lot of information that would sustain your thesis that Prebisch's contribution was more as a packager, manipulator, and communicator than as a thinker.

GR: I got to know him very well in later years. In fact, he was the man who proposed me to be executive-secretary of ECLAC. And I never quite understood why. But I think by that time he was getting on in age. He must have been in his late seventies. And he did not want to lose the perks of being recognized as the leading apostle of ECLAC. And I think he wanted to make sure that whoever took over the secretariat would give him his place. Enrique Iglesias was the person who had the idea that I should be his successor. And he recruited Prebisch to convince me (and, possibly, to legitimize the decision).

I remember one of the highlights of my personal life—Prebisch taking me out to lunch in Lima, again, at an ECLAC meeting; this time in April of 1984. Prebisch was there, one more



time, holding forth at an ECLAC meeting. And he took me out to a very elaborate lunch at the Hotel Bolívar. And we talked about everything except the topic at hand during lunch. *À la* Mexican fashion, when we got to dessert, he raised the topic that he thought that I should take over the ECLAC secretariat.

So, actually, I was anointed by the saint. Very few people know that, by the way. In subsequent years I got to know him very well, and I became increasingly aware of his considerable strengths. But in the end I also confirmed in my own mind that the “cult of Prebisch” had been damaging to ECLAC. We can talk more about that later, but this idea of hanging onto Prebisch and ECLAC’s original thesis as some kind of a doctrine went on too long and caused the organization a great deal of damage by the time I got there.

TGW: Actually, this suggests the importance of ideas even after they have outlived their usefulness, scientific or otherwise. They tend to have a life of their own.

GR: Especially in a bureaucracy, because a lot of people lived off of that, and lived very well, because the ECLAC secretariat in Santiago became a little fairy land of its own, where staff enjoyed a lot of perks. They really believed that they were some kind of enlightened technocracy, very arrogant because they had the idea that they knew what had to be done. So it became an artificial little world, which lived on much too long. And, of course, they needed some kind of a cult figure for that, and Prebisch filled that bill.

TGW: How would you characterize the quality of the people who worked in the secretariat, either in the regional offices or in headquarters? The reputations of ECLA or ECLAC and the ECE (Economic Commission for Europe) seemed to be at the top of the regional commissions pile, and then the others certainly somewhat below. But, in general, how would you characterize the international civil service as you knew it in ECLA and ECLAC?

GR: As I knew it or in Prebisch's time? Those are two different things.

TGW: Both.

GR: I would tell you that in Prebisch's time, there is a word in Spanish. I don't know if it has a good translation. It is called *mística*. I guess mystique. The people who worked at ECLAC had *mística*. They had a very strong dose of idealism in some of the things that the UN stood for. One was development, and the other thing that you could easily relate to was Latin America—my region. It is harder to relate to Africa and much harder to relate to Asia and the Pacific, due to the great diversity of situation within those regions. But it is not that hard to relate to Latin America. It is a common culture, a common language. We always say, “No, Latin America is very different, a very heterogeneous region.” But you can talk of Latin America beyond an abstract notion.

So you got a group of people starting something new, who could believe in two noble causes—development and Latin America. And what kept them going, I think, was *mística*. Some of them were very good, and others, as happens in any organization, probably were not that great. But they had very good leadership, in the person of Raúl Prebisch. So I think one would have to give the organization very high marks in terms of the quality of the staff in its pioneering years. They were very motivated, with good leadership, and some very high quality people. And it was connected to the UN, which was also a noble thing. So that gave it its original impetus.

And I think the organization continued to capitalize on that up to today. It has been able to attract talent over the years because it is one of the relatively few organizations in Latin America which offers technocrats the possibility to work for two noble causes, such as Latin

American development. So, as to the average intellectual capacity of ECLAC, I would give it high marks.

TGW: In relationship to a really competent government civil service or in comparison with a good social science faculty or in a bureaucratic context?

GR: I would say compared to any organization. But of course it is difficult to measure it. I would tell you that there are enough people in ECLAC today with Ph.D.'s from the best universities in the world to compare favorably with a good faculty of economics in an academic setting. And they also would compare favorably to a very good ministry of finance of a more advanced country in Latin America—Brazil or Mexico. Except the ministries of finance of Brazil and Mexico have more Ph.D.'s from the best universities than ECLAC does. But the level is pretty good. ECLAC staff and governmental experts do different things. But both have been able to attract talent. When I left ECLAC and a vacancy was circulated even at a fairly junior level, you typically would get thirty or forty applications, and at least half of those would have Ph.D.'s from very good universities.

My interpretation is that in today's world, when probably the majority of young people tend to go into the business sector more than into public life, there still are enough idealists left, even if it is only 10 or 20 percent of each graduating class, who don't find that many outlets for their idealism. People end up in legal aid in this country or in the Peace Corps. There aren't many opportunities to respond to their aspirations. The UN is one of them. The UN is an organization that, if you are an idealist, offers you the opportunity to believe that you are doing something noble. And that is why I think the organization still attracts talent and keeps up a very respectable level of quality in what it produces.

TGW: We'll fast-forward to the year 2001 in New York. Your encounters with the international civil service in New York, you feel comfortable about saying the same thing?

GR: I think, person for person, the Economic Commission for Latin America, has done it a little better. But the reason for that is, I think, the identity of working for development in Latin America—this is a little more abstract here. I am not telling you that every person who works at ECLAC is excellent. But there are enough excellent people to make it a very respectable organization.

TGW: As long as we are on this topic, what kinds of pressures did you or senior staff in ECLAC come under to choose on the basis of nationality, political connections, family, friends, as opposed to the person with the most solid academic credentials, who had the best experience, who would be the right person for the job. Because that is the name of the game in New York, certainly. And I just wondered the extent to which—

GR: None. There were no pressures. The only pressure that exists has to do with gender. There is a big drive in the UN towards gender equality. Sometimes you would look for the best person, who happened to be male, but you would have to possibly sacrifice it in terms of getting somebody slightly less competent who happened to be a female. But I think, basically, what did function a lot is contacts. But they weren't contacts to help a friend. They were contacts because you knew a person that you thought was especially competent who you would like to get on board. So, I think the recruitment was relatively transparent and the main criterion was, in general, competence.

TGW: How did ideas move back and forth between the fantasy world you have described, the complex in Santiago, and say, Geneva or New York? In general, when a new piece of information, a new interpretation, or some new data became available, how did they go

from the regional commission to the global level? Or what ideas, in reverse, came from the global level back to the economic commission that needed to be reprocessed with Latin American lenses on them? What is the dynamic? What is the process? How does it work?

GR: I guess the main influence is documents, publications. I think the influence from the regional commission towards the global scenario is probably bigger than the other way around, in that you have a group of people who are looking at the world through the regional perspective. That is their main preoccupation. But, by looking at the world through, say, the Latin American perspective, they take into account what is going on at the global level. And, whatever ideas they come up with in terms of development policies appear in publications which are then picked up by New York and Geneva. I think that publications from New York and Geneva also influence the production of the regional commissions.

And probably there is a little too much incestuous relationship within the UN. I was urging my staff to do more reading of what is coming out of the academic community, both in Latin America and in developed countries. And, toward the end, I think they were doing it more. But the easiest thing is to look at the documents that are produced within the organization, which gives it, like I say, sort of an incestuous relationship and maybe stunts creativity a bit.

TGW: In terms of a major publication, thinking about Latin American eyes, what happens when a new book or a new idea comes up that is outside of the UN context? Paul Kennedy's book on *The Death of Empires*, or something that comes out of an academic context, as opposed to a report from the Secretary-General or a report from a global conference. Is it possible that these outside ideas or outside notions push a secretariat? My own experience was that the internal things got far more discussion and were far more influential than any outside source, however prominent.

GR: I think the internal documents are given more consideration, strictly in terms of the time allotted to them. I don't know if it is because they are easier to accede to. But, having said that, there are people who are reading and following the important debates that are going on in academic or in other circles. It depends very much on individuals, and how they organize their staffs. I had at least one head of division who kept one or two junior assistants reading publications all the time to sort of nurture his own thinking.

In general, it is hard to identify where ideas come. A lot of these ideas you practically absorb by osmosis and you don't know exactly where they originated. You don't know how original it is, whether you got it from within the UN or from somewhere else. But what I can tell you is that if you step into somebody's office and look at their bookshelves, 80 or 90 percent of what you will see there are UN publications.

TGW: I think that is correct, actually. And I think it is one of the reasons the Secretary-General's present desire to open up windows is an important one at the top level and every other level. I just wondered whether there is a difference between regional integration, regional cooperation in the Americas and in Europe, in the sense that the European experiment strikes me as having begun to avoid war or to lessen conflict. It seems to me that all of the Latin American experiments were more driven by desires for economic development, rather than this notion about conflict management. Is that fair?

GR: Yes. I think they were driven basically because they were functional to industrialization. Industrialization, as you know, was basically predicated on import substitution. So, if you had a limited market, a limited domestic market, it seemed to make sense to amplify that market by joining with another country. And that was the original conception. Then, in Central America, there was a very interesting initiative, a failed initiative, which tried to identify

five or six large industries which required economies of scale, and which sort of tried to establish one in each country, by giving them a legal monopoly. So you would have a glass factory in one country and a rubber tire factory in a second one and a fertilizer plant in a third one. This drew the resolute opposition of the United States and some parts of the private sector as being anti-free trade and too interventionist. But the ideas were consistent with ECLA's conceptual framework, both in advocating certain state intervention, or planning in the economy, and in promoting industrialization. Indeed, ECLA felt that even the regional market of the five was barely enough countries at the time to sustain one viable industry.

So, while Latin America was inspired by the European experiment, what basically led integration in Latin America was the need to make industrialization viable. So the very large countries had a little less interest. Mexico, Brazil, and Argentina felt that their domestic markets already could sustain a large amount of industries. It was the little guys who felt the need to integrate.

TGW: Is this what you meant by *regionalismo abierto*?

GR: No, that is a new version.

TGW: That's the new version of the historical explanation?

GR: Yes. *Regionalismo abierto* takes distance from integration being functional to import substitution industrialization, and is predicated on the need to become internationally competitive. It is sort of the opposite, really, the mirror image. Because in the 1980s, all Latin American countries unilaterally adopted trade liberalization. They were sort of dragged into it. So, if you have effective protection barriers of 100 percent and then create a common market behind barriers of 100 percent, you keep out many imported goods. And then you hope that competition within the region will bring prices down.

But once you have effective protection of 8 to 10 percent, you have to have a different type of justification for economic integration. And that is what *regionalismo abierto* was about. This document came out in 1994 and had a pretty big impact.

TGW: How do either of these regional ideas, the earlier or the later versions, change by the inclusion of the “C” in ECLAC, from the middle of the 1980s? What were the important arguments behind keeping the Caribbean separate, and putting the Caribbean into the regional commission? And why, in the end, was it included?

GR: They were bureaucratic, really. The English-speaking Caribbean wanted to create its own economic commission. And there was very little sympathy for that in the UN in the 1960s because of the costs involved. It didn’t seem to make much sense. The Caribbean was sort of forced to go along with Latin America. We went through three stages there, three mindsets. The first mindset was that the Caribbean was geographically part of Latin America, and we didn’t need to talk about Latin America and the Caribbean. The Caribbean was part of Latin America, which in fact was true for Cuba and the Dominican Republic, which also had the cultural and linguistic heritage. But the English-speaking Caribbean is really very different. So then, the Caribbean countries sort of resented this idea that they were the same, and they wanted their own cultural identity reflected. So then they went out and said, “the Caribbean is different and we want our own organization.” And since they couldn’t have it, they settled for Latin America and the Caribbean as two separate entities under a common roof. That is the history.

The non-Spanish speaking Caribbean is very different. The countries come from a very different tradition. The civil service is very different. I believe that they have a better civil service than most Latin American countries, in terms of discipline, competence, and tradition. And there is a tension there, which has never been resolved, and it is present here in the UN also.



The Latin Americans don't quite understand the Caribbeans. They find them to be a bother. It seems to bother many of them that some fifteen little islands that represent less than eight million people try to exert the influence of a great power. For their part, the Caribbeans see Latin America as totally insensitive to their cultural identity. It is a tension that is permanently present.

The way it was resolved at ECLAC, but only partially resolved, was through the creation of a sub-regional office in Port-of-Spain, which basically is run by people from the English-speaking Caribbean, and which is highly sensitive to the English-speaking Caribbean, or non-Spanish-speaking Caribbean point of view. The Caribbean is part of the CBI (Caribbean Basic Initiative), but they also relate to Europe through the trade agreements of Lomé. At least for now, they have preferential treatment in both Europe and the United States, which is a huge difference in the way they relate to the rest of the world. They are basically based either on services or on agriculture. You can find many, many differences there.

It is really a fiction to talk of "Latin America and the Caribbean." So the only way we resolved that was by giving the Port-of-Spain office a lot of independence to work out their own work program and relate with the governments. That is the way it has been handled.

TGW: Before the addition, in 1984 or 1985, how were these economies treated in analyses of the region? Were they considered?

GR: Barely. They explain why the U.S., the UK, France, and the Netherlands are members of the Economic Commission for Latin America, which is sort of a mystery for some people. They are there because geographically they were present when the economic commission was created. The present states were all colonial territories at one time. They only gained independence in the 1960s. But the colonial powers were never thrown out of ECLAC,

as did occur at ECA (Economic Commission for Africa). ECA is made up only of African countries.

The Cubans tried to have the developed countries thrown out of ECLAC. This happened in the late eighties. We developed the idea that ECLAC functions on two levels. One refers to the things that Latin America does within its own backyard, which really is our own business, and developed countries don't need to be sitting at the table. So we created a forum called "Group of High-Level Experts," which is made up of only Latin American countries. But, on the other level, there is recognition that the UN is all about international cooperation. And we want developed countries to be sitting at the table of the commission, to examine the way Latin American countries relate with the rest of the world. But then the next question was: "But why are only the U.S., Canada, UK, France, and the Netherlands sitting in?" So then a move started to bring other countries in. Spain and Portugal came in. Then we tried to get Italy, Japan, and Germany in. The Germans balked because they thought it might have financial implications. The Japanese said yes, but they never followed through. Italy actually entered. Italy is a member of the commission today. So it is a rather strange arrangement. But the only reason I bring it up is that the origin of this strange arrangement is the colonial presence in the Caribbean at the time. And still today, because France, as you know, has two territories in the Caribbean. And France is very active in ECLAC. I think it is the only country that has a special ambassador named to ECLAC.

TGW: In speaking of these differences—Caribbean and Latin American, or Spanish-speaking and non-Spanish-speaking—how does this relatively well-off group approach the independence of other newly independent states in the 1960s and 1970s? Were these seen as, in some ways, allies or competitors? I am always struck by the extent to which many of the

founding ideas from the Haberler report (*Trends in International Trade*) and UNCTAD and others are based on a Latin American experience, which has limited applicability to other parts of the world. So I am just sort of turning this whole notion on its head. How did Latin Americans see this burgeoning of countries with varying levels of development, most of them way behind Latin America?

GR: I don't know. I'm not sure that it was a topic of discussion in the economic commission. There was a sense of superiority at the notion that we were light-years ahead of Africa. And, already in my era, in the 1980s, there was a sense of inferiority, *vis-à-vis* the East Asian experience, i.e., that those countries had had a more successful development experience. And that began to be looked at seriously in the 1980s, why some of the East Asian, and more recently the Southeast Asian countries had been more successful. What had they done right? First it was the Four Tigers, but then it moved south to countries like Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, and even Indonesia and the Philippines.

Actually, Southeast Asia is probably a little closer to the Latin American experience. I don't find too much in common with Korea or Taiwan or Hong Kong. But Indonesia, the Philippines, Thailand, might have useful lessons. So there is a lot of work coming out of Latin America in the 1980s and early 1990s, comparative analyses of the development experiences of Asia and Latin America. And very little comparative work in relation to Africa.

TGW: Does this motley assortment of developing countries make sense as a group? I am sort of fast-forwarding to your experience in New York, as well as going back into the 1970s and 1980s, in ECLA. The Group of 77, or the South, or the Global South, or the Third World, certainly was an effective force at the outset in flagging certain issues and putting certain ideas on the international agenda. Does it remain a sensible grouping?

GR: The G-77? At the conceptual level, yes. At the practical level, less so. It is so divided. It is so heterogeneous. And it is hard for it to remain credible. The leadership of the G-77 gets together a group of more proactive, or more militant countries, and takes decisions and acts on them in the UN, but in the world of low politics, not the important things—negotiations, draft resolutions on economic matters. And they tend to articulate a G-77 position which really reflected the position of the more militant members. And the other member countries don't take too much issue with it either, because it doesn't seem important enough to them, or, something that I discovered here, which I was not aware of when I worked at ECLAC—a very important motivation in the UN is the electoral process. For instance, any country that wishes to become a member of the Security Council knows that it has to curry favor with 130 countries in order to be elected to the Security Council. So that starts influencing your conduct in the UN. And countries are not quite as transparent as you would want them to be *vis-à-vis* their policies because they don't wish to alienate what they regard as a very important voting bloc or constituency.

So a lot of countries do not take issue with the more militant G-77 positions, which they feel do not reflect their own, simply because they do not want to alienate the leadership. But this degrades the G-77, because it goes around making statements which are not taken too seriously. In other words, non-G-77 countries tend to view those positions as posturing. But it all happens at the level of a low politics. The important decisions do not go through them. I suppose they never did, but now it is even less, because the interests of countries are very different. The G-77 would like to think of itself as a very important force, but it rarely is.

TGW: What explains the continuation of this grouping? Is it a little akin to the extension of the life of Prebisch's ideas within ECLA? This is a process, but an important one for

international discussions. And it does seem to me that it has outlived its usefulness. But it still is around.

GR: That is a good question. I think a lot of the issues in the UN do have a North-South cleavage. Some of it is just rooted in the culture of the UN. Some of it is real. So it makes sense for the South the band together. Actually, I see a return to North-South tensions; let me put it this way: the North-South cleavage was greatly accentuated in the 1970s, where the G-77 members used the UN as sort of a podium to ventilate their frustrations and to make their denunciations about what an unfair world this is. That had its utility. It clarified how certain trends in the global economy affected development. But, at the same time, it weakened the UN, because a perception grew that the very same governments that went to the UN to denunciate conducted their serious business in other international forums, and especially the Bretton Woods institutions. So the ministers of finance would go the Bretton Woods institutions and conduct affairs in a very business-like manner, while their foreign ministers went to the UN and ranted and raged. This was not doing the UN any good.

I think the fever passed at some point in the 1980s. Then we went into a more cooperative mode. And developing countries spoke of developed countries as our partners. And we had about ten years of tranquility, of non-contentious dialogue between North and South. I have the impression that, in the last year or two, the level of contention is going up again. We will see what happens now because the Islamic Republic of Iran is taking over the presidency of the G-77, and we will see how they manage this. Nigeria was the last president. And before that, it is was Guyana. Guyana—a voice of reason; Nigeria—something in between. I don't know how Iran will react. The person who is going to do this year is a very competent person

and a very well-liked person. He is the permanent alternate representative and most probably will not be inclined to take a very radical approach.

The leadership of the G-77 is very decisive in where the movement is going. And I don't know what the future holds after the G-77 held its first-ever summit, in Havana, in mid-2000. What divides the G-77 today is precisely those countries that already opted for becoming members of the global economy and those that are still struggling.

TGW: To what extent are these spikes in North-South bitterness or confrontation explained by global economic conditions, and to what extent are they explained by ideas? That is, to what extent did the end of the gold standard, and the Yom Kippur War and OPEC's (Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries) oil prices explain the NIEO (New International Economic Order), and to what extent did the Mexican debt crisis explain a more cooperative approach to negotiations? Or to what extent did ideas themselves—that is, redistribution in the NIEO—drive this process?

GR: I don't know. It's a mix. I tend to view these things also in a sort of a pendular manner. I think it was Arthur Schlesinger who spoke about U.S. history as moving between idealism and realism. I suspect there is some cyclical dynamic, since I was educated in the cyclical nature of economic performance. I think there is something similar in the world of ideas also, that ideas, when they become commonplace, people start grappling for new ideas. There is something cyclical about these things.

I don't know how much ideas shape the G-77 stance, and how much objective circumstances do, and whether they reinforce each other, or how much the influence of certain personalities shape the G-77 position. Sometimes a very forceful personality steps forward and launches these initiatives. The New International Economic Order got a tremendous impetus

from the fact that President Luís Echeverría was in president of Mexico at the time. And probably it was functional to his domestic difficulties to launch this international initiative, which basically points a finger at the North for everything that is wrong, while the North is pointing a finger at the South, saying, “Why don’t you guys get your own house in order and then everything will be better.”

But I couldn’t tell you now much—clearly ideas are involved in these cycles, changing ideas, or changing perceptions. But to try and establish causal effects—I wouldn’t waste my time on that.

TGW: Actually, it sounds very much like something you wrote in this piece about the future when you asked “whether economic thinking and policy actions shape economic performance, or whether economic thinking was, instead, shaped by economic realities. In fact, of course, both phenomena were going on simultaneously.”

GR: Yes, I think so.

TGW: I wanted to go back to that period in the 1970s for a minute. To what extent did the changes in the region, dramatic changes, affect what was possible to think about or write about within the secretariat? I am thinking, in ECLAC in particular, about the coming and going of [Salvador] Allende and [Augusto] Pinochet, the wars in Central America, and the bitterness of the Cold War. To what extent did these events impinge upon normal operating procedures and research within ECLAC?

GR: Certainly, events in Chile had an enormous influence on ECLAC. I always thought that the link between the ECLAC secretariat and the domestic environment in Chile was much too strong. The outside environment always had a tremendous influence on what the institution was doing and what its staff was thinking. In other words, the environment surrounding ECLAC

was very influential on the content and tone of the institution's work. A large number of its professional staff participated in the Allende government. In consequence, the Pinochet regime viewed ECLAC as practically a center of conspiracy. In fact, they were very close to throwing ECLAC out of Chile. So that must have impacted on the minds of staff.

On the other hand, the local staff and especially the secretarial staff, in view of the need to have bilingual secretaries in the UN, tended to be conservative. So the local staff tended to be anti-Allende and pro-Pinochet, while the international staff the other way around. So this generated enormous tensions inside the organization which had nothing to do with the work of the UN. It was very parochial Chilean politics. This is something that hasn't been studied or even talked about. But I happen to think it influenced the organization a great deal over its lifetime always.

My first contacts with ECLAC were in the 1960s, when I found that the professional staff was greatly influenced by the Christian Democratic government of Eduardo Frei. One of his hallmarks was to push a very serious land reform program in Chile, which was eagerly absorbed by the secretariat of ECLAC as some sort of paradigm that had to be promoted all over Latin America. One probably could write a very interesting essay about how domestic affairs in Chile influenced ECLAC much more than how ECLAC influenced the domestic affairs in Chile.

TGW: Did the arrival of the Chicago School in Chile arrive in ECLAC at the same time?

GR: No. It was seriously resisted and even "satanized." The Chicago School was viewed as practically the opposite of what ECLAC was predicated on.

TGW: Some of those same comments, I think, one might almost make about the UN being based in the United States, that the local situation—not in terms of the staff—but that the



domestic situation is taken perhaps too seriously, or has an extraordinary impact on the work program.

GR: Probably. It certainly is true for an organization like FAO (Food and Agriculture Organization) in Rome.

TGW: Was this true also in Mexico City?

GR: No.

TGW: Not at all?

GR: I don't know if not at all, but much less. These organizations tend to recruit a lot of local staff and a lot of international staff. The UN has quotas for their international staff, over-represented, under-represented, et cetera. You note in their staffing documents that where they have a duty station, the nationality of that particular country is always over-represented, because the greatest thing that can happen to a Chilean professional is to get a job at the UN in his own country. And once they get in, they will probably stay there for the rest of their lives. When I got to ECLAC, I think there were around ten divisions and, of those, seven were headed by Chileans. So events in Chile had an enormous albeit indirect influence. And some of these people are quite provincial. Chile is the center of their world. So I would say that Chile provincialized the United Nations a little more than is convenient.

TGW: How did Cold War politics circumscribe what kind of research was undertaken or what kinds of publications came out of the secretariat?

GR: I think that the ECLAC secretariat, maybe more than the rest of the UN, does have an ideological tag on it, which would be a reformist and somewhat nationalistic tag—nationalistic in terms of “Latin America first.” And it would have a slightly anti-U.S. ingredient. And it had some sympathy for Cuba in the initial years, in the 1960s and 1970s, as a

country that had bravely broken the yoke of oppression. But I would never put on it the label of “socialist” or “Marxist.” There were Marxists working in the secretariat, some very prominent Marxists who ended up in Salvador Allende’s government. But the organization was always reformist. None of the executive-secretaries was anywhere near Marxist, none of them.

But in the Cold War era, to be reformist was being what John Foster Dulles called a “fellow traveler,” or what Latin American conservatives called the “anteroom to communism.” So the U.S. didn’t like ECLAC. They thought they were fostering dangerous ideas. And the left didn’t like ECLAC because the secretariat was not radical enough. It was not a calling for the revolution. They, the left, sincerely believed that the UN secretariat was dominated by the big powers, which to a degree is true, of course. So, in the end, to be a reformist during the Cold War, you end up not being liked by either the left or the right, in conventional terms. It is sort of a lonely place to be. And that was the ideological position that the institution took for many, many years—probably still today. Except today it is meaningless, ten years after the Cold War.

TGW: To what extent did the ideological culture of ECLAC mean that, when the dominant mood switched toward what we now label the “Washington consensus,” to what extent was there a different kind of inertia within the secretariat about looking at these ideas in any sort of objective fashion?

GR: It was resisted, but in combination with other things. I think ECLAC reached a turning point in the 1980s, and it happened to coincide with the crumbling of the Berlin Wall and the emergence of the Washington consensus. The organization capitalized on its pioneering years. No one disputes that in the 1950s, the organization made a very creative contribution to the development thinking. Whether it contributed to development or not, and what its impact was, you can discuss; but, as an intergovernmental organization, it had an enormous influence in

the 1950s. And the people that worked at ECLAC got to like the very prominent and prestigious role the organization had acquired. And they hung on to that for twenty-five more years. They didn't want to relinquish it. Long after as it was *passé*, long after other things had happened, they felt the need to defend what they perceived as a doctrine. And, already with the monetarist policies of the 1970s, and certainly the Chicago School, and even the so-called Washington consensus—I would call it changing international realities—there was strong resistance to change on the part of the old guard of ECLAC. Time would prove that “we” were right, that all of these new theories were passing fads, which would be proved wrong in the end.

That was Enrique Iglesias's term at ECLAC. It would be interesting to interview him, because Iglesias was of two minds on all these matters. He did not define himself as to where he wanted to go. Part of Iglesias belonged to the old guard. And he had been a very close collaborator of Prebisch. He had grown up in the old ECLAC. But he is a very sophisticated guy, and he has very good antennas. So part of him wanted to update ECLAC. And he recognized that changes were going on. He started to bring in some new, more modern thinkers, embodied by the likes of Andrés Bianchi. And a tremendous conflict started to rage within his secretariat between the old guard and the new people.

Iglesias never properly defined himself. He let both groups operate. The secretariat was producing documents that pointed in opposite directions in terms of policies. You knew who the authors were. It was a secretariat without an opinion; or rather with two opinions on every topic. And that went on for about seven or eight years. When Iglesias left, the conflict was still not resolved, this internal conflict of identity.

In the meantime, the real world was in turmoil. Latin American governments were unilaterally opening up to the world and adopting very prudent and rigorous macroeconomic

policies in the areas of monetary exchange and fiscal policy. Those things did not interest the “old” ECLAC at all. Short-term economic policymaking: you don't find anything on the subject in the first twenty years. The roots of inflation are structural, according to ECLAC.

So the real world and policymaking in Latin America were more and more distant from what the ECLAC secretariat was saying. The ECLAC secretariat was still saying that what you must do is continue industrialization, and not lower barriers to trade and forget about short-term economic policy. The people that were doing economic policy in governments were beginning to perceive ECLAC as some very strange, outmoded organization that was wallowing in its past and had absolutely no relevance for the present and future. I think that was a low point of the organization, and it was shortly before Iglesias left. He knew it. And he was beginning to do something about it. But then he left abruptly, to take over the Ministry of Foreign Relations of Uruguay.

TGW: This is a very good point at which to stop because we are at the end of tape number one.

TGW: This is the beginning of tape number two, the 3<sup>rd</sup> of January, Tom Weiss and Gert Rosenthal. We ended up in ECLAC. Before we get to your tenure there, I just wondered whether, as you look back on this entire period, what extent the love-hate relationship of Latin America and the United States plays into the production of ideas or the production of research? Is anti-Americanism or anti-Chicago School or anti-market reform—because they emanate from the North—rejected in some way automatically by some members of the staff, while others embrace it for the same reasons?

GR: I think you have some of both. What runs together with the somewhat nationalistic and reformist predilections of ECLAC would be a certain dosage of anti-Americanism. Indeed,

you found that in some of the older staff members. A person like Anibal Pinto, who was very prominent in ECLAC, had little use for the United States. I think there was a predilection in the old days to recruit staff that had done its graduate studies in Europe, *vis-à-vis* the United States. Of course, since the 1970s, most staff has been trained in the United States. And I think there has been a considerable change in attitudes. But in the founding years there was this love-hate relationship, in part due to the presence of the United States in the intergovernmental machinery of ECLAC, playing a fairly important, and I would say, restrictive role.

What also has to be remembered is that the United States opposed the creation of ECLAC to begin with, arguing that there was no need for an Economic Commission for Latin America because the OAS (Organization of American States) fulfilled that role. So I think that is still in the collective memory of the old-timers, or was in the collective memory of the old-timers. The United States very reluctantly agreed to the creation of ECLAC on a trial basis. I think it was for two years, in the beginning. But, of course, once it was created, like all bureaucratic organizations, it was not shut down. The relationship with the United States is one of the many intricate strands in the intellectual worldview of the secretariat.

TGW: What are your fondest and your worst memories of being the executive head of ECLAC from 1980 to 1997?

GR: I don't know. That is like the question you ask little children, "What did you like best about today's activities?"

TGW: Well, it was a wild period in terms of history—you joined in the height of the Cold War, became head with changes starting in the Soviet Union. Shortly thereafter, the Berlin Wall falls. The world political situation is quite different by the time that you retire. So I just

wondered whether, when you took over, any of this was in the wind, whether you were surprised by it, whether this created new opportunities.

GR: Yes. What is hard to describe is any particular moment which was the worst or the moment which was the best. I will tell you that the most difficult thing was orchestrating the transition, or consolidating a transition which had begun under Iglesias, but which I had to finish—a transition towards a more relevant, updated organization. That was difficult and painful because I had to step on many toes. Personally, I don't like being rude or ungracious to people. I don't enjoy it. And I did have to take unpopular positions *vis-à-vis* part of the staff. That was a difficult period for me.

The rest was pretty smooth sailing. I was very fortunate because my tenure coincided with three or four very positive aspects. One was the end of the Cold War. I assumed the secretariat almost the same year that the Berlin Wall came crumbling down. Second, I mentioned to you already, the very close—too close—relations that the secretariat has with the Chilean environment. When I got there, Chile was preparing for its plebiscite, which turned out to lead towards a period of democratization and a period of consolidation of civilian democratic rule in Chile, which was extremely positive for the ECLAC secretariat. The third is that there was no longer any doubt that the original ideas of ECLAC were now totally overcome by events. Whether ECLAC liked it or not, the vast majority of Latin American countries had succumbed to certain new policies; whether you want to call it the Washington consensus or something else. (John Williamson says he regrets he ever called his document the “Washington Consensus,” because it was neither a consensus nor devised in Washington).

But it was clear that something new was going on in the region, and we sort of zoomed into that. Fourth, during my tenure, I was able to bring in new people, because it was the

beginning of a generational change, where part of the old guard left and I was able to replace them with new blood. So I was very fortunate. I had, after an initial, rather difficult entry, very clear sailing for a long period. Basically, it was a very good period, professionally for me, and I think for the organization also.

TGW: In what way specifically did the end of the Cold War have an impact on the secretariat in Santiago?

GR: I think it cleared the air. The Cold War sort of forced people to pick sides. Either you were with the U.S. or you weren't. Either you were with the socialist bloc or you weren't. The Cuban phenomenon was important in Latin America also. And Cuba is an important member state of ECLAC and always was a member of ECLAC. During about ten years, ECLAC was the only place where Cuba could meet with the rest of Latin America and even with the United States. So, with the end of the Cold War, staff in ECLAC would look at Cuba in a more, how would I say, less ideological way also. The end of the Cold War was very healthy for ECLAC because it moved the U.S. away from security considerations, more to the area of economic cooperation. It contributed to an era of greater tolerance in general, which is certainly one of the hallmarks of the UN. It made life a lot easier.

And, of course, in that parochial setting which is Santiago, the end of the Cold War was also very helpful to overcome the tremendous divisions in the Chilean society. The Chileans were coming out of a period where, even within families, hatreds persisted. So this new dawn was all to the good.

TGW: In thinking back to residues that remain around, or ideas that remain around for a long time, probably the idea that is most associated with Latin America is *dependencia*. To what

extent did this remain in the secretariat and flavor its work? Or to what extent did it simply seem *passé* or something that had long since been overcome by events?

GR: I would tell you that the important strands in ECLAC's or regional thinking were all revisited in the 1980s and 1990s, but in a different context. Certainly one of the main preoccupations of Prebisch was how Latin America relates to the rest of the world, which was very clever by the way because it is the one unifying theme among Latin Americans. It is very abstract to talk about Latin America. But when you start talking about how each Latin American country relates with the rest of the world, you start working on commonalities. And this has been a *leitmotif* all through the history of the organization.

And the school of dependency, which was worked on more by the sociologists than the economists in the second half of the 1960s, was an extension of how Latin America related with the rest of the world, more radical, more uncompromising. So, in the 1990s, we still worked on how do you function in a global economy. The same question in a different context. Another preoccupation in the early years was the application of technology to the productive process. In the early years, Prebisch and his colleagues reached the conclusion that only industry would lead to higher levels of productivity. That is another topic we were working on extensively in the 1990s, with less emphasis on industry, with the idea that higher productivity could be achieved in all sectors and even intra-sectorally. But competing in a global economy required applying technology to the productive process.

A third strand that has been present is the preoccupation with equity always. And we continued working on that. But equity in the 1960s basically was addressed through the structural reforms: land reform, tax reform. In the 1990s, it was addressed through other means, especially investment in human capital. Education came to the forefront. Then there are some



new themes. The environment is relatively new, although ECLAC did some pioneering work on natural resources in its original years. The link between natural resources and development is something that was worked on in the 1950s and 1960s. The new face of that work is environment and development.

And the whole structuralist approach is also a *leitmotif* in the whole history of the organization. I would say there is more emphasis now in the last ten or fifteen years on institutions, which finds a parallelism in work being carried out in academic circles on institutional economics. In other words, you ask yourself not only which are the good economic policies, but what kinds of institutions do you need for development to take place.

So there is nothing radically new in the main preoccupations of development, as seen through the Latin American perspective. What changed radically was the context in which development is taking place. I think that is what made the message of ECLAC in the 1990s much more relevant, because instead of insisting to governments that they should do as they were telling them to do in the 1960s, you were offering guidelines to policymaking in terms of what they were actually doing in the 1990s, which was trying to relate to a very different world. And then we were working on very specific topics which were relevant: the management of debt, much more emphasis on short-term economic policies, which virtually did not exist in the early years because ECLAC was more concerned with strategies and long-term development. The role of the state has always been another *leitmotif*. It is not that you abdicated totally to the Chicago School and accepted that the “right” prices would resolve everything; you still were concerned with what the public sector should be doing, and what incentives and disincentives it should be setting for the private sector to function properly.

So these are all important concerns on development, which needed updating, and indeed received an updating, and are being continually updated today. And one final thing which the organization was doing in the early years and still does today is monitoring events and informing both governments and academic communities what is going on. The yearly economic surveys continue to be an important contribution to the intellectual history. ECLAC still does that very well.

TGW: As you look back from today to your days at Berkeley, how would you characterize changes in your own approaches to thinking about the development conundrum?

GR: I never considered myself an ideological person. I always was open to new ideas and adapting to new circumstances. When I look back today to the last forty years, it is amazing how much change occurred in the world and how the Latin American economies were able to adapt to these changing circumstances in a rather pragmatic way. Probably ECLAC did the region a disservice in trying to proclaim some kind of doctrine or paradigm for development, which would be valid for all time, although Prebisch never made such a claim. But a lot of his collaborators, some of whom are still around, deep inside believe that they had hit upon the theory. I never believed that. I always was very pragmatic. I think the forty years have been a confirmation that that was a good thing.

TGW: During this period, some new thoughts, or at least new thoughts for me, have come up. Maybe we could explore one of these and see when you became aware of it. The notion that gender is somehow central to development, to human relations, et cetera, came, at least in the UN context, around the first conference (World Conference of the International Women's Year) was held in 1975. When did this enter on your radar screen, and what accounted for it jumping from the back burner to the front burner of international concerns?

GR: I have a deep conviction of—I don't know whether to call it equality or social justice—which probably is born from the highly unjust circumstances of Guatemala, which is basically an ethnic problem. Guatemala, frankly, is a racist society, probably not that different from South Africa. So for me, the gender issue or the ethnic issue are really matters of social justice. I felt for many years that putting gender on the front burner in the UN context was trivializing the topic—the feminist movement, gay rights. There is an element of fadism involved in all this. But, frankly, for me it was nothing new: the idea of opposing discrimination of any kind. I experienced it in my personal life. My wife is a physician. I remember that her parents, who were good Germans, thought that her role was to be a good housewife, and why the hell was she going to go to the trouble of going to medical school? I was absolutely shocked and incensed at an idea like that. This was in the late 1950s. And nobody had talked to me about gender equality. It was just something that was born inside me, due to considerations of social justice in general.

So for me, it was very easy to embrace the more legitimate aspects of gender equality. I think the UN has made an important contribution in Latin America in this area. So there has been both the frivolous aspect, and there has been a real contribution, to the point that today it is politically incorrect for any government in Latin America not to have at least one or two women in the cabinet or in congress. The UN has had a big impact.

TGW: There are two or three kinds of vehicles for the transmission of ideas that we have been concerned with. I wondered whether we could just talk about eminent persons or global blockbuster reports. You mentioned that ECLA, for a long time, had been concerned with resource management and conservation and these kinds of things. So I don't know whether it is fair to ask whether something like the *Limits to Growth* in 1972 made a difference. Or, to come

to your taking the helm in Santiago, the Brundtland report (*Our Common Future*) as sort of an extension of the argument, quite a different focus on sustainability and development. But how did these big reports make a difference? Or when did they make a difference? Or do they make a difference?

GR: It depends. There are reports and there are *reports*. Some are UN-sponsored, like the Brundtland report; or *Limits to Growth*, which had nothing to do with the UN. Most of them have an impact. And I happen to think that one of the things the UN does best is to impact on public awareness through either global conferences or reports or just the repetition of certain topics. Sooner or later, people start repeating certain basic propositions. Usually they are born in the UN secretariat, or the UN secretariat buys in when they are developed somewhere else and popularizes them. The UN does that very well. It takes time. No single document, no single conference is a watershed event.

It is usually a cumulative process, where some seminal ideas which tend to be discussed among a very limited group of people, sort of bursts into the public consciousness, through media, through word of mouth, through documents. And all of a sudden, maybe two, three, five years after the document came out, everyone is repeating some of its main points as if they were gospel. It may be bad policy advice, but it had its impact. And the UN is very good at that, on big things and small. For example, in all capital cities of the world today, you will see special arrangements for handicapped people on curbsides, access to buses, and preferential parking. And those are ideas and commitments that were born in the UN, which at some point are popularized, again, this idea of social justice. Why should a person confined to a wheelchair be punished, why not make life a little easier for him?

And gender equality plays into the same theme as do issues of population. The UN has a big impact on certain seminal ideas, as it has on how to go about development or international cooperation. And it is very hard to explain exactly at what moment or through which document the case was assimilated, but if you look at the history as this project does, over the long term, the contributions that this organization made to development thinking have been tremendous.

TGW: Is there a better or a worse moment to bring out a report by an eminent commission or to organize a global conference or a follow-up to a global conference? Is this a cumulative process? And I think I would agree with you there. If you were planning when you wanted to set up a new commission or to think about having a conference, what would be the factors that would enter into the calculation?

GR: Timeliness. To identify real issues. I personally have difficulty in resolving, in my own mind, whether you want to tackle holistic issues or specific issues. It is easier to tackle specific issues. Latin America has a debt problem. Then you work on how you deal with a debt problem. That is something tangible, and you can come up with very tangible recommendations. A holistic issue, like how do you address development, is more complicated. Parts of the UN secretariat, including ECLAC, have had a penchant to tackle holistic issues; not to be content to say only how you would improve transport infrastructure or how you tackle debt. They want to go with the big picture and tell governments how to tackle poverty. That is harder, you know. I am convinced there are cycles in these things. There are moments in history where humanity craves for some kind of paradigm, maybe after a very traumatic experience, like the Great Depression. Lord [John Maynard] Keynes came and made a major contribution, offered a major paradigm, in the wake of the events of the interwar period.

I don't know how you identify those moments in history when you can come out with holistic proposals. But, for specific issues, it is easier because circumstances will tell you where the problems are. And those are the problems you set out to tackle. It is less ambitious, but it is probably more effective in the long run. And that was what the UN was doing in the 1990s. They tackled environment and development, population and development. The children's summit, I think, has had its impact. The social development summit came a little closer to being holistic. But at least it made people aware of the problem of social justice.

Now the UN is talking about a conference on finance for development. I think that is the way that the UN functions in bringing ideas to its constituency, whomever they may be. Who is the UN's constituency, the public, governments, academia? A lot of academics take a very dim view of the UN. They don't think it is an important originator of ideas. Maybe they are right. The organization was never meant to compete with academia, but to deal with more practical issues, more action-oriented issues. I always described ECLAC as a half-way house between academia and public policy, between reflection and action. I do think, however, that there is a potential marriage between the academic community and the UN.

TGW: In your view, when does that work best? You mentioned the most dramatic example—Lord Keynes—but I presume there are less dramatic examples. Besides people occasionally reading things, or having their assistants read things, when can an outside thinker or scholar make a difference?

GR: Certainly on the specific issues. Again, on the holistic, it is more difficult. That is an area that hasn't been explored too much—the links between academic communities and the United Nations, and how much they draw on each other, if at all, and what their respective attitudes are. I suspect that centers of excellence are not impressed with what the UN does. The

UN has mixed emotions towards centers of excellence, but tends to appreciate them for what they are. Most centers of excellence are regarded with respect among the UN technocracy. I don't think the same is true the other way around, which, in part, is the fault of the UN.

TGW: Would there be ways to draw in either individuals or clumps of individuals who work in centers of excellence from the academy?

GR: Yes, I think so. I have told the Secretary-General many times that he should upgrade the intellectual capacity of the UN Secretariat. The UN should have brought in a Joe Stiglitz type long ago, as the senior economist of the organization—someone who has a great deal of credibility in the intellectual community—such as Frances Stewart, or who have you. People who sort of have an *a priori* positive attitude towards the United Nations. I would have been much happier to have seen Stiglitz running the UN's economic area than having him in the World Bank. The Secretariat never did that. The global UN has never even had a Prebisch. UNCTAD had a Prebisch. ECLAC had a Prebisch. ECE had a Gunnar Myrdal. The UN Secretariat never had a Prebisch or, even better, a Stiglitz, and they should have had one. They still could have one. They could attract somebody of that level and standing, which I think would be an important thing if the UN wants to play a serious role in generating ideas. The closest thing the UN has come to this notion is the *Human Development Report*, but I am not sure I am so happy about that, because, in my opinion, it is located in the wrong place. But Mahbub ul Haq unquestionably had what I am speaking about. I wish he had served the UN Secretariat instead of UNDP.

TGW: Why? More visibility?

GR: Because the UNDP tends to be another UN, doing everything the UN is doing. I would rather that the UNDP be the operating arm of the United Nations, instead of creating its

own intellectual capacity, and its own capacity to convene meetings and seminars and provide assistance. It sort of blurs the lines. But one has to recognize that they have been more successful with the ten or eleven Human Development Reports than the United Nations Secretariat has been in giving an institutional opinion on development issues. The *Human Development Report* is closer to the personality of ECLAC, in that it represents an organization that has an opinion. You can agree with it or disagree with it, but it has an opinion (in spite of the UNDP disclaimers). I am not sure that the UN Secretariat has something comparable.

TGW: As we are talking about influences on the world of ideas and the United Nations, it is also now not possible to have an intergovernmental discussion without private voices, without nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). This began, more or less, with Stockholm, but it now seems to have permeated virtually everywhere. Is this a good thing?

GR: Yes and no. It is both. On the one hand, it trivializes participation a bit because there are a lot of heated discussions going on in the NGO world also. A lot of people are highly committed as advocates, but a lot of people also push their personal agendas. It is one of those things that anybody who is an NGO has to be listened to and instead of a message governments hear a cacophony. But on the other hand, yes, I think it is good for the UN to be a little more open to outside opinions. And I think it is a positive thing that the Secretary-General has looked to a greater partnership with the business community and with parliaments and with civil society, whatever that means.

What I don't know, and what I haven't thought too much about, is how you put all this together. There are several ways to do it. One would be to ask government delegations to incorporate in their national delegations representation of their own civil societies. The other is to open forums where you listen to NGOs. The risk is that the more avenues you open to



participate, the more you risk constructing a sort of a Tower of Babel. You are listening to so many opinions and so many orientations that they tend to cancel each other out. So, I don't know where you draw the line.

Where there has been an explosion in NGOs is in the world of environment—thousands. And, of course, you cannot listen to thousands of voices. So you tell them, “Get your act together and talk to me through one or two or three spokespeople.” But, on balance, I think it is a healthy thing for the UN to open up. The organization has not thought through yet how to institutionalize the wish to listen to more voices and to make an effective input into what is essentially an intergovernmental organization. And, of course, some governments, such as Cuba, oppose the opening up altogether as an unwanted distraction.

TGW: How, precisely, has whatever we have done today—parallel conferences in the same room, down the street, on some delegations—how precisely has the presence of NGOs influenced policy or influenced the world of ideas? Have they brought new things to the table? Or have they just pushed things along faster than they would have gone without their presence?

GR: I think it has worked in two directions. One is that they bring a certain pressure to bear on the organization—not so much ideas as what is politically correct. They are a moderating influence on what the intergovernmental machinery does on any particular topic because delegates are sensitive to what the more radical advocates on the street are going to say. The second thing which is often overlooked is that they are great mechanisms of dissemination of UN ideas, because all these people that mill around these global meetings—and there are a lot of them, sometimes thousands—are fully conversant with what resolution so-and-so says and what was decided. They are very good at disseminating UN ideas and UN actions. So it works in both directions. I think it has been a rather utilitarian partnership.

But it is messy. When you have one of these conferences on population or on the environment, you get a lot of people who come and sometimes it gets out of hand, as happened on the streets in Seattle and Prague, which may also be a good thing. I don't know.

TGW: You mentioned a moment ago that, with the proliferation of NGOs, there are lots of views, and sometimes they cancel themselves out. What about within the UN system? The tensions, if you wanted to describe it gently, between the host of agencies that consider themselves specialized or independent or part of the secretariat, but independent like UNICEF (UN Children's Fund) or UNDP—to what extent does the competition among these agencies in the world of ideas contribute to better ideas, better policies, better governmental action? And to what extent is this wasteful, as Mr. [Jesse] Helms would undoubtedly argue?

GR: Well, it is an age-old discussion within the UN, and it has never been resolved. There is waste. There is duplication. There is certainly overlapping. And some people will tell you that is okay because it fosters competition and it is good to have more than one opinion. Others say, "No. We can't afford this." It has never been resolved. There is no effective coordination between the UN Secretariat and the agencies. The ACC (Administrative Committee on Coordination) is supposed to be an instrument of coordination, but everybody is—one can doubt its effectiveness—looking after his own turf.

Personal agendas play a lot into that also. And there is an institutionalized hypocrisy in the meetings of heads of agencies. I have been in dozens of them. The heads of agencies proclaim their undying loyalty to the UN, and proclaim that they are good team players, and that they want to work with the others. But no one believes a word of what they say. They are there basically to protect their turf. And they think the others should be coordinated, and they should be the one doing the coordinating. How you resolve that, I don't know.

But I don't know if it is awfully relevant for what we are working on—the intellectual history. One would have to ask himself if the lack of coordination between the Secretariat and the agencies have a stunting influence or maybe a stimulating influence on the generating of ideas. I don't have an answer. I suspect neither, in any dramatic way. But if you are concerned with what Jessie Helms would call reform and avoiding overlapping and duplication, there is a lot that could be done. But I don't think it will ever be done, because once a Secretary-General comes into his position, he just doesn't have time to deal with disciplining the whole system. Even getting the disparate departments of the Secretariat to work together is a tall order.

TGW: Would you make the same argument about the Bretton Woods institutions, that in fact a more obvious, or perhaps more open, separateness, actually is healthy for the production of ideas?

GR: Yes. It is easier to argue that between the economic area of the UN and the World Bank, because there is one characteristic of the World Bank that the UN doesn't have, and that is its conditionality. So the policy advice the World Bank gives a government is always a little suspect. The guy who is receiving the policy advice might have a better opinion of the World Bank in terms of its expertise and the quality of its staff, but he is always a little suspicious because in the world of lending money or even giving away money, there is no free lunch. There are certain conditions. The UN, on the whole, is perceived as a more objective, neutral institution for providing policy advice. Many times in my personal experience, governments turned to the UN to check out if what they were being told by the World Bank makes sense—like a second opinion. Just like you go to a doctor for a second opinion, they turn to the UN.

So there one could make a case that the 189 member nations of both organizations are well-served. Others will tell you no. The most radical idea is to convert the UN into a

peacekeeping and humanitarian organization, and to leave the business of development to the World Bank. That might even be a rational approach. If they could work very well together, why not? But I don't think it will ever happen because the UN folks say, "you cannot have peace without development." You know all the arguments.

TGW: You mentioned the perception of government officials toward experts or expertise or advice coming from the World Bank or the IMF, I presume. How would you respond to Jacques Polak who, in one of the interviews, basically said that the IMF had better people than the UN—mainly because they pay them more and the place was more intellectually alive? Would that be correct?

GR: I think so. There are pockets of excellence in both organizations. And I am sure there are less qualified persons in both organizations. But I think the World Bank and the IMF have done a better job at recruiting than the United Nations has. It has to do a little with the level of remuneration and less restrictions, and simply that when you deal with money, you can compromise less than in the UN. I would say that man for man, the quality of Bretton Woods staff is better than the quality of the UN staff.

I wouldn't say it publicly, but I do believe that. I think there is also a greater level of accountability in the Bretton Woods organizations than there is in the UN. In all my career in the UN, I don't think I have seen more than five people fired. There just is no accountability. You can get away with anything and there are no sanctions. So this makes for a better quality staff at the Bretton Woods institutions, whether we like it or not. Even when you compare the IDB (Inter-American Development Bank) to the World Bank, where one has to suppose that the IDB has the same levels of rigor and accountability, again man for man the World Bank seems to

have better staff than the IDB does. Maybe that is because the pool of expertise that they accede to is bigger or more diverse, or simply that it is a more prestigious place. I don't know.

TGW: After twenty-five years in the UN, how did you feel leaving?

GR: I wanted to leave. I didn't have to leave. But I felt that ten years at the head of ECLAC was enough, for several reasons. One is that in all my professional career, I have never spent ten years doing the same thing. You start losing creativity. I have always felt the urge to move on after a certain point. The second thing is that I have always had a sort of repugnance for the people who hang on to these jobs forever because they are very attractive jobs and very hard to come by. There are about thirty posts of under-secretaries-general in the United Nations. Some people would argue that once you get one of those jobs, you would be an idiot to leave it voluntarily. So I have always had the strong feeling that people should move on and open opportunities for somebody else and not hang on to these for life. Thirdly, I was getting a little tired of Santiago. I had been gone from Guatemala for over twenty years. And I felt a certain need to go back to my roots. My return turned out to be very short-lived. But I still plan to go back there. I find Guatemala stimulating. Well, I find it both. I find it stimulating to be there and at the same time a little provincial in terms of what I have been doing for the last twenty years.

But I think I would like to do something professionally in my own country before I am too old to do anything useful. Just when I was settling down to do some teaching and writing in Guatemala, they offered me this post. And my wife thought it was a very good idea to go to New York for a year or two. So I accepted it sort of as, well, for me it is like an extended sabbatical. And it has been fun. I have enjoyed it, and I have learned something about the UN sitting on the other side of the table. And I have enjoyed living in New York. It is not the most

professionally stimulating thing I have done in my life. But, to be able to come to New York and live with the perks of a diplomat is a privilege.

TGW: What exactly have you learned on the other side of the table about the United Nations that you hadn't learned from twenty-five years inside of it?

GR: The intergovernmental machinery is a mess. And I don't know how you fix it. I think that the missions here are overstaffed, by-and-large. So there is the problem of governments micromanaging the Secretariat. I had the great privilege of running an organization where there was no intergovernmental machinery overlooking it. The commission per se met every two years, and we went and reported what we were doing and asked for new guidelines. But the new guidelines tended to be the ones that we suggested to our member governments.

Here in New York, you have 199 ambassadors and all their staff, with essentially not enough to do. Because I would like them to give the Secretariat a wider delegation of authority. But by the mere fact that they are here it is very much like the Executive Board of the World Bank or the IMF. Once you are there, you have to do something. You can't just sit in your mission reading novels. So then we start micromanaging the organization. I think that is a fundamental flaw in the way the organization is run. And I don't know how you fix it or how you deal with it. There is a lot of ritual and relatively little substance, because the intergovernmental machinery—I work ten hours a day, and I produce half an hour's worth of work because most of my time is spent doing ritual. I sit in meetings. I socialize. I network.

But I don't have an answer for how to do things better. And it becomes very self-serving because these are very attractive posts from the national career. If you are in the foreign service of France or Germany or the U.S. or any country—Guatemala—to be posted to New York is one of the most senior posts. And once you are in New York, you want a staff to cover all the fronts.

They become little islands that, in a way, are as self-serving as the UN Secretariat is for itself. And when you mix them both together, you find that personal agendas and national agendas often prevail over the broad goals and objectives of the organization itself.

So, if you wanted to paint a critical picture, you could. And if you want to paint a more favorable picture, you also can. Because in the final analysis, the intergovernmental machinery does deliver consensual decisions. It depends on what elements you pick. But it is a privileged position. You sit on various fora as a permanent representative—especially I have, because I have been picked to chair a few things. So I have seen from the inside how the intergovernmental machinery works. And it has been interesting. I would be much better qualified today to write a book about the UN than I would have been two years ago, because I have seen both sides of it.

TGW: When are you going to write your book?

GR: I won't. Not about the UN. What can I tell you? I have very positive thoughts about the UN. I think it is a great organization. I think the world would be worse off without it. But the same thing for Santiago is true for the UN as a whole. It is sort of an Alice in Wonderland world. It is an artificial world, which has its own dynamic and inner functions, and which offers a lot of perks to a lot of people that work in the Secretariat and in the missions. And that becomes an objective of its own. So you tend to look at the UN as an organization that is sort of trying to bring peace, security, and personal well-being to humanity. Then when you look at it inside, you find thousands of people milking a very big cow for their personal benefits. You have both of those things—the noble and the base—and sometimes it is not a pretty sight. I don't think the founding fathers of the UN had that exactly in mind.

TGW: Is your impression that different UN cities function in different ways? Is New York, because it is the center with the most governments represented with the biggest permanent missions, worse than Santiago? Would there be a hierarchy with Geneva and Vienna?

GR: Yes, the mood is very different. You palpate it as soon as you enter the building. Out of all them—Geneva, Vienna, Nairobi, Santiago, Bangkok, New York—each one has its own culture, its own little gang of constituencies. In each is stationed an army of retired secretariat workers who can't live without the UN and come every day to the coffee shop. It is a whole culture of its own. In Geneva, it is different from here.

TGW: How do you explain the difference? Is it the local culture or the work in the organization?

GR: It is a mixture of both. I think it is driven, in part, by the high proportion of nationals of the particular country where the duty station is. Then it is driven by what the organization does, because Geneva does different things than New York. You have more human rights there, and in Vienna you have atomic energy and now drugs and crime. So it depends on what they do also. And it depends on the level of staff that governments send to the different missions. They tend to send more senior people to New York, less senior people to Vienna. Geneva is an intermediate situation. It is a combination of all those things.

When you just step into the building, if you took me blindfolded, I could tell you instantly where I am, whether it is Geneva or Vienna or Nairobi or Santiago. I could tell you right away.

TGW: Is it your impression that diplomats, foreign service officers, specialize in multilateral things, negotiations, following meetings, et cetera. Or do many of them come from the bilateral and go back to the bilateral? And does it make a difference? Within the United



States, there is no such specialization. And, in fact, most people try to avoid it because—except at the top—it is not the quickest ladder up. Whereas, in other parts of the world, I have noted that there are people who actually know something about these institutions. And, in your case, you knew it from the inside, and you have just described being on the other side of the desk. To what extent do your colleagues bring a real knowledge to the table? Or are they new at this game?

GR: There is a bit of each. Most people who are sent to the UN have previous multilateral experience. And almost all ministries of foreign relations in the world are organized around bilateral issues or multilateral issues. So you always have some people who know something about the multilateral world, be it the OECD (Organisation of Co-operation and Development), United Nations, sub-regional organizations, what have you. The multilateral world is very different. And one of the things that makes it different is that when you are posted in the bilateral context, your main job is to relate to the actors of the country where you are posted. When you are posted to a multilateral organization, your main business is relating to your counterparts, the other ambassadors.

Decision-making is much slower. The impact of what you do is more diffuse. You can be the ambassador of the United States in Kenya and do something which would have a tangible impact on U.S.-Kenyan relations. But most ambassadors in New York don't have a tangible impact immediately. It is a different type of thing. The reasons are different. The objectives are different. I don't know anybody here—I guess there are some—but I don't know anybody who hasn't had some multilateral experience before being posted here. And the ones who don't are lost. I know one ambassador who has no previous experience, period. He is a lawyer, and I think he was the attorney general of his country. He has never been an ambassador anywhere,

neither bilaterally nor multilaterally. He doesn't speak a word of English. So he comes here and he doesn't have a clue about what's going on. He has been here for one year now, and I think he still doesn't have a clue.

But there are very few. Most people are experienced. And I am impressed at the very high level of some of the ambassadors. There are maybe twenty to twenty-five people here who are really first class, in any foreign service. But whether that is good for the UN, I don't know, because they tend to be sort of creative, impulsive personalities. I don't know if that is a good thing for the Secretary-General or not. The dynamics of the interaction between the secretariat and the intergovernmental machinery is something that hasn't been well-studied either.

And, probably, in my opinion, it comes out on the negative side, although I don't have experience in the Security Council. It seems that in that context, since it is small and since it often deals with high politics and not just low politics, it seems to work fairly well.

TGW: Are there rewards in being a senior official on the government side that are more attractive? I'm not speaking about salary or perks, but in terms of intellectual rewards or professional rewards or professional satisfaction that are superior to being a senior official within the international civil service? And are there downsides?

GR: That depends. I personally enjoyed my tenure as an under-secretary-general much more than I enjoyed being an ambassador of a little country. Maybe if I were a member of the Security Council I would find more kicks in it. I don't know. But the Security Council is something that has very little to do with the intellectual history of the UN.

TGW: That's right.

GR: I personally liked the secretariat better. But I was in a very privileged position because I virtually ran my own secretariat with minimal supervision and a *raison d'être* in

Santiago, which is a situation that is a little harder to find here. Because you can talk yourself into believing that you are doing something important for Latin America. It is a little more abstract here in New York. So I found it very stimulating and very attractive. And I knew when to get out. When I started recognizing in myself diminishing returns in productivity, I thought it was time to get out because it was very comfortable. Kofi Annan invited me to stay on. He even indicated that my leaving was a problem for him. And he asked me to recommend my successor, which I did. But he would have preferred me to stay at least for a while.

I felt a compulsion that ten years was a limit. In fact, I was telling my wife after eight years, "I've got to go."

TGW: Very few people have the gumption to do so. I actually left the UN secretariat after ten years, saying exactly the same thing. After six years I said it was time to go. But it took me a few years to figure out a way to leave.

GR: One of the very perverse things in the UN is that once you have been there for a while, there are very strong disincentives to leave, in terms of your severance package. And people start telling you, "Stay until you have been here twenty-five years." And I didn't. I didn't succumb to that. By the time I reached ten years, for my own good, I had to look for something new. I still stayed one more year, because, when Kofi Annan took over, he asked me to stay on another year or two. I offered to stay as long as necessary for the transition. And I actually stayed the whole year. I helped pick my successor earlier on and waited until he was available to take over.

The last thing that was on my mind was to come back to the UN. I would have been happy to have done some consulting for the secretariat, but only things that I wanted to do. But not to come back as a diplomat. I always had certain disdain for diplomats. So, here I am doing

the same thing. But it has been interesting, more because of New York and the stimulating things New York has to offer.

TGW: You mentioned several Secretaries-General. What difference does it make having particular people at the top of the organization? To what extent is leadership the crucial variable? Or is this actually just a holding operation in geopolitics, a basically circumscribed activity?

GR: It is a mixture. It is clear that the dominant powers, and especially the United States, don't want a world class leader. It goes with the micro-management conflicts. You don't want an exceedingly strong personality there. That lowers the barrier, for starters. People of the caliber, say of Nelson Mandela, you don't want in the UN—or rather the U.S. doesn't want in the UN. You lower the barrier. Within that, there is a certain room for wiggle. And I think Kofi Annan has been relatively more successful than his two predecessors on one critical issue, and that is his relations with the host country—something that [Boutros] Boutros-Ghali never seemed to understand. I think [Javier] Pérez de Cuéllar understood it, but it was his misfortune to be Secretary-General during the Reagan era. So, within the very severe limits that that imposed on the UN, I think Pérez de Cuéllar did quite well. Boutros-Ghali didn't understand the United States. But the tragic thing is that he thought he did, because of his participation in Camp David. He misread the U.S. over and over again. I don't know if you've read his book.

TGW: Pathetic.

GR: It shows the bitterness. The “unvanquished” is really the UN vanquished by the United States. Kofi Annan didn't commit the same mistake. He has a personality to go with this role of staying within the boundaries. The fact that he is African helps him, I think. He can get away with things that neither Boutros-Ghali nor Pérez de Cuéllar could have gotten away with,

because of the sensitivities of not being perceived as attacking a Secretary-General based on ethnicity. And the man knows the UN very well from the inside, which is his strong note. So he has done better than the other two in my judgement. But he hasn't exercised the Secretariat to its potential, basically because the powers that be wouldn't let him to begin with. The only person who probably broke that mold was [Dag] Hammarskjöld. And I don't know how much he broke it. There is also a legend about Hammarskjöld, very much promulgated by Brian Urquhart. I don't know how much of that is in Urquhart's mind and how much of it is real. Because if you read what Brian Urquhart has written and what he says, again you have the cult of Hammarskjöld. It is the same thing as with Prebisch—this man who could do no wrong, and everything he did was perfect. Of course, he died in an airplane crash so it is easier to martyrize him than Prebisch. Prebisch died in his bed of a heart attack at the age of 86. But there is some parallelism there.

TGW: I think many critics say the same thing about Kennedy, that the myth, particularly someone who dies in the midst of doing supposedly great things, is hard to criticize. But I think you are correct. No one, so far as I know, has attacked Hammarskjöld for lack of initiative. There is an icon quality to his reputation.

GR: Yes. And there is this ideal that he rose to the occasion, or even beyond the occasion, that he is the only Secretary-General who truly embodied the spirit of what the Charter would like a Secretary-General to be. Actually, the Charter cuts the Secretary-General's wings. It gives him very few privileges. The only thing it gives him is the right to name his collaborators. On almost everything else, he is held on a very tight leash, which is what you discover here. The Secretariat is held on a short leash, and not only by the United States, but by

every small government that is here. They all get involved in the micro-management, or like to think they're involved.

TGW: You mentioned the term "small government" to characterize your own situation, as well as others. Are there advantages within a multilateral context to being small, or are there mainly just burdens of trying to cover too many things with fewer people?

GR: No, I mentioned this because a small country like my own or Jamaica gets to exercise extremely influential positions in the UN. Jamaica has a very lucid ambassador here—Patricia Durant. She is a woman. That helps. She has been on the Security Council for a couple of years. So they get a stage which is way beyond the size and influence that that country would exercise bilaterally. Or myself, I was involved in organizing the Millenium Summit. And now I am chairing the Fifth Committee, and I am chairing the UNDP executive board. These things land on me basically because of my past experience with the UN. But no matter. Guatemala has an inordinate influence on events here. So those are the advantages. Even little countries can hold very big positions. It happens all the time, and in the funniest circumstances. There is a very prestigious man from Barbados, an island of 60,000 people, who is extremely influential on the ACABQ (Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions). How he got there I don't know. I think he was a president of the Fifth Committee once.

So you have these situations where people come from very small countries and play very important roles. Those are the perks the UN offers you. But on the big issues, if you are a small country on the Security Council, you end up basically doing what the U.S. wants you to do. And I think it must be very uncomfortable because of the capacity of the U.S. to gets its way. But, again, these things have very little to do with the intellectual side, the generation of ideas of the

UN, except in that—I don't know whether the intergovernmental machinery in a way inhibits it. Probably not. The intellectual history of the UN is basically a product of the UN secretariat.

TGW: I think that's right.

GR: Not the governments, not the individual diplomats who may have contributed to the forming of ideas. I think that the intellectual heritage was formed from the people and the teams that were at the disposal of the UN secretariat or its agencies or programs. They did make a difference over the fifty-five year lifetime of the organization.

TGW: You mentioned earlier a slight regret at not having done a dissertation. Any other regrets?

GR: I would say that's the main regret. As I look back on my professional life, that's the main regret—which I still could redress today. I don't know now, after having had the level of responsibilities I've had in my life, whether I could discipline myself enough for going back to school. Maybe I could.

TGW: I think it would be difficult.

GR: Probably. One has to ask himself what for. In terms of the knowledge I would acquire, you can do the same without going to school. And I already have two honorary Ph.D.s, so I don't know whether it makes much sense to submit myself to it at this stage in my life. There are other things that I can do more productively, I think. So probably I won't pursue that anymore.

TGW: Is there a question that I should have asked you that you wish I had and that you would like to ask yourself?

GR: I have the sensation that we left many blank areas. But, no, basically the bottom line is that I have a pretty favorable opinion on the proven UN capacity to produce ideas over the

years. There simply is no way to measure cause and effect there and even less so its impact. I often asked myself that question in ECLAC, because during the fever of the Chicago School's ascent, one of the things that was being said about ECLAC was the enormous damage that the commission caused in Latin America by pointing governments in the wrong direction. Mario Vargas-Llosa used that accusation a lot when he was running for president of Peru—a little like satanizing ECLAC for having condemned Latin America to poverty. And that is a little unfair, because what ECLAC did was interpret what was happening and wrapped it up in a conceptually coherent proposal. And to think that they were that influential that they could push all the governments off in the wrong direction is crazy.

I think what happened is that the region developed two very important pressure groups through industrialization, which were the few industrial entrepreneurs, which were the owners of the industries, and a very small blue collar *burguesía* which got a better-paid employment. And they had a great deal of influence on policymaking and kept excessive protection going longer than it should have. But I don't think it is fair to attribute that to the UN secretariat, as having induced governments into picking the wrong route through development and losing thirty years time, and finally discovering that Asia did it better, when the Asians were as embarked on import-substitution in the past as the Latin Americans were.

So there is a lot of misconception also as to what the UN did and didn't do. And there are also misconceptions on what the original ideas of the UN were, and what sort of adaptations of those ideas were that somebody borrowed heavily from outside but put them in a nicer wrapping. I don't know how much of Prebisch's ideas were his own original ideas. But he was very clever in presenting them. You read that report of 1949. It's very compelling. And you don't have to be an economist. You don't have to be an intellectual. It appeals to anybody in



Latin America, be it Brazil or Honduras or Haiti. It gives you a very compelling explanation of why your country is poor and what you can do to address its situation—a very popular message.

TGW: Well, perhaps this project will make a small contribution to making some sense of the last fifty-five years.

GR: It will be hard because you have all of these things out there on the table. And how do you organize it in a coherent story? I still haven't read *Ahead of the Curve*. I don't even know if I have it. I don't think I've ever received it.

TGW: No, just the final chapter. But we will have it, hopefully next week—I'm supposed to get the galleys next week. I'll make you a copy. Well, thank you kindly for putting up with my interrogation. It's been a pleasure.

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