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## ***Copenhagen failure and North-South dynamics***

### **Introduction**

This study is a rhetorical-philosophical analysis of select Copenhagen Climate Convention public speeches and their North-South dynamics. In this paper, the concept of North refers to UNFCCC's so-called Annex I group (developed nations) while South refers to non-Annex I countries (developing nations). When I chose the speeches, the main criterion was to get material that covered both the North and South and nations in the transitional stage. Therefore I chose the following speeches and speakers: 1) the United States (Barack Obama), 2) The Climate Group, an NGO (Tony Blair), 3) China (Jiabao Wen), 4) Zimbabwe (Robert Mugabe), and 5) the African Union (Meles Zenawi).

This paper aims at answering the following questions:

What sort of North-South dynamics can be revealed from the chosen Copenhagen Climate Convention's speeches? How is the possibility for "crossing the North-South gap" enhanced or impaired in the speeches?

Rhetorical analyses may involve many perspectives, but the one I chose as especially interesting concerns the identification thesis of Kenneth Burke. The identificational viewpoint involves focusing on the ways people rhetorically group themselves and the others. It helps us to see whether the voices of North and South form their own separate groups or attempt to "open themselves" and form a "global we" to act despite the differences in their views. Burke's concept of 'identification' can be described as follows: A becomes identified with his colleague B, when their interests are joined (or he assumes that they are, or is persuaded about that) (Burke 1969, 20). This leads to a feeling of collaboration that consequently enhances the possibilities for real teamwork in the negotiation situation.

In international climate negotiations, there are two main types of identification that take place between negotiators. *Barrier-crossing identification* occurs when the North and South overcome

their differences and acknowledge their shared interests or attitudes: this identification is crucial for successful results. The counterpart is the *barrier-blocking identification*, which takes place inside either North or South, excluding "the other side". Barrier-blocking identification may diminish the possibilities for successful agreements or negotiations.

## The results

### Issue 1: The seriousness of climate change

In a public discussion or negotiation certain participants often have the power and ability to define the debate and therefore turn it to their side: if environmental issues are labeled (for example) as "owls versus people," then the owls have practically lost already (Bruner & Oelschlaeger 2008, 218). This problem is present in climate change discussion: it seems that the North has had the power to define the debate's terms with its scientific and economic dominance. Climate change has been reduced into a technical and scientific question reflecting the present Western worldview.

Obama labels the climate change as "a grave and growing danger to our people". He refers to scientific evidence and reminds the audience that climate change will pose risks to mankind and the planet. There are two notable issues: firstly, Obama expresses the scientifically oriented concern for climate change. Secondly, he talks about a *danger* that *will* cause risks unless handled. This is temporally oriented to future, stating implicitly that the relevant dangers are ahead but not yet actualized. This can be considered as downplaying the South's present distress which may have caused dissatisfied reactions among the South's representatives.

Blair does not speak about an undoubtedly proved phenomenon, but reminds his listeners that there is a huge amount of scientific support for the view that the climate is changing. Therefore, even purely as a matter of precaution, we should act. He puts emphasis on the accord's urgency. This concern was scientifically rhetorized and, in a way calm, but still it can be considered as strong concern that was supported coherently by other parts of Blair's speech: the urgency rhetoric here was barrier-crossing towards the South.

China's representative Jiabao Wen admits that climate change is a severe global challenge and he calls the actions "saving our planet". He reminds the audience that this challenge is common for every nation and individual. There are neither rhetorical references to the scientific basis (language typical to North), nor rhetoric regarding the urgency and real presence of the climate change typical to South. This distinguishes China's language from both North and South in this point.

Zimbabwe's concern was more concrete, strong and did not lack vivid expressions. For Mugabe, climate change's consequences "have become all too abundant to be denied or ignored, they become more poignant each day that passes". His part of the world, the South, is the drowning and burning tragedy demonstrating the consequences of the North's development path. Mugabe was not subtle in expressing this division of the guilty ones and those that face the consequences.

Zenawi who represented the African Union group (consisting of 53 African states) was distinctively more cautious and kept the rhetoric on a more conciliatory spirit. Yet he describes climate change as a catastrophic problem with clear scientific evidence. The temporal argument of climate change taking place already is present. The change is described as destructive and unpredictable; interestingly this rhetoric unites both the North's scientifically oriented and South's empirically focused approach to describing the phenomenon. Therefore, I suggest that Zenawi's rhetoric in this issue succeeded in barrier-crossing identification.

Every speaker agreed that climate change must be taken seriously. This forms a basis for collaboration. However, the analysis revealed that the North and South experience climate change very differently. The North's future-oriented and rather technical view on the issue conflicts with South's hour of need. As a result, the barrier was more blocked than crossed.

## **Issue 2: Place in the North/South map and the view of "the other side"**

Taking a new collaborative approach would mean that the representatives had to reform their identities and the conceived identities of the other side on this North/South "map". There would be no more "suffering South under continual colonization" or "North that has to do all the sacrifices while South keeps on going and growing" (these pictures are intentionally aggravated to point out the differences).

Obama places the United States on the top of the North: "As the world's *largest economy* and the world's *second largest emitter*, America bears our share of responsibility in addressing climate change". He reminds the audience that the United States is not the largest emitter. Perhaps Obama wants to emphasize that the United States is doing better in the emissions per GDP scale than China. There may also be a broader message: namely that the North is not the only player emitting greenhouse gases in alarming amounts. When speaking of South, Obama mentions the importance of the adaptation fund. Otherwise, the South is neglected, except when China is mentioned. As the South was waiting for the North to promise some hope and aid, the lack of South-related rhetoric in Obama's speech can be seen as an example of "ignorant North", possibly resulting in a barrier-blocking identification.

Blair makes a division between developed and developing nations, recognizing their different interests. He also identifies China and India as special cases, nations growing so rapidly that despite their developing status their emissions are and will be significant in world's scale. Although the divisive elements are present, Blair emphasizes the importance of unity regardless of the differences between North and South (and inside the South). For him, the crucial point is "to make sure that everyone is on the train, going in the same direction". He attempts to overcome the barriers.

China's view of its place was an interesting question: being the most populous nation and having an explosive economic growth during the last 15 years makes it a special case in the climate puzzle. China's absolute annual emissions are largest in the world; yet its emissions per capita are far below North's average emissions. China's view becomes clear when Wen states that "China was the first *developing country* to adopt and implement a National Climate Change Program". He also emphasizes that China has 150 million people living in poverty. However, there is a clear duality in China's place in the North/South map. Other South representatives barely need to talk about their current emissions. China cannot choose this way; by describing its "unremitting effort" to fight against climate change, Wen admits its great share of the world emissions. China prefers to place itself among the South, willing to be seen as the leading climate change fighter in that group.

When looking at Zimbabwe's speech, the barrier-blocking is strong. Mugabe is unwilling to seek any similarities or positive connections between North and South. He starts by focusing on his own part of the world. In the South, rains fail and lands burn or drown. Mugabe paints a picture of the

South with colorful yet desperate and frantic words. Next, Mugabe describes the North. He disapproves, maybe even despises, the "unfriendly model of development pursued by some of us in the so-called highly-industrialised developed world". The North-South opposition is reconstructed as nearly insurmountable. There is a chasm between the "suffering us" and the "destructive, ignorant them". For Mugabe, the North is so guilty and ignorant that it should take a giant leap to give the South any hope that it could take the South's development needs and climate change seriously. For now, the barrier is blocked.

Whereas Mugabe spoke mostly on behalf of his own country, the African Union's Zenawi speaks of climate change as a test "whether we as a global community are able to rise over our parochial interests to protect our common destiny". This is an attempt for barrier-crossing identification. Zenawi reminds his audience that Africa has contributed virtually nothing to climate change but it has faced the hardest consequences so far. As Zenawi relates, Africa's misery is the unjust price for North's carbon intensive development. This forms, to some point, an unavoidable dichotomy between the North and South. However, Zenawi continues to a more positive direction: "we are not here as victims nursing our wounds of injustice of the past [...] but as stakeholders of the future reaching out across the continents, so that together we can build a better and fairer future for all of us.". This future-orientation creates a possibility for a new dynamic between the North and South. Africa is here elevated from a victim to an emerging active negotiator and stakeholder of the future.

Nations maintained rather stereotypical North and South identities: developed nations admitted their responsibility for climate change, but argued they are already bearing their responsibilities. Developing nations considered themselves as unjustly suffering from the North's actions. The North/South "map" formed strong boundaries that nations mostly maintained in their rhetoric, resulting in barrier-blocking identifications. Yet some attempts for barrier-crossing identification emerged, especially from the African Union.

### **Issue 3: Action suggestions**

One of the main questions in climate negotiations is naturally the action plan: who should do what, what are the relevant time scales of action, and which are the most important objectives at the moment?

The United States repeats the call for acting together. However, Obama's rhetoric emphasizes the decisive national actions of the major economies, followed by a statement that "many of us have already done so". This may imply unwillingness to make global, ambitious and binding commitments together – although my interpretation can be questioned, it gets support from the fact that Obama uses rich words to 'effectively' prove that his nation is already meeting its responsibility. When it comes to South, Obama argues for establishing the adaptation fund. It seems that Obama promises a little less funding than the South called for. This funding is also partly suggested on the condition that the fund be a part of a broader accord described by the United States. Obama's conditional rhetoric probably does not build trust which is so urgently needed.

Blair emphasizes the importance of the deal: the objective for Copenhagen is "to get us moving. [...] And to make sure that everyone is on the train, going in the same direction." This rhetoric attempts to diminish the North-South opposition, suggesting that the next step could be taken together despite earlier disagreements. Blair reminds the audience that the more precise goals can be adjusted later: here the short-time targets are emphasized more. In the short term, the mitigation obligations fall mainly to the North, along with the commitment to start funding the South. When these demands are laid out by a North representative, they are promising attempts to express the willingness to overcome the barriers. However, since Blair is representing a non-governmental organisation, he may fail to identify with the North nations here, even if he succeeds in reaching out to the South.

China's view on the best continuation strategy reveals its problematic place. China cannot demand financial assistance with its economic growth. The earlier rhetoric also revealed that China was under a pressure to mitigate emissions. How about the rhetoric regarding the Copenhagen accord's content? Wen emphasizes the importance of sticking to Kyoto Protocol principles. For him, "it is even more important to focus on achieving near-term and mid-term reduction targets, honoring the commitments already made". This favours China's situation, as in the earlier accords it is listed among the non-Annex I countries (to say South) but in the longer term, it will certainly be considered a developed country, facing stricter emission mitigation goals.

For Zimbabwe, funding the South is the key demand. Mugabe demands that the North "takes

serious and effective measures to cut emissions on the one hand, while supporting developing countries to adapt to and mitigate the effects of this man-made planetary, if not cosmic disaster” on the other. The suggestion is clear, yet it leaves the gap between North and South as wide as it was in Mugabe's speech overall. For Zimbabwe, the climate change challenge does not seem to imply acting together; the situation is more about waiting for the North to compensate its wrongdoings and change its action.

The African Union is more practical in its communication. Zenawi describes a detailed funding proposal, stating what would be ”enough” for South. He also describes the criteria for the fund administration, for example, the board of trustees should have an equal number of both North and South representatives. Here the South clearly calls for funding from the North, but on the other hand it has lowered its expectations from some earlier demands, Zenawi clearly states what would be enough for now and thirdly, the administrative suggestions could be considered as conciliatory towards North (as the administrative places would be shared fifty-fifty).

Some agreement existed on the actions: developed countries should mitigate the emissions and support the South. There was, however, strong disagreement about sufficient level of these actions. The North's lack of ambition in emission mitigation and adaptation funding results a barrier-blocking effect. As a transitional stage nation, China had potential to act as an example of barrier-crosser, but it withdrew from any promises. The South and North approached each other in the action questions, but their clash remained still stronger than collaboration.

## **Conclusions**

The analysed speeches support more division than barrier-crossing identification. Copenhagen failure was present in these speeches. Success can be found at the level of considering climate change as a serious problem and understanding that emission mitigation is necessary. After this baseline, potential for identification overcoming the North-South barrier is minor. Most expectations were set on the United States (”the negotiation leader”), but on the grounds of this analysis Obama's speech actions did not live up to these expectations. However, the African Union's speaker Meles Zenawi gave hope for future negotiations with his barrier-crossing rhetoric.

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