

Article

The New Role Conception of Colombia and its Leadership Projection in Central America and the Caribbean in the Post-Conflict Context

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Abstract

This article tries to understand the leadership aspiration of Colombian foreign policy during the two presidential terms of Juan Manuel Santos (2010-2014-2018) in a context of transition to the post-conflict period and the material limitations of the country as a secondary regional power. Role theory, the concept of leadership as process, and niche diplomacy are used. This case study focuses on the projection of Colombia in Central America and the Caribbean (CAC) through the offer of South-South Cooperation (SSC) and Triangular Cooperation (TrC). Empirically, the configuration of a new role conception is identified, represented by cooperation with CAC in the resolution of similar problems to those faced by Colombia, by knowledge transfer. Subsequently, the role performance of Colombia in the two sub-regions through SSC and TrC is analysed. The result is that Colombia has a favourable asymmetry in CAC through its roles as “partner” and “pivot” country, approaching the type of projection described by the concepts of issue-oriented and functional leadership, building a thematic and geographical niche diplomacy.

Keywords

Colombian Foreign Policy, New Role Conception, Leadership, Central America and the Caribbean, South-South Cooperation, Triangular Cooperation

Introduction

Since the arrival of Juan Manuel Santos to the presidency in 2010, the international agenda of Colombia, has been diversified in both geographic and thematic

terms (Pastrana, 2011, p.98). The approach of extreme subordination and alignment with the United States of America (US) during the presidential terms of Álvaro Uribe (2002-2006-2010), when Colombian foreign policy focused almost exclusively on trade and security issues, has been reduced (pp.75-78). Hence, Colombia has returned to the Latin American scenario and has actively participated and promoted regionalisation projects, such as the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC with its Spanish initials), the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR) and the Pacific Alliance (PA). Additionally, Colombia resumed important relations with Europe and formulated, then started, an insertion strategy towards the Asia-Pacific. In thematic terms, the Santos government has incorporated issues such as the environment, food security, human rights, migration, south-south cooperation (SSC) and triangular cooperation (TrC) in different areas, renewable energies, and the need for a new approach in the fight against drugs, amongst others, into its foreign policy agenda (Pastrana, 2014, p. 127-128).

Between 2012 and 2016, President Santos negotiated and concluded a set of peace agreements with the FARC, to find a political solution to the Colombian internal conflict. Colombia sought to internationally legitimise the peace process and its foreign policy played a key role. It designated Venezuela and Chile as facilitators of the process, while Cuba and Norway were guarantors. Moreover, it incorporated the United Nations as a verifier of the agreements, whose mission is conformed of the states of CELAC (Pastrana & Gehring, 2017, pp. 13-14).

In this context, Colombia has started to project, during the two presidential terms of Santos (2010-2014-2018), the image of a trusted country, no longer a source of insecurity or a threat to its neighbours. Moreover, it has started to deploy an active foreign policy in Central America and the Caribbean (CAC), materialised in SSC initiatives (p. 19). Accordingly, this article aims to answer the following question: What type of leadership is Colombia building through its foreign policy towards CAC in the post-conflict context?

The problem of the search for leadership by non-powerful countries, such as secondary regional powers, will be discussed theoretically through a constructivist framework based on role theory. The article will analyse the connections between the search for leadership, role conception, and Colombian objectives towards CAC, with two empirical sections. First, the Problem Representation (PR) and role expectations of foreign policy, as defined by the Santos government, and second, the initiatives and actions of Colombia towards CAC in terms of the SSC and TrC it offers.

The first section will allow the identification of the definition and self-attribution of the roles of Colombia. What is important, what is sought and expected, and

the *with whoms* and *hows* of this diplomacy can be traced in the public declarations of Santos and in official foreign policy documents. It may be noted that the acquisition of positive international recognition and the search for leadership opportunities are transversal elements, linked to what will be foreign policy in the post-conflict or the conception of a more ambitious diplomacy for a nation in transformation. CAC emerge as geographical areas suitable for the construction of niches of cooperation diplomacy that Colombia needs to inaugurate its self-promotion as a leader through the exercise of certain functions or specialties.

In the second empirical part, Colombian cooperation activities in the two sub-regions will be analysed, in comparison to that which it offers in South America, to understand and interpret, through role theory, the performance of the roles previously defined. SSC and TrC initiatives will allow the analysis of the scope of the new positioning of Colombia and its route to achieving this leadership, signalling potentialities, weaknesses and contradictions.

Interpretive Framework

A “problem” is understood as “a perceived discrepancy between present conditions and what is desired” (Hermann, 2001, p.53). Subjectivity operates from the moment in which the perceptions of decisionmakers appear, and a “foreign policy problem” begins when they consider that a concern or opportunity exists in the external environment (Pastrana & Vera, 2014, p.37).

The search for opportunities to build international leadership using available resources and foreign policy instruments is both an analytical and practical problem. It depends on several factors and the level of material capabilities of a country, but begins with a clear intentionality. The search for leadership can be verified as a “foreign policy problem” for decisionmakers when their cognitive representations reflect an aspiration or expectation related to the achievement of the objective. The worldviews of government leaders, influence greatly a country’s foreign policy (Rosenau, 1966, pp.207-208), determining, for example, the proclivity to, or rejection of, assuming external positions that imply a leadership role of their country, or can be perceived as something with that intention.

Worldviews are a cognitive framework, usually containing images or representations of the individual or state, and the “other”, causal beliefs, prescriptive beliefs, and expectations (Mowle, 2003, p.562). Although they are not directly observable, given that they exist in the minds of leaders, they can be inferred through the reconstruction and interpretation of the Problem Representation (PR from hereon) that they formulate, formally or informally, facing challenges or opportunities in foreign policy. PR has been defined as:

“a mental model of goals, constraints, preferred solutions, and expectations about

the effectiveness of various tactics” (Mowle, 2003, p.564).

PRs can be inferred from the public declarations of decisionmakers and, in general, from documentation or official stances related to the guidelines and objectives of public and foreign policy; the combination of these factors can reveal patterns in postures or “policy stances” (Mowle, 2003, p.564).

Role theory allows one to establish ways of inferring these behavioural expectations and using them as an independent variable to try to explain both the formulation of the frameworks of the decision problem (the PRs) and the adoption of concrete decisions. It is a heterogeneous approach, but it has a common origin in symbolic interactionism within sociology, associated with authors such as George Mead, John Dewey and Charles Sanders (Benes & Harnisch, 2015, p.148).

Role is a normative concept that prescribes the behaviour someone should adopt in relationship with others and a certain position in a social structure, and is distinct from the factual way, appropriate or inadequate, in which it is performed (Holsti, 1970 p.238). Holsti (1980, cited in Bailin, 1980) argued that national role conceptions contain the perceptions of decisionmakers regarding the measures, rules, commitments and enduring international functions that their nations favour, and which would permit the explanation of foreign policy patterns (p.533). Role conception can be considered an independent variable to partially explain foreign policy behaviour in terms of role performance (Holsti, 1970, p.245).

These conceptions may change, depending on the position of the actor in a social structure, making it necessary to verify the role expectation, or the role an actor wants to play, and compare it to the expectation of the recipients and to that of its “audience” (Thies, 2009, p.9). Social structures – for example a security community, a military alliance, etc. – are constituted by elements like shared knowledge, material resources, and practices (Jackson & Sorensen, 2006, p.165). These conceptions are related to specific social structures because role has two components: the expectations of a country’s decisionmakers or the construction of the *ego*, and the prescriptions and expectations of others who define the *alter*, principally the direct recipients of the role (Benes & Harnisch, 2015, p.148). Wehner (2014) has identified that the expectations of South American secondary powers regarding Brazil (the *alter*) have influenced the rise of the country as a regional power, as they shaped the way in which its role was conceived and executed, although they reflect the obstacle of the diversity of understandings that exist between countries about what is the region in which they interact (p.436).

Constructivism assumes that material elements such as economic, military and diplomatic resources are important in the constitution of identities, roles and structures, but are subordinate to and dependent on the meaning attributed to

them (Jackson, & Sorensen, 2006, p.165). In certain social contexts, the quantity of material resources possessed by an actor may not significantly affect, or not correspond to, the perception of the role and its performance.

It also assumes that the justification that gives meaning to a role is defined through social interaction, as positions inside a social structure help to define their functions, scope and duration. In turn, these positions depend on the collective conception of the purpose of the group (Benes & Harnisch, 2015 p.148). There are four elements to analyse the presence and development of a role: the national self-conception of the role, the expectation of the role by the international actors and setting, the position in a structure or system, and the performance of the role (Holsti, 1970, p.240). The adequacy of a role obeys a relative balance between these four elements.

However, unlike other human relations, the international relations of states operate in less defined structures, with a national prescriptive predominance given by the principle of sovereignty, where the functional concept of “position” is difficult to apply and the idea of status or ranking is usually used to classify the states (Holsti, 1970, p.242). These classifications are usually polemic, because they depend on diverse factors and how they are prioritised, and because the categories of “great power”, “middle power” and “regional power” do not necessarily reflect their influence or leadership (p.242). Sociological constructivism assumes that roles and interests are defined *through* relations and not *a priori* (p.243). But the tendency in the diplomatic world is that foreign policy is principally derived from the needs and priorities of decisionmakers, while the prescriptions of the environment – customs, norms, treaties – are usually more flexible or undefined (p.243).

Evidence indicates that the more ambiguous or contradictory the expectations of others are, is greater the possibility that “self-restraint” is lost and the “I-” part is superimposed (Benes & Harnisch, 2015, p.147). When the role prescriptions of the recipient and observers (the *alter*) are not clear for the executor, the ideas and values that the role intends to play (the *ego*) may be more influential.

A country may try to assume incompatible roles, obliging it to choose, or to play a role which exceeds its available resources, leading to “overload” (Thies, 2009, p.7). This could happen with the assumption of new roles. Inconsistencies are also found in role performance when one distinguishes between the roles an actor seeks to perform (ascribed roles) and the roles they currently play (achieved roles). It has been found that new and emerging states who improve their status usually respond more to ascribed roles than achieved ones, while more established and better positioned states have multiple roles already consolidated (Thies, 2009, p.8).

The relationship between roles and leadership is even more complex than the link between status and roles in terms of foreign policy. The concept of leadership in international relations is controversial. A similar interpretation to that of the concept of role indicates that leadership is not an attribute or an achievement, but rather a type of social relation in which the existence of followers can be verified, where possessing power resources is insufficient, and it is necessary that the position assumed by each country within a social order is recognised by others (Vu, 2017, p.2). Likewise, the connection between positional improvement and leadership is not direct. Studying rising or emerging powers it is desirable to recognise when they either fail to become global or regional leaders, despite improved capabilities, or when they have very delimited leadership in a geographical area or group, categorised as “issue-based leadership” or “problem-based leadership” (Vu, 2017, p.3-6). In line with the latter, we propose the use of the synonym “issue-oriented leadership”, as its emphasis can be geographic but is predominantly thematic, based on agenda-setting in a specific field. Instead of aiming for a construction of hegemony, this type of leadership aspiration is based on what has been called the “functional model” or “functional leadership”. Some units of the system become promoters of action and responsibility in certain international affairs, without aiming for dominance, instead trying to shape cooperation dynamics based on their capacity to propose attractive initiatives (Vu, 2017, p.4).

Countries without power in material terms do not necessarily assume a purely passive foreign policy, or bandwagoning, and can also reflect expectations of international projection and recognition. They can identify opportunities to excel in specific matters of the global, regional or sub-regional agendas, through specialisation. Some have defined this type of foreign policy as “niche diplomacy”, indicating that small states and those with a great capacity to play notable roles in the international system, but not enough to impose positions or solutions, opt to exercise persuasive influence instead of coercive (Henrikson, 2005, p.67). Even if they do not achieve consideration as “middle powers” or intermediates in the international hierarchy, they can play significant supporting roles such as intermediaries or providers of assistance (p.67).

This type of projection is highly relevant for countries with strong material limitations, like Colombia and secondary powers in general. These are defined as states which occupy the second position of power in a regional hierarchy when their material and/or symbolic capabilities are compared to the superior regional power(s), permitting them to partially compete with regional powers in the moment of defining policy areas (Bach 2006; Flesmes & Wojczewski, 2011, cited in Flesmes, 2012, p.33). They are characterised by ambitions such as participating in regional and sub-regional leadership and promoting issues in collective agendas, while maintaining a limited projection at the global level (Flesmes & Castro, 2015,

p.2; Fletes, 2012, p.25; Pastrana & Vera, 2012a, p.189; Pastrana & Vera, 2012b, p.614).

Therefore, participation in SSC and TrC schemes allows this type of country to exercise a niche diplomacy through which they gain recognition as specialists in a specific cooperation area. SSC has been defined as: “a methodology of development which facilitates the exchange of knowledge, experience, technology, investment, information and capacity between and among Southern countries through governments, civil society organizations, academic institutions, national institutions and networks to accelerate political, economic, social, cultural, environmental and technical development.” (UNIDO, n.d.). For its part, TrC has been defined as: “The tripartite collaboration and partnerships between South-South-North countries (...) (and) is the result of technical cooperation among two or more southern countries (South-South) that is supported, through financial, technical or other means by northern donors or by international organizations (UNIDO, n.d.).

The personification of the state is assumed by some constructivists, arguing that it is a social and conscious (collective) person and that it even imitates some traits of a biological organism (Wendt, 2004, p.291). In this sense, psychological theories of leadership may support the theoretical bases of this “issue-oriented and functional” leadership. Some of them emphasise the control, by some actors, of highly valued social resources (Huang, L. et. al., 2011 p.95). Conventionally, it is believed that hierarchical roles within an organisational structure are those which can naturally determine the results of the actions or thinking of others, for example, because they can reward and punish (Yukl & Falbe, 1991, cited in Huang, L. et. al., 2011 p.95). Nevertheless, there are situations in which the body expansiveness of an individual versus others, independently of the nominal role they possess, can influence the observable conduct or thinking of others (Huang, L. et. al., 2011, p.100). Hence, foreign policy instruments are the equivalent of the corporal extension of states (as constructed social “beings”), through which they make others “feel” their physical presence outwards. This extension may be independent of the nominal or formal position a state possesses in any social structure.

Another approach suggests that leaders oriented towards specific tasks can increase the efficiency of group actions and the optimism of participants, while “classical” leaders, or those oriented to defining hierarchies and formal positions, achieve a greater level of group cohesion but have less impact on outcomes (Tabernerero et al., 2009, p.1391). Thus, “coordinators” act more as motivators of participation and guides of collective action to jointly establish strategies and tasks, while conventional leaders, “directors” or “commanders”, tend to formulate strategies rigidly, assign the positions and tasks of each actor and supervise fulfilment (Durham, Knight & Locke, 1997, cited in Tabernerero et al., 2009, p.1394).

Therefore, the search for issue-oriented or functional international leadership in the absence of conventional hegemony, dominant hierarchy or the conferral of a superior role by potential or actual recipients, can be verified in two ways. Firstly, finding a relation between the change of leaders' national role conception and the expansion of the instruments with which a state secures its physical presence in the territory of others, for example, armed forces, diplomatic missions, exports, investment, cooperation, etc., and secondly, verifying the awareness of leaders about their possession of a social resource collectively valued or demanded by the potential or actual recipients of the social interaction. For instance, knowledge or experience positively valued by others. These may be delivered through SSC and/or TrC, and they may evolve into recognised niche diplomacy practices. Hence, a secondary regional power may focus on the projection of its leadership in regional and sub-regional spheres in specific thematic issues, promoting and executing delimited cooperation programs or activities, based on a specific *know-how* like public or homeland security, peace-building or institutional reform.

Thus, the perception of positional improvement, the change in national role conception, the attribution of new roles, and the consciousness of leaders about the expectation of valuable social resources demanded by other actors can be connected to the search for international leadership. However, the self-restraint of decisionmakers, limitations of the international setting, and a modest position in material terms could incentivise the deployment of delimited projection roles, seeking a pragmatic and non-strategic, or non-power-oriented leadership.

Leadership can thus be based on the construction of diverse roles in an intersubjective process of various stages, of which three are highlighted: change in the distribution of material power or status, the emergence of role expectations between the aspirant leader and potential followers, and the eventual institutionalisation of practices associated to the role that emerges (Vu, 2017, p.2). Thus, leadership is a complex and relational process more than a result, but it has some indicatory uses that can be traced despite the inconsistencies or weaknesses of the emerging countries. With time, the social interaction facilitated by the offer of cooperation can have visible effects on the interests and identity of both parts (offeror-recipient), which is to say that a relationship of persuasion and intersubjective exchange can eventually become one of transformation and the emergence of followership (Nabers, 2010, p.55).

For a leadership under construction, like that of Colombia, it is plausible to associate the projection of its new roles with the perception of a partial improvement in its capabilities and international status in an increasingly multipolar context and with the change in the expectations of national role conception of the Santos administration. Due to the incipient character of the roles projected by Colombia towards the sub-regions of CAC, referring to the specific expectations of the *alter*

or the degree of institutionalisation of the roles makes little sense, giving priority to the formulation by the *ego* and the (self-)attribution of sub-regional roles, making it difficult to verify the existence of acquired or permanent roles.

Problem Representation and Role Expectations in the Foreign Policy of the Santos Administration

Colombia, is considered one of the three secondary regional powers in its region, along with Argentina and Chile (Flemes & Castro, 2015, p.2; Pastrana & Vera, 2012a, p.189). It can't be considered a middle power because of its weak or in-constant global projection. Nor is it a primary regional power because it does not exercise predominance in its own geographical area, as Brazil does in South America. But Colombian foreign policy is committed to a greater international projection as a mechanism to transform its external image and *alter* expectations. The possibility of limited leadership, subregional and thematic, is coherent with Colombia's limited capabilities and secondary position in the region. It allows Colombia to modify its traditional image as an economically and militarily dependent country, a drug exporting country, a violent country submerged in armed conflict, and an underdeveloped country.

Colombia has been improving its position and international image under Juan Manuel Santos (2010-2014, 2014-2018). In part, it has been benefited by the external bonanza of raw materials (2010-2013), by partial improvements in its internal security, and by the search for peace with the insurgent groups. Its foreign policy focus on the possibility of offering international cooperation. Although primarily localized, such offer supports the construction of new external images, such as a stable and safe country, a country that seeks peace, and a country in the process of modernization and development. This niche diplomacy geographically concentrates where Colombia can positively influence countries with similar or greater security and development problems, seeks a relative balance between limited capabilities, geographical proximity, costs, partial dependence on the resources of strategic partners or funders of cooperation, and the search for a leadership based on persuasion, positive interaction, and recognition of the country's experience in specific topics.

South America, Central America and the Caribbean are conceived as neighborhood zones or subregions of Latin America and priorities for Colombia. In particular, the Northern Triangle (Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras) and the basin of the Caribbean have had security and development problems similar to those of Colombia or have submitted their interest in the knowledge and experience of the Andean country. Building leadership in South America is more difficult than in Central America and the Caribbean because of the predominant role of Brazil and the small relative distance between secondary powers, which does

not allow for positive asymmetry. This offer of cooperation in CAC also strengthens the diplomatic activism and the credibility of the country in the multilateral organizations of the global level, such as the United Nations, and reinforces Colombia's contribution to the achievement of the 2030 Agenda.¹

The international initiatives of Santos reflect a worldview in which opportunities are perceived for Colombia to begin projecting itself as a leader based on the offer of cooperation. PRs, as stimuli and frames of reference for executing foreign policy, can be related to the identity that states assume facing other actors in the international system, as this orients instrumentally and normatively the type of relations a state will have with others. In the case of Colombia, the search for international leadership in the midst of post-conflict construction, and despite the necessary search for external support for peace-building, tends to be a recurring problem to solve in its policy stances and appears to be a method to transform the identity of the state.

In his inaugural speech in 2010, Santos stated that the country would “play a highly relevant role in new global spaces”, and would assume “the appropriate leadership role in international scenarios” (Presidencia, 2010). This global projection ambition appears to contradict the limits of the category of a secondary power, but Colombian foreign policy itself points to a concentration in the sub-regional scenario. This is better explained by the adaptation of the new roles the country is seeking, sometimes surpassing the possibilities of its factual diplomacy in the leader's discourses. Santos declared the commitment of Colombian diplomacy to the promotion of human rights for conviction, not for “external pressures or impositions” (Presidencia, 2010), thus affirming the principle of multilateralism and a relatively autonomist stance facing the US or other leading powers. He also referred to the search for international recognition based on the achievement of “world-class” national economic, business and technological capabilities.

Applying role theory, the stage of attributing roles can include inconsistencies and dualities because it deals with new functions that the state aspires to assume and not functions that are already acquired or are widely recognised by others. Thus, Colombia is “testing” options of global and regional projection, although it remains a secondary power, and it will try to become an offeror of cooperation even though it still depends on international help as a recipient and is in the process of transformation towards stability and comprehensive development.

In his 2014 speech after re-election, Santos argued that Colombia had recovered a preminent role in the world and showed willingness to contribute to regional

¹ See Colombia's proposals regarding the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in the context of Río+20. In: <http://www.cancilleria.gov.co/rio/abc>

integration, coordination and cooperation despite differences, protecting the interests and sovereignty of the state (Presidencia, 2014). This reflects his own perception of the changed status of the country. He also clarified that some medium-term goals, until 2025, would turn Colombia into a country of peace, equity and with the highest level of education in Latin America, achieving an image of the country as “prosperous. Admired. Respected. A leader” (Presidencia, 2014). There is not yet a clear role conception, but an expectation of emphasis on the ascent of the country’s status and a willingness to assume various, though limited, regional responsibilities.

In 2015, in the international presentation of advances in the peace process with the FARC, Santos commented that: “countries like Mexico and the Central American nations, where drug cartels affect the population more and more, would benefit from the achievement of peace in Colombia” (Presidencia, 2015). Additionally, he suggested that the external image of Colombia had changed from one of a “a violent and failed state” to a new and better one. Based on this, one can perceive the general political objectives of leadership and a changed international image. Thus, the presidential expectation of a new role conception is to begin contributing to countries of the region which have experienced similar difficulties – underdevelopment, armed conflict and narcotrafficking – based on the lessons learned in Colombia’s own processes of internal adjustment, although it has not yet fully overcome these issues. However, what is not clear are the strategies and instruments to achieve said objectives, which are required to fully construct the PR.

The “Foreign Policy Guidelines of Colombia” offer some clues. These establish, among other specific objectives, that: a) bilateral and multilateral agendas will be consolidated, prioritising the sustainable development of the country, and b) countries of Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) will receive “priority attention” (MRE, n.d. a). In this sense, two items are offered to build niche diplomacy: the theme – human development – and the geographical destination – LAC. Among other methods and instruments, it was prescribed in 2010 that Colombia would: 1) deepen integration with LAC to generate more opportunities in trade, investment and technology transfer, 2) seek to position itself internationally in diverse technical and scientific areas, 3) consolidate the receipt and offer of SSC and TrC as foreign policy instruments (MRE, 2010).

Regarding this dual role, the “Roadmap of International Cooperation 2015-2018” is a point of reference, mentioning two strategic objectives. First, to focus and stimulate the cooperation Colombia receives to: a) support the construction of peace, sustainable rural development and environmental conservation and sustainability, and b) achieve the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and enter the OECD (APC, 2015). Second, to share valuable knowledge

to contribute to foreign policy, the development of the country and the development of partnerships in SSC and TrC, offered through bilateral mechanisms, regional strategies, strategic alliances and regional integration (APC, 2015). This willingness to “share” a valuable social resource (Huang, L. et. al., 2011 p.95) corresponds to the concepts of “issue-oriented and functional” leadership. This pretention of leadership may be based more on sharing *know-how* than on transferring material capabilities, and not necessarily on the aspiration to lead an ideational project trying to define a regional identity, or a common long-lasting regional or sub-regional project (Nolte, 2012, p.35).

Additionally, in the PR of Colombian decisionmakers, lies the implicit question of how to build leadership relations within a position of duality as both a recipient and offeror of cooperation. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs recognises that although the economic status of the country has changed to a “high-middle income country” meaning it is not a priority recipient of Official Development Assistance (ODA), it continues to require ODA. Although Colombia wants to be an OECD country offering cooperation, it does not try to – nor can it – assume the role of “emerging ODA donor” and, as such, will not become a member of the Development Assistance Committee of the OECD (MRE, s.f. b). In fact, despite the change in its status in 2010, Colombia has remained one of the countries in LAC that receives the most ODA: in 2013 it received ODA of 862 million USD, increasing to 1505 million USD in 2015 (Banco Mundial, 2017).

From the perspective of role theory, a country may try to assume incompatible roles, obliging it to choose, or to play a role which exceeds its available resources, leading to “overload” (Thies 2009, p.7). In the role conception of Colombian policymakers, attempts to resolve the dilemma have led to the offer of experience and knowledge rather than ODA, and the use of principles in SSC and TrC such as “horizontality, solidarity, interest and mutual benefit”, which prescribe shared responsibility in the formulation, financing, execution and evaluation of initiatives (APC, s.f.a, p.3). These are prescriptions of the *alter* internalised by Colombia, because they are part of the new, non-traditional cooperation methodologies endorsed by the community of offerors and recipients, as reflected in the Declaration of Paris (2005) and the Accra Action Plan (2008). An intermediary role is defined between that of donor and recipient, a “partner” country, which takes responsibility for the analysis and implementation of ODA, although OECD countries remain the main donors (OCDE, n.d., p.5). Consequentially, issue-oriented and functional leadership, with the backup of donors, seems preferable because of the constraints derived from modest material and ideational capabilities.

In the case of TrC, one can identify a relationship of three roles following the model of other countries which promote SSC, and not only those which are underdeveloped or developing: the presence of a “facilitating partner” or a developed

country of the North which finances the project, the intervention of a “strategic partner” or a “pivot country”, like Colombia, and the acceptance of a “receiving partner” (APC, 2016a, p.15). This apparently allows a country of moderate capabilities to lead, coordinate and distinguish itself by utilising the resources or back-up of an actor with a superior position in the social structure. As a role, the “pivot” is equivalent to a “coordinator” and is a position which defies somewhat the role expectation traditionally attached to a leader, in which the autonomous use of material resources or the asymmetric aggregation of capabilities of others in favour of the leader is expected, or in which a normative superiority or capability to instil in others the leader’s rules, values and beliefs is supposed. In this triangular scheme, the functions assumed by the pivot are to offer their tested experience or good practice, lead network activities, meet with counterparts, coordinate resources, and synchronise offers and requests for cooperation (APC, 2016a, p.16).

Such arguments are useful to interpret the new role conception of Colombia and the leadership it is starting to build in CAC via SSC and TrC. Such forms of cooperation are formulated and implemented in the framework of flexible schemes of reciprocal exchange, oriented to specific tasks and projects in themes of human development and security, in which Colombia assumes a posture more of coordinator and bridge between financers and recipients, than that of a directing and hierarchic role. The following section will deal with its offer of SSC and TrC in CAC to verify in practice this new role conception and role performance.

Colombia in Central America and the Caribbean and its Role Performance in SSC and TrC

The data of the Ibero-American General Secretariat (SEGIB) exposes facts that are incomplete in the official pages of the Foreign Ministry and the Presidential Agency for Cooperation. SEGIB has an Integrated Ibero-American Data System on SSC and TrC with American States since 2015, based on the information and experience of more than ten years of cooperation between Spain and Latin America and the Caribbean (SEGIB, 2016, p.14). However, SEGIB recognizes that there is greater clarity in measuring traditional cooperation than SSC and CTR (p.33), so it depends on guides, surveys, and information provided by the agencies and cooperation offices.

Regarding Colombian SSC and TrC, a substantial increase in the role of CAC as recipients can be observed. From 2008, with the initiative of Uribe’s government to offer SSC to the Caribbean, and the 2010 decision to participate in the “Mesoamerican Regional Cooperation Program” (PRCM with its Spanish acronym)²,

² This is directed to Belize, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama and the Dominican Republic.

in the framework of the “Tuxtla Dialogue and Coordination Mechanism”³, Colombia changed from being a passive member of the “Mesoamerican Project”⁴, trying to become a SSC manager, following the path of Mexico (SEGIB, 2012, p.117). There are two sub-regional strategies which represent the guidelines of the Colombian offer and which try to build cooperation networks between the public sector, the private sector and civil society organisations from both sides.

Firstly, between 2008 and 2009, the “Strategy of Colombian Cooperation with the Caribbean Basin” was formulated and its implementation started, promoting projects in bilingualism, technical education, natural disaster management, food security, academic mobility, culture and environment (APC, s.f.a, p.7).

Secondly, in 2010, the PRCM was formulated. The program promotes initiatives in issues of social mobility, quality management, public services, local governability, public security among others (APC, s.f.a, p.8). In 2016, greater coordination between the PRCM and the guidelines of the Central American Integration System was adopted, additionally promoting themes such as transport, energy, telecommunications, trade facilitation and health (APC, 2016b). Here one can note the effort to reconcile the role conception of Colombia based on the *ego* with the prescriptions of the *alter*, which allows the identification of the specific themes valued by the recipients to deploy niche diplomacy consistently through the role of “partner” or “pivot” in international cooperation.

As a complement to the two regional strategies, the Strategy of International Cooperation in Comprehensive Security of Colombia was formulated (ECISI with its Spanish acronym), emphasising the fight against transnational organised crime and directed at applicant countries from Central America, the Caribbean, South America and Africa, but prioritising the first three sub-regions (MRE, s.f.a, p.2). The four axes of the offer and its sub-themes are: a) homeland security, b) anticorruption, c) human rights and international humanitarian law, and d) strengthening operative capabilities (MRE, s.f.a, p.11).

Here, one can observe that decisionmakers do not appear fully conscious of the limitations of Colombia as a secondary regional power in their planning of its issue-oriented diplomacy beyond LAC, which could open geographic niches that are difficult to maintain. There is also a duality in the attributed role, because some of the themes in which Colombia seeks to transfer its expertise are weak areas in its own public management or are tied to the still unresolved causes of its armed conflict. For example, the weak territorial presence of the state, represented in the

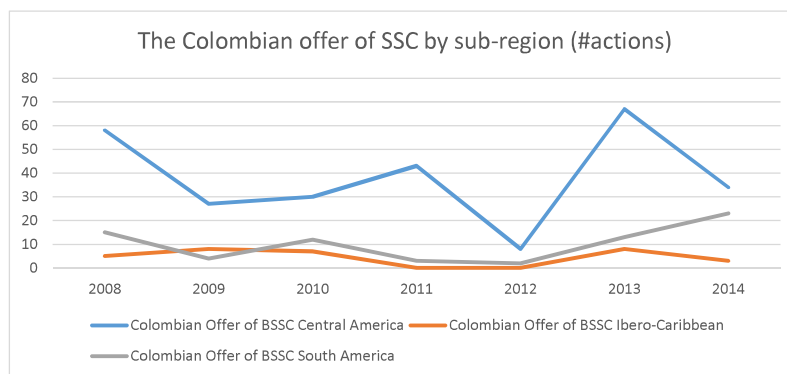
³ This forum has its origin in the 1991 Summit, where the Presidents of Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua and Mexico participated, deliberating on the main issues linked to the development of Central America and Mexico. See: <http://www.sela.org/es/cumbres-regionales/tuxtla/>

⁴ Colombia was incorporated to this sub-regional integration mechanism in 2006. See: <http://www.proyectomesoamerica.org>

precariousness of transparent public policies and police and justice institutions in many areas of the country. However, from role theory, this is understandable because the country is going through a stage of transformation of its self, and because several objectives derived from the new role conception will be corrected by trial and error. Concrete practices may allow attributed roles to become acquired ones.

In quantitative terms, the roles of partner and pivot played by Colombia can be shown in bilateral SSC by sub-region and the number of cooperation actions. First, it stands out that between 2008 and 2014, Central America tends to concentrate between 30% and 70% of the bilateral SSC activities offered by Colombia in Ibero-America, except for the harsh decline in the year 2012 (SEGIB, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013-2014, 2015, 2016). Second, within irregular patterns, the supply of bilateral SSC to Central America remained higher than that directed to South America and the Caribbean, with emphasis on the increase in supply to the three sub-regions between 2012 and 2013, which is partially explained by the creation of the APC in 2011-2012. In sum, in Central America appears to be a solid geographical niche strengthening, making the issue-oriented and functional leadership more sustainable than in other areas.

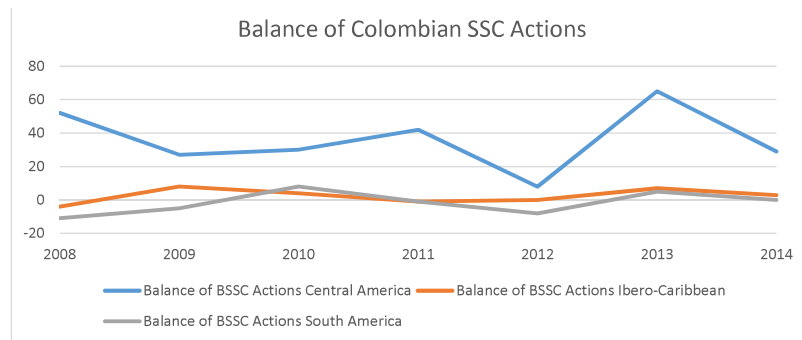
The following graphs help to identify the importance of the SSC for Colombia, but they do not allow solid comparative inferences between the Uribe and Santos administrations because of the only period available (2008-2014), except that it can be assumed that the highest point in number of SSC actions from Colombia has occurred during the Santos government.



Source: authors with data from SEGIB (2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013-2014, 2015, 2016).

An even more revealing fact about the favourable asymmetry that Colombia tries to build in CAC can be perceived by calculating the balance of bilateral SSC

actions, when SSC actions received by Colombia from countries in the three sub-regions are subtracted from the SSC actions Colombia supplies. It is assumed that SSC has a reciprocal and symmetric character, making it difficult to distinguish a “leader”, but the balance shows that while SSC with South America does not have a clear surplus, with the Caribbean there is a slight predominance, and with Central America there is a clear predominance of Colombian supply.



Source: authors with data from SEGIB (2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013–2014, 2015, 2016).

Although the SSC data for the Caribbean appears low, it is worth remembering that SEGIB considers the supply of pivots towards the non-Ibero-American Caribbean separately. There, Colombia improves its asymmetrical position, given that between 2012 and 2014, sixty-one further SSC actions were registered in this geographical zone.

Regarding TrC, it is noted that between 2011 and 2016, Colombia acted as a pivot in twenty-two projects with twenty-three beneficiary countries: three in 2011, six in 2012, seven in 2013, six in 2014, one in 2015 and eight in 2016 (APC, n.d., p.6). Among the destinations were six countries in Central America⁵ and four in the Caribbean⁶. These individual TrC projects are added to other collective projects in CAC in the framework of the two sub-regional strategies of Colombia (p.7). It should be added that TrC with Central America increased slightly in the framework of the ECISI. To better understand what Colombia offers as a pivot, data from 2016 indicates that of eight projects approved by participants in that year, with a total value of 5.2 million euros, Colombia committed itself to contributing 800,000 euros (APC, n.d., p.9). Regarding donors, US support has represented backup for the SSC and TrC offered by Colombia, but it is not the only one. Between 2011 and 2016, the country reported that of twenty-two TrC

⁵ Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Panama and Nicaragua.

⁶ Belize, Dominica, the Dominican Republic and Cuba.

projects executed, one in development, ten approved and two in the call phase – thirty-five in total as a “pivot” – the US was the backup in only five, with Germany also taking this role in five cases (APC, 2016a, p.7).

Despite the growing importance of Colombian CSSC and TrC, it is worth emphasising that, in a comparative analysis, Colombia is not the main supplier in Latin America. There have been years in which, in numbers of coordinated actions, Colombia has been found among the top suppliers, for example, achieving first place in bilateral SSC in 2014, with eighty-five initiatives of a total of three hundred and thirty-three in Ibero-America (SEGIB, 2016, p.48). But in SSC in general, it remains behind the supply of Brazil, Argentina, Mexico and Chile, as the fifth partner in LAC (APC, s.f.a, p.10). In terms of TrC, in the period 2010-2014, it was only in 2012 that Colombia arrived to the top three suppliers, behind Chile and Mexico (SEGIB, 2016, p.178).

However, the differentiating factor for Colombia, or its “added value” compared to other SSC and TrC offers, appears to be thematic. All pivot countries direct projects and initiatives in specific themes related to the promotion of sustainable development. In fact, the SEGIB (2015) groups all offers into four broad areas: economics, institutional strengthening, social issues, and environmental policies. Thus, there are two thematic issues in which Colombia wants to distinguish itself from the “regional portfolio”, based on what it considers its greatest expertise: public security and peace-building. They may be issues in which the country still has significant domestic challenges, but they are the axes of the projection discourse that is building the image of Colombia as an issue-oriented and functional leader.

Conclusions

This article used a simplified version of role theory based on authors such as Holsti (1970) and Thies (2009) to try to explain the basis of the new international role conception of Colombia during the two terms of Santos and its foreign policy PR in terms of how to make the country an international leader in the midst of transition to the post-conflict period, and despite the material limitations it faces as a secondary power.

The concepts of issue-oriented and functional leadership (Vu, 2017) and niche diplomacy (Henrikson, 2005) were used to interpret the role conception and role performance of Colombia in CAC, in comparison to its cooperation in South America, with the aim of identifying the relevance of these areas. Additionally, the article incorporated the deployment of socially valued resources to examine the expansion of the foreign policy instruments of Colombia.

The first empirical section sought to reconstruct and understand the interaction

between the new national role conception of the Santos government and its ways of representing the problem of the search for Colombian leadership, based on the revision of presidential discourses and the analysis of official documents that orient foreign policy decision-making. Some objectives and strategies designed to promote that incipient leadership were identified, and the assumption that the perception of the main decisionmaker points to a positive meaning attributed to domestic and international changes, and to a change in status, was verified.

Although the country has not resolved its internal problems, the presidential expectation of a new role conception is to begin contributing to countries of the region that have experienced similar difficulties, like underdevelopment, armed conflict and narcotrafficking, based on the lessons learned in its own internal adjustment processes. This pretention to leadership appears to be based more on sharing *know-how* than on transferring material incentives or capabilities, and seeks its development in non-hegemonic matrixes of cooperation.

In the second empirical section, the “partner” and “pivot” roles of Colombia were identified as functions that approach the type of projection described by the concepts of issue-oriented and functional leadership. It was verified that despite the prescription of reciprocity in the SSC it offers and receives, Colombia maintains a favourable asymmetry, above all in Central America, but also a growing asymmetry in the Caribbean when the non-Spanish-speaking countries of the region are taken into account. The themes of peace promotion and citizen security appear as differential aspects facing other offers of SSC and TrC and with a geographical emphasis in the most vulnerable countries of Central America, becoming, for the moment, pillars of a niche diplomacy. Colombian participation in the “Mesoamerican Regional Cooperation Program” and the formulation of instruments such as the “Strategy of Colombian Cooperation with the Caribbean Basin” and the “Strategy of International Cooperation in Comprehensive Security” are frameworks to define role expectations, both in the *ego* and the *alter*, although they tend to reflect more Colombian aspirations.

As the Colombian case shows, the stage of role attribution can include inconsistencies and dualities, above all because this secondary power is “testing” options of global and regional projection in a process of trial and error. As the shared practices and concretisation of expectations, and evaluations, of the *alter* are consolidated, Colombia could pass from the second phase of leadership construction to the third, institutionalising what are currently short-term initiatives. That is, converting the attributed roles within the new national role conception into acquired and externally legitimised ones.

Bio

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