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**Power, Knowledge and Resistance:  
Between Co-optation and Revolution in Global Trade  
(forthcoming in the *Review of International Political Economy*)**

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***Introduction***

The failures of the multilateral trade system to produce welfare gains for all and to deliver on promises for development are well documented (Wilkinson, 2014; Singh, 2017). This paper takes ‘resistance’ to neoliberal orthodoxy and inequitable rules within the multilateral trade regime as its focus. Unlike conventional accounts which identify social movements and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) as the key agents of change in these areas, we examine the network of global trade governance to identify certain intergovernmental organisations (IGOs) that ‘break rank’ with neoliberalism but also contest global trade rules that appear to be rigged in favour of the most developed states. For the purposes of this paper, neoliberalism is viewed as a dominant, indeed globally pervasive ideology that expounds the virtues of free and unencumbered trade, promotes enterprise and hastens the opening up of national economies - big and small, rich and poor - to international competition (for further discussion of the term see Eagleton-Pierce, 2016).

Analysis of NGOs as agents of resistance, democratic change and social justice, particularly in global trade, has provided a great deal of insight into the constraints to challenging the dominant trade agenda and to bringing about substantive and normative policy change in areas such as access to medicines, agricultural liberalisation, and water services (Hannah, 2016; Hopewell, 2015; Murphy, 2010). Scholars tend to conceive of NGOs as acting upon, rather than from within, the governance of global trade and channelling the concerns of the grassroots upwards to policymakers through various tactics ranging from protest and media campaigns, to lobbying for policy change, to the provision of analysis and expertise to developing and least developed countries (LDCs). Indeed, NGOs are widely understood to constitute an autonomous group of ‘outsider-insiders’ in global trade which play an essential role in:

Providing a forum for debate; generating ideas and policies; legitimating ideas and policies; advocating for ideas and policies; implementing or testing ideas and policies in the field; generating resources to pursue ideas and policies; monitoring progress in the march of ideas and the implementation of policies; and occasionally burying ideas and policies (Weiss et al., 2009: 123, 128-129).

Many point to the success of NGOs in offering a crucial check on state power, increasing the voice of the developing world in trade negotiations, nullifying some of the asymmetries in political power, and providing trade expertise and analysis to bolster their participation (Scholte, O'Brien and Williams, 1998; Trommer, 2014). Others have suggested more limited possibilities in this regard and the relative weakness of NGOs to bring about change (Paterson, 2009; Hannah, 2014).

While the role of NGOs in politicising and demystifying global trade remains very important, it is crucial to note that they form just one part of a broader network of international organisations (IOs), both state and non-state, which are engaged in resisting neoliberal trade orthodoxy. The role of IOs in this network is also significant and remains understudied. Increasingly, a range of IOs, acting from within global trade governance networks, are engaged in activities aimed at challenging and transforming the status quo. While some would argue that these IOs are little more than the agents of powerful states, we find that there is rather more to their activities. Indeed, our research reveals trends that are generally unacknowledged in the existing literature: that IOs are the source of new ideas and knowledge, and that they are sometimes more critical of dominant discourses than leading NGOs. They are engaged in a dynamic relationship involving the governance of global trade, on the one hand, and the production and dissemination of trade-related knowledge to developing and least developed countries on the other. Indeed, these organisations are uniquely positioned to affect trade policy and negotiations because they are able to hold observer status on WTO committees and write member state submissions to the WTO while also engaging in demand driven advocacy with poor countries – that is, the provision of trade-related legal and technical assistance at the behest of developing countries. Their expert status gives them access to state leaders and officials who make game-changing decisions on the global stage. NGOs can perform some of these roles but not all of them – for example, they are not allowed to hold observer status at the WTO.

It is possible to identify a number of IOs involved in the generation and dissemination of trade-related knowledge, including organisations with universal membership such as the Advisory Centre on WTO Law, the World Intellectual Property Organisation, the World Health Organization, United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), and the International Labour Organization, and those with regional membership such as the African, Caribbean and Pacific Group of States, Alianza Bolivariana para los Pueblos de Nuestra América (ALBA), Caribbean Community (CARICOM), Comisión Económica para América Latina y el Caribe (CEPAL), and El Mercado Común del Sur (MERCOSUR).

In this paper, we focus on two IOs, one regional and one universal – South Centre and United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) respectively – the work of which can be described as elemental within the vast network of global trade governance, pertaining directly to the norms, rules and procedures of trade (Keohane and Victor, 2011). These IOs

have also been selected because their mandates are explicitly ‘resistant’ to neoliberal orthodoxy and to trade rules that disadvantage developing countries. UNCTAD and South Centre are both centrally involved in supporting the global South in international trade negotiations but there has been little analysis of the strategies and patterns of resistant knowledge production and dissemination by these organisations. Despite its ongoing provision of resistant research and advocacy on international trade and development issues, South Centre has largely escaped scholarly gaze, making it a particularly interesting case. While the work of UNCTAD has been more closely followed by scholars, many of the more recent studies of the organisation have taken a pessimistic tone, postulating that UNCTAD has been stifled and co-opted by the powerful states of the global North (see, for example, Taylor 2003; Bello 2000). Although UNCTAD and South Centre both face limitations and challenges, this article demonstrates that the context in which they are working is not one of co-optation but rather one of dynamic (yet asymmetric) dialogue. Whilst some excellent insight can be taken from extant neo-Gramscian analyses (see especially Taylor, 2003), there remains a tendency to over-emphasise structural power in delimiting agency and counter-hegemony in global trade.

In this article we elucidate the complexity between the poles of co-optation and revolutionary change in global governance. To that end, we develop a spectrum of strategies and activity across four hypothetical models or ideal-types: neoliberal IOs, embedded liberal IOs, transformative IOs, and revolutionary IOs. While existing conceptualizations have used similar language to describe resistance, such as the categorization of civil society by Scholte (2005) as conformist, rejectionist, reformist, and transformative actors, our typology advances our understanding of resistant activities by accounting for the activities of IGOs and by unpacking the role of IOs as knowledge creators and disseminators, two things that are missed in the extant literature. Using this typology, we illustrate how UNCTAD and South Centre leverage their trade-related expertise and exercise resistance to neoliberal orthodoxy in global trade governance. We show how – in the area of global trade – prevailing ideas, structures and ways of thinking are often resisted and transformed by the everyday acts of knowledge production and dissemination by certain IOs. In particular, it is our contention that many of the big ideas that inform policy are fed into the network of global trade governance on a day to day basis through the provision of trade-related technical assistance and policy advocacy by IOs.

The arguments in this article are based on research undertaken as part of a three-year research project exploring the transformative potential of IGOs and NGOs within global trade governance. It combines archival research undertaken in 2013-14 with data collected through participant observation in WTO fora including ministerial conferences and public forums. The research has also drawn from 25 elite interviews undertaken with trade officials working across the areas of international trade policy and advocacy in Geneva, Nairobi, Paris and Rome. These were targeted interviews with key people working on trade within a range of IOs, supplementing

interviews with a number of national trade delegates exploring which organisations they use for accessing trade expertise.

The paper unfolds as follows. It begins by mapping out a typology of resistance that peels back the veil on power, knowledge and resistance in global trade governance. Here, we aim to show how acts of everyday knowledge production and dissemination can generate change in global trade. We then map the work of UNCTAD and South Centre onto these ideal types. This is illustrated through detailed examination of their work in key areas, which collectively shows the potential for IGOs to help redress inequalities in global trade governance. However, we also identify a range of structural and institutional limitations to their work. We conclude by reflecting on how these findings contribute more broadly to understanding the role of IGOs in exercising resistance in global governance.

### *Thinking about ‘resistance’ in global trade*

Scholars often observe that, ‘where there is resistance, there is power’ (Abu-Lughod, 1990: 42). But just what is resistance? Who exercises it? And, how does it help us to understand processes of change in world politics? Although the field of International Political Economy (IPE) has opened in recent years to give greater consideration to sources and processes of political change – as seen in commentary in the wake of the Seattle protests (Gill, 2000; Halliday, 2000) and more latterly during the post-2008 anti-austerity protests (della Porta, 2015; Barker et al, 2013) – the nature of resistance itself remains somewhat under-theorised, leaving us with a conceptual toolkit inadequate for understanding how particular ideas and practices rise and fall.

The dynamic relationships between the WTO and other IGOs involved in global trade governance could be unpacked through the lens of regime complexity. Regime complexity refers to ‘nested, partially overlapping, and parallel international regimes that are not hierarchically ordered’ (Alter and Meunier, 2009: 13; see also Keohane and Victor, 2011). Recently, Orsini, Morin and Young have elaborated on this to note that regime complexity includes, ‘a network of three or more international regimes that relate to a common subject-matter, exhibit overlapping membership, and generate substantive, normative or operative interactions recognized as potentially problematic, whether or not they are managed effectively’ (2013: 29). In this view, ‘[r]egime complexes always exhibit varying degrees of divergence regarding the principles, rules or procedures of their elemental regimes’ (Orsini, Morin and Young, 2013: 29), divergence that could potentially breed acts of resistance.

The global trade regime complex is arguably the densest of all complexes in global governance (Meunier, 2011) and this lends partial insight into why we find significant conflict and divergence among relevant IGOs here. In response to this complexity there is a small but burgeoning literature that considers the challenges of regime complexity in trade-related areas of

new economic regulation such as intellectual property rights (Yu, 2007), agriculture and food security (Margulis, 2013), and the environment (Gehring, 2011). There is also growing concern that the proliferation of preferential trade agreements will create friction in the global trade regime and serve to create competing and overlapping regulatory spheres that may conflict with WTO rules and exacerbate asymmetries between developed and developing countries (Bilal et al, 2011). These studies illustrate the challenges associated with regime complexity in global trade, particularly as they pertain to inter-institutional power dynamics, forum shopping and enforcement of compliance (Davis, 2009). Nevertheless, they fall short of unpacking the specific patterns of resistance and strategies employed by IGOs in the production and dissemination of knowledge, our primary concern here. They also miss the demand-driven character of resistance – IGOs are acting at the behest of members to generate new ideas and knowledge to push back against neoliberalism and inequitable trade rules. Understanding the agency of IGOs and the nature of their resistance therefore requires different theoretical tools than are provided by the regime complex literature.

And yet, even when we look beyond the regime complex literature towards some of the more ‘critical’ frameworks and accounts that might appear to be better predisposed to the study of resistance, two limiting tendencies predominate. First is a tendency toward structuralism whereby the focus of scholarship is on the conditions for resistance rather than on the detail of resistance itself. We find this tendency within the works of orthodox Marxists for example, who treat popular resistance to global capitalism as fundamentally constrained by structural and material factors and ultimately bound to fail if not led by working classes. We also find it in mainstream social movement studies where there is a tendency to emphasise resistance as something which emerges within or against a ‘political opportunity structure’ (see, for example, Meyer and Staggenborg, 1996). The echoes of structuralism are also apparent in a subset of post-positivist works that have been concerned with the ways that discursive and social contexts constrain agency and cement ideas about appropriate subjects for dialogue and debate. Tucker (2014) and Strange (2013), for example, seek to demonstrate how the assimilation and reproduction of dominant neoliberal discourses blunt the teeth of resistance movements in global trade governance.

Second is a tendency to locate civil society actors – NGOs and social movements – as the sole agents and sources of political and economic transformation away from neoliberalism. We find this tendency in the works of neo-Gramscian scholars in particular. Stephen Gill’s *Power and Resistance in the New World Order* for example conveys a dialectical account of power and resistance, with his argument that, as the globalisation of power intensifies, so too do globalised forms of resistance led by social movements, embodied in a kind of ‘Postmodern Prince’ (see Gill, 2000). Robert Cox (1999) meanwhile articulates the possibilities of enacting change through a long term ‘war of position’, that once again highlights civil society actors as the key agents of change. As George Lafferty (2000: 19) writes, for neo-Gramscians ‘the politics of civil

society, articulated primarily through new social movements, have superseded the politics of class', meaning that resistance and counter-hegemony are addressed almost exclusively through the work of NGOs and popular movements.

As much as some scholars have tended to celebrate NGOs and social movements as the sole bastions of resistance to neoliberal ideology, there is a much more complex story to tell here. Lichbach and de Vries (2004) chart the rise of international protest events against multilateral economic institutions in the twentieth century. They find that during the late 1990s the frequency and level of protest mobilisation taking place during the meetings of multilateral economic institutions increased significantly, culminating in spectacles that included 'The Battle of Seattle', a protest mega-event that was simultaneously mounted in over fifty cities around the world. Yet, as Sidney Tarrow (2005: 55) suggests, 'the cycle of international mega-protests that began in the mid-1990s may be just that': a cycle, now on the wane.

Moreover, since the early 2000s, there has been a notable quieting or displacement of the radical social movements in major centres of power and decision making such as Davos, Geneva, and at the WTO ministerials (Hannah, Scott and Wilkinson, 2017). Meetings have been held in out-of-the-way places, driving down the level of participation of protesters. For Bill Paterson (2009) the Seattle ministerial conference was followed by a classic case of transformismo in which the 'anti-globalisation' groups that had suddenly become so visible in global trade politics were brought into the WTO system, their language adopted by WTO members and the Secretariat, and WTO aims reformulated to sound like they coincided with those of the protest movement itself. Subsequently during the Doha Round, despite unprecedented input into the WTO negotiating process, NGOs were unable to get the issues of their greatest concern – such as environmental issues, gender and labour rights – onto the agenda, and failed to alter the WTO's existing procedures (Paterson, 2009: 54). Paterson's analysis chimes with much of the other neo-Gramscian analyses of the global trade system, in which the WTO is seen as a central element of a neoliberal hegemonic bloc offering limited room for effective resistance (see Peet, 2003).

In addition, global justice movements have arguably failed to mobilise a broad enough constituency to effect meaningful change. As Tarrow notes, 'although the main victims of neoliberal globalization are widely believed to live in the global South, global justice protests are still primarily mounted in the affluent countries of the North...it is striking that many of their themes, tactics, and organizational preferences have failed to penetrate the South' (2005: 55). All of this has taken place alongside an increasing 'professionalisation of NGOs' or NGO-ization, through which resistance becomes routinised, domesticated and blunted. While some radical activism around trade persists, for critical scholars such as Arundhati Roy, '[t]he NGO-ization of politics threatens to turn resistance into a well-mannered, reasonable, salaried, 9-to-5 job' (Roy, 2014). Of course, IGOs have always been professionalised in this sense and this is partly why they are seen as unlikely sources of social and political change, particularly in global economic

governance. Part of the motivation of our study is to explore the ways in which IGOs have been able to overcome this constraint on agency through everyday knowledge production.

Arguably, the most influential civil society actors in today's global trade landscape are 'embedded NGOs'. Extending and applying the insights of Polanyi (1944) and Ruggie (1982) to the case of INGO's, Hannah (2014) conceives of these actors as non-profit knowledge producers from the global North and South who work to address injustices by institutionally empowering low-income countries, and push an embedded liberalist agenda of inserting social and environmental priorities into the global market economy. They offer a particular type of status-quo preserving insider critique the aim of which is not to disrupt or transform, but rather to build and maintain a socially embedded, liberal international economic order. Altogether, this paints an increasingly bleak picture of NGO resistance.

It is against this backdrop that we seek to redirect the scholarly gaze towards the work of IGOs that find ways of contesting inequitable trade rules and resisting neoliberal orthodoxy *from within*. With some notable exceptions, such as Nitsan Chorev's perceptive analysis of adaptive strategies and bureaucratic pushback within the WHO (Chorev, 2012; 2013), these resistant 'insiders' have attracted little analysis or commentary in neo-Gramscian work, being more commonly dismissed as agents and institutions of neoliberalism. Robert Cox (1983) for example, offers a view of multilateral institutions as incubating spaces and mechanisms for the development of hegemonic ideologies. He attributes them with five characteristics or functions in particular: (i) they embody rules which facilitate expansion of hegemonic world orders; (ii) they are products of the hegemonic world order; (iii) they tend to ideologically legitimate the norms of the hegemonic world order; (iv) they co-opt elites from peripheral nations; and, (v) they absorb counter-hegemonic ideas through processes of transformismo.

Whilst Cox's formula offers an insightful reading of the ways that material and ideational power come together in the international arena, it arguably both overstates the ideological unity of international organisations and sidelines Gramsci's own astute observation that it is possible and often necessary to work *within and against* structures of power in order to mount a 'war of position'. Gramsci's 'war of position' describes a strategy for transforming or usurping the ruling ideology without resort to violence and coercion. Within this, he points to role of 'organic intellectuals' in building alternative institutions and alternative intellectual resources within existing society. Gramsci's intellectuals are depicted as individuals fully conscious of their role in 'theorizing, popularizing, and justifying ideological positions that represent the interests of [a particular class], but in a fashion that makes an appeal to all' (Griffiths, Roach and Solomon, 2009: 180). In *The Modern Prince*, he goes on to describe the relationship between these intellectuals and the world of production as 'mediated' by the whole social fabric and by the complex of the superstructure in which the intellectuals are in fact the 'officials'. Intellectuals then, play a kind of double game, forced to strike a balance between the 'two great floors' of the



superstructure, with civil society on the one hand and the state on the other. As such, their activities can take on a variety of forms which sit uneasily with the opposing labels of co-opted ‘fixers’ and revolutionary ‘nixers’ (Drache with Froese, 2008). Furthermore, we can learn from Gramsci’s own multiple roles, as prisoner, writer, educator, rebel and patient that each and every political actor is both the object and subject of power-loaded discourses and processes. In the words of Vinthagen and Johansson (2013: 13), ‘power and resistance are not the dichotomous phenomenon that is often implied’. Rather, they reside together, rearing their heads at contemporaneous and intermittent junctures in the context of everyday political practice.

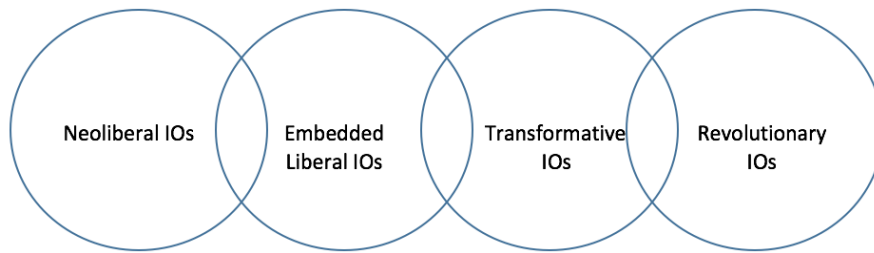
It follows that not only are there different types and degrees of resistance at play in global trade governance, but that resistance is also to be found in some more unexpected places, such as those spaces related to the production, dissemination and transformation of trade-related knowledge. With this in mind, the next section of this paper identifies variegated degrees of resistance exercised by IOs which is not well conceived in the existing literature, captured in the ideal-types of embedded IOs, transformative IOs and revolutionary IOs.

### *A typology of knowledge as resistance*

As Hannah (2016) argues, epistemes – the background knowledge, ideological and normative beliefs, and shared, intersubjective causal and evaluative assumptions about how the world works – determine which policy options are conceivable, who has a voice in global trade governance, and which agendas are prioritised in trade negotiations (see also Adler and Bernstein, 2005). Increasingly, a panoply of international organisations – state and non-state – are engaged in developing, disseminating, challenging, and transforming the epistemic foundations of global trade. De-mystifying the role of international organisations as producers of expert knowledge provides insight into their potential to resist the dominant neoliberal trade orthodoxy, loosen the shackles of received wisdom, and transform knowledge about the possibilities of global trade to work for development (Hannah, Scott and Trommer, 2015).

Before expanding on three organisational ideal-types engaged in resistance, we begin by identifying a fourth type of organisation that engages with global trade governance but acts solely as a means of furthering established agendas. It should be noted, however, that there is overlap in across this typology (see Figure 1). The ideal-types are not considered fully isolated from each other.

Figure 1



### *Neoliberal IOs*

It is widely recognised in the literature that civil society is a place where contestation over different ideologies, theories, policy prescriptions and conceptions of the good life take place. It is an arena of immense diversity, and yet there is a problematic and prevailing assumption that civil society is necessarily ‘progressive’ – committed to pursuing broader social values and sustainable development (eg. Hannah, 2016; Edwards and Hulme, 1996). This is certainly not the case in practice, particularly when they work in tandem with IGOs. If we wish to understand the full range of organisations participating in global governance we need to recognise the organisations that serve merely to further neoliberal orthodoxy and business interests.

For example, alongside the familiar protest groups that have attended WTO events there have also been occasional pro-free trade demonstrations, such as that by the (now defunct) Freedom to Trade organisation at the Hong Kong ministerial conference in 2005. The creation of the annual Public Forum by the WTO as an institutionalised opportunity for engaging with non-state groups led to the creation of a profusion of business groups taking advantage of this new opportunity. Indeed, in recent years such business interests have formed the largest group attending the Public Forums (Hannah, Scott and Wilkinson, 2017). Such non-state organisations advancing the neoliberal agenda have counterparts among the range of IGOs, with the OECD, World Bank and the IMF being the most prominent in this category.

Recognising this, mapping out the range of organisations engaged in global trade governance requires a category for those that are seeking to further the agenda of greater liberalisation and further entrenchment of markets. We term these ‘neoliberal IOs’, and this group sits at one end of the spectrum of organisations engaged in knowledge production. They aim to influence the trade agenda through recreating and rearticulating dominant neoliberal ideology. In this respect, neoliberal IOs are involved in the day to day generation and dissemination of status quo-establishing knowledge. Additionally, they actively participate, often simultaneously, in civil

society consultations and national delegations in international trade negotiating forums. The third prong of their work is aimed at neutralising, silencing or co-opting critics of neoliberal orthodoxy.

### *Embedded Liberal IOs*

Hannah (2014) coined the term ‘embedded NGOs’ to characterise NGOs that eschew conventional advocacy or protest strategies to provide trade-related legal and technical expertise across a range of issues areas that are of central concern to poor countries. They seek to empower developing countries by increasing their negotiating capacity while pushing an embedded liberal agenda. This definition can be extended to capture the work of IOs (state and non-state) more broadly. Embedded IOs are highly specialised, think tank-like organisations that operate as knowledge nodes and engage in demand driven advocacy in an effort to resist and redress injustices in global trade. In other words, embedded IOs are broadly status quo preserving with respect to the neoliberal trade agenda but work to embed sustainable development priorities within it. Embedded IOs are state and non-state actors that work to provide advice, resources and technical assistance to developing countries with the explicit goals of improving their negotiating capacity in global trade, elucidating and informing policy options, and promoting sustainable development, thereby challenging or undermining prevailing power dynamics in global trade.

Embedded IOs engage in knowledge production activities which make WTO rules, administration and negotiations more transparent and accessible to trade policy communities. Actions which might fall into this category include: making WTO rules clearer through legal interpretation and clarification; simplifying the technical language in formal documentation; and translating important policy guidance into a wider variety of languages. Information dissemination about the WTO which reaches beyond the policy sector, for example through outreach and community initiatives, can also enhance the organisation’s democratic accountability since it enables engagement and understanding by a wider public.

Embedded IOs also produce knowledge that is aimed at improving the evaluation of global trade impacts; they work to monitor, scrutinise and assess the development, implementation, and impact of trade policy. They provide credible, evidence-based and policy-oriented assessments of newly proposed and existing rules. By conducting independent research and disseminating their findings directly to trade officials, they provide developing countries with additional information and interpretations of official reports and assessments offered by the WTO Secretariat and other international organisations.

Embedded IOs exercise resistance to the extent that they consciously challenge existing power and knowledge asymmetries in global trade. However, they rarely produce new knowledge and ideas aimed at challenging conventional wisdom about the possibilities of trade to work for global development and produce welfare gains for the world’s poorest people. Instead, their

policy contributions ‘tinker at the margins’ and indirectly cement the normative underpinnings of the global trade system. Consequently, embedded IOs tend to crowd out space for more transformative forms of resistance and facilitate processes of co-optation.

### *Transformative IOs*

The idea of transformative IOs is not entirely new in the global governance literature but to date this discussion has largely centred on NGOs. As such, scholars fail to capture some of the subtleties and nuances of knowledge provision in global trade governance. First, as Hannah and Scott (2015) have shown elsewhere, in matters of global trade NGOs do not always work from the ‘bottom up’, merely acting on IGOs such as the WTO to effect normative change. They often work symbiotically with them, offering democratic legitimacy and aiding in service provision and knowledge construction. Indeed, NGOs often operate as ‘agents’ of governance across the network of global trade – sometimes status quo preserving, sometimes status quo altering, but fundamental (as opposed to peripheral or secondary) to the operation of global trade governance. Furthermore, by taking a closer look at the network of actors operating in the arena of global trade governance, we find that actually, some IGOs can also be considered to have ‘transformative potential’ from within the network of global trade governance. These IGOs consciously attempt to educate state officials and other actors in trade policy communities and actively facilitate them in challenging existing practice.

Transformative action is widely understood to inspire major change or a shift in viewpoint. It alters something significantly in form or function, usually in a way that makes it better. Building upon this definition, ideal-type transformative IOs are state or non-state organisations that strategically leverage their position as experts in the trade landscape and which actively produce new knowledge and ideas that are aimed at fundamentally shaping or altering ways of thinking or doing in global trade. They challenge prevailing power asymmetries and conventional wisdom about the possibilities of global trade to work for development while maintaining their institutional autonomy and resisting co-optation. Working from within the trade landscape and through everyday acts of knowledge production and dissemination, transformative IOs develop counter-narratives that unsettle the underlying power and knowledge dynamics of global trade (Eagleton-Pierce, 2015).

### *Revolutionary IOs*

Where transformative action alters something significantly in form or in function, revolutionary IOs could be seen to go one step further, challenging and overturning the epistemic foundations of global trade – the background knowledge, ideological and normative beliefs, and shared, intersubjective causal and evaluative assumptions about how the world works. In so doing they aim to bring about more emancipatory global trade politics centred on progressive social values, for example through the replacement of the neoliberal order with an ecologist one. Unlikely as this possibility seems, for our purposes the category of ‘revolutionary IO’ is a useful tool. As an

abstract ideal-type it helps us both to give order to complex phenomena and to ascertain progress towards the goal of ‘change’ in global trade governance.

In the sections that follow, we elucidate this variegated typology of resistance through examining the work of two international organisations. Taking the examples of UNCTAD and South Centre we show how everyday knowledge provision and advocacy around several key issues – policy space, special and differential treatment and special safeguard mechanisms – filtered through to the WTO in ways that significantly disrupted, at least for a time, prevailing power and knowledge asymmetries in global trade.

### *United Nations Conference and Trade and Development (UNCTAD)*

This section argues that it is too simplistic to see UNCTAD as fitting neatly into a dichotomy of being initially revolutionary and, following the reforms of the 1990s, co-opted by the neoliberal turn, as much of the existing literature has done. Rather, UNCTAD has always fallen between these poles and resisted dominant trade narratives without trying to overturn existing structures entirely. We begin by examining UNCTAD’s early years up to the reforms of the 1990s, before examining its contemporary work.

The prominent development economist Raúl Prebisch was invited to write a report to UNCTAD’s first meeting in 1964 and was made the institution’s first Secretary General. Under Prebisch’s leadership UNCTAD became a voice for core-periphery analysis, focusing attention on the defects of the international economy and the trading system from the perspective of the global South (Taylor and Smith, 2007; Finger and Ruchat, 2000; Margulis, 2017). Nonetheless, it is important to note that UNCTAD under Prebisch’s intellectual leadership did not advocate unqualified opposition to the GATT and the liberal trade system at which it was aimed, but was always more nuanced in its approach. Prebisch did not call for the abandonment of the GATT but wanted it to be made ‘as effective an instrument for the developing as for the advanced countries’ (UN, 1964: 39). Moreover, Prebisch was critical of the import substitution policies that many developing countries were pursuing, arguing that they had generated levels of protection that went far beyond what was economically justifiable.

A distinction must be drawn, however, between UNCTAD’s Secretariat and its core membership. Prebisch’s outlook with respect to the GATT system was not necessarily shared by the members of the G77, many of which wanted UNCTAD to replace the GATT as the primary organisation governing global trade, pushing an agenda drawn from the New International Economic Order (UN General Assembly, 1974). Some of the G77 wanted UNCTAD to become a revolutionary IO in the typology set-out above, but when judged by the work of the Secretariat UNCTAD has always exhibited a more balanced attitude toward the global trade system. It was a source of resistance to the GATT agenda, but much of this resistance was aimed at making

existing structures more reflective of the needs of developing countries rather than replacing them.

In this sense, UNCTAD is best seen in its early decades as a transformative IO, engaged in acts of resistance to the dominant ideology but not trying to overthrow the existing system. Nonetheless, this was a period in UNCTAD's history in which it articulated a substantially different analysis of the global trade regime than the (embedded) liberal theory that underpinned the GATT, using dependency theory as a guide to its work.

The 1980s initiated a period of 'crisis, retreat and reinvention' within UNCTAD caused by numerous external shocks (for detailed analyses, see Taylor and Smith, 2007: 67-90 and Finger and Ruchat, 2000). Most commentary argues that the outcome of this crisis was that 'UNCTAD was transformed from being a radical critique of global capitalism and its framers, to being an apparatus of global economic governance... UNCTAD ... abandoned its traditional role of providing a serious counterbalance to the economic prescriptions of the North' (Taylor and Smith, 2007: 82, citing Diekmann, 1996: 226). For critics on the left, the reforms UNCTAD initiated amounted to a 'strong ideological tilt towards neo-liberalism' (Bond, 2003: 29). Or as Ian Taylor and Karen Smith put it in a measured assessment, UNCTAD adopted 'the basic premises of neoliberal globalism, rather than confronting or challenging such norms' (Taylor and Smith, 2007: 93).

And yet, it would be wrong to characterise the reforms within UNCTAD as having rendered the organisation merely an agent for preserving the status quo or, as Bello (2000) once put it, a 'fixer' for the WTO. While UNCTAD was certainly affected by the rise of neoliberalism and the creation of the WTO, it was not entirely eviscerated and has not become merely another agent for neoliberalism. One senior UNCTAD official described its new role as being 'the OECD of the developing world...[p]reparing the ground, tilling the ground for the hard law-making process [at the WTO]' – that is to say, UNCTAD provides the conceptual tools, data and analysis that facilitates the subsequent process of inter-state bargaining to take place. But UNCTAD's reforms have not meant that, using the nomenclature outlined above, it has become a neoliberal IO as would be the case if it were fully co-opted. Instead, UNCTAD has retained an identity that pushes back at the ideology and policy orientation embedded in the WTO and the Bretton Woods Institutions, and has been successful in some areas in achieving policy changes and enhanced accountability. The next sections examine two such areas, namely Special and Differential Treatment (SDT) and policy space, in which UNCTAD has played an important role in resisting the deepening of the neoliberal project. These cases illustrate how UNCTAD continues to utilise its two key assets – its wealth of expertise and its legitimacy – to challenge dominant ways of thinking about trade and to engage in acts of resistance.

### *Special and Differential Treatment*

The GATT agreement of 1947 included no formal special privileges or flexibilities to developing countries. The creation of UNCTAD increased the pressure on the GATT to become more reflective of the needs of developing countries, but it was only in 1979 that the principle of SDT was formalised with the agreement of the Enabling Clause. However, the next opportunity to put these provisions into practice – the Uruguay Round – showed their inadequacy. The overall principle adopted in the round was that developing countries would be required to take on all obligations, with SDT amounting only to lesser tariff cuts, longer implementation periods and promises of capacity building (Oyejide, 2002: 505).

Almost immediately following the conclusion of the Uruguay Round, the rich countries pushed for negotiations to begin on a range of new areas including information technology products, financial services and basic telecommunications. Developing countries were put on the defensive, as they had not anticipated the WTO becoming a site of continuous negotiation. UNCTAD Secretary General Rubens Ricupero, who had himself been a negotiator during the Uruguay Round and saw how the agenda had been dominated by the developed countries, realised that the developing countries in the WTO ‘knew that they had to resist or to fight some proposals, but overall ... [lacked] what some of us call a positive agenda for trade liberalization’ (UNCTAD, 1997) – a statement that encapsulates well the area that lies between co-optation and revolutionary. Over the next three years work on the positive agenda took up a considerable amount of UNCTAD’s work, undertaken ‘in response to the request of developing countries and the encouragement of our member states’ (UNCTAD, 2000: vi), applying the idea to all areas of the Uruguay Round agreements and the prospective new areas of negotiation that were being pushed by the rich world.

An important element of work on the positive agenda was appraising the SDT provisions of the Uruguay Round and suggesting ways in which the concept could be operationalised more effectively in future negotiations. This work did not reject the WTO outright, nor seek to overturn its fundamental aims. Rather, UNCTAD argued that ‘trade negotiations should seek substantial liberalization of trade’ but emphasised that this should be done in ‘a balanced manner covering all products, services sectors and modes of supply of export interest to developing countries’ (Gibbs, 2000: 16) and should include greater SDT, particularly for LDCs. To this end, UNCTAD sought to provide a different framework for understanding and implementing SDT that carved out space for developing countries to deviate from the strictures of WTO rules. One element of this was formulating a critique of the limited SDT provisions of the Uruguay Round. UNCTAD argued that ‘While there is merit in [the] hypothesis that ultimately all countries should be subject to the same obligations, it is also logical that they benefit from such differential treatment in their favour so long as it is required, not simply for an arbitrary transitional period’ (Gibbs, 2000: 8). In line with UNCTAD’s longstanding basis in the structuralist theories of the likes of Prebisch, they sought to reconceptualise SDT around a recognition that structural inequalities need active policies, not merely time, to be solved.

SDT suffused UNCTAD's work on the positive agenda (see UNCTAD, 2000). As the WTO members moved toward launching a new round of negotiations, ideas on SDT that had been developed in collaboration with UNCTAD were submitted by member states to push the agenda toward the interests of developing countries. To take one example, UNCTAD co-organised a workshop (with the government of South Africa and UNDP) on integrating LDCs into the global trade regime, disseminating and discussing their work on SDT. The results formed the basis of a communiqué submitted to the WTO by Bangladesh, detailing the outcome of that process (WTO, 1999). Such submissions resulted in the inclusion within the Doha Round work programme of 'making [SDT provision] more precise, effective and operational' (WTO, 2001: paragraph 44). As a step toward achieving this, WTO members agreed to create regular Special Sessions in the WTO Committee on Trade and Development.

Space does not allow a comprehensive exploration of the extent to which these efforts succeeded in bringing about greater commitment to meaningful SDT within the DDA. However, an idea of the position of SDT within the DDA can be taken from the extent to which SDT provisions can be found in the so-called 'Rev. 4' texts, representing the point the negotiations had reached when the impasse was reached. The modalities on non-agricultural market access (WTO, 2008a) contained four introductory and 27 substantive paragraphs. Of those 27, sixteen (or nearly 60 per cent) contained some SDT content. However, it must be remembered that SDT provisions in the GATT were generally of a weak nature, demanding only that the developed countries make their 'best endeavour' to provide more favourable treatment to the developing world. It is therefore important to look in more detail at whether the provisions are providing something substantive. Of those sixteen paragraphs, nine provide some form of concrete benefit such as lower tariff reductions, longer implementation periods or mandated preferential market access.<sup>1</sup> Similar calculations for the Rev. 4 text on agriculture (WTO, 2008b) are more difficult as they demand greater interpretation.<sup>2</sup> Nonetheless, SDT again permeates this document, with lesser commitments, longer implementation periods and provisions specifically for developing countries contained across every area. In this sense, the DDA can be seen to have embedded SDT in the DDA in the manner in which UNCTAD envisaged in its work on the Positive Agenda.

While the DDA has been effectively abandoned, in 2013 WTO members agreed to the organisation's first fully multilateral deal – the Trade Facilitation Agreement – and it is noteworthy that the SDT provisions in this were of a fundamentally different nature to those of previous agreements under the GATT. For the first time, the agreement was based on the

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<sup>1</sup> These are paragraphs 5-8, 11, 13-15 and 28.

<sup>2</sup> For example, lower reductions in subsidy bindings for those members that have initially lower subsidy levels will benefit developing countries since the major developed countries do not fall into this category, but these provisions make no mention of SDT. As such it is a matter of judgement or opinion as to whether these are a form of SDT.



principle that developing countries would only be bound by the disciplines contained therein if they had the capacity to implement it. In this way, until sufficient capacity building measures and finance were made available to developing countries, the trade facilitation agreement would not become a part of their WTO obligations (see Wilkinson, Hannah and Scott, 2014). This is in stark contrast to the Uruguay Round agreements, in which technical capacity building and implementation finance (where mentioned at all) were included as best endeavour clauses but developing countries were bound by the obligations whether or not such assistance was ultimately forthcoming. As one interviewee put it: SDT provisions in the trade facilitation agreement are ‘a complete set – a different set of obligations, and, more directly than in the past, connected with international co-operation and enhancement of institutional capacity’. Importantly for present purposes, UNCTAD’s work specifically on trade facilitation (UNCTAD, 2011: 45-7) laid out precisely the strengthened form of SDT seen in the final agreement, and it disseminated this work to WTO negotiators through its extensive range of engagement activities.

Many individuals, organisations and member states contributed to this outcome and care must be taken neither to overstate the direct causal lines of influence from UNCTAD to the WTO texts, nor to lose sight of the continued centrality of states to these processes. Indeed, it is the member states that submit papers and draft texts to the WTO and they have a central role in setting UNCTAD’s agenda. Nonetheless, it can be seen that UNCTAD’s work on SDT within the positive agenda set the conceptual foundations for a revised form of SDT which subsequently became integrated into the WTO agreements. The following section examines in more detail the idea of policy space, as a particular form of SDT and a conceptual frame for differential treatment.

### *Policy Space*

One of the most important ways in which UNCTAD has pushed back against the agenda of the WTO and the pressure for ever greater liberalisation among the developing countries is through the articulation of the concept of ‘policy space’, defined as ‘the freedom and ability of governments to identify and pursue the most appropriate mix of economic and social policies to achieve equitable and sustainable development in their own national contexts, but as constituent parts of an interdependent global economy’ (UNCTAD, 2014: vii).

Though the term emerged relatively recently, it draws from a longer tradition within political economy. It can be traced back to the work of Alexander Hamilton (1791) and Friedrich List (1841), who were concerned with effecting industrial catch-up with Britain in their respective countries of the US and Germany. Both advanced the idea that active state policies, including protectionism, were required so that ‘every separate nation can be raised to that stage of industrial development in which union with other nations equally well developed, and consequently freedom of trade, can become possible and useful to it’ (List, reprinted in Crane and Amawi 1997: 52). Both List and Hamilton acknowledged the force of the argument in favour

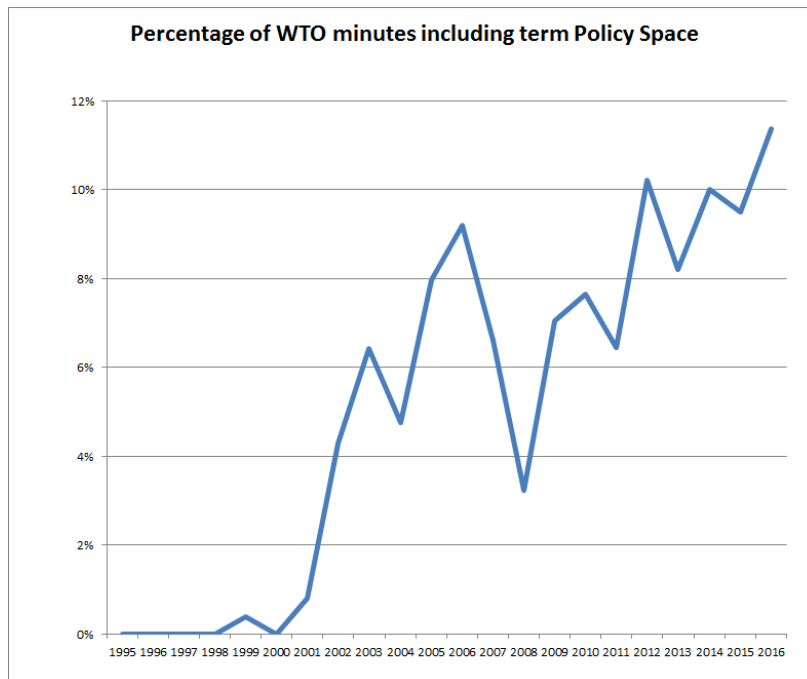
of free trade and both envisaged free trade as the ultimate objective, but only once greater equality with Britain had been achieved. They neither rejected the benefits of trade nor the importance of markets, but sought to balance liberalisation with other policies that aimed at achieving structural change rather than economic efficiency (see Shafaeddin, 2000).

This position mirrors that set out by Prebisch in his 1964 Report (UN, 1964: 6, 26). ‘Policy space’ as a term did not appear in the works of Hamilton, List or Prebisch but it has come to represent the core concept within this tradition of thinking about trade and development – that developing countries need to retain the ability to use temporary, targeted protection, not as a rejection of the market but as a means of altering the manner in which they are integrated into the global trade system. In this way, the concept of policy space resists without trying to overturn the broadly liberal trade agenda that has characterised (non-agricultural) trade post World War II. It can be seen as an aspect of SDT, providing greater flexibility to developing countries due to the structural inequalities they suffer but with the expectation that such countries will be subject to all WTO rules in the fullness of time when they have overcome their adverse incorporation into the global economy.

UNCTAD claims to have coined the term ‘policy space’ in the run up to the UNCTAD XI conference of 2004 in Sao Paulo, within the context of discussions on the conditionality used by the Bretton Woods Institutions (UNCTAD, 2012: viii). They had been highlighting the problem that would become known as the loss of policy space from at least the early 1980s (UNCTAD, 2012: 7) but the term came to greater prominence in the early 2000s. The championing of policy space, as one interviewee put it, ‘nearly broke’ the 2004 UNCTAD XI conference – ‘the big countries were very upset about [UNCTAD’s] stance’. Nonetheless, policy space was then addressed in detail in the 2006 Trade and Development Report and has been a core analytical tool within UNCTAD’s work, particularly within their critique of the institutions of global economic governance and an over-reliance on neo-liberal policy prescriptions. In UNCTAD’s 50<sup>th</sup> year, the flagship *Trade and Development Report* was titled ‘Global governance and policy space for development’, while volume one of UNCTAD’s series on *Rethinking Development Strategies after the Global Financial Crisis* was devoted to ‘Making the Case for Policy Space’ (UNCTAD, 2015). This highlights the central position that policy space has come to hold within UNCTAD’s analysis of all areas of economic governance.

On the basis of UNCTAD’s work, policy space became an element of discussions within the WTO. Figure 2 shows the percentage of WTO meeting minutes that include the term, as a measure of its traction as a concept. These figures demonstrate that policy space has become an established element of WTO discourse. It is frequently invoked by LDCs and African delegates (see WTO, 2015a: 7 and WTO, 2015b for examples from the 2015 ministerial conference).

## Figure 2



Source: Authors' calculations using data from [www.wto.org](http://www.wto.org).

The concept of policy space flows from the idea of the developmental state and the need to learn the lessons of those countries that have successfully industrialised (see UNCTAD, 2014). Despite being formulated explicitly as a corrective to neo-liberalism, its advocates do not aim for a radical disengagement from the global economy, but see maintaining policy space as a means of repeating the policies used by those countries that have successfully utilised global integration to bring about lasting economic change. Policy space as a concept is a means of resisting the pressure toward ever further liberalisation and draws directly from an economic tradition that sits counter to neoliberalism. Its advocates aim to transform how we think about trade and challenge conventional doctrine. That said, UNCTAD staff are mindful of the tension between retaining policy space and the potential benefits of entering binding international agreements which will by necessity constrain sovereignty and policy options in some way.

In this way, we can see the work of UNCTAD on SDT and policy space as fitting neither an organisation that is status-quo maintaining, merely 'embedded' in existing dominant epistemes, nor one that is revolutionary and engaged in attempting to bring about a fundamental overturning of that episteme. It is engaged in acts of resistance, while also acting to smooth global trade. Its primary impact is through strategic use of its expertise to intervene in core trade debates, principally those taking place within the WTO, and combining this with leveraging its other great asset, namely its legitimacy, as a means of shaping the trade agenda. The example of UNCTAD illustrates both the concept of embedded liberal IO (when considering some of its work on SDT) and transformative IO (when thinking about its early work under Prebisch or its

more contemporary work on policy space). It shows us how, over time and over issue, an IO can navigate the space between the ideal types outlined above.

The following section examines the case of South Centre as an example of an organisation that resists more stringently the neoliberal agenda and more clearly illustrates the category of transformative IO.

### *South Centre*

South Centre came into being in 1995, emerging from the prior work and experiences of its parent organisation, the South Commission. Established in 1987 by members of the Non-Aligned Movement acting in their personal capacity, the South Commission aimed to: investigate the common problems of the Southern countries; identify the options and possibilities for cooperation to solve those problems; and to develop a new dialogue with the North (Chatterjee and Finger, 1994). The South Commission's 300 page report 'The Challenge to the South' alludes to a climate of hope for the global South during the 1970s and highlights the importance of the G77 and UNCTAD as negotiating and coordinating fora that built on the principles of collective self-reliance established in the anti-colonial movements of the post war period. However, it also laments the failure to step up plans for South-South collaboration in the 1980s, when crisis and structural adjustment pinned many developing country economies to the imperatives of neoliberalism and exposed their vulnerabilities vis-a-vis the global North. Citing these 'lessons from experience', the report called for the establishment of a 'South Secretariat' which would act to strengthen ties and participation between developing states at the global level on an ongoing basis. South Centre was thus established for this purpose by an Intergovernmental Agreement which came into force on 31 July 1995.

South Centre is effectively an intergovernmental organisation of developing countries, headquartered in Geneva. It has the stated objective of helping 'developing countries to combine their efforts and expertise to promote their common interests in the international arena' (South Centre, 2015a). Since its inception, South Centre has operated as a transformative IO, actively resisting both co-optation and neoliberal orthodoxy, developing new knowledge that significantly challenges conventional wisdom about the possibilities of global trade to work for development in the global South.

South Centre moves to fulfill the objective of promoting the common interest of the global South in a number of ways. It produces research outputs and technical assistance in a number of strategic areas: development policies, sustainable development, climate change, global governance, economic and social development, South-South cooperation, global economic conditions, intellectual property, technology transfer, access to knowledge, health, trade agreements, and food security (South Centre, 2014). It also puts on a wide variety of seminars,

conferences and workshops, year on year. The majority of South Centre coordinated events take place in Geneva. As such, the Centre offers a physical space in which developing country delegates can come together to discuss issues salient to them. Such opportunities can be seen to increase developing countries' and LDCs' capacity for consultation, giving them an important space wherein they may foster collective agreement and common strategies on issues.

South Centre has observer status in a range of international fora, including UNCTAD, the WTO Committee on Trade and Development, UN General Assembly, World Health Organisation and World Intellectual Property Organisation. South Centre representatives gather and record information at the meetings of these organisations, which is then condensed, evaluated and disseminated through presentations or publications. In some instances, South Centre also organises side events at global meetings, where developing country delegates in particular are invited to attend workshops and information sessions geared towards providing additional informational support and advice.

In these ways, South Centre exhibits many of the characteristics we would expect of embedded liberal IOs: they work with state delegates to provide advice, resources and technical assistance with the explicit goals of improving their negotiating capacity and enhancing the democratic credentials of the trade system as a whole. However, their work goes much further than this. Indeed, there are several important areas in which South Centre has had an identifiably 'transformative' role, developing and disseminating new ideas and filtering these ideas into the network of trade governance. This transformative activity is clear in the generation and dissemination of knowledge by South Centre over a key defensive mechanism in the field of agricultural trade – the Special Safeguard Mechanism (SSM) – an issue grounded on a basis, not of increasing global efficiencies or extending liberalization, but in an articulation of the needs of smallholder farmers in the developing world and the need to protect such family farms from excessive international competition and price and import volume volatility. In this respect, South Centre has picked up the idea of policy space born in UNCTAD and has sought to operationalise it in ways that help developing countries resist both the liberalisation imperative and the structural inequalities inherent to the global trade system.

### *Special Safeguard Mechanism*

On the eve of the Cancún ministerial conference in September 2003, the G33 coalition formed with the expressed aim of ensuring that the issue of food security, rural livelihood and rural development become integral parts of WTO agricultural negotiations. Comprised of 46 import-sensitive developing countries, the G33 rallied around the fact that many developing countries, unlike their developed country counterparts, are unable to use the Special Agricultural Safeguard (SSG) – the key defensive mechanism in the Agreement on Agriculture (AoA) – to protect themselves against dramatic price fluctuations and import surges because they had not 'tariffed' (the process by which members agreed to convert non-tariff barriers into tariffs) during the

Uruguay Round. It is the G33's view that the AoA does not provide sufficient policy space necessary to secure national and regional food reserves and to manage price and income volatility for poor, rural households. As such, the agreement entrenches unfair trade rules and cements underlying power asymmetries in global trade. Since 2001, South Centre, working in close collaboration with the FAO and International Centre for Trade and Sustainable Development (ICTSD), has actively sought to challenge these dynamics through the strategic provision of ideas, research and expertise to developing countries.

The issue was formally placed in the DDA when it was agreed in the 2004 July Framework that 'a Special Safeguard Mechanism (SSM) will be established for use by developing country Members', a defensive mechanism that would allow all developing countries the necessary policy space to introduce temporary contingency remedies (raise tariffs) on imports to deal with import surges and/or dramatic price fluctuations (WTO, 2004). The commitment was reaffirmed at the 2005 Hong Kong ministerial conference (WTO, 2005a) albeit with the precise purpose, coverage, modalities and commercial implications of the mechanism left unresolved.

While it is impossible to attribute the origin of the idea of the SSM to one source, several insiders trace the G33's position back to South Centre in 2001 (Green and Priyadarshi, 2001). Indeed, the first substantive G33 proposals to the WTO were originally authored by Shishir Priyadarshi, former agriculture negotiator for India and current Director of the Development Division at the WTO, while working at South Centre (WTO, 2005c, d). Luisa Bernal, former coordinator for trade and development at South Centre, is credited with leading and coordinating the generation of research and demand driven advocacy on the SSM and Special Products between 2002 and 2008. In this respect, South Centre operated as the incubator for the SSM idea. What is also particular about South Centre's work on this issue is its partnership with other transformative IOs in the generation of research aimed at supporting the G33's position in WTO negotiations.

For example, early on South Centre (2003), FAO (eg. 2002, 2005) and ICTSD (2005) provided research that would establish the G33's position that an SSM must include a 'dual trigger' that would address both surges in import quantities and price fluctuations (WTO, 2005b, c). The strength of the G33's argument, and the weight of the research supporting it, convinced WTO members to agree to the dual trigger at Hong Kong, 'though precise arrangements were to be further refined' (WTO, 2005a).

After the SSM was agreed in principle the more difficult task of deciding how best to operationalise the mechanism preoccupied G33 members. In order to develop and substantiate its position, the G33 sought out the research and technical trade-related expertise of South Centre and ICTSD. This partnership is important to note because it is not possible to assign the research conducted at this stage to a single organisation; key personnel working for South Centre,

including Luisa Bernal, partnered with experts on the roster at ICTSD and circulated research through ICTSD outlets. Most significantly, South Centre (eg. 2009a) and ICTSD (eg. Valdes and Foster, 2005 and Montemayor, 2008) collaborated and pooled their expertise to conduct extensive appraisals of the potential impacts of the various SSM proposals placed on the negotiating table since 2006.

South Centre and ICTSD researchers worked together to develop a methodology for the identification of products to be covered by the SSM (Bernal, 2005). In-country field testing of the methodology in six G33 Countries – Barbados, Honduras, Kenya, Pakistan, Peru and Sri Lanka – was then conducted (ICTSD, 2005b). Additional studies took place in 2006 and 2007 and formed the basis for G33 special products lists in WTO negotiations (Mably, 2009). Notably, this methodology and in-country field testing encouraged broad-based, multi-stakeholder dialogues within G33 countries. Local researchers, trade officials and academics were brought together to consult with farmers and civil society organisations at the local and sub-national levels to discuss import sensitivities and the potential impacts of further liberalisation. National positions were based on a much wider range of input, research and expertise than they would have been in the absence of the methodology developed by South Centre and ICTSD, thereby enhancing the evidentiary basis of G33 members' positions in negotiations.

In addition to the methodology developed to help developing countries determine SSM product coverage, researchers from South Centre and ICTSD developed a simulation exercise designed to evaluate the impact of various SSM proposals on G33 members (Montemayor, 2007). The findings of the report (ICTSD 2007) were reflected in numerous G33 communications and submissions to the WTO on trigger mechanisms and remedies between 2008 and 2010 (eg. WTO, 2010b, c). In particular, the simulation highlights the superiority of price-based triggers and claims that the usefulness of an SSM will be small if some countries are limited in their ability to exceed bound tariff levels agreed to during the Uruguay Round or during WTO accession negotiations.

Despite the important research conducted by various international organisations and utilised by the G33, the question of how best to operationalise the SSM did not arrive on the DDA table until the 2008 mini-ministerial in Geneva. Trade ministers representing approximately 30 WTO members were gathered to hammer out the core outstanding issues in the DDA in green room negotiations. Slow and difficult progress in this forum prompted Director-General Pascal Lamy to organise a series of smaller, closed door meetings with the 'G7' that included major traders (China, EU, US) and representatives of the agricultural coalitions (Brazil for G20, India for G33, Japan for G10 and Australia for the Cairns Group). After nine days of intensive talks, negotiations collapsed when no agreement could be reached on the SSM. Although the collapse has been attributed to technicalities and a conflict of interest between the US and India, it was fundamental and normative North-South and South-South disagreements over the overarching

principles and purpose of the SSM that caused negotiations to collapse. This battle remains deeply entrenched today.

The 2008 mini-ministerial was the first time the operationalisation of the SSM and the commercial implications of such a mechanism had been discussed in a serious way by WTO members outside of the G33 (Wolfe, 2009). Meanwhile, the G33 came armed with a very deep knowledge base and well-supported demands for an easily operated mechanism; this was, in large part, supported by research provided by South Centre and ICTSD. However, negotiations centred on several intractable issues.

First, there was a general concern that countries such as China and India would abuse the SSM in the name of other, much poorer and import-sensitive developing countries. There was also concern that universal product coverage for the SSM and limited developing country capacity to monitor import surges and price fluctuations would lead them to be ‘trigger-happy’ while using the SSM. In order to limit abuse, conditions and transparency provisions were proposed. For example, the APU – Argentina, Paraguay and Uruguay – actively sought to restrict the SSM by introducing stringent transparency conditions and very restricted coverage. The APU also sought to eliminate recourse to the SSM on any product originating from other developing countries, and exclude to Free Trade Areas and Customs Unions from the calculation of volume and price triggers. The other issues stem directly from both developed and developing agricultural exporters’ concerns about whether remedies can exceed pre-Doha bound rates and, if so, under what circumstances.

Following the advice provided by South Centre and ICTSD, the G33 has ardently opposed such restrictions and conditions as attempts to make the mechanism unnecessarily burdensome and, arguably, more burdensome than the SSG available to developed countries. The G33 aims to secure a more flexible mechanism than the SSG in light of the fact that it is meant to address the development concerns of the world’s poorest people.

At Hong Kong, WTO members agreed that developing countries should have recourse to both price-based and volume-based SSMs. However, negotiations have centred largely on a volume-based SSM, much to the dismay of G33 members since they view a price-based SSM as ‘an indispensable trade remedy for most developing countries’ (WTO, 2008g; WTO, 2010d). It is the position of the G33 that developing countries must be permitted to breach pre-Doha bound rates in the face of volume import surges OR price declines (WTO, 2010a, d; South Centre, 2009a). Moreover, the G33 has used comparative research conducted by South Centre to demonstrate that a restrictive SSM would perpetuate unfair terms of trade in global trade because the conditions for use would be more stringent for the SSM than they are for the SSG (WTO, 2010a; South Centre 2009b). The G33 has time and again made calls for ‘universal access’ of all agricultural tariff lines, without restrictions including trigger thresholds (WTO, 2010d).



Disagreement over these technical issues reveals much deeper and substantive disagreements over the actual purpose of the SSM within the context of DDA negotiations. First, there is disagreement about whether these negotiations are part of a broader agenda to further liberalise international trade and open up agricultural markets in the developing world. Second, the G33 views the SSM as necessary to protect poor and very vulnerable farmers in import-sensitive countries against the price and market distortions caused by domestic support in developed countries. According to this logic, the SSM should respond to any market disruptions, be available for all products (regardless of when they were liberalised) and should be simple to use with low triggers and powerful remedies.

By contrast, developed country and developing country agricultural exporters alike, consider the SSM as a ‘time-bound means’ to encourage liberalisation in developing countries. Export-led growth is viewed as an essential step on the path to development and so the clock must not be turned back on the liberalisation achieved in previous rounds of multilateral trade negotiations. Therefore, the SSM should be designed to address market disruptions that occur as a result of further liberalisation only. Finally, and perhaps most significantly, there is serious concern about an SSM contracting South-South trade. Key developing country exporters such as Argentina, Paraguay and Uruguay are not keen on an SSM that applies to their products because this would stunt their own export-led growth agenda.

There has been no substantive change in SSM negotiations since the impasse was reached in 2008. While several new G33 proposals have been placed on the table, particularly following the Bali ministerial (eg. WTO, 2013) and in advance of the Nairobi ministerial (eg WTO, 2015c), WTO members are unwilling to open the SSM box in the context of multilateral trade negotiations (Montemayor, 2016). At Nairobi for example, WTO members simply re-affirmed the right of developing countries ‘to have recourse to a special safeguard mechanism’ agreed upon in 2005 without making any attempt at convergence in the negotiations (WTO, 2015d). With the effective abandonment of the development agenda, there is little prospect that this issue will be addressed at the WTO in the near future (Wilkinson, Hannah and Scott, 2016).

Working from within the trade landscape and through everyday acts of knowledge production and dissemination, South Centre worked in collaboration with other IOs to operationalise the concept of policy space and to develop a counter-narrative on safeguarding food security, rural livelihood and rural development in import sensitive countries. It did so in ways that ultimately unsettled the underlying power and knowledge dynamics of global trade but failed to produce any real change in the rules of the game. This impasse boils down to a normative disagreement over the value of export-led growth as a path to development in the global South. Discord over inequalities and unfair terms of trade is likely to persist so long as developed countries have access to a flexible SSG while developing countries are denied access to such policy space.

There is no doubt, however, that South Centre will continue to act as a transformative IO, helping developing countries advance, research and support policy ideas that push back against entrenched global inequalities.

## *Conclusion*

This paper has sought to make three interventions. First, it has suggested the need for a greater focus on the nature of resistance within IPE. Second, and in pursuit of fulfilling that objective, it has set out a typology of resistance using four ideal types: neoliberal IOs; embedded IOs; transformative IOs; and revolutionary IOs. Taken together these provide a spectrum of activity that helps to elucidate the ways in which resistance is played out within global governance. Third, the paper has suggested the institutions involved in acts of resistance are not only NGOs, as is frequently the assumption made in the literature. Instead, we argued that intergovernmental organisations are also important actors in the area of resistance, and may enjoy a unique position in this endeavour. In particular, we showed how policy is impacted by everyday knowledge production and dissemination by IOs to developing countries and LDCs.

Indeed, the exploration of the role of South Centre and UNCTAD point to the dynamism of these organisations as they react to broader developments within the international system, becoming producers, amplifiers and incubators for particular kinds of trade-related knowledge. The point of articulating the set of ideal types above is not to enable a rigid assigning of IOs into these groups. Rather it is to illuminate and theorise the conceptual space between co-optation and revolution that has thus far been neglected in dominant thinking about the role of IOs in governing the global economy. When exploring global governance as it is actually played out, we must avoid merely revealing what our theories precondition us to see (Weiss and Wilkinson, 2014).

South Centre, and to a lesser extent UNCTAD, have been understudied to date. South Centre has been almost totally absent from academic attention, despite being an important source of ideas, a number of which made their way into the DDA, of advocacy for development concerns and of coordination of developing country groups. It is instructive to contrast the scholarly attention given to the impact of civil society groups in the wake of the Battle of Seattle, which was ultimately of limited duration and effect, with the behind-the-scenes work of the likes of South Centre, which has been almost entirely overlooked. Likewise, though to a lesser extent, the effect of UNCTAD on the global trade system remains obscure, perhaps as a legacy of UNCTAD's failure as a negotiating arena and its prolonged crisis. Both organisations and their interlocutors deserve greater scholarly attention.

One avenue of future research lies in mapping the complex network of IOs, both state and non-state, that are involved in knowledge production and resistance. IGOs and NGOs increasingly collaborate in the provision of expert knowledge to developing and least developed countries.

Scholars should unpack the dynamic interplay between IOs in order to better understand the potential for IOs to create, disseminate and challenge conventional wisdom about trade and development.

By noting the multiple, simultaneous and overlapping identities and types of resistance being exercised by organisations such as UNCTAD and South Centre, we should also become attuned to the existence, action and evolution of discrete groups of actors or individuals responsible for influencing and disseminating ideas. While it is beyond the scope of this paper to track the activities of particular, networked individuals as they move within and between positions of influence in the global trade system, future research should also pay close attention to the everyday craft of trade experts and the ways in which they are constructing and contesting trade knowledge and practice, as Murphy and Yates (2009) have done in the field of standard setting.

All of this is to say that resistance is not futile, but much more work needs to be done in the corners of global governance where conceptual light is dimmest.

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