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Abstract
The literature on civil society interaction with European trade policy-making limits its analysis on Brussels-based campaigning and finds low impact levels. At the same time, the EU identifies global civil society as one factor of explaining the stalling of trade negotiations with African, Caribbean and Pacific countries. The paper presents a case study of NGO campaigns on the EU-West African trade negotiations to suggest that the growing complexity of global governance presents the same political opportunities for non-state actor participation in trade as they have been shown to skilfully use in other policy domains. It concludes that political economy studies should integrate insights from the transnational activism literature in order to better grasp the effects of ongoing globalisations on trade policy-making.

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Trade
Non-State Actors
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Activists beyond Brussels:
Transnational NGO Strategies on EU-West African Trade Negotiations

I) Introduction
On 26 February 2008, a high-ranking European Commission official identified the European Union (EU)’s ongoing trade negotiations with Africa as “a public relations disaster for the Brussels bureaucracy” during a conference on the Lisbon Treaty and poverty alleviation (Cronin, 2008). Maintaining that the so-called Economic Partnership Agreements (EPA) are positive tools for development, the official admitted that lobbying efforts of anti-poverty activists, which perceive EPAs as harmful, had caused the EU difficulties in pursuing its negotiating agenda with African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) countries. In the future, the official explained, the Commission needed to take non-governmental organisations (NGO) in poor countries “more seriously” (Cronin, 2008).

To the literature on the political economy of trade, the assessment comes as a surprise. Recent analytical studies of European trade policy find that despite good access to decision-makers and in the absence of counter-lobbying from corporate interests, NGOs fail to influence EU trade policy choices in a meaningful way (Dür and DeBièvre, 2007; Young and Peterson, 2006). NGO participants criticise the ‘Civil Society Dialogue’, launched by the Directorate-General (DG) for Trade in 1998 as a remedy for its perceived alienation from the wider public, as a briefing rather than a dialogue that lacks a link with policy-making and remains too Brussels-centred (Slob and Smakman, 2006; Bizarri and Iossa, 2007). Nonetheless, the official’s statement implies that activists have developed strategies that go beyond Commission-centred approaches and that they are more effective than Brussels-based advocacy.

While this may look like a novel phenomenon to political economy, from the vantage point of the literature on ‘transnational activism’ or ‘global civil society’, the observation that NGOs successfully pursue policy goals across national divides and therefore appear as ‘activists beyond Brussels’ is
positively unsurprising (Risse-Kappen, 1995; Keck and Sikkink, 1998; della Porta and Tarrow, 2005).

Building on the transnational activism literature, I present a case study of NGO strategies on EU-West African trade negotiations. I use data that I collected during field research in Dakar and Geneva between April and December 2009. My main sources are personal interviews with trade officials and activists, official publications and media sources. Because I focus on transnational NGO advocacy geared at the West African side of the EPA negotiating table, I do not include evidence from internal EU trade policy-making other than to establish how NGOs failed to reach their goals by lobbying the European policy process. Global South NGOs enter my analysis in as far as they are relevant for the implementation of global North NGO strategies. I refer to data from the broader EPA context where it is relevant for the West African context also.

My case study suggests that the increasingly globalised and networked nature of world politics today allows NGOs to create political opportunity for influencing outcomes even in previously exclusive policy domains such as trade. Despite diagnosing a lack of NGO influence on the EPA process, Dür and De Bièvre (2007) note that a final verdict cannot be spoken until the agreements are concluded. This remains true as negotiations continue throughout the year 2010. Beyond obvious limits to assessing a process in motion, my data reveals that a full analysis of NGO EPA campaigns needs to take account of the fact that EPA negotiations present classical two-level games where outcomes on the international level are connected with the domestic policy processes of all negotiating parties (Putnam, 1988). In addition to the various European policy levels, EPAs depend on the positions that emerge from the ACP group, where domestic stakeholders equally compete for influence in trade policy-making. This gives NGOs multiple opportunities to pursue their goals within all affected domestic systems and to enter into transnational coalitions with political allies on all sides of the table.
The EU is a central actor in the global trading system due to its market size and leading role in global trade governance (Paemen and Bensch, 1995; Smith, 2001). At the same time, trade is one of the oldest and most successfully integrated policy areas of the EU (Young, 2000; Meunier and Nicolaïdis, 2001). Due to the internal complexity of EU multilevel decision-making, Member States’ power, preferences, institutional arrangements and policy agendas have an impact on EU trade policies (Meunier, 2005). Meunier asserts that “it is time finally to ask how the process of integration affected outsiders and the EU’s own position in the world political and economic system” (Meunier, 2005:14). Bearing in mind the political opportunities that ‘multilevel polities’ create for non-state actors (Sikkink, 2005), my case study suggests that insights from the transnational activism literature can contribute to our understanding of the political economy of trade.

In the quoted statement, the Commission official referred to the specific context of North-South trade agreements. In terms of relations with the global South, Van Reisen (1999) identifies trade as “arguably the most important policy area influencing the developing countries over which the European Union has competency” (Van Reisen, 1999: 129). Holland (2002) points out that conflicting policy agendas in EU Member States and Commission DGs make negotiating trade agreements with the EU a complex process. The fact that “the tension between global trade liberalization for exports and internal market protection remain an undeniable part of Europe’s policy equation” equally leads to inconsistencies in EU foreign policy (Holland, 2002: 143). In addition, the role of preferential trade agreements (PTA) in a development context, such as the EPAs, is ambivalent. The question of trade creation, which occurs when a PTA member replaces domestic products with cheaper goods from a PTA partner, and trade diversion, which occurs when a PTA partner replaces cheaper goods produced outside of the union with products from a PTA partner, is one problematic element (Browne, 1999). Tariff revenue loss due to trade liberalisation, which is often substantial in Southern countries, is another contentious issue (Browne, 1999: 97-101). Finally, Browne (1999) highlights sustainability issues arising from trade liberalisation in its current form (Brown, 1999: 151). All aspects create inherent tensions and
contradictions in the negotiations of North-South trade agreements between the EU and ACP countries that can be explored by NGOs to create the political opportunity for influencing policy outcomes in multilevel governance structures (Gamson and Meyer, 1996).

In sum, NGOs can explore policy tensions for the purpose of pursuing their goals with actors across a broad spectrum of multilevel trade governance, including the European Commission, EU Member States and ACP countries. Unlike in the field of development policy, transnational NGO activities have attracted relatively little attention in the trade literature. In this paper, I demonstrate how the analytical tools from transnational studies can explain dynamics in EU-West African trade negotiations that escape the traditional political economy approach to trade policy-making and point to the existence of new sources of influence in world politics instead. Section II provides an overview of the existing political economy literature on NGO interaction with European trade policy with its focus on Brussels-based lobbying. Section III presents the analytical tools of transnational activism studies while emphasising its insights on political opportunity structure. Section IV applies the lens to NGO strategies pursued during the West African EPA campaign. Section V concludes.

II) Brussels-based lobbying and its discontents
Conventional accounts of trade policy-making deny civil society organisations meaningful influence. Woolcock (2005) finds that the Civil Society Dialogue between the European Commission and the NGO community does not have any discernable impact on trade politics. Young and Peterson’s (2006) verdict is more optimistic, describing a ‘new trade politics’ that has emerged with the establishment of the WTO. It is characterised by three elements. As a consequence of low tariff barriers and in order to liberalise service trade and international investment flows, trade politics have started to regulate traditionally non-related policy areas through the introduction of behind-the-border rules, such as technical standards, health, environmental protection, social standards etc. Second, with the advent of the WTO, developing countries have risen to visibility as influential
actors in global trade policy. The third element is the rise of new actors, namely parliaments, non-trade agencies and NGOs. Young and Peterson present these developments as interrelated. With regard to the traditional paradigm according to which trade liberalisation hurts the few (import-competing industries) and benefits the many (exporting industries, user industries and consumers), the authors point out that this cost-benefit distribution was transformed as domestic rules became affected by trade policy. When trade rules started hampering environmental protection efforts or countries’ abilities to deal with health risks, for example, the traditional view that trade policy was merely about the global distribution of profits and had no repercussions on other regulatory domains started to be challenged by non-traditional actors. Nonetheless, the authors argue that shifts in EU trade policy positions predominantly emanate from changing views at the highest political level about the purpose and priorities of trade policy and do not result from the advocacy of consumer, environmental or development NGOs (Young and Peterson, 2006).

A study by Mohr et al. (2005) has shown that business associations invest more of their resources into lobbying the European level than trade unions and NGOs do. Furthermore, while business associations engage more in network-based lobbying, NGOs spend the majority of their resources on advocacy geared at the broader public. However, all groups adopt networking strategies to exploit the existence of expert knowledge and personal contacts, as well as public strategies aiming to influence public opinion (Mohr et al., 2005). Examining EPA negotiations, Dür and De Bièvre’s (2007) find that even in the absence of counter-lobbying from business associations and despite goods access to Commission officials through the Civil Society Dialogue, development NGOs have been unable to alter the negotiating positions of the EU in the course of negotiations from their launch in 2002 to the cut off point of the analysis in 2006. Dür and De Bièvre argue that the failure stems from the fact that NGOs represent relatively unorganised interests that are not motivated by immediate economic pay-off. This is thought to lead to difficulties in adopting effective strategies in the long run. In general, as concentrated gains and losses mainly affect importing and
exporting interests, scholars presume corporate agents to hold a monopoly of influence over trade policy-making (Frieden and Rogowski, 1996). Ultimately, NGOs do not dispose of the information about constituency-preferences or market conditions that would be useful in affecting a political actor’s chances for re-election or re-appointment and retain ‘inclusion without influence’ in the trade policy process (Dür and De Bièvre, 2007).

However, trade policy under the WTO cannot be reduced to tariff calculations, because the trade agenda has broadened considerably (Patomäki and Teivainen, 2004). The fact that the EPA sets specific standards in trade-related policy areas shows that the trend towards far-reaching trade rules which began in the multilateral arena has been carried over to the bilateral realm. This means that trade rules not only have repercussions for international trade flows, but also affect the regulation of areas such as environmental and social policy (Dymond and Hart, 2000). If trade rules are today more holistic, regulating many other things than strict border measures, this suggests that groups organising on these issues may also have taken a more holistic approach to lobbying. An analytical tool to assess this cannot rely on domestic interaction between civil society actors and trade policy-makers alone. It must take the multi-dimensional nature of global governance seriously and take the multiple options for applying political pressure that result from ongoing globalisation as the starting point of analysis. The next section introduces the transnational activism literature as one possible analytical alternative for studying NGO engagement with trade policy.

III) Transnational Advocacy and Political Opportunity

In the late 1990s, Keck and Sikkink (1998) observe rising transnational networks of non-state actors in world politics. Activists that operate in issue-areas with high value content and transcultural resonance seek changes in formal and informal power relations, not only by influencing policy outcomes, but also by transforming the terms and nature of debates over time. These transnational advocacy networks typically promote causes, principled ideas and norms in policy areas where information plays a key role. Their campaigns cannot easily be linked to rationalist understandings of their own ‘interests’ nor
explained by material cost-benefit analysis. Human rights and environmental networks are often-quoted examples, but transnational advocacy networks have also been identified among women’s rights, peace, development or global justice organisations. Groups working on these issues often find lobbying channels to their national governments blocked. In this situation, they bypass the state and search out international allies to pressure governments from the outside according to the so-called “boomerang effect” (Keck and Sikkink, 1998: 12).

Today, NGOs and social movements increasingly foster transnational ties in order to protest, lobby, network, frame their claims, coordinate strategies and share resources (Reitan, 2007). Thus, they adapt to a growing complexity in multilevel governance which is characterised by the following power shifts in world politics: a reliance on the executive and expert knowledge to the detriment of parliamentary influence at national levels, a transfer of power to supranational and regional institutions at the international level and an increasing preponderance of the market mechanism over traditional forms of political decision-making, with a reconfiguration of power relations between the state and corporate actors at both the international and national policy levels (della Porta and Tarrow, 2005). Because power is diffused through the global political system and increasingly dislocated from national governments, collective civic action has equally transnationalised. Della Porta and Tarrow describe “coordinated international campaigns on the part of networks of activists against international actors, other states, or international institutions” in which non-state actors that organise around shared issues seek political opportunities to pursue their goals (della Porta and Tarrow, 2005: 7).

Sikkink (2005) highlights the fact that “transnational opportunity structures, just like domestic opportunity structures, need to be seen as presenting both threats and opportunities” for non-state actors (Sikkink, 2005: 152. Emphasis in original). In order to make the structures visible, Sikkink advocates a theoretical approach which explores the interaction of domestic and international policy levels to grasp the potential for transformation and
innovation in global politics. Crucially in international negotiation, transnational actors “often bypass heads of government and directly engage in cross-table lobbying” (Sikkink, 2005: 154). In doing so, they not only operate within the context of existing political opportunities and constraints, but also create opportunity based on new channels of access resulting from multilevel governance. Sikkink explains that “over a longer term, a goal of many transnational activists is to transform or recreate the very opportunity structure within which they operate” (Sikkink, 2005: 154).

One key factor of political opportunity is the level and quality of access to political institutions, both domestically and across borders. In this sense, groups “do not act in a vacuum”, but “the strongest influence on their behaviour and tactics are the behaviours and tactics of the governments they challenge” (della Porta and Tarrow, 2005: 9). Most transnational activism scholars focus on either the domestic or the international level, presuming that NGOs seek international allies to pressure their governments from the outside. However, a scenario where NGOs lobby governments abroad that negotiate an international agreement with their government fits well with the transnational studies approach, because it respects demands for a theoretical framework that integrates domestic and international policy-making in a dynamic way. NGOs may find their political opportunities to influence negotiating outcomes enhanced by engaging with the government that is more open to their views. If they have better access to domestic decision-makers across borders that are engaging with their own domestic governments in negotiation, there is no reason why NGOs should not apply similar lobbying strategies as when they try to mount international opposition to their government’s policies. In such a setting, groups can frame issues in a way to seek or create the political opportunity that allows influencing policy outcomes in the short run. They can do so with the long-term ambition of transforming the structures that enable or restrict their political participation in a given issue area.

Transnational advocacy networks typically develop and promote ideas and norms in an effort to transform discursive positions and institutional procedures
of governments, international organisations, corporations and civil society (Florini, 1999). In order for these ideas and norms to find resonance abroad, issues must transcend a specific cultural or political context. Therefore, Keck and Sikkink find issues involving bodily harm to vulnerable individuals and issues of legal equality of opportunity to be most characteristic of these networks (Keck and Sikkink, 1998). Price (2003) identifies four types of activities that transnational networks engage in, namely:

(1) agenda setting - identifying a problem of international concern and producing information; (2) developing solutions - creating norms or recommending policy change; (3) building networks and coalitions of allies; and (4) implementing solutions – employing tactics of persuasion and pressure to change practices and/or encourage compliance with norms (Price, 2003: 584).

All activities can help to create political opportunity in multilevel, multi-issue policy domains, such as North-South trade negotiations, because they allow NGOs to present a topic from a perspective that makes it resonate with potential political allies. In the following section, I present empirical data to trace the transnational NGO campaign on EU-West African EPA negotiations. Based on the insights provided by the literature on transnational advocacy, I analyse the process through which groups created the political opportunity structures that made their voices heard in trade negotiations.

IV) Activists beyond Brussels: Transnational NGO Strategies on the EU-West Africa EPA

As outlined in Section I, the complexity of European trade policy processes opens up several points of leverage for NGOs. Aside from the European Commission, EU national governments and the European Parliament hold potential influence over EPAs. ACP policy processes also determine negotiating outcomes since EPAs are international agreements that require the consent of both parties. ACP institutions therefore present access channels to the EPA decision-making process. Furthermore, the uncertainties surrounding the impact of trade liberalisation on development referred to above allow portraying EPA issues in a way that facilitates the creation of political opportunity. In this section, I first identify the NGOs engaged in EPA
campaigning. I show that their European EPA campaigns provided unsatisfactory results and outline the contours of the formal and informal transnational networks they established. Second, I demonstrate how the NGOs’ presentation of both the EPAs and their related concerns with the agreements helped to create political alliances and political leverage with trade political actors in West Africa. Third, I highlight campaigning successes of the transnational network in West Africa that could not have been reached by lobbying the EU.

The EPA Network
The NGO campaign on the West African EPA is embedded in broader, all-ACP EPA campaigning. Most European NGOs that have attempted to influence the EPA process are global justice, anti-poverty or development organisations from former EU-15 countries.iii NGOs concerned with the environment, human rights and peace have organised around negotiations where the agreements threatened to have an impact on their field of interest.iv All groups formulate a structural critique of the global economy and hold neo-liberal forms of globalisation responsible for economic, social and political inequality in the world. In this sense, they defend societal concerns and broadly share values of equality and justice, which ease their integration into a transnational network. At the same time, the belief system resulting from these values is broader than the conventional conception of trade interest with its focus on economic pay-off.

The literature discussed in section II finds that these NGOs have little to no policy leverage with the European Commission. Therefore, NGOs attempted to influence alternative European policy actors and had certain successes with EU Member States’ governments and with European parliaments (Dür and de Bièvre, 2007). The UK Parliament International Development Select Committee has used NGO insights in its deliberations on EPAs (UK Parliament, 2005; 2007a; 2007b).iv The French National Assembly submitted a critical EPA report to the EU in 2006 which cites NGO hearings as sources of information (Délégation de l’Assemblée Nationale pour l’Union Européenne, 2006).v Certain political groups in the European Parliament have echoed the NGOs’
negative portrayal of the EPA process (Socialist Group in the European Parliament, 2009), at times with reference to insights provided by NGOs (The Greens/European Free Alliance in the European Parliament, 2009). However, actors failed to mount the political pressure in Member States to amend the Commission position.

With domestic campaigns bringing few satisfactory results and in the absence of an international policy level which could pressure the EU, European NGOs in search of political opportunity turned to the EU’s negotiating partner: ACP countries and their governments. Northern NGOs connected to ACP NGOs through several formal and informal networks. Africa Trade Network (ATN), for example, launched a “Stop EPA” campaign on the 15 October 2004. ATN is a “network of African social, labour, women’s, faith-based, developmental, environmental, farmers, human rights and other organisations, dealing with the role and effects of international trade and trade agreements in relation to Africa’s needs and aspirations at local, national, regional and continental levels” (ATN, 2008). Stop EPA regroups 164 anti-poverty and development organisations, encompassing national campaigns in fourteen EU Member States and four EPA regional negotiation groupings. The campaign calls for an overhaul of the EU’s neo-liberal trade agenda and rejects the adoption of EPAs as pure free trade agreements. The goal is pursued with the help of public information campaigns as well as fax and email petitions and open letters to decision-makers. In addition to Stop EPA, numerous informal EPA networks share information and coordinate strategies notably via the worldwide web. EPA Watch, for example, is “a common website of NGOs working on EPAs” containing “news and civil society campaign resources” provided by NGOs from eleven EU Member States (EPA Watch, 2010). EPA 07 is another forum in which NGO publications and EPA-related studies are pooled and where campaign contacts are exchanged. EPA 07 covers organisation from twelve EU Member States and eight ACP countries plus seven regional organisations (EPA 07, 2007).

European NGOs fulfil several functions in these networks. They monitor European policy processes and inform ACP counterparts on latest
developments in Europe. As pointed out by one NGO representative involved with the West African EPA campaign, this supports the lobbying efforts of their ACP partner organisations. Through pooling of resources and information-sharing, technical expertise is spread throughout the network. Second, global North NGOs organise regional conferences on EPAs in the ACP. One example relevant to the West African campaign is provided by the ACP Dialogues on EPAs which have been co-organised by the Geneva-based International Centre for Trade and Sustainable Development and the Dakar-based NGO Enda Third World. These dialogues bring together representatives from global North and South research and development NGOs and provide an opportunity to exchange technical information, liaise with activists and devise common strategies. Third, European NGOs assist ACP NGO campaigns financially. The support of local groups through the provision of technical trade expertise and financial resources is important because ACP decision-makers attribute influence to domestic NGOs on their trade policy choices.

In the West African campaign, framing EPAs as development issues created political opportunity for the transnational network. By depicting EPAs as issues of bodily harm and unequal access to opportunity, and by supporting local West African NGOs, European NGOs contributed to advocacy campaigns that strengthened sceptical EPA voices in West African politics. As a result, transnational advocacy proved to be a more successful strategy for European NGOs critical of EPAs than lobbying the European policy levels.

Framing EPAs as a Development Issue

When forced to overhaul the traditional preferential Lomé trade regime with ACP countries due to a negative WTO ruling, the EU presented tariff liberalisation and ‘ambitious’ trade agreements - including free service trade and harmonised standards on intellectual property, competition and many other areas - as effective development policies for ACP countries (Elgström, 2008). Then-Trade Commissioner Peter Mandelson explained to the European Parliament in 2005:

My overall philosophy is simple: I believe in progressive trade liberalisation. I believe that the opening of
markets can deliver growth and the reduction of poverty (Mandelson 2005).

Because access to European decision-makers was blocked, NGOs that were sceptical of Mandelson’s overall philosophy attempted to pursue their policy goals with actors who were more receptive to their world views and causal beliefs. One element of their framing effort was to portray EPAs as sources of enhanced structural violence or injustice in the global political economy and to depict negotiations as unfair. In an open letter to then-Trade Commissioner Peter Mandelson in 2005, European NGOs warned:

The most unequal trade negotiations in history began three years ago ... EPAs ... could unleash a development disaster... threatening jobs, industries, government revenues and public services in some of the poorest countries in the world” (ActionAid, 2005).

More recently, an EPA policy paper published by Germanwatch opened with two questions to the reader. Making allusion to EPAs, Germanwatch asked:

Would you sign a treaty without having the time to thoroughly check its content? A treaty which could have drastic consequences on your economic subsistence and your perspectives for survival?

before promptly providing the answer: “Probably not” (Bertow, 2009). In 2006, thirty ACP and EU NGOs launched the Harare Declaration under the umbrella of ATN. They explained that EPAs

will lead to deeper unemployment, loss of livelihoods, food insecurity and social and gender inequity and inequality as well as undermine human and social rights (TWN Africa, 2006).

NGOs thus highlighted two elements, the threat of increased poverty in ACP countries and unfairness of the negotiating process, as their main concerns with EPAs. By connecting EPAs to elements of harm (induced by poverty) and to lack of access to opportunity (the opportunity to negotiate fairly and, in view of the predicted disastrous economic consequences, the opportunity of development), NGOs framed the issue in a way that made it resonate transculturally. By asserting that EPAs would have negative impacts on poverty reduction, NGOs presented a perspective that echoed familiar concerns in West African trade politics, which is the region with the highest
concentration of countries on the United Nations list of “least developed countries” in the world.

As a result, NGO messages that EPA debates needed to consider the development impact of the agreement resounded forcefully with both the general public and decision-makers in West Africa.\textsuperscript{xii} The NGO network advanced the view that trading freely with the EU would trap the countries of the region in economic dependence and export vulnerability due to the adjustment costs associated with trade liberalisation and the region’s economic and structural weaknesses. Arguing that dismantling trade barriers would produce more problems than it could solve, NGO networks insisted that EPAs needed to integrate a development component (ATN and Stop EPA, 2004). Their discourse emphasised the tensions between the EU’s trade and development policies that have been pointed out in the literature (Browne, 1999). West African trade negotiators and public officials confirmed in interviews that the merit of civil society participation lay in introducing the development perspective into domestic policy debates on EPA.\textsuperscript{xii} After a failed negotiation round in September 2009, West African trade officials publically supported the view that trade rules for development must be carefully drafted and cannot simply rely on the free market principle. They echoed NGO discourses when announcing:

\begin{quote}
that confining West African countries to the production of primary commodities amount to condemning them to remain locked in the commodity trap (Peace FM, 2009).
\end{quote}

Since West African public officials have subscribed to the idea of trade and development issue linkage in negotiations and pressed the EU for more development-friendly EPAs, several negotiating deadlines have been missed.\textsuperscript{xiii} This suggests that NGOs had more success in pursuing their policy goals when working through transnational networks that clearly presented their case as a development issue to West African trade decision-makers than through Brussels-based advocacy.

\textit{Transnational Campaigning Success}
Considering the pressing nature of the poverty problem in the region, NGO arguments that credibly questioned the merits of market liberalisation for development carried more weight with ACP governments than with the European Commission. Emphasising the development dimension and challenging mainstream views on trade and development transformed EU-West African negotiations because it changed the terms of the debate. The literature has shown that transnational coalitions of actors that mobilised around trade issues have been extremely successful in affecting perceptions of trade issues in the past (Macdonald and Schwartz, 2002). In the EPA example, the European Commission discourse on EPA eventually also adjusted to the new concerns voiced by the ACP. If according to Peter Mandelson, trade liberalisation was an end in itself that had the beneficial side effect of bringing development in 2005, his successor Catherine Ashton saw development as the end and trade, not trade liberalisation, as one means of achieving it. Her statement to the European Parliament in 2009 provides evidence for this view. She defined EPA as:

partnership agreements founded on the shared goal of development that make trade the servant of this objective not the reverse (Ashton, 2009).

Thus, introducing policy linkages between trade and development not only presented a positive lever for NGO participation in the EPA negotiating process, it also striped EPAs of their purely technical nature as trade agreements by shifting EPA debates onto the slippery terrain of economic policy recommendations for development. Since there is no consensus on the best economic policy strategy for development, emphasising the development dimension radically politicised negotiations. It also jeopardised the influence that the EU is thought to hold over global South countries in the field of trade policy. In West Africa, the content of EPAs is now a question of what actors believe is good for development, rather than being a question of how to liberalise trade most effectively.

The EPA network has celebrated other campaign successes in the region. One Senegalese public official, for example, explained in a personal interview
how NGOs influenced the government’s decision not to sign an EPA at the initial 31 December 2007 deadline set by the EU. The West African region was expected to establish whether it was in a position to sign EPAs in 2007 through a mid-term review of the negotiating process. The public official recalled that it was the regional NGO community campaigning on EPAs which insisted that West Africa should conduct an independent review instead of relying on a joint evaluation funded by the European Commission. NGOs argued that an evaluation of whether or not the region was ready to sign, which was financed by the negotiating partner who was pushing for signature, would not reach objective conclusions. The official acknowledged that public administration followed NGOs on this reasoning. The subsequent independent evaluation established that the region was not in a position to sign at the initial date.xiv With public pressure mounting as local NGOs were campaigning against EPAs and the national administration declaring signature premature, President Abdoulaye Wade of Senegal announced that he would not sign an EPA with the EU on the 31 December at the 2007 EU-AU summit in Lisbon (Afrol News, 2007). By supporting their West African counterparts in opposing the 31 December deadline in terms of financial and informational resources, European NGOs therefore advanced their campaign more successfully than they could through European channels.

The EPA network also produced alternative information and inserted it into the policy process. The quality of information accessible in West Africa had a direct impact on negotiating outcomes with the EU. Information was used as a political tool in two ways: first, it was not equally shared among negotiating parties, which is characteristic of trade negotiations. Second, pieces of information that constituted interpretation or opinion of one negotiating party have been portrayed as objective facts. This is particularly true for the EU’s contention that WTO law obliges parties to free trade agreements to liberalise 90% of their trade flows. On the basis of this reading, the EU has pushed for an 80% liberalisation in all ACP markets in exchange for 100% liberalisation of European markets. Civil society organisations have proven this to be a legally flawed argument (Diouf, 2009). Hence, the West African tariff liberalisation offer of 60% vis-à-vis the EU has directly resulted from NGO input because a
West African NGO, supported through the EPA network, provided the legal reasoning to adopt the official position. The key role and the scarcity of accurate information in the EPA process enabled NGOs to enhance their policy influence with West African public officials by appearing as sources of hitherto unavailable information, be it in addition to or as an alternative for the European discourse. Thus, they conducted research about possible EPA alternatives, which according to the European Commission did not exist, and fed this information to ACP governments and civil society (Bilal and Rampa, 2006).

In sum, in order to influence EPA outcomes, NGOs have organised in a transnational advocacy network which exposes the main characteristics established in the literature. The network has identified trade and development as a problem of international concern and produced relevant information (agenda-setting); it has recommended policy change (developing solutions); NGOs built coalitions and networks of allies; and have employed tactics of persuasion and pressure to change practices (implementing solutions) (Price, 2003; 584). Framing EPAs as a development issue has helped NGOs to create their network and to insert themselves in the West African policy process. Since West African decision-makers were receptive to the EPA network’s demands and were ready to rely on their information, this has lead to readjustments in the negotiating process which could not have been propagated through the European policy levels due to blocked access. In addition, by cooperating on EPAs, international NGOs with a trade focus have been able to create stronger ties amongst each other and have strengthened coalitions aiming for the promotion of more equitable trade rules. In line with the theoretical assumption that NGOs seek to create political opportunity structures in the long run, the network expects the new ties and strategic lessons from the EPA campaign to impact on their ability to influence other trade institutions (Traidcaft, 2009). This places EPAs into the broader context of multilateral and bilateral trade negotiations and points to the existence of holistic, long-term approaches envisaged by NGOs involved in trade campaigning.
V) Conclusion

My case study suggests that insights from the literature on transnational activism can contribute to a more complete understanding of what determines the outcomes of trade negotiations under the conditions of a globalised and networked international society. Just because access of anti-poverty, global justice and other NGOs concerned with societal interest is blocked at the European trade policy-making levels, this does not mean that advocacy ends here. Today, trade rules intrude ever more deeply into traditionally unrelated policy domains and are increasingly made through bilateral, rather than multilateral channels. As a result, the international trading system experiences a multiplication of actors and issues. Due to the dynamics of WTO decision-making, lobbying a West African trade official in order to prevent a given intellectual property measure, for example, may not be a feasible strategy. When West Africa is the partner on which the successful completion of a bilateral agreement depends, the situation is different. Furthermore, the expansion of trade measures under the ‘new trade politics’ also means that their impact on other policy domains is exacerbated. The uncertainty connected with trade liberalisation, especially in the context of North-South trade agreements, can be used by NGOs to further their policy goals. In the case of the EU-West African EPA, they appeared as ‘activists beyond Brussels’ by creating political opportunity to advance their causal beliefs and world views with the newly influential negotiating partners.

My analysis suggests that states are still important actors of global governance. However, traditional power sources such as military or economic strength lose significance in complex multi-level policy systems as the quality of information and knowledge acquire new centrality. The West African example shows how framing EPAs as a development issue helped to politicise the debate which facilitated coalition-building with the EU’s negotiating partner. Despite the fact that West Africa experiences severe aid and trade dependence on the EU, Europe could not dictate its preferred trade deal on the region, as most observers would have predicted. This suggests that as power becomes diffused through the steadily internationalising political system, it not only moves from states to the global level and from
governments to corporate actors, as the literature has outlined. Due to the interconnected nature of issues, governance fields and actors, the influence of traditionally powerful states over traditionally marginalised ones can also whither. The Commission official’s surprised reaction to the influence of NGOs in global South countries is testimony to the fact that the possibility of such realignments is often overlooked. In the case of the West African EPA, NGOs have proven that they are part and parcel of this development.

My case study presents two avenues for future research. First, political economy studies should take insights from the transnational activism literature seriously and start asking how the growing complexity of global governance affects trade policy-making. Second, scholarship should devote attention to the contradictions and tensions resulting from the increasing overlap of policy issues as a result of the various forms of globalisations that characterise world politics today. This can create understanding of how they shape the way in which power and influence can be exercised and of how our scholarship can contribute to positive change.

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EPAs are trade agreements negotiated since 2002 between the EU and the group of ACP countries in order to bring the WTO-incompatible unilateral preferential trade arrangements of the Lomé and the Cotonou Conventions in line with international obligations. EPA negotiations have been split into six regional sub-processes, namely EU-Caribbean, EU-Central Africa, EU-Eastern and Southern Africa, EU-West Africa, EU-South Africa and EU-Pacific. These have to date led to the successful completion of one agreement with the Caribbean.
For example 11.11.11, ActionAid, ATTAC, Oxfam, Traidcraft and World Development Movement, but also Ecologistas en Acción, Solidarité or Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom (Stop Epa, 2010; EPA Watch, 2010).


Notably by ActionAid, Christian Aid, European Centre for Development Policy Management, Overseas Development Institute, Oxfam and Traidcraft.

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