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Paper prepared for the ECPR Conference, Turin, September 2007, Section 7 on: “Global governance, a critical encounter: depolitisation/repolitisation in theory and practice”

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<p style="text-align: center;"><b>How to study the influence of business actors in environmental governance?</b> <b>The limits of mainstream International Relations and International Political Economy</b> <b>Approaches<sup>1</sup></b></p>
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## **Introduction**

Environmental governance is taking more and more importance on the international agenda and business actors have been influential in environmental politics at all levels of policymaking (Rowlands, 2001). In this respect, studying business interests’ influence in international environmental politics seems crucial to understand its previous and current developments in this field.

Originally the study of global environmental governance relied on International Relations’ approaches such as analyses of international negotiations and regime theory. Their aim was to understand under which circumstances state actors could cooperate and establish international rules. However, by focusing on state actors, they underestimated broader patterns of globalisation in which environmental governance was embedded, and more importantly they neglected the role of firms in international rule making. On the contrary, International Political Economy analyses took the latter realities as a starting point and focused on the influence of neo-liberalism and capitalism in international politics. More recently, the Neo-Gramscian school emphasized the political role of firms in influencing environmental governance through various forms of power: economic, organisational as well as discursive.

This paper argues that despite their eminent contributions to our understanding of environmental governance, these competing approaches do not explain fully the relationship between business actors and international environmental regulations. In particular, they exaggerate business actors’ capacities and underestimate the limits of their influence. They

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<sup>1</sup> The author would like to thank Prof. Daniel Compagnon -Sciencespo Bordeaux-, and Prof. Peter Newell – Warwick University-, for useful comments on earlier versions of the text. Most of the work done for this paper has been elaborated in the stimulating research environment of the Centre for the Study of Globalisation and Regionalisation during a Garnet mobility.

tend to deny any specificity to environmental governance. They also focus excessively on structural aspects of corporate power. More fundamentally, this paper argues that what is now lacking for a proper understanding of business actors' role in international environmental rule making is the development of a parallel, complementary analytical framework, focusing on the global governance dimension of environmental politics. This paper aims at contributing to the formulation of such a framework.

To that end, it examines the emergence of International Relations, International Political Economy and Neo-Gramscian perspectives on global environmental governance in order to highlight their theoretical backgrounds and the arguments in support. While so doing it focuses on the questions at stake in the study of business in environmental governance. The paper attempts to evaluate these perspectives' explanatory power when looking at current developments in international environmental governance. Finally, it presents the first steps towards a new understanding of business influence in environmental governance using a global governance framework as a conceptual basis. To illustrate these different points and particularly to assess the different approaches' adequacy in explaining environmental governance at world level, the paper relies on the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) as a particular case study<sup>2</sup>.

## **1. A genealogy of the study of firms in international rule-making**

### **a. International Relations approaches**

Understanding the power dynamics in the international sphere is at the core of International Relation's theory. Studies of the interactions between states at the international level have consequently been developed early in the field, focusing particularly on conflict resolution and have been followed soon by studies of international negotiations' mechanisms through historical, rational choice, organisational and even psychological behavioural approaches (Kremenyuk, 2002; Chasek, 2001: 35-38). Historical approaches derived from diplomacy studies and tried to chronicle the emergence of international negotiations (Freymond, 2002). In a different perspective, rational choice theories (Avenhaus, 2002) tried to model the negotiations' processes according to the different parties' interests in relation to

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<sup>2</sup> The case study is based on the review of the literature dealing with the CBD developments, as well as some fieldwork conducted during the last CBD negotiation meetings including participatory observation as well as 30 interviews with key actors in the field.

the negotiation outcome. Analysts of organisations got interested in groups' dynamics and the importance of such organisational structures in the negotiation process (Kahn, 2002). Finally, psychological behavioural approaches were focusing on the importance of negotiator's personalities and leadership in the negotiations (Rubin, 2002)<sup>3</sup>.

However, it became soon obvious that it was necessary not only to understand the dynamics of such negotiations but also and more importantly to analyse at the international level the motives behind cooperation in an international system characterised by permanent anarchy. The multiplication of international institutions in all domains - not just security and conflict resolution- prompted the development of a new framework to understand international cooperation: regime analyses. Such analyses aimed at studying the emergence of cooperation schemes in an international environment characterised by anarchy, questioning the reasons of international cooperation among states. As Vogler reminds us, there is no such thing as "regime theory" (Vogler, 2003: 35) and one must consider how the different paradigms (realist, neo-realist, liberal, neo-liberal or cognitive) apply to regime analysis. For instance realists view the world as an anarchic collection of sovereign nation states, unitary actors pursuing their unique national interests, and largely defined in terms of relative power or security. Realist approaches consequently view international cooperation as the domination of a "hegemonic power" imposing its standards internationally through international regulations (Steffenhagen, 2001: 8).

All regime theories, however, proved to have several shortcomings for the study of international cooperation (Newell, 2005: 21-28; Stokke, 1997; Vogler, 2003). Two of these, common to all regime theories, are particularly problematic in relation to business actors' influence on environmental governance. First of all regime analyses are difficult to mobilize on that topic since they focus on state actors as the main players on the international scene. The liberal interpretation of regime's inception is more conducive to the inclusion in analysis of national lobby groups' interests, in particular with the two-level game proposed by Robert D. Putnam (Putnam, 1988). According to him, states define their preferences at the domestic level through consultation with societal groups including the industry and then try to translate such positions at the inter-state level. But even in this approach states are still at the centre of international politics. This prevents a proper analysis of the diverse levels –national, transnational and international- of private sector involvement in international negotiations.

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<sup>3</sup> These are the main streams considered in international negotiation studies. For more details about other approaches such as cognitive approach, content analysis or legal perspectives see (Kremenyuk, 2002; Chasek, 2001: 35-38).

This state-centric character of regime analyses was amended by studies on non state actors' lobbying in international policy-making (Arts, 1998; Corell and Betsill, 2001). Yet this literature is concerned with non governmental organisations seen as the "new players" in the environmental field. In addition, they focus on the influence of non-state actors in the final texts of the treaties. Therefore they look at the issue of the channels of influence used by business actors only superficially.

Secondly, regime analysis was largely disconnected from former diplomatic and international negotiations' studies, which focused on the meso level of politics. Instead of capitalising on former international relations' studies, regime analysts neglected the importance of actors' interactions for the ultimate outcomes of negotiations. Though, the meso level can be of particular relevance for the study of non-state actors in world politics (Vogler, 2003). Neither international negotiation's studies nor regime analysis really addressed the role of private firms as important actors at the international level. This in turn has been the focus of study of International Political Economy.

#### **b. Studying the firm: International Political Economy**

The interactions between private actors and international politics are at the core of International Political Economy (IPE) studies. This discipline analyses the interactions between firms and states in international relations from a structuralist point of view. This structuralist approach is justified by the focus of International Political Economy on the consequences at the international level of broad economical trends such as the technological developments of the new century accompanied by the industrialisation era and the liberalisation of markets. These dynamics had two important consequences for private firms: on the one end the concentration of all industry sectors in a few conglomerates; on the other side the internationalisation of such corporations. This has been the case even more for industries highly dependant on technological innovation- such as the chemical or biotechnology industries- as well as for the sectors the latter's activities rely on -the financial or insurance sectors being examples. When studying the globalisation forces and their consequences on firms' organisation it became clear to IPE scholars that the development of global governance provided some degree of global regulation but at the same time, that transnational corporations played a key role in the establishment of such international rules. More than former economic actors such as national industries, these new transnational firms could use several tactics to support their activities internationally.

Susan Strange was one of the precursors of the IPE debate on the displacement of authority in the international scene. She developed the notion of “structural power” (Strange, 1988: 24) in perspective with a possible erosion of the state through the emergence of transnational corporations (TNCs) in political economy. This “structural power” encompasses four distinct power structures that are strongly linked together: security, financial, production and knowledge powers. These structures mainly rely on the correspondent resources of state or non-state actors. It doesn't mean that Susan Strange does not recognise the existence of “Relational power”, which she defines as the power of actor A to get B to do something he would not otherwise do, but her main point is that, in political economy, structural power is the prominent form of power (Strange, 1988: 24). One interesting characteristic of Strange's approach to TNCs' power is to underline a new component of power usually neglected by former IPE analysts: the importance of discursive power.

Susan Strange's studies and generally the debates around a potential erosion of the state by TNCs actions have been followed by research on the emergence of international standards in new and highly contentious domains of political economy such as international property rights (Sell, 2003). Parallel to the globalisation of industry sectors the question was raised whether these international rules provide a regulation of business or regulations for the private sector's benefit (Newell and Glover, 2003; Newell, 2003; Paterson, 2000). These studies mainly question the privatisation of global governance, better illustrated by the emergence of private international regimes (Haufler, 2001) - that is to say regimes developed by private actors- but also by the privatisation of former public domains such as international research or by the development of public-private partnerships for the implementation of international regulatory standards.

However these studies were mostly limited to the economic sphere of international governance and mainly focused on the market power of industrial actors. Increasingly, the development of international regulations in new domains beyond usual business activities, such as the environment, required a new framework to study corporate power in this context. This is precisely what the emergence of a Neo-Gramscian theory of global environmental governance is purportedly doing.

**c. Firms as political actors in global environmental governance: The Neo-Gramscian framework and environmental politics**

For the Neo-Gramscian scholars addressing business' influence in global environmental governance<sup>4</sup>, big corporations that have an influence in the formulation of economic regulations also have an impact on the international environment. They are indeed to a large extent responsible for environmental degradation; but also seem to have more and more control over the formulation of international standards. Just to quote a few examples, a handful of agro-industries are nearly controlling the entire world market for Genetically Modified Organisms (GMO) (Dufumier, 2006: 2). In other domains, such as climate change, the use of market instruments in environmental policy is increasingly obvious with the emphasis on carbon emissions trading or investment in climate mitigation technologies. In broader terms, the apparent greening of the business community requires a closer look. Neo-Gramscian assumptions concerning business influence in global environmental governance are consequently based on a structuralist world-view where hegemony, in a Gramscian meaning of the world (i.e. the stabilisation of positions in one domain of international politics), is a central notion to understand global environmental politics. The growing importance of technology and global systems such as capitalism and trade liberalisation, represented by hegemonic states strongly linked to business interests, has strong impact consequences on the shaping of global environmental politics. Economy in that sense is strongly linked with its environmental and social outcomes.

Another fundamental point of the Neo-Gramscian approach to global environmental politics is to claim that business choices are not just about economics and financial decisions but are in essence political. According to these scholars, hegemony relies on three sites of power: economic, organisational and discursive which will be successively and alternatively mobilised by the actors engaged in governance shaping (Levy and Egan, 2003). The way these strategies are mobilised lead to the formation of different "historical blocs" defined as networks between states, international organisations and non state actors. The Neo-Gramscian definition of hegemony emphasises the fact that any kind of stabilisation of politics can be contested via a "passive revolution" –as a reformist change from above- or a "war of position" – as a reorganisation of hegemony through strategic actions on the three pillars of power. While concluding their conceptual chapter on the Neo-Gramscian framework David Levy and

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<sup>4</sup> This section deals precisely with the use of a Neo-Gramscian framework by some scholars studying environmental politics. As much as there is no such thing as "regime theory", the interpretation of the work of Gramsci by Neo-Gramscian scholars has taken different directions (Levy and Newell, 2005: 53). In this perspective, the environmental part is largely apart and is seen as one of the less radical. In the rest of the paper, the expression "Neo-Gramscian scholars" refer to this particular group of researchers studying environmental governance.

Peter Newell highlight three distinctive contributions they make to regime analysis: the question of war of position determined by the ability of actors to reinforce the three pillars of hegemony; the potential for outmanoeuvring forces to emerge notably through non governmental organisations (NGO) and civil society actions; and the importance of the notion of historical bloc as a key for stable international regimes (Levy and Newell, 2005: 63-65). This approach permits to develop the many possible actions firms can undertake to try to intervene at the international level and notably integrate the importance of discourse in shaping corporate power. Concerning their evaluation of influence, Neo-Gramscian scholars recognise that the power of firms is also dependent on their relational power and abilities to mobilise efficiently their resources. Though, their interpretation of business influence is not a pluralist story of interest group bargaining among equals; the broader dominance of neoliberal institutions provides business with significant leverage (Levy and Newell, 2005: 75).

## **2. Field testing the explanatory power of the Neo-Gramscian approach**

New approaches, as mentioned above, are usually proposed to overcome the limits of previous theories and in view of addressing problems and dimensions formerly neglected. The presentation of the different theories available to understand business' influence in global environmental governance thus follows a logical line. Regime analysis was developed to try to explain the emergence of international cooperation while International Political Economy focused on the structural power of private actors and the shifts in authority at the international level. Some Neo-Gramscian scholars recently tried to overcome the shortcomings of both approaches in a broader understanding of the power of private firms to control political decisions in global environmental governance.

One way of evaluating the analytical relevance of international relation theories is to confront them with the current developments of the political processes they are trying to address. This section will therefore look at current developments in global environmental governance to assess whether they can be explained by the approaches described above. As the Neo-Gramscian framework has been the latest theoretical attempt to analyse global environmental governance, in an effort to broaden the understanding of firms' political actions, we are willing to test its main assumptions.

As a matter of fact it appears that Neo-Gramscian interpretations of business influence in global environmental governance face several limits. The first one concerns the use of the notion of hegemony as a conceptual reference for political power in environmental

governance. Two other limits are related to the Neo-Gramscians' understanding of the relations between state and private actors on one hand, and the overemphasis on firms as "obvious" political actors on the other hand.

**a. There is no such thing as hegemony in global environmental governance**

Neo-Gramscian studies focus on the three pillars of hegemony- material, discursive and organisational- as the key components of corporations' political actions. In that sense, hegemony is a central concept in their understanding of power. Neo-Gramscians define hegemony as the stabilisation of politics in a certain domain and insist on its contested and contingent nature (Levy and Newell, 2005: 75). In global environmental governance, what can be defined as hegemony, according to Neo-Gramscians? Going back to the Neo-Gramscian framework, it seems that hegemony corresponds to the stabilisation of world politics on a neo-liberal model, even in the case of environmental politics. As mentioned before, Neo-Gramscians believe in the broader dominance of neo-liberal institutions at the international level (Levy and Newell, 2005: 75). In that case, environmental governance can entice corporate actors, at best, to make a few concessions to environmental standards; these accommodations however have marginal impact on their activities.

This new definition of hegemony has been developed by Neo-Gramscians precisely because environmental issues question the most common understanding of hegemony at the international level. States usually perceived as hegemonic powers have had some difficulties in dealing with the development of global environmental regulations. This is particularly the case for the United States (Falkner, 2005; Vogler and Bretherton, 2006), which is one of the few countries that did not ratify the CBD and sign its Cartagena protocol. It can be argued that environmental governance is going to suffer from the retreat of what would, in a realist interpretation, be considered as the world hegemonic power. However, especially in the case of the CBD and biosecurity, states can actually establish some controls over GMOs at their borders without been impeded by the US non-participation (Falkner, 2007: 29). The Cartagena protocol in that sense is a victory against the free trade coalition of the Miami group<sup>5</sup>, which had to make several concessions when the protocol was adopted (Andrée,

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<sup>5</sup> The Miami group during the negotiations of the Cartagena protocol was a coalition of LMO (the protocol name for GMO) exporter countries led by the US. Its members included Argentina, Chile, Australia, Uruguay, Canada and the United States.

2005: 157). This group then hoped to weaken the Cartagena protocol by bringing the biosafety issue back to the WTO, a forum much more favourable to its free trade interests. However this attempt failed as several European ministries strongly reacted to the coalition's proposal (Frances and de Jonquieres, 1999). In environmental politics a strong neo-liberal internal consensus at a national or even coalition level does not guarantee a victory at the international level.

Moreover, it is the scope of global environmental governance with its extensions in domains such as biosafety or patentability -far beyond a mere "greening" of world politics- that is surprising for those who look at international politics through the lenses of a concept of hegemony. Environmental governance is no more developing at the "periphery of international relations" (Smith, 1993) but more and more has an impact on other fields of global governance. Its legitimacy is internationally growing (Rosendal, 2006b: 274). In the biosafety issue for example, it is the threat the Cartagena protocol, as an international acceptance of EU standards, represented for US exports of grain that led them to make a formal complaint against EU GMOs' regulations to the WTO dispute settlement mechanism in 2003<sup>6</sup>. The panel did not condemn the European regulations or even its right to impose a moratorium but rather the procedure it followed and the lack of scientific evidence to support the moratorium (OMC, 2007). Some authors point out that the ruling might also backlash for the US in terms of renewed publicity on the biotechnology controversy (Raffin, 2006: 13). Neo-liberal arguments are indeed facing more and more scepticism internationally and this can be illustrated by the failure of initiatives such as the International Agreement on Investment (Wilkinson, 1999). More generally, the WTO Doha round of negotiations is full of contentious issues raised by the developing countries on the privatisation of the living and patent issues at the forefront (Rosendal, 2006a: 436).

Neo-Gramscians would argue that their theoretical framework is compatible with such developments, precisely because hegemony is a disputed notion. The examples above concerning biosafety would be the consequence of a typical "war of position" between a European Union and a North American interpretation of environmental politics. Contestations would be explained by the raise of NGO's pressures and civil society concerns on the European continent. However this interpretation raises several problems.

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<sup>6</sup> It is indeed not clear whether the WTO should have the precedence over the CBD as the latter's preamble recognises the mutual supportiveness between trade and environmental agreement. This could be considered as another victory of environmental governance against a neo-liberal vision of the world (Mgbeoji, 2006).

First of all, it does not correspond to the initial hypothesis of dominant neo-liberal institutions. Secondly, some authors argue that such an understanding of contestation gives a top-down character to international politics. A strong and coherent hegemony is put in place by organised elites and networks that are then contested by usually less organised civil society organisations (Amoore, 2000; 188). In general, the dynamics of environmental governance are much less straightforward and easy to understand as they appear in this kind of dual evolution. More importantly the notion of civil society poses some conceptual problems, in particular that it is not a universal concept (Wapner, 1997).

The third problem lies in the evaluation of the limitations to business influence in global environmental politics. These limits are usually explained by Neo-Gramscian scholars as miscalculations from the historic bloc in its material, organisational or discursive strategies; or successful pressures by civil society representatives against hegemony. Aren't there some other mechanisms to explain the failure of corporate actors to influence global environmental politics? Several studies of international negotiations have shown that actors that are usually not considered as potential hegemonic powers –such as developing or small countries- can have great influence on negotiations' outcomes (Habeeb, 1988; Berton and al. 1999). It has in fact been the case for several environmental agreements, the CBD and its Cartagena protocol for example, which have been put on the agenda by developing countries (Arts, 1998: 197; Steffenhagen, 2001: 37). Civil society contestation is poor in developing countries and there were few mobilisations from northern NGOs at that time (Arts, 1998). Moreover, a counter-factual analysis of NGO's influence on the CBD shows that their actions had very few impacts as the discussions were already led by developing countries (Arts, 1998: 200). This is still the case in current negotiations. On the Access and Benefit Sharing (ABS) issue, for example, the question of a certificate of source for the use of genetic resources emerged from a strong coalition of developing countries, the Like Minded Megadiverse Countries<sup>7</sup>.

In global environmental governance, where usual hegemonic powers are not leading the discussions; where broader neo-liberal trends are increasingly questioned and where new issues put on the agenda by developing countries are negotiated, it appears essential to question the utility of conceptualising power as hegemony. There does not seem to be such a thing as hegemony in the “controversial universe” (Boisvert and Vivien, 2005: 188) of global

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<sup>7</sup> The LMMC coalition regroups countries with a particularly rich biodiversity. These are Bolivia, Brazil, China, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, the Philippines, India, Indonesia, Kenya, Malaysia, Mexico, Peru, South Africa and Venezuela. The certificate requires countries to disclose the source of the genetic resources used in the innovation process while asking for patent protection.

environmental governance. Neo-Gramscian scholars have been aware of that particularity and tried to introduce the notion of contingent and contested hegemony. However, contestation and the emergence of alternative interpretations of environmental politics do not seem to rely only on civil society actions. A framework corresponding better to the complex dynamics of environmental politics might need another conceptual reference, such as a global governance framework, instead of stretching the notion of hegemony into a pretty loose interpretation.

According to a Neo-Gramscian framework corporations are said to ally with states in the creation of hegemonic blocs. Questioning the existence of such hegemonic blocs in environmental governance leads us, in the next section, to question the relations between firms and state actors in the framing of international environmental regulations.

#### **b. The complex interactions between business and the state: the capture of national interests revised**

National policy making is considered the level of predilection for business actors to express their views (Brown, Chasek and Porter, 2000: 61; Newell and Glover, 2003: 3). In a Neo-Gramscian interpretation, the strong links business representatives have with national officials reinforce the three pillars of economic, organisational and discursive power they possess. At least two problems arising from developments in global environmental regulations are however in contradiction with a complete coordination between states and business interests: the construction of national interest on one hand; and business' influence on delegations outside its usual political environment on the other hand.

States/industries strong links are based on the important connections between the structure of firms' production and state production patterns. These links are at the origin of the "competition state" argument, an interpretation which describes a shift of power between firms and states in which national governments perceive it as one of their primary responsibilities to maintain a favourable policy and regulatory environment to attract and retain private investment (Newell and Glover, 2003: 3). Neo-Gramscian scholars are supporting this interpretation by stating that "in the contemporary context business is gaining the upper hand in the state-multinational corporations bargaining process" (Newell, 2005: 34). Is that the case in environmental governance?

First of all, the neo-liberal ideology supported by certain coalition of states might not always be the result of business lobby activities (Falkner, 2003: 84). Policy choices require the consideration of many different aspects which are weighted according to personal

judgements and believes (interview with NGO representative). More importantly, this means that government positions can be decided independently from business interests. A closer look at the elaboration of national positions among the coalitions more inclined to defend free-trade arguments in environmental governance, such as the United States and Canada during the biosafety negotiations, reveals that their positions were not reflecting all their national business representatives' views. In the case of the United States, the representatives of the first two biotech companies in the US, Monsanto and Calgene, asked for government regulations on biosafety to secure the market for GMOs. Government's officials from the Reagan administration refused, arguing that the larger biotech companies only wanted regulation to exclude smaller competitors from the market (Andrée, 2005: 141). Just after the elaboration of the CBD text, in a private initiative, a working group of NGOs and pharmaceutical and biotechnology firms- including Merck, Genentech, and World Resource Institute- was formed. This group carefully evaluated the treaty and eventually drew up an interpretative statement supportive of US accession. This made the Clinton administration accede to the treaty but did not convince the senate to ratify the convention (Raustiala, 1997: 52).

This is also the case for the elaboration of Canada's position during the negotiations of the Protocol on biosafety. Biotechnology firms believed that an international mechanism for the marketing of GMO would be beneficial to the sector; and the seed traders feared the consumers' concerns against GMO products. However, the trade representatives who got involved in the Canadian delegation developed more radical views than business representatives, being worried about the biotechnology sector, Canadian export, as well as patents. For example, the position of the Canadian seed traders was initially to recognise that they were not able to segregate modified cereals from non-modified ones in their shipments. However, they offered to determine a threshold and establish a labelling system indicating that the products were tested in Canada and satisfied Canadian regulatory requirements. Government representatives rejected this proposal since the Canadian government would have been legally responsible for any damage caused by the GMOs. The only line of argument they retained and used against other governmental delegations was that segregation was not feasible from the industry viewpoint (Dufault, 2006: 139). In the name of market freedom, states are able to reach decisions against private actor's will.

Quoting one representative from an NGO, Dufault concludes that the Canadian biotechnology industry is the « creature » of the government (Dufault, 2006: 147). In such a configuration of actors, business representatives might not all be listened to by governmental

delegations. More than intra or inter-capital conflicts which are underlined by neo-Gramscian scholars, these examples show the difference between corporate policies on the one hand and the imperative of market followed by states on the other. The dynamics inside the Canadian and American delegations resulted in part of the business representatives at best having their interests taken into account by the negotiating position of their governments; and more interestingly, in having state delegations radicalising corporate positions and using business discourses to justify largely different state policies. One Canadian representative recognised that the Canadian position made no sense at all in term of future competition.

Another important point, often eluded by Neo-Gramscians, is that business actors have little influence on delegations outside the frame of their usual activities. This was the case during the negotiations of the Cartagena protocol concerning delegations from the European Union and developing countries (Bled, 2007: 15-18). The closer look some scholars had on discursive component of firms' power explains part of this failure to influence national representatives (Fuchs, 2005). The biotechnology discourse is based on several contradictions – GMOs are like any other kind of food but need patent protections that will certify their “novelty”- which confer it some shaky grounds (Kleinman and Kloppenburg, 1992; Champion and Gendron, 2002). But that does not seem sufficient to explain their general lack of persuasive impact on international negotiations. At closer inspection, the focus Neo-Gramscian scholars have on structural and ideological aspects of influence leads them to neglect its relational components. At the beginning of the negotiations of the Cartagena protocol, industry representatives as well as Miami group members thought such a text would never be accepted (interview with European industry representative). This was also the case for the world leader company Monsanto, which choose to ignore any possible rejection of GMOs at the international level and tried to push for their acceptations in straightforward actions that damaged the company's reputation within the negotiation arena (interview with Monsanto representative). In the case of the biosafety negotiations, the aggressiveness of neo-liberal coalitions and industry representatives has been reported as an obstacle to a possible dialogue with such parties (Nevill, 2002: 147).

Moreover, industry representatives do not usually have links with government delegates coming from environment, foreign affairs, development ministries or NGOs composing international environmental policy-makers (Rosendal, 2006b: 272). This is the case at the European level and explain why Germany, that has a strong internal opposition to the protocol, had finally to support biosafety regulations. At the international level, this creates an

environment quite hostile to business interests. At the beginning of the CBD negotiations, for example, business representatives have seen their presence questioned by many delegates (interview with oil company representative). This means also that the topics raised during the negotiations are very far from business usual activities. In that context, following CBD negotiations requires multiple competences in science, law, or public relations (interview with Monsanto representative). Finally, the particularly complex and changing nature of global environmental negotiations does not allow very rigid groups, such as most industry coalitions, to have their positions heard (interview with NGO representative).

Business actors' relations with governments might not always be as easy and straightforward as approaches of business influence in international negotiations assume them to be. Governments do not necessarily follow industry groups' interests but might use some of their arguments to justify their strong positions for liberalisation and free trade. Radical industry groups are the ones more likely to have their requirements heard by these "competitive" governments. Otherwise, industry arguments might find it difficult to penetrate other delegations. These limits in business influence at the national level are linked to the fact that business representatives are not inherently political actors, a point developed in the next section.

### **c. The limits of business actors as political actors**

Neo-Gramscian analysts acknowledge the pluralism of political positions inside the business community, especially among different industrial sectors -the so called intra inter-capital conflicts- but believe in the convergence of policies at the international level, through the globalisation process. Very few studies have indeed considered intra- and inter-capital conflicts (Levy, 2005) while several focus on policy convergence at the international level (levy and Kolk, 2002; Andrée, 2005). The development of global environmental governance has taken form also as a growing mobilisation of corporations at the international level (Le Prestre, 1997: 206). The emergence of global industry coalitions in every policy domains and representing a common voice for business at the international level, has been perceived as an important sign towards a strong and unified international lobby (Sell, 2003; Clapp, 2003).

When looking closer at these industry coalitions in the case of the CBD negotiations for example, it appears however that international coalitions such as the Global Industry Coalition (GIC)—the strongest lobby coalition against biosafety regulations- emerged at a late stage in the negotiation process. The late creation of GIC can be explained by the difficulty business

representatives had to express a common view on future biosafety regulations (Reifschneider, 2002: 274; Tapper, 2002: 271). In an effort to push for such a common position, North American business representatives strongly lobbied inside the business community for the replacement of former groupings (the Biotechnology Industry Organisation-BIO- or the Global Initiative for a Platform on Biotechnology- Gibip-), which they considered to be too loose organisations, in order to create a strong international initiative through the GIC (Interview with Gibip member). The GIC is therefore usually perceived as a very well organised pro-biotechnology group (Steffenhagen, 2001: 157). However, members of the coalition now admit it did not attain its goals at the moment of the adoption of the protocol because the coordination within the coalition was difficult (interview with GIC member). Pharmaceutical companies left the meetings soon after they managed to obtain a special provision, excluding pharmaceutical products from the protocol. This further weakened the internal cohesion of the GIC. At a later stage of negotiations, just after the adoption of the Cartagena protocol, and in view of the mediocre results of the GIC, the grain traders left the coalition and created another lobby group, the International Grain Trade Coalition, since they were more open-minded on GMO trade regulations. At the same time, the GIC also went through an internal reorganisation with the creation of a leading committee composed of the most important corporations and a secretariat<sup>8</sup> (interview with a GIC representative). This reorganisation was intended to help coordinate the corporations' positions and facilitate the administrative management.

The difficulty business interests faced in organising coalitions was not restricted to the biosafety issue. To take another example, the International Chamber of Commerce (ICC), who is supposed to represent a common voice for the business community in the ABS negotiations, has not been able, due to internal dissensions, to produce common statements on important topics under discussions such as a certificate of source/origin (Smolders, 2005: 3). On the ground, the ICC has particular problems to coordinate its actions due to some divergence in lobbying styles between European and American companies. In that perspective organisation of business representatives seems to be as difficult as for NGO activists, sometimes even worse (interview with ICC representative).

Generally, Neo-Gramscians tend to consider that the political role of firms is inherent to their nature. The examples developed above call for nuances in this judgement. First of all, corporations might not evidently be aware of the potential impacts the issues raised in

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<sup>8</sup> The committee includes some international federations such as Croplife international or the International Seed federation; as well as individual companies: Bayer, BASF, Dow, Monsanto, Syngenta, Dupont (Pioneer).

environmental forums might have on their activities. This could explain why industry representatives were initially not present during the negotiations of the CBD, creating international coalitions only during the last negotiation phase of the Cartagena protocol. The concept of “asymmetry of attention” (Nye, 1974) -which describes the fact that more powerful states might be less concerned about international regulations’ evolutions as they feel more secured- can be applied in the case of industry’s involvement in biosafety negotiations and its effect was reinforced by the specificity of environmental governance, although sometimes the latter ran against usual business interests. Political action requires skills and resources that the business sector might not possess such as a good understanding of the politics discussed, an elaborated view on these politics and some flexibility as well as good abilities for collective work. This suggest that more research on firms in relation to their social environment as well as management studies and the consequences they have on our conceptualisation of business as an actor in international relations, have to be incorporated into the study of business actors’ influence in global environmental governance.

### **3. How to conceptualise a general framework to consider the developments of global environmental governance: a global governance approach**

Recent developments in global environmental governance suggest therefore some possibilities of divergence with Neo-Gramscian analyses. More than a struggle between potential hegemonic blocs shaped by the broader structures of neo-liberalism and civil society contestations, the politics of the environment are characterised by a display of different actors continuously promoting their interests and contesting their opponents. From this perspective, global environmental governance is not paralysed by and embedded in broader economic structures such as the WTO, but constantly reshaped and negotiated by the actors to oppose and qualify such developments. Negotiation dynamics and actors’ interactions are central to this understanding of global corporate power. These interactions, between states, states and non-state actors and between non-state actors themselves do not take always the same form. On the contrary, it is the evolution of the positions and strategies of each kind of actors that will shape the final agreements.

The aim of this paper is to shed some new lights on the question of corporate influence in global environmental governance by developing a new understanding of corporate power. It does not mean necessarily that both approaches –the Neo-Gramscian and the one adopted here- are contradictory. Rather, and depending on the cases selected, both provide insights to

understand the overall political importance of business actors on the international scene. Neo-Gramscian scholars often point at the hegemony of business power at the international level; this study would like to balance this Neo-Gramscian perspective on global environmental governance.

#### **a. From explanatory limits to conceptual shortcomings**

Before presenting an alternative framework to the study of private actors' influence in global environmental governance, it might be useful to summarise the different conclusions that emerge from the confrontation of Neo-Gramscian theories to certain characteristics of global environmental governance. These conclusions mainly concern the definition of power used in the Neo-Gramscian framework as well as the methodology it relies on.

Concerning the definition of power Neo-Gramscian analysis focus on what we could call “aggregate structural power” of the firms -that is to say their resources, capabilities and position- instead of considering their “issue-specific structural power”, which depends on the alternatives, commitment and control they have on a specific issue<sup>9</sup>. This second component of power is extremely low for radical business actors in the biosafety arena<sup>10</sup>: they do not have alternatives within the negotiation forum since they do not want any kind of agreement to be signed on this topic by CDB parties, their commitment to avoid regulations is high but so are the costs of pursuing unilaterally their activities, especially in the presence of a general consensus that these have to be regulated.

Much in line with this lack of consideration for issue specific power, another problem of the Neo-Gramscian framework is to take corporations' sources of power– financial, organisational, and discursive- for granted. On the contrary, the emergence of international industry coalitions and the increased mobilisation of corporate resources do not indicate a

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<sup>9</sup> This distinction is used by Habeeb in his study of asymmetrical negotiations (Habeeb, 1988). Commitment refers to the extent and degree to which an actor desires and/or need its preferred outcome. Control is defined as the degree to which one side can unilaterally achieve its preferred outcome despite the costs involved in doing so.

<sup>10</sup> Neo-Gramscians consider the question of issue-specific power, notably in the case of climate change, but in a different way. According to their definition, issue specific power refers to the specific links particular industrial sectors have with government representatives. In that case, oil industries for example, which are working in a sensitive area for governments see their aggregate power in the climate change issue reinforced. However Neo-Gramscians do not consider the broader characteristic of global governance where such particular sectors can meet hostile delegations as well. In fact, this concept has never been developed by these scholars for biosafety issues. In that sense, Neo-Gramscian studies are biased in favour of the study of possible elements reinforcing business influence, but not their limits.

growing corporate influence, but rather the sense of corporate leaders that action is required to protect their business interests.

This is probably due to the focus of Neo-Gramscian scholars on the structural power instead of relational power and actual behaviour of the firms. This implies a focus on broad dynamics and general trends, which does not permit to analyse the mechanisms inside such structures. On the contrary, several factors located at the national or actors' levels can explain the limits of business actors' influence over the CBD issues, such as their absence of links with certain national governments, the lack of unity of their positions and their difficulties to organise and interfere with delegations. This requires a more detailed analysis of negotiations' processes and actors' interactions. Such dynamics will have to be studied carefully in a different methodological framework based at the local, national and international levels of environmental politics and using observations, interviews and inter-groupings dynamics.

#### **b. Towards a multi-level framework**

Considering all these former theoretical developments as well as their limits, we defend a pluralist view of international environmental governance as the result of the interactions between a particular set of actors in the biodiversity field. There are different actors in global environmental governance, which pursue different goals and have different interests changing according to the issues and moment they are raised. International regulations are the results of the struggles between these groups, each one with its own capacities. The power of such groups is defined in a structural way –aggregate and issue-specific- as well as relational way. It is exercised and has different effects according to the varied levels of the political arena.

The limits underlined through the explanatory capacities of Neo-gramscian approaches as well as the previous elements brought forward by International Relations and IPE studies lead us to re-examine the concept of global governance –instead of hegemony- as a starting point and to develop a sociological approach of international relations focusing on actors and dynamics. Critics of the concept of global governance usually denounce the “depolitisation” of the role of business actors in this field. On the contrary, a precise analysis of business actor's actions and interactions in environmental governance based on the theoretical contribution of Rosenau (Rosenau, 1995; Rosenau, 1999) -emphasising the importance of all non state actors in shaping national and international policies- would add constructive nuances and corrections to the Neo-Gramscian interpretation of business involvement in environmental politics. Conducting an analysis in term of a global governance scheme means

to focus on all kinds of international actors, to understand how they lead through steering rather than order, to consider the multi-level nature of governance, that is to say local, national and international; and to unravel the complex hierarchy of power relations and the displacement of authority to other spheres than the national one (Dingwerth and Pattberg, 2006). This framework allows also the use of former concepts and elements developed in the diplomatic/international analysis of negotiations as well as the International Political Economy literature. It aims at bringing back elements such as the importance of political organisations, interest groups analysis, personal links, and relational power back to the core of the study of business influence.

Following our deconstruction of the Neo-Gramscian explanations of global environmental governance from the global to the national and actor level, a multi governance framework will construct the patterns of business actors' influence in global environmental level step by step, initiating with the micro-level of business actors organisations to the global level of international negotiations, through the meso-level of state and private actors interactions. In order to clarify and explain the mechanism of this new framework we are going to develop each level separately and in detail.

### **c. The level of the actor: the contested firm**

One striking feature of the approaches we have reviewed and that study private actors in global environmental governance is that they tend, just as International Political Economy used to do, to assume that corporations are powerful actors, in the same way realist or neo-realist traditions in International Relations assume nation states are. As Louise Amoore explains: "put simply, Orthodox understandings of the firm in IPE tend neither to open up the firm to examine the social power relations within, nor to look outside at their extension into wider social contexts". (Amoore, 2000; 185). Firms are indeed considered as black boxes, obvious agents of globalisation.

The only attempt to consider the context and power relations in which corporate actors are embedded was through the reflection on the unity of the private sector. Neo-Gramscians alluded to it when they made reference to possible intra and inter-capital conflicts. Having considered a few examples of firms' involvement in environmental issues it seems however that many other kinds of conflicts and social interactions can occur inside and outside the business realm. In a more systematic and detailed analysis, these conflicts have been studied by the "business conflict school" an approach recognising that the so called "private sector"

may include a wide variety of actors, which interests diverge when facing different issues (Falkner, 2001). These splits can separate industry representatives developing new environmental approaches from the ones focused on lobbying and business-as-usual activities; but it can also involve differences between sectors in terms of activity, size, or even origin. Some scholars noted also that, more than differences along the supply chain and economic choices, the origin of the firms and their lobbying styles can be of relevance in the construction of business political positions and actions (Coen, 2005: 211).

Taking Karl Polanyi's work on historical and contextual contingency of social action and its further developments in international political economy, Louise Amoore, with what she calls "the contested firm" concept, proposes to study the social relations occurring within the firm, across different firms and between firms and governments. This agenda seems to be of particular interest in the case of firms' involvement in environmental issues such as the ones raised by the CBD. It also proposes an interesting framework in which to gather and further develop former attempts to tackle the issue of social and power relations among and across business representatives. As Amoore suggests, studying the actor's level in the construction of political action reinstates the importance of micro-social factors in the negotiation process as well as cultural specificity of private actors. The firms are no more perceived as inherent political actors but it is the interactions between their economical and political nature that determine and constraint their actions. The last element suggested by Louise Amoore, the relations between firms and governments, is developed in the next section.

#### **d. State and business interactions: towards a pluralist model**

Just as the black box of firms and firms' coalitions has never really been opened, the consequences of such internal disparities and dynamics on the interactions between firms and their broader environment haven't really been studied. We have seen that addressing the national level raises questions concerning the immediate assimilation of business interests as national ones. A possible "competition state" scenario demonstrates how the radicalisation of business positions through their interactions with state actors can, in certain cases, erode business actors' influence. These complex relationships have to be studied more closely. This can be done by considering a pluralist model of the national system inside each government participating in the international negotiations. This would mean studying the involvement of pressure groups in policy formation. Such an analysis would help to consider the interactions

between different political subsystems –such as different ministries inside the national level or the interactions between national and regional levels such as in the case of the European Union (Reinalda, 2001: 20). Developing a pluralist understanding of national politics will help to analyse the cases in which business actors were able to have their concerns heard by national governments as well as the cases in which they haven't been successful.

#### **e. Firms and the international policy processes**

Finally, the consideration of business influence at the international level can illustrate to which extent and degree the issue-specific and relational components of power constraint the actions of the private representatives in negotiations. Each environmental governance problem raises different issues and mobilises different actors that the private sector has to interact with, to have its voice heard. In a global governance framework, the international level requires, as was the case for the national level, the consideration of interest group approaches. However, it will also have to borrow some elements of transnational studies so as to consider the specificity of non state actor's involvement at the international level. The horizontal and vertical interplays at stake at the international level make it a particular environment, with different actors and rules of the game, where an approach in term of global governance could be useful to consider the processes of negotiations inside the environmental arenas. The question would then be to understand to which extent business representatives fit to this environment.

#### **Conclusion**

The understanding of the influence of private actors on the development of environmental governance has benefited from the former theoretical approaches in International Relations, International Political Economy and Neo-Gramscian studies. However, these approaches do not seem satisfactory to clarify certain aspects of global environmental governance such as the absence of hegemony in that domain, the complex relations between business' interests and government representatives at international negotiations, and the difficult mobilisation of firms on these topics. The development of a multi-level framework based on the notion of governance as an analytical concept and coupled with a multi-dimensional definition of power is proposed to qualify former assumptions about business power in global environmental governance.

In term of contribution to the field of international relations, this new framework helps to complement Neo-Gramscian approaches to global environmental governance. It tries to bring some concepts of international negotiation analyses, management and critical political economy studies back into the field of global environmental governance studies. As Louise Amoore puts it, “International Political Economy is itself constituted and contested knowledge: of what we know about the world, how we know it and how we might seek to change it” (Amoore, 2000: 199). In that context, proposing a new way of studying private sector involvement in global environmental governance can help to broaden, qualify and precise our understanding of the processes of globalisation.

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