International trade ties the world together and is hypothetically fair and equal. In reality, it is highly asymmetrical and poses a significant challenge for developing countries. A massive sea change occurred in the international trade regime during the Uruguay Round of negotiations of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) from 1986 to 1994. Developing countries as a whole began to embrace liberal trade policies which seemed to be the only alternative to failing import substitution industrialization (ISI). An historical comparative account describing and explaining this transformation of developing countries’ attitudes toward the GATT is used in this dissertation to provide an alternative explanation for the transition of developing countries from having little interest in the Uruguay Round of GATT negotiations to sharply changing course and adopting neo-liberal policies which supported the conclusion of the Round. Three theoretical approaches seek to explain why this change occurred, including: liberal trade theory (economic reforms), dependency theory (external forces) and constructivism (the role epistemic communities).

The Uruguay Round negotiations were dynamic and heavily influenced by two power-house developing economies, India and Brazil, who were initially opposed to the Round itself. Kenya found itself in a starkly different situation with minimal ability to participate or influence negotiations. These three countries constitute the study’s illustrative case studies. As negotiations progressed, India and Brazil changed course and agreed to the Round’s ‘single-undertaking’ and the ‘inequitable Grand Bargain’ between the developed and developing economies. This subsequently led to other developing countries following suit through a powerful demonstration effect in a trade-off between the inclusion of trade in services and intellectual property for reforms in agriculture and textiles & clothing. While economic reforms began to occur and attitudes began to change during the Uruguay Round itself, assessing developing countries during the Round found that no single theoretical approach can explain developing countries’ transformation; rather each had their own trajectory for their economic reforms. A multi-dimensional conclusion provides the most comprehensive account of this transformation of the global trade regime.