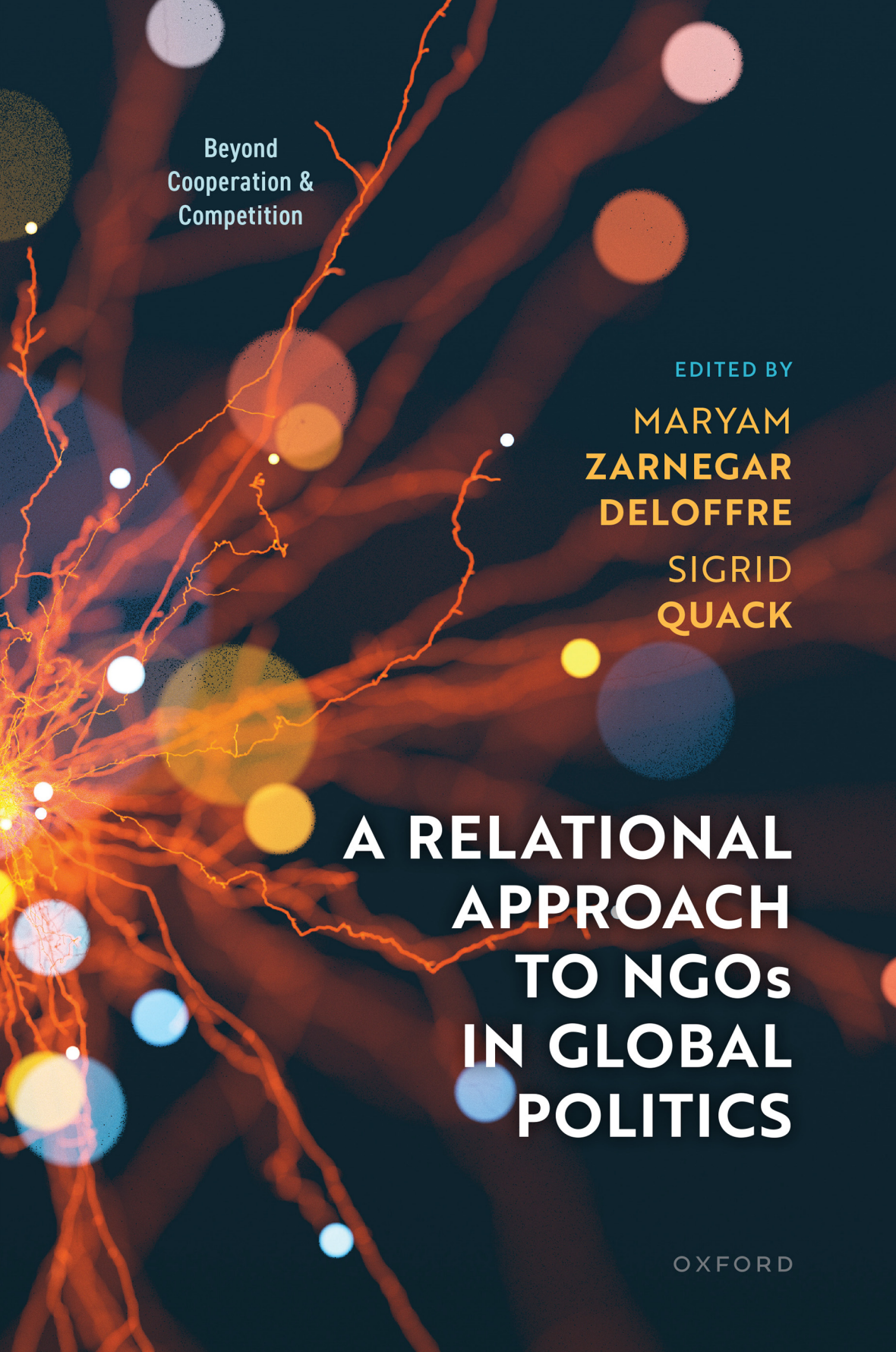




Beyond
Cooperation &
Competition

EDITED BY

MARYAM
ZARNEGAR
DELOFFRE

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A RELATIONAL APPROACH TO NGOs IN GLOBAL POLITICS

OXFORD

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Beyond Cooperation and Competition

Edited by

Maryam Zarnegar Deloffre
Sigrid Quack

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This volume has travelled along a lengthy journey. It is the product of a collective endeavour that started with discussions between the two editors after Maryam joined the Käte Hamburger Kolleg/Centre for Global Cooperation Research (KHK/GCR21) at the University of Duisburg-Essen in Germany as a Senior Research Fellow in 2019. We observed that conversations with colleagues, with policymakers, and with nongovernmental organization (NGO) practitioners seemed to always come back to the everyday activities and practices that enable NGOs to do their work despite the great odds against them. At the same time, the major existing theories and approaches to NGOs did not seem to capture their dynamic, relational, and creative activity. We were curious to probe further and with the support of the KHK/GCR21 we convened two workshops with a thoughtful and engaged group of international scholars and experts from different disciplinary and regional backgrounds to begin conversations on these topics.

We launched the call for papers on the day both Germany and the United States announced the first country-wide lockdowns in the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic. Unbeknownst to us, the lockdowns would be a regular feature of the next few years. While we had planned for in-person authors' workshops to be held at KHK/GCR21, travel bans and social distancing requirements related to the COVID-19 pandemic forced us to move online. We organized virtual workshops in spring 2021 and a follow-up in autumn 2021. We thank Julia Fleck, the KHK/GCR21 events team, and Uwe Amerkamp for their support in organizing these virtual workshops in ways that enabled in-depth scholarly exchange and debate on the volume and the individual chapter contributions. Organizing these workshops was no small feat, as authors were spread across the world in different time zones, from Hong Kong, to Germany, to the United States. We are grateful to the contributors for believing in this project and enthusiastically engaging with a conceptual framework that unfolded through, and because of, our scholarly interactions. Throughout the process, they have been very responsive to our requests for revisions and clarifications and have provided valuable feedback on the framework chapter ([Chapter 1](#)). Franziska Höhne and Jasmin Schmitz provided helpful research assistance that contributed to the successful workshops and advanced the early work on the volume. Special gratitude goes to the KHK/GCR21 research and publications staff, namely, Victoria Derrien, Saina Klein, Bianca Sola Claudio, and Clemens Weggen for their professional support in preparing and formatting the manuscript. We also thank Rhodri Orders for invaluable language-editing assistance.

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benefited from these helpful conversations, comments, and suggestions. We presented an early draft of [Chapter 1](#) at the KHK/GCR21 Research Colloquium where Nicole Doerr provided detailed and challenging discussant comments and Matthias Ecker-Ehrhardt, Katja Freistein, Anna Geis, Volker Heins, Ayşem Mert, Nina Schneider, and Christine Unrau shared feedback that helped us improve the clarity of our argument and conceptual framework. We presented portions of the edited volume on two panels at the International Studies Association conference in Nashville, Tennessee in 2022 and on a roundtable at the 2023 conference in Montreal, Canada. We gratefully acknowledge discussant comments from Suparna Chaudhry and audience feedback from Matthias Hofferberth, Swetha Ramachandran, Mariam Salehi, and others at the International Studies Association (ISA). In spring 2022, Orfeo Fioretos invited us to present [Chapter 1](#) at Temple University's International Relations Seminar; we thank Orfeo and his graduate students for their engagement with the paper and their provocative questions. We also received valuable feedback from several colleagues and friends who read and commented on (sometimes multiple) drafts of different versions of our introductory and concluding chapters, including Deborah Avant, Cristina Balboa, Carrie Booth Walling, Jennifer Brinkerhoff, Dennis Dijkzeul, Nina Hall, Hans Peter Schmitz, Jan Aart Scholte, and Jonathan Zeitlin. Conversations over lunch and coffee with our KHK/GCR21 colleagues, including Maria Koinova and Jens Steffek, but also numerous others, broadened our perspectives and helped us anticipate critiques; we learned a lot from them. Finally, Khaldoun AbouAssi, Crystal Collins-Camargo, Emmeline Chuang, Eugenio Cusumano, Clara Egger, Luc Fransen, Ana-Lena Honig, Hui Li, Bowen McBeath, Jutta Joachim, and Andrea Schneiker participated in the first workshop in the very early stages of this project and enriched our thinking and approach to studying NGO interactions. It has been a long journey; we extend our thanks to all that we could not list by name here.

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For us as co-editors, the project has been one of enriching personal and professional exchange. What started as a professional relationship has blossomed into an ongoing friendship which has helped us sustain the project despite the challenges

of a global pandemic, political unrest, and the trials and tribulations of everyday life. We look forward to many more years of conversations, shared meals, writing retreats, and collaboration. We hope that some of the enthusiasm and spirit of the project will extend to the readers of this volume.

Maryam thanks her husband and her children, who packed up their lives and moved to Germany for her fellowship year, patiently and graciously provided the time and space necessary to complete this volume, cheered every success, and believed in her. The three of you make every day full of joy and wonder; thank you. Sigrid thanks her partner Jonathan for his loving support, patience, and intellectual exchange throughout the journey towards the completion of this volume.

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Abbreviations

ACCMR	Athens Coordination Center for Migrant and Refugee issues
AFLA	Africa Legal Aid
AGNA	Affinity Group of Nongovernmental Organization Associations
AI	Amnesty International
AIDS	Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome
AMIF	European Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund
AOSIS	Alliance of Small Island States
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
BINGO	Business and Industry Nongovernmental Organization
CAFOD	Catholic Agency for Overseas Development
CARE	Cooperative for Assistance and Relief Everywhere
CBO	Cross Border Operation
CBO Soc Partner	Cross Border Operation Societal Partner
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CESCR	Committee on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights
CFT	Contract failure theory
CGA	Charlie Goldsmith Associates
CIEL	Center for International Environmental Law
CJN	Criminal Justice Network
CLARA	Climate Land Ambition and Rights Alliance
COHRE	Centre on Housing Rights and Evictions
COP	Conference of the Parties
CRS	Catholic Relief Services
CSO	Civil Society Organization
DRC	Danish Refugee Council
ECHO	European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations
ECOSOC	United Nations Economic and Social Council
EECMY	Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus
ELF	Eritrean Liberation Front
ENGO	Environmental Nongovernmental Organization
EPIM	European Programme for Integration and Migration
EPLF	Eritrean People's Liberation Front
ERA	Eritrean Relief Association
ERD	Emergency Relief Desk
ESC	Economic, Social, and Cultural
EU	European Union
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
FATF	Financial Action Task Force
FIAN	Food First Information and Action Network
FIFA	Fédération internationale de football association
FMB	Farmer Market Brands

xiv Abbreviations

FTS	Financial Tracking Service
GA	General Assembly
GC	General Comment
GONGO	Government-Organized Nongovernmental Organization
Gov	Ethiopian Government
Gov Soc Partner	Government Societal Partner
GUI	Ground Up Investing
HIGGS	Higher Incubator Giving Growth & Sustainability
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Viruses
HLPF	High Level Political Forum
HRCCWG	Human Rights and Climate Change Working Group
ICESCR	International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights
iCSO	Integrated Civil Society Organization
IGO	Inter-Governmental Organization
IMA	Interchurch Medical Assistance
INGO	International Nongovernmental Organizations
IOC	Inter-Organizational Conflict
IOs	International Organizations
IPO	Indigenous Peoples' Organizations
IR	International Relations
IRC	International Rescue Committee
ISQ	International Studies Quarterly
LC	Largely Compliant
LGBTQIA+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, Asexual
LNGO	Local Nongovernmental Organization
LWR	Lutheran World Relief
M&A	Mergers and Acquisitions
MdM	Médecins du Monde
MNC	Multi-National Corporation
MSF	Médecins Sans Frontières
NCA	Norwegian Church Aid
NCP	National Contact Point
NGO	Nongovernmental Organization
NOR	Norwegian Church Aid
NRC	Norwegian Refugee Council
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
OEOE	UN Office of Emergency Operations in Ethiopia
OHCHR	Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights
RAC	Rede de Advocacy Colaborativo
RDT	Resource Dependence Theory
REST	Relief Society of Tigray
SECU	UN Development Programme Social and Environmental Compliance Unit
SEM	Swedish Evangelical Mission
SI	Survival International
TAN	Transnational Advocacy Network
TCE	Transaction Cost Economics

TdH	Terre des Hommes
TNGO	Transnational Nongovernmental Organization
TPLF	Tigrayan People's Liberation Front
TRIPS	Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights
TUNGO	Trade Union Nongovernmental Organization
UN	United Nations
UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
UNGP	United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
USAID	US Agency for International Development
VNR	Voluntary National Reporting
WANAHR	World Alliance for Nutrition and Human Rights
WCC	World Council of Churches
WGC	Women and Gender Constituency
WWF	World Wide Fund for Nature
YOUNGO	Youth Nongovernmental Organization
YUVA	Youth for Unity and Voluntary Action

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A Relational Approach to NGOs in Global Politics

Maryam Zarnegar Deloffre and Sigrid Quack

Introduction

Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) are a ubiquitous feature of global politics. Their role in global governance ranges from producing and promoting new norms, to shaming and pressuring states, intergovernmental organizations (IGOs), and multinational corporations (MNCs) to comply with these norms; to providing public goods and services ranging from healthcare to food assistance, to technological and legal expertise. NGOs advocate for marginalized groups, fight to protect the environment, and raise the alarm about human rights abuses. Their unique role in global governance is well-recognized by academics and policymakers alike (see e.g., [Willettts 2011](#); [Scholte 2018](#); [Stroup 2019](#); [Joachim 2020](#)). NGOs are carriers of world culture ([Boli and Thomas 1999](#)), force multipliers ([Powell 2001](#)), and vigilante enforcers of international law ([Eilstrup-Sangiovanni and Sharman 2022](#)). The breadth of their activity is quite remarkable given that NGOs lack the resources, capacity, and authority of states, IGOs, or MNCs. We argue that NGO power, authority, and legitimacy are constituted through their relationships and interactions.

The networked quality of NGO collective action has been widely recognized (e.g., [Keck and Sikkink 1998](#)) as a means of leveraging resources and as a strategy for achieving collective outcomes. Building on this scholarship, others have examined how networks are constituted and how these structures affect collective action (e.g., [Bob 2005](#); [Hertel 2006](#); [Carpenter 2011](#); [Hadden 2015](#)). Yet we know much less about the NGO–NGO interactions that produce their power, agency, and authority in the first place (see also [Schneiker 2017](#)).

This volume is motivated by a desire to better understand the relationships between NGOs. We want to know more about their creativity and flexibility. We are curious about the contingency and situatedness of their ability to act and influence, which often makes it appear like they are simply in the right place, at the right time. How do NGOs create the spaces in which they act, despite the invariably tall odds stacked against them? How do NGOs seem to meet the requirements of the moment? Why is the sum of NGO activity often greater than the parts? We believe that we cannot answer these questions by simply looking at NGOs' organizational attributes or

outcomes. To truly grasp the power of NGOs, we need to examine how they relate with each other as well as with states, IGOs, businesses, and other actors.

We argue that there is much to learn about the dynamics of global governance if we adopt an analytical perspective that considers the social interactions between actors as the primary unit of analysis and examines how these relationships and patterns of interactions fill governance gaps, form governance architectures, and produce public goods. In other words, we suggest that by examining NGO–NGO interactions we develop an understanding of the dynamics that generate global governance from the ground up (see also [Koinova 2022](#)).

Interactions are the many ways that NGOs and other social actors, institutions, and norms engage with and relate to each other (see also [Eberlein et al. 2014](#)). We propose studying interactions to understand their power and determine their political and social effects. Stated differently, ‘power is a relational phenomenon that cannot be grasped without first identifying a social relationship’ ([Berenskoetter and Williams 2007](#), 3). A relational approach allows investigation of these processes and dynamics and begins to shed light on NGO power and how global governance occurs through NGOs.

We develop a relational approach that focuses on ‘*NGOing*’ ([Hilhorst 2003](#); [DeMars and Dijkzeul 2015](#)). This is an approach which views NGOs as constituted by recurrent everyday processes and practices of legitimation that evolve within dynamic, overlapping networks. This means that we see NGOs as evolving rather than as fixed entities. We argue that the social category of ‘NGO’ is constructed through an iterative process of claim-making, where one social actor makes a claim *to* NGO that must be accepted or rejected by relevant audiences. Shifting focus from NGOs as things or entities to *NGOing* emphasizes the processes and interactions that constitute their power and agency, rather than assuming that they are ontological givens ([Hofferberth 2019](#); [Hofferberth et al. 2022](#)). Relational approaches thus differ from the scholarship on NGOs that emphasizes their organizational forms (e.g., [Wong 2012](#); [Schmitz and Mitchell 2022](#)) or organizational outcomes.

Collectively, the contributions in this volume show that the nature and dynamics of relationships between NGOs are as important as their organizational properties to understanding their power and agency in global politics (see also [Hadden 2015](#)). NGO–NGO relationships have often been assumed or investigated narrowly, with a focus on one type of social tie (e.g., coordination or cooperation) ([Guo and Acar 2005](#); [Mitchell 2014](#); [Gazley and Guo 2020](#)) or on one issue area (e.g., [Clarke 2010](#); [Murdie 2014b](#); [Egger 2017](#)). We develop a typology of social interactions which considers a wide range of NGO–NGO relations beyond these more conventional categories. The empirical chapters investigate these interactions in a variety of issue areas including climate politics, human rights, social and economic rights, counterterrorism, humanitarian assistance, and environmental conservation. Comparing and synthesizing across contexts deepens our scholarly understanding of the nature, types, and effects of NGO–NGO relations and sheds light on the rich texture of relational contexts in which NGOs are embedded. Taken together, the contributions

point towards the importance of NGO–NGO interactions for generating collective agency and power in a wide range of global political arenas.

The Argument

We argue for more detailed attention to the forms and processes of interactions between NGOs and a broader conceptualization of NGO–NGO relationships to better understand their power and agency in global politics. A key tenet of relational theory is that social phenomena cannot be understood outside of social relations. Relational approaches suggest that understanding the type and form of relationships between social actors is as important to explaining their behaviour and outcomes as their organizational characteristics and the institutional environments in which they are embedded (Emirbayer 1997; Emirbayer and Mische 1998; Hadden 2015; McCourt 2016; Hofferberth 2019; Jackson and Nexon 2019; Koinova 2022). A relational approach develops understanding of the everyday politics of NGOs and what NGO collective action ‘really looks like in practice’ (Schneiker 2017, 324).

Existing scholarship has analysed NGO–NGO relationships predominantly as either cooperative or competitive (Schneiker 2017; Gazley and Guo 2020). The conventional wisdom arising from these studies tends to see these two forms of interactions on opposing ends of a power continuum with ‘like-minded organizations’ coalescing in networks achieving common goals and preserving recognized principles (Keck and Sikkink 1998) and NGOs competing for resources whilst undermining each other’s power in an atomized sector that is replete with inefficiency, redundancy, and overlap (Cooley and Ron 2002; Bob 2005). In this formulation, cooperation via collective action increases NGOs’ ability to successfully advocate, while competition undermines their ability to achieve their goals. Conflicts between NGOs, however, can produce, as the sociology of conflict suggests (Simmel 1904a; 1904b; Coser 1956), productive social changes in institutional rules and human rights. NGO power therefore might flow through more variegated and complex configurations of social ties and practices. Even within transnational advocacy networks, relationships are complex; members might have divergent or competing agendas, disagree on goals and norms, or struggle over tactical and strategic orientations (Bob 2005; Hertel 2006; Carpenter 2010; Jurkovich 2020; Pallas and Bloodgood 2022).

NGO interactions might also generate contradictory social effects. Attention to relationality helps make sense of findings that NGOs are both cooperative (Keck and Sikkink 1998) and competitive (Bob 2005), that NGO activity contributes to both progress and inequality (Banks et al. 2015; Brass et al. 2018), and that NGOs both help and harm (Murdie 2014a; Carruth 2021). For NGOs working in weak democracies or authoritarian contexts, where restrictive domestic laws limit their activities, capacities, and ability to organize, peer interactions become an important means to bypass constraints, creatively acquire necessary resources, and reposition themselves in their field of activity (Mitchell et al. 2020; Li and Farid 2023). Examining

peer interactions also sheds light on processes of collective self-reflection and how learning occurs (Deloffre 2022a).

Repeated patterns of interactions construct and constitute global social spaces. Social ties between actors might build connections over time, node by node, to make networks. Conversely, disruptions, contention, and instability might result in the transformation of social structures (e.g., Hadden 2015). Attending to social interactions thus helps explain how they might result in the various organizational forms observed in the literature on NGOs from networks (Keck and Sikkink 1998; Hertel 2006; Carpenter 2007) to markets (Bob 2005) to hierarchies (Barnett 2017; Stroup and Wong 2017) and how these structures might change and evolve.

We develop our argument in six steps. We begin by articulating a conceptual move away from defining NGOs as organizations to the concept of *NGOing*, a process of dynamic social construction resulting from social interactions. Next, we discuss the relational contexts in which NGO–NGO interactions are embedded, including their relationships with IGOs, states, and businesses. We then develop a typology of social interactions to broaden the spectrum of relational analyses of NGOs. To guide analysis of how power is generated through social relationships, we refer to three forms of relational power: *power over*, *power to*, and *power with*. Next, we discuss four types of effects produced by social interactions: identity, mobilizing, legitimacy, and ordering effects. Finally, we offer guidance on how to analyse relational types by proposing three different analytical entry points common to relational approaches—social ties, configurations, and sites of interaction. Taken together, our conceptual framework seeks to contribute to a better understanding of the contingent, dynamic, and iterative processes through which NGOs affect, enact, and construct global governance across scales, space, and time.

NGOs and *NGOing*

The definition and categorization of NGOs is the subject of a decades-long scholarly debate (see for example: Salamon and Anheier 1994; Vakil 1997; Willetts 2011; Davies 2019; Mitchell et al. 2020). Beyond a semantic exercise, distinguishing NGOs from states, IGOs, and MNCs has implications for how we understand their authority, legitimacy, and power. We classify definitions of NGOs into three main categories: legal, organizational, and relational.

Legal definitions refer to NGOs' standing in international and domestic law. Willetts (2011) traces the origin of the term NGO to the adoption of the United Nations (UN) Charter and the need to create a nongovernmental category of private actor permitted to have formal relations with the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) of the UN. Article 71 of the UN Charter specifies that ECOSOC 'may make suitable arrangements for consultation with non-governmental organizations which are concerned with matters within its competence' (UN 1945), but does not define what is meant by NGOs. Decades later, resolution 1996/31 vaguely designated NGOs as 'international, regional, sub-regional, national non-governmental

organizations, non-profit organizations, public sector or voluntary organizations' (ECOSOC n.d., para. 4; UN 1996). Willetts (2011) further observes that while the UN has not adopted an explicit policy, over the years ECOSOC has consistently interpreted these regulations to apply only to non-violent groups. International law does not provide further specification of NGO status, referring instead to national law to resolve questions regarding their legal standing (Martens 2002; Bloodgood et al. 2014). While international law emphasizes the 'nongovernmental' aspect of NGOs, domestic law focuses on defining and regulating the 'non-profit' attribute, which varies significantly across national contexts and affects NGO activities (Salamon and Anheier 1994; Stroup 2012; Mitchell et al. 2020; Schmitz and Mitchell 2022).

Organizational definitions typically refer to five specific attributes that differentiate NGOs from other entities. According to Mitchell et al. (2020), NGOs claim to act in the public interest, are not-for-profit, independent, voluntary, and structured as formal organizations. First, NGOs make claims to act in the public interest by protecting the welfare and well-being of the public, working in service of the public benefit, and providing public goods. While numerous scholars have demonstrated that NGOs' interests for organizational survival at times impede their ability to meet these objectives and, in some instances, their activities cause harm (Murdie 2014a; Bush 2015; Stroup and Wong 2017; Balboa 2018; Carolei, Chapter 2, this volume), the claim to act in the public interest is seen by most organizational approaches as a common defining feature of NGOs. Second, NGOs are seen as independent from governments and are self-governing, which means they are thought to determine their own policies and direct their own activities. This attribute assumes a specific NGO–state relationship where civil society and the state constitute separate spheres, as we might expect in democracies (Vakil 1997; Sending and Neumann 2006; Toepler et al. 2020). Third, NGOs are regarded as voluntary organizations which means that participation in the work of the NGO is not compulsory (e.g., required by the state). Fourth, NGOs are classified as principally not-for-profit which means they are not organized to generate or distribute profits for private benefit. The fifth common attribute is the requirement for formal organization, which serves to differentiate NGOs from other more fluid civil society organizations, social movements, or grassroots groups. Formal organization requires clearly defined goals, organizational statutes, membership, and written rules and procedures. Such formality is also often an eligibility requirement for obtaining legal status (Salamon and Anheier 1994).

While legal and organizational definitions are helpful, they also have their limitations. Relying on legal and organizational attributes skews our attention and analyses towards hierarchical, professionalized organizations, while excluding horizontally and loosely organized groups. It also makes it much harder to encompass the reality of civil society groups working in restrictive and authoritarian spaces. Many NGOs operate in restrictive environments where governments either deliberately or unintentionally impede their ability to register, establish legal status, or open bank accounts. Government crackdowns in countries like Ethiopia, Egypt, India, and Nigeria restrict or freeze funding, strip NGOs of legal status and licences to operate,

or curtail their human rights and advocacy efforts (Dupuy et al. 2016; Roepstorff 2020; Chaudhry 2022). In these politically volatile contexts, NGOs respond in different ways. Some refuse to register, some adopt informal structures and processes to insulate their organization from co-optation by politically motivated actors, and some might decide to work more closely with governments (Li and Farid 2023).

A relational approach towards categorizing NGOs can help to better accommodate these realities. Such an approach focuses on the actions of, and interactions between, these entities rather than the organizations themselves. The attention shifts to how NGOs are constituted as a social category, and how the meaning of NGO is negotiated and legitimated between the actors involved. NGOs are seen as sites through which political power operates, governing is performed, and networks intersect (Sending and Neumann 2006; Andersen 2015; DeMars and Dijkzeul 2015; Schapper and Dee 2024). This view also implies that NGOs are considered not as fixed entities but fluid and dynamic social constructions—they are a product of social interactions with states, IGOs, MNCs, NGOs, and other global actors. These interactions subsequently shape both how they work and who they are.

In relational approaches, NGOs are the products of the everyday politics and practices of legitimation and they have no fixed boundaries. They are instead constituted by overlapping networks that are constantly in flux and attend to the priorities of the moment (Hilhorst 2003, 4–5). NGO is a ‘claim-bearing label’ (Hilhorst 2003, 7) and *NGOing* describes how organizations adopt and struggle over the meaning of ‘NGO’ (see also DeMars and Dijkzeul 2015). According to DeMars and Dijkzeul (2015), *NGOing* involves two anchoring practices: claiming to serve a universal public purpose and partnering with social and political actors in multiple settings.

We find the concept of *NGOing* a useful starting point for studying how ‘NGO’, as a social category, is produced through processes of claim-making and subsequent acceptance or rejection by key audiences. In *NGOing*, an entity makes a claim to represent certain interests or concerns or to meet a target audience’s needs by providing goods and services. Claims are powerless and meaningless unless acknowledged or accepted by relevant audiences, which includes a wide range of actors including peers, partners, opponents, regulators, and wider publics. Through *NGOing*, claim-makers identify and construct the audience (by asking, for example, ‘Who do we claim to represent?’ or ‘Who do we claim to serve?’), the responsibilities (e.g., ‘For what rights should we fight?’ or ‘What are the audience’s needs? ... ‘What are the demands?’), and their own relevance and positionality in meeting those responsibilities. *NGOing*, specifically the process of claim-making, is integral to producing the power and agency of NGOs. Several chapters in this volume show how important the lens of *NGOing* is to understanding NGO–NGO interactions, from revealing the nature of conflicts and how future claims are made (Carolei, Chapter 2, this volume), to negotiating new organizational forms (Schmitz et al., Chapter 4, this volume), to legitimizing the purpose of meta-associations (K. R. Cheng et al., Chapter 9, this volume).

In sum, by focusing on organizational and legal attributes, conventional definitions of NGOs might miss the creativity, resourcefulness, and relationships necessary

to ‘NGO’ in a variety of political settings and from more open to more restrictive contexts. They might overlook the activity of how these actors shape-shift to fit the priority of the moment. We argue that a relational categorization that shifts attention from NGOs, as organizations and entities, to *NGOing*, as process and practice, reveals the real politics and dynamics of these global actors.

NGO–NGO Interactions in Relational Context

Through the processes of *NGOing*, NGOs interact with states, IGOs, businesses, other NGOs, and grassroots groups to advocate, enact change, provide services, and serve as watchdogs. These interactions are critical to generating their power, agency, and legitimacy and to determining whether they are successful in their pursuits. Given that mainstream theories of global politics have traditionally been rather state-centric, a significant portion of the literature focuses on differentiating between states and NGOs and showing how NGOs influence and shape state interests (Coston 1998; Najam 2000; Young 2000; Brinkerhoff and Brinkerhoff 2011; Gazley and Guo 2020). States have often been the target of transnational advocacy campaigns led or supported by NGOs, as seen, for example, in the campaigns against apartheid in South Africa or against the Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS Agreement) of the World Trade Organization to facilitate access to medicine for human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) patients around the world (Keck and Sikkink 1998; Sell 2003; Baogang and Murphy 2007). In addition to these more adversarial relationships, NGOs also cooperate with state actors to fulfil the demand for public goods left unsatisfied by governments or to help carry out the delivery of public goods in partnership with the state (Young 2000).

NGO interactions with IGOs, like UN agencies or the World Bank, can be cooperative, co-optative, competitive, and conflictual depending on the alignment between values and resources (Johnson 2016). NGOs might compete with IGOs for funding from states but might also sub-contract with them to implement programming and provide goods and services. As with states, NGOs might apply pressure on IGOs to advocate for and promote new norms, issue areas, or policies (Joachim 2003; Steffek 2013). Interactions between NGOs and business are also quite diverse (Moshtari and Vanpoucke 2021). Multinational companies are frequently the target of NGO critiques and advocacy campaigns, such as those conducted by Greenpeace against Shell (Tsoukas 1999; Jordan 2001) or networks of labour NGOs against global garment labels (Soule 2009). NGOs have also increasingly engaged in cooperation with companies seeking to promote and monitor corporate environmental and social responsibility—attempts which according to Baur and Schmitz (2012) can have the unintended effects of compromising their autonomy and leading to their co-optation.

Less scholarly attention has been paid to the specifics of NGO–NGO interactions versus NGO–government or NGO–business interactions (Gazley and Guo 2020). Yet the ‘politics of interactions’ with their peers (Stroup and Wong

2016, 141), in addition to NGOs' capacities and relationships with their most salient public audiences and stakeholders, are key to understanding their power and agency in global politics. Examining NGO interactions with their peers reveals information about how socialization, creative problem-solving, collective action, learning, mimicry, and emulation occurs. The peer relational circles in which the NGO is embedded might influence or constrain NGO actions and decision-making.

NGOs do not interact in isolation but are embedded in a broader relational context where NGO relationships with states, IGOs, and businesses shape how they interact with each other. For example, in highly competitive markets where NGOs rely on states and IGOs for scarce resources, shared funding partners are an important source of institutional pressure. State and IGO donors play a critical role in shaping NGO relations as well as their operational activities (Atouba and Shumate 2015) through several practices, including the provision of material incentives (conditionality), symbolic requirements, coordination mechanisms, and the structure of contracts (Guo and Acar 2005; Cooley 2010; Egger 2017; Knox Clarke and Campbell 2018). Resource interdependence perspectives capture a different dynamic where organizations rely on each other to acquire and exchange resources in their weakest areas. Research on government–NGO collaboration in both the global and US domestic contexts finds the government sector collaborates with NGOs for information, expertise, status, and reputation, whereas NGOs collaborate with governments for funding (Ebrahim 2003; Gazley and Brudney 2007). Our contribution to understandings of the broader relational context is to conceptualize the relations at the core of NGO activity. In the next section, we offer a typology of social interactions that conceptualizes the range of relational types.

Typology of Social Interactions

In shifting focus from NGOs to *NGOing*, we argue that it is not the type of actor, but the type and form of relationships that are key to understanding NGOs and global politics more generally. To identify and study the types of NGO interactions, we develop a typology (Table 1.1) with a range of possible relationships. At one end of the spectrum we place 'divorcing', which involves exiting an existing relationship or refusing to engage with another. On the other end is 'merging', where separate actors meld into one. In between we propose a range of social interactions that might capture NGO relations. 'Disregarding' refers to what might not be perceived as a relationship at first glance, but arises from mutual interactions: avoiding interaction, overlooking another or being indifferent to each other, as well as denying or rejecting issues and frames. 'Conflicting' relationships involve clashing or disagreeing on goals, interests, strategies, identities, or ideas. Such conflictive interactions are characterized by direct opposition or friction. 'Competitive' relationships are characterized by (often indirectly) striving against another to acquire resources that are in limited supply to achieve goals. These resources can be material, but also consist of recognition

Table 1.1 Typology of social interactions

Relational type	Definition
Divorcing	Exiting or rupturing a relationship or refusing to participate and engage.
Disregarding	Avoiding interaction with another, overlooking another, treating each other with indifference, denying or rejecting issues and frames.
Conflicting	Clashing or disagreeing on goals, interests, strategies, identities, or ideas. Actors in opposition or friction.
Competing	Striving against another to acquire resources, recognition, status, or access that are in limited supply to achieve goals.
Co-opting	Appropriating the ideas or achievements of another, capturing or infiltrating processes and systems, or disempowering another.
Brokering	Arranging, negotiating, or facilitating an agreement, contract, or transaction between actors that would otherwise remain unconnected.
Coordinating	Mutually adjusting, harmonizing, or acting in synchrony.
Cooperating	Working together in the pursuit of similar goals through joint effort and planning and pooling resources for mutual benefit.
Merging	Blending, reconfiguring, or fusing separate entities into one.

Source: Authors' own compilation.

or access. 'Co-opting' describes an asymmetric relationship of appropriating the ideas or achievements of another, capturing or infiltrating processes and systems, or disempowering another. 'Brokering' is a triadic relationship of arranging, negotiating, or facilitating an agreement, link, or transaction between actors that would otherwise remain unconnected. While 'coordinating' relationships are characterized by mutually adjusting, harmonizing, or acting in synchrony, 'cooperative' ones typically refer to closer forms of working together in the pursuit of similar goals through joint effort and planning and pooling resources for mutual benefit. We do not suggest this is an exhaustive list but believe this spectrum is useful for thinking about the range of possible social ties among NGOs and other actors. While the typology was developed for NGO–NGO interactions that are at the centre of this volume, it can also be applied to NGOs' relationships with other actors.

The concept of *NGOing* sheds light on the dynamics of these social interactions. Recall that *NGOing* involves two core steps: NGOs make a claim to meet a designated responsibility, for example, to represent group interests or to provide a service or public good, and those claims need to be acknowledged by an audience. In this process, claim-makers identify and construct the audience, the audience's interests, and their own relevance to that audience. In divorcing, the claims of an NGO are rejected by another, and the latter exits the relationship. For example, in Reiners' chapter (Chapter 5, this volume), a group of activists broke off from Amnesty International and founded Foodfirst Information and Action Network (FIAN) over conflicting views on the importance of economic and social rights to human rights advocacy. In disregarding, the claims of an NGO are ignored and not validated by another.

This dynamic is at the centre of the interactions in the health committee studied by Reiners where actors treat each other with indifference. We also see it in Petropoulos' chapter ([Chapter 3](#), this volume) where established, local Greek NGOs work in parallel to large INGOs and UN agencies newly arrived to address the refugee crisis. In conflicting relationships, as shown in Carolei's chapter ([Chapter 2](#), this volume), the claims made by an NGO are contested by another. Survival International (SI) contested World Wide Fund for Nature's (WWF) claim to represent the interests of Cameroonian Indigenous groups and their identity as an NGO.

Competing, one of the most examined NGO–NGO relationships, means actors strive against one another in what is understood to be a zero-sum game to acquire resources, status, and power—a relationship which is discussed in chapters by Petropoulos ([Chapter 3](#), this volume) and DeMars and Dijkzeul ([Chapter 7](#), this volume). In co-opting, one actor appropriates the ideas, contributions, or achievements of another as their own, which silences and erases the latter. This dynamic is particularly prevalent in relationships between INGOs and local NGOs, where INGOs sub-contract or partner with local NGOs but do not publicly acknowledge (on websites, in evaluations, or auditing reports to donors) the contributions, expertise, roles, and efforts of local actors in delivering programming or achieving goals ([Van Brabant and Patel 2017](#)). In this volume, Reiners ([Chapter 5](#)) finds co-optative claim-making in committee work at the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), and Petropoulos ([Chapter 3](#)) observes co-optative fundraising activities in the Greek refugee crisis. In brokering relationships, claim-making revolves primarily around the broker establishing its own relevance to different audiences and making the claim that these audiences should be linked. To the extent that delinked actors accept these claims, brokering can occur. As the chapter by H. Cheng et al. ([Chapter 6](#), this volume) shows, however, brokerage types vary and produce different relational configurations.

In the final three relational types—coordinating, cooperating, and merging—actors acknowledge and accept each other's claims, but vary in interest, alignment, and relevance. In coordinating relationships, actors' interests are mutually compatible, but their relevance to each other varies. In K. R. Cheng et al.'s chapter ([Chapter 9](#), this volume), meta-associations establish themselves as leading from behind through modular practices and indirect steering; they facilitate, but do not dominate coordination amongst members. By contrast, in Schapper's chapter ([Chapter 8](#), this volume) on super-networks, the centrality of the super-network was created through interpersonal relationships between members of transnational NGOs over a long period, by connecting a broad range of issues using the language of human rights and sustainability (what she calls packaging), and by amplifying this common message in all communications. The super-network directly steered the activities of constituent members and established itself as highly relevant to facilitating success. In merging, as shown in the chapter by Schmitz et al. ([Chapter 4](#), this volume), claims, interests, and relevance of the actors ultimately align after a complex process of negotiating a common new identity with internal and external stakeholders.

The social interactions identified in the typology and the broader relational context in which they are embedded are mutually constitutive. NGOs' social interactions with other NGOs, states, IGOs, and businesses produce this complex web of overlapping relationships. Relational interactions might also impact and change the context. Simply identifying the type of social interactions, however, does not tell us about the power-laden nature of these ties (Koinova 2022) or how power is produced or constrained by relations. We turn our attention to the concept of relational power in the next section.

Relational Power

Power—what it means, who possesses it, and how it is exercised—is a perennial concern in the social sciences. Conventional approaches to power in international relations (IR) conceive of power as one actor exercising influence over another through different means. The 'means' are those that control or limit the actions of the other and induce them to do what they otherwise would not do (Dahl 1961). These approaches often view power as an attribute of an entity (e.g., powerful states, great powers) or a possession that is held or seized by that entity (e.g., financial resources). The resulting assumption is that the greater the resources, the greater the perceived power. State-centric IR literature has been rather dismissive of NGOs because they hold relatively insignificant amounts of material power compared to states, IGOs, or MNCs. The literature has also paid limited attention to conceptualizing NGO power (see Mitchell et al. 2020 for an exception). As such, NGO scholarship has focused on instances where NGOs have been able to exercise influence, or gain access, as evidence of their power (e.g., Keck and Sikkink 1998); on the types of non-material power exercised by NGOs, ranging from ideational, to social, to symbolic power (Boström and Hallström 2010; Mitchell et al. 2020); and on authority as a proxy for power (Stroup and Wong 2017; Balboa 2018).

The conventional view of power as a possession, resource, or attribute of an actor underlies several core hypotheses of NGO behaviour. Johnson (2016) proposes that if NGOs draw on the same pool of resources, they are more likely to compete, whereas if they draw on distinct resource pools and share similar values, they are more likely to cooperate. NGOs with weaker resource pools might cooperate with well-resourced NGOs to build capacity, gain access, or improve visibility, but doing so might result in a hierarchical relationship where the more powerful NGO dominates (Murdie 2014b). NGOs with weaker resource pools might be reluctant to cooperate with well-resourced NGOs because their input might be overlooked, their strategies and practices appropriated, or their contribution erased in the public discourse (Moshtari and Gonçalves 2017; Stroup and Wong 2017). These hypotheses reflect the assumption that NGOs are strategic and instrumental actors, scanning the environment for partners with comparative advantages and methodically partnering with those that can boost their capacity to act (Bob 2005; Cooley and Ron 2002; Pallas and Bloodgood 2022).

This book's logic draws on a relational understanding of power which sees power as an effect of interactions, rather than as an attribute of an entity; the question of interest is how power is generated, not only how it is exercised. Barnett and Duvall conceptualize relational power in global governance as 'the production, in and through social relations, of effects that shape the capacities of actors to determine their own circumstances and fate' (Barnett and Duvall 2005, 3). Accordingly, power is not some 'thing' or attribute that can be possessed; it is not the property of an actor (Allen 2003; Barnett and Duvall 2005; Qin 2009; Avant and Westwinter 2016). Power is engendered and produced through the dynamics of social interactions and relationships and is always constituted in space and time (Allen 2003, 8; Qin 2009). This relational understanding of power also means that power is dynamic and relational positions are not fixed: they might be changed through new and different social ties. Relational power flows between these positions rather than being held by them, as such relational power also results from a unique set of circumstances.

Power Over, Power to, and Power With

To analyse how power is generated through social relationships and whether and how its nature changes over time, we draw on the literature to distinguish between *power over*, *power to*, and *power with* (Haugaard 2021; Pansardi and Bindi 2021). These three concepts are ideal types and overlap in practice. Barnett and Duvall (2005, 10) define *power over* as 'concepts of power rooted in action and interaction [and] point to actors' exercising control over others.' *Power over* is exercised as dominance or control, where one actor induces another actor to do something it otherwise would not do. While the typical coercive characteristics of state relations do not apply to NGOs, this dynamic might be observed between a large INGO that directly imposes terms of sub-contracts on local NGOs, which influences how the local NGO operates and the activities they pursue. The INGO makes a claim that its access to financial resources or expertise is relevant and necessary to the local NGO, and the latter acquiesces because of a lack of alternatives. *Power over* might also operate more indirectly, such as when a group of INGOs develops performance standards that are later adopted by donors, the adoption of which consequently changes the operating environment for all humanitarian actors.

Power to refers to the capacity for action and/or the ability to accomplish something (Partzsch 2017; Haugaard 2021; Pansardi and Bindi 2021). *Power to* may be generated through collective action or interpersonal dynamics, as numerous chapters in this volume show (see Petropoulos, Chapter 3; Reiners, Chapter 5; Schapper, Chapter 8). The concept of *NGOing* is useful in clarifying how *power to* operates. *Power to* implies societal actors are socially empowered to act, which means that their claims are recognized by relevant audiences. *Power to* is enabled when claims are accepted and constrained when claims are denied, and it can take two forms

for NGOs. NGOs generate the *power to* influence as advocates, standard-setters, and producers of information (see for example [Keck and Sikkink 1998](#); [Boström and Hallström 2010](#); [Deloffre 2016](#); [Mitchell et al. 2020](#)). Furthermore, as service providers, they generate access to communities in need. In examining the interactions among local Greek and international NGOs working to provide humanitarian assistance to refugees and migrants arriving in Greece, Petropoulos ([Chapter 3](#), this volume) shows how strong interpersonal ties empowered medium-sized local NGOs to act and collaborate. Central to both the *power to* influence and the *power to* generate access are the acceptance of NGO claims by relevant audiences.

Power with is inherently relational and collective ([Partzsch 2017](#); [Haugaard 2021](#); [Pansardi and Bindi 2021](#)) and relies on mutual recognition of claims and mutual acknowledgement of relevance. Drawing on [Follett \(2003 \[1940\]\)](#), [Pansardi and Bindi \(2021, 57\)](#) suggest *power with* is ‘the power of the people united, moving to achieve common ends.’ *Power with* operates through reflexive processes ([Deloffre 2022a](#); [Freistein et al. 2022](#)). [Partzsch \(2017, 195\)](#) suggests that *power with* ‘implies learning processes that allow actors to question self-perceptions and to actively build up new awareness of individuals or groups.’ *Power with* can overcome power asymmetries or deficits in material power; mutual dependence, even with power imbalances, can lead to collaborative activity ([O’Brien and Evans 2017](#)). In South–South development cooperation arrangements, civil society organizations mutually exchange financial, technical, knowledge, and information resources, with a focus on shared learning and solidarity ([Appel 2018](#)).

We argue that to understand how NGO–NGO relations produce effects we need to trace the processes through which relational power develops in particular temporal, relational, and contextual settings. A relational approach helps identify and foreground instances of *power to* and *power with* that conventional approaches to power might overlook. Several contributions in this volume indicate how relations within a specific temporal context produce *power to*. Carolei examines the productive power of conflict in the context of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) arbitration procedure that enables a widening of definitions of claim-bearer; Petropoulos’ ([Chapter 3](#), this volume) and Reiners’ ([Chapter 5](#), this volume) chapters reveal the power of interpersonal relationships in the distinct contexts of the Greek refugee crisis and ICESCR committee work, and find enabling and limiting effects. Appel and Borges Pinho ([Chapter 10](#), this volume), examine how brokering and collective activity in specific contexts can generate the *power to* achieve unlikely outcomes. In several chapters in this volume, we can also observe how relations within a specific temporal context produce *power with*. For example, DeMars and Dijkzeul ([Chapter 7](#), this volume) show how a confluence of networks enabled humanitarian responses on both sides of the famine in Ethiopia. In Schapper’s study ([Chapter 8](#), this volume), we can see how the ability of the super-network to coalesce around a common framework created relational power and mobilizing effects. In K. R. Cheng et al. ([Chapter 9](#), this volume), meta-associational power derives from the interactions between members (see also [Deloffre 2022b](#)).

Effects of Interactions

Drawing on relational sociology and NGO studies, we suggest that the relational power produced through social interactions can produce four types of effects: identity, mobilizing, legitimacy, and ordering. Following [Freistein et al. \(2022, 231\)](#), we employ effects to mean ‘processes through which something is influenced, rather than for outcomes’. The four types of effects are analytically distinct but might overlap and occur simultaneously in practice.

Identity Effects

As [Qin \(2016, 38\)](#) suggests ‘actors are and can only be “actors-in-relations”’ and social identity is a product of dynamic social relations. Identity effects thus refer to relational processes through which identities are actively created, developed, and changed. Identity is defined as the qualities or characteristics that create affinities or differentiate among actors and might be observed in actors’ self-categorizations in relation to others. The organizational identity of NGOs is shaped and transformed by their interactions with peers, states, IGOs, MNCs, and other actors ([Stroup 2012](#); [Stroup and Murdie 2012](#)). In many instances, NGOs define who they are in contrast to what they are not, as is the case with the ‘French doctors’ groups, like Médecins Sans Frontières and Médecins du Monde, which developed in opposition to the International Red Cross and its principles, policy stances, and practices ([Krause 2014](#)). In a field of activity such as maritime search and rescue, NGO-NGO interactions shape organizational identities, mandates, and policy positions. As NGOs take positions on how to conduct maritime search and rescues and commit to favoured policy ends (migration or return), they define organizational identities and roles in relation to each other ([Cusumano 2021](#)).

Whereas literature on NGO advocacy often assumes that ‘like-minded’ organizations ([Keck and Sikkink 1998](#)) come together to achieve a common goal, the interactions that generate these collective identities are rarely discussed. Several chapters in this volume show how new identities emerge. They also highlight how individual and collective identities change through relational processes. Schapper ([Chapter 8](#), this volume) finds that the inter-constituency alliance, what she calls a ‘super-network’, formed a unique collaborative identity, and reveals the processes (packaging, integrating agendas) through which ‘like-mindedness’ develops. Individual members of the super-network felt empowered by the collective mobilization around their core values, and they integrated the principles and advocacy positions championed by the other members of the super-network. Similarly, Appe and Borges Pinho ([Chapter 10](#), this volume) highlight how the interactions between NGOs led to the emergence of the Criminal Justice Network, with its distinct identity and agenda, in the Brazilian political sphere. K. R. Cheng et al. ([Chapter 9](#), this volume), explore processes of identity formation in the context of two NGO associations with diverse memberships, while the analysis of Global South inter-community

networking by H. Cheng et al. ([Chapter 6](#), this volume) highlights how NGO communities' perceptions of themselves and others are reflected in brokerage patterns. Schmitz et al. ([Chapter 4](#), this volume) examine how the process of merging changed the identity of the involved organizations.

Mobilizing Effects

Mobilization has perhaps received the most attention in the literature on NGOs, given the focus on transnational advocacy networks and social change (e.g., [Keck and Sikkink 1998](#); [Bob 2005](#); [Carpenter 2007](#); [Busby 2010](#); [Carpenter 2011](#); [Pallas and Bloodgood 2022](#)). Networks, which are constituted by social ties between nodes, are relational structures born from interactions. Mobilizing effects conceptualize the power of these interactions to foster social coordination and collective action. There is an aggregate effect whereby social actors interact to constitute something greater than the sum of its parts. Mobilizing effects also highlight the constitutive creativity of action, conceived of as 'the permanent reorganization and reconstitution of habits and institutions' ([Joas 1996](#) quoted in [Emirbayer and Mische 1998](#), 929). Social actors engaged in creative and collective problem-solving redefine their identities, goals, and strategies in relation to each other in a contingent process ([Avant 2016](#)). Shared imaginations ([Freistein et al. 2022](#)), and the politics of aspiration ([Finnemore and Jurkovich 2020](#)) can be powerful drivers of mobilization.

The consideration of a wide range of types of interactions, as undertaken by the chapters in this volume, adds to our understanding of mobilization effects. Petropoulos ([Chapter 3](#), this volume), as well as DeMars and Dijkzeul ([Chapter 7](#), this volume) point towards a complex co-existence of processes of competition, coordination, and cooperation from which mobilization effects arise. At the same time, the chapters also point towards conflict as a potential source of mobilizing effects (see Carolei, [Chapter 2](#) and DeMars and Dijkzeul, [Chapter 7](#), both this volume). H. Cheng et al. ([Chapter 6](#), this volume) highlight how brokering relationships can foster the mobilization of resources and access for some, but not for others. Several chapters highlight how relationships across multiple temporal-relational contexts can generate *power to* and *power with* that facilitate mobilization (K. R. Cheng et al., [Chapter 9](#); Schapper, [Chapter 8](#); Appe and Borges Pinho, [Chapter 10](#), all this volume). Relationships that bridge multiple policy, organizational, and social contexts facilitate mobilization because they enable learning (Schmitz et al., [Chapter 4](#); K. R. Cheng et al., [Chapter 9](#), both this volume) and the travel of information and discourses from one audience to another (Schapper, [Chapter 8](#); Appe and Borges Pinho, [Chapter 10](#), both this volume). DeMars and Dijkzeul ([Chapter 7](#), this volume) find that configurations of practices (sovereignty, societal affinity, and humanitarian) mobilize different emergency response networks in Ethiopia. Petropoulos ([Chapter 3](#), this volume) likewise finds configurations of practices (local funding, local leadership, local language) mobilize more effective humanitarian responses in Greece.

Legitimacy Effects

A relational approach conceives of legitimacy as socially constructed, deeply embedded in relationships between actors, and contingent upon an actor's perceptions of another actor, rule, or institution (see also [Johnson et al. 2006](#); [Bernstein 2011](#); [Deloffre and Schmitz 2019](#)). This understanding aligns with [Suchman's \(1995, 574\)](#) widely cited definition of legitimacy as 'a generalized perception or assumption that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper, or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs and definitions'. Actors produce legitimacy through their interactions with legitimating environments—which are constituted by legal rules, social norms, and cognitive models—and through legitimating audiences—that are embedded within these environments and support organizations' activities and existence ([DiMaggio and Powell 1983](#); [Kanter and Summers 1987](#)). Legitimacy also results from interactions with other social actors. [Brown \(2008, 34\)](#) observes, 'associational legitimacy is created by ties to other actors or institutions widely recognized as legitimate'. Thus, it follows that when actors or institutions are not widely recognized, actors are delegitimized.

In our volume, legitimacy effects result from the various processes of *NGOing*, which are constituted by claim-making and relating to societal actors. When key audiences accept claims made by NGOs, they confer legitimacy; however, rejecting those claims might delegitimize the NGO. For example, Carolei ([Chapter 2](#), this volume) shows how SI's actions produced legitimacy effects from both its claim that WWF was acting as a corporation and by casting doubt on WWF's claims to serve the public good (delegitimacy effects). Schmitz et al. ([Chapter 4](#), this volume) and K. R. Cheng et al. ([Chapter 9](#), this volume) show, by contrast, how processes of merging and associating produce legitimacy effects that bolster claims to serve the public good. DeMars and Dijkzeul ([Chapter 7](#), this volume) show how relating with an NGO, a state, and various societal partners, creates a humanitarian space and the legitimacy to provide humanitarian assistance in Ethiopia. The *power with* developed by the inter-constituency alliance at the Paris climate summit, studied by Schapper ([Chapter 8](#), this volume), and the Criminal Justice Network, examined by Appe and Borges Pinho ([Chapter 10](#), this volume), enhanced the legitimacy of their claims towards the Parties at the Conference of the Parties (COP) and the Brazilian state, respectively, thereby leading to the ordering effects discussed below.

Ordering Effects

Ordering refers to patterned or structured relationships among actors that are maintained by rules, laws, and norms ([Barnett and Finnemore 2004](#); [Lake et al. 2021](#)). Ordering can thus occur through several processes including standard-setting, law-making, and rule-making. Ordering can involve intentional design of the composition and institutional procedures of the field, determining goals and driving

activities towards them, as well as influencing the policy agenda, the range of feasible options, and premises for decision-making (Sørensen and Torfing 2009; Tsingou 2015; Avant 2016). Ordering can also occur through creative problem solving, learning, and reflexivity (Freistein et al. 2022; Deloffre 2022a, 2022b) and complex and emergent processes (Djelic and Quack 2003, 2018). Ordering effects can create new room for action, negotiate meanings, (re)constitute a field of practice, and enrol other actors into accepting these practices and procedures.

Various studies have pointed to the role of NGOs in standard-setting on forest, labour, humanitarian, and environmental issues that propose best practices and provide technical guidance in each area of activity (Peters et al. 2009; Boström and Hallström 2010; Gugerty and Prakash 2010; Deloffre 2016, 2022a; Quack 2023). Standards reify categories of desirable behaviour, which generates the incentive to strive for highly valued attributes, behaviours, and rankings. As such, standards—which are developed through interactions between NGOs and other relevant actors—also shape and change the relational context in which these actors are embedded. Standard-setting as a relational activity thus might produce order but might also foster inequality (Fehl and Freistein 2020). For example, when standard-setting initiatives adopt managerial and technical jargon and practices developed in the Global North, they might exacerbate power imbalances and exclude NGOs from the Global South from inter-NGO relationships (Krause 2014; Appe 2018; Deloffre 2025).

Likewise, NGO interactions with their peers and their institutional environment can have significant effects on rule-making and law-making. While law-making is traditionally considered to be the primary activity of state and intergovernmental legislative bodies, NGOs are increasingly called upon as organizations and to delegate experts to committees that influence, define, and write legal comments, laws, and procedures (Türkelli et al. 2013; Reiners 2022). In rule-making, NGOs interact with peers and other actors to produce formal and informal rules in each area of activity. These rules mediate relationships and regulate behaviour (Elbers and Schulpen 2011; Balboa 2018, 36). Rules might fix positions within a network or community by establishing rights and obligations, setting decision-making procedures, regulating the distribution of resources, and establishing authority (Barnett and Finnemore 2004; Fehl and Freistein 2020). As with standards, the social processes of rule- and law-making maintain or transform the relational contexts in which NGOs and other social actors are embedded.

We observe ordering effects in myriad ways in the chapters of this volume. The relationships in super-networks and meta-associations in the chapters by Schapper (Chapter 8, this volume) and K. R. Cheng et al. (Chapter 9, this volume) show important ways of direct and indirect forms of ordering. Patterns of interactions and the resultant social ordering emerge through NGO interactions in brokerage chains (H. Cheng et al., Chapter 6, this volume), humanitarian response configurations (Petropoulos, Chapter 3; DeMars and Dijkzeul, Chapter 7, both this volume), and processes of rule-making (Reiners, Chapter 5; Carolei, Chapter 2, both this volume). Appe and Borges Pinho (Chapter 10, this volume) show how interactions through

the Criminal Justice Network led to more institutionalized spaces for NGOs to interact and establish agency in the counterterrorism policy field. Transcalar interactions among local and international NGOs led to the creation of the new Collaborative Advocacy Network.

Nature of Effects

The power inherent in social interactions produce identity, mobilizing, legitimacy, and ordering effects, but we suggest the nature of these effects can vary in at least four ways: they can be inclusive or exclusive in nature (Pouliot and Thérien 2018), innovative, or maintain the status quo. Effects are inclusive when they give voice to new and more diverse actors, level the playing field via flatter forms of cooperation, and enhance accountability through public debate and transparency. Accordingly, they can be regarded as exclusive when marginalizing certain viewpoints and disempowering specific positions, often based on arbitrary selection criteria and processes of participation, and in ways that reproduce or reinforce inequalities and divisions (Pouliot and Thérien 2018, 170).

For example, social interactions such as brokering, link actors with complementary sources of information in ways that fill what network theorists have called ‘structural holes’ (Burt 2004). Such social interactions can have ordering effects through enhancing trust, increasing cohesion, and facilitating cooperation, and thereby decreasing uncertainty and fragmentation (Goddard 2009). Institutional homophily—when actors work with partners who share attributes and operate in similar ways—is one strategy to deal with incomplete knowledge about the intentions of potential cooperation partners (Spires 2011; Murdie and Davis 2012). However, filling structural holes by intensifying the density of social connections might also ‘reinforce boundaries, harden current identities, and bolster the political authority of those who claim to speak for the group,’ generating *exclusive* ordering effects (MacDonald 2018, 146). Exclusive ordering effects result in fewer interactions between NGOs based in high-income and middle- to low-income countries, as demonstrated by the chapter on communities and brokers in this volume (see also Cheng et al. 2021).

Identity, mobilizing, legitimacy, and ordering effects might also be innovative in nature or maintain the status quo. Social interactions that produce new forms of collective identity and social mobilization or innovative ways of problem-solving, and those that introduce regulations, represent a break from the status quo (Hertel 2006; Hadden 2015; Freistein et al. 2022). Chapters by Carolei (Chapter 2), Reiners (Chapter 5), DeMars and Dijkzeul (Chapter 7), Schmitz et al. (Chapter 4), and Appe and Borges Pinho (Chapter 10, all this volume) show how NGO interactions fostered creativity, new patterns of working, and changed rules and regulations. Social interactions can also maintain relational patterns, reinforce social identities, and ‘tame’ NGO activities to reproduce the status quo (Bush 2015; Stroup and Wong 2017). Balboa (2014, 2018) and Munro (2020) both find that innovation and creativity are

lost as NGOs scale up from the local to the global level. In this volume, H. Cheng et al.'s chapter ([Chapter 6](#)) shows how brokerage chains reinforce patterns of relating that maintain existing organizational communities.

Distinguishing between the type and nature of effects allows us to remain open towards the various ways in which social interactions produce social and political outcomes. As several chapters show, coordinating and brokering can produce both inclusion (Schapper, [Chapter 8](#); K. R. Cheng et al., [Chapter 9](#), both this volume) and exclusion (H. Cheng et al., [Chapter 6](#); DeMars and Dijkzeul, [Chapter 7](#), both this volume), and NGO collective action can result in collaborative failures ([Gazley and Guo 2020](#); Mitchell and Schmitz 2022). Conflicting, brokering, and cooperative relationships can generate ordering effects of both an innovative and maintaining nature (see for example, Carolei, [Chapter 2](#); H. Cheng et al., [Chapter 6](#); DeMars and Dijkzeul, [Chapter 7](#), all this volume).

Analysing NGO Interactions: Overview of the Volume

We organize this volume along three different analytical entry points common to relational approaches—social ties, configurations, and sites of interaction. Social ties are interactions between two or more entities, positions, processes, or practices; configurations are dynamic arrangements of ongoing and interacting social positions, practices, or processes; and sites of interaction are relational spaces created from a patterned mix of social ties and configurations among social actors, processes, and practices. There are multiple strands of relational theory and while there is agreement that relations are ontologically prior to entities, there is also variation in the unit of analysis emphasized—positions, processes, or practices ([Emirbayer 1997](#); [McCourt 2016](#); [Jackson and Nexon 2019](#)). In the real world, however, these analytical perspectives tend to mix and combine and chapters in this volume consider all three.

Social Ties

Social ties are observable connections between actors or social objects and might vary in quality—fleeting or durable; thick (recurring) or thin (one-off)—and nature (friendly or adversarial). Social ties might exist between NGOs and other actors; within an NGO (for example, between departments or staff); or between practices, discourses, or narratives. Social ties are the building blocks of any type of global order, from hierarchies, to networks, to markets ([Avant and Westerwinter 2016](#); [Slaughter 2017](#); [Barnett et al. 2021](#)). According to [McConaughy et al. \(2018, 187\)](#), transactions create social ties between one or more social actors, social ties might be durable or dynamic, and ‘patterns of social ties resolve into relative stabilities in patterns of interaction which appear as structures taking the form of networks of

ties'. These relational structures and actors' positions in them, rather than just the attributes or interests of an actor, shape their actions and power to influence global policy (see for example [Bob 2005](#); [Hertel 2006](#); [Goddard 2009](#); [Stroup and Wong 2017](#)).

Part I of this volume includes three chapters that analyse different types of social ties between NGOs. By empirically analysing different types of social ties and their underlying processes, such as disregarding, conflicting, cooperating, and merging, the chapters make several contributions. Together, the chapters demonstrate that NGOs are not static entities with pre-defined resources, but rather they develop relational power through their interactions. The chapters thus highlight the value of the *NGOing* concept and show how the types of interactions matter in producing varied effects.

Domenico Carolei ([Chapter 2](#), this volume) examines a conflicting relationship between two major NGOs, SI and WWF, and focuses on a legal complaint filed by SI against WWF, under the OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises. SI accused WWF of facilitating human rights abuses of Indigenous groups in Cameroon. In its complaint, SI demonstrated how the OECD guidelines, which were established for multinational enterprises, could apply to the WWF and NGOs more broadly. SI argued that WWF's legal and organizational structure—a federation of over eighty national offices worldwide—and its market-based approach to conservation, made it a multinational enterprise. The OECD agreed and stipulated criteria to determine whether an NGO could be evaluated against the OECD Guidelines. Through this complaint, SI expanded the use of the OECD rules beyond their intended target and contested and rejected the claims on which WWF's *NGOing* was based. Carolei shows how *conflicting* social ties disrupted relations between SI and WWF, but also bridged a regulatory gap at the international level, thereby spurring ordering effects.

The chapter by Sotiris Petropoulos ([Chapter 3](#), this volume) analyses NGO interactions and activities in response to the 2015–2020 refugee crisis in Greece. The analysis notes competitive, collaborative, and cooperative relations and highlights how strong interpersonal ties between NGO personnel can help to overcome barriers to cooperation between their organizations if embedded in specific relational configurations and fields of activity. The enabling effect of interpersonal ties was evident in advocacy and common projects, while absent in the field of fundraising. Interestingly, interpersonal ties became more important for fundraising as funds became less abundant and shifted towards long-term development assistance. Comparing the role of interpersonal relations between an ad hoc configuration, in which large INGOs arrived after the beginning of the crisis and established only shallow local contacts, and an established configuration, in which INGOs had more long-term local contacts, the chapter shows key actors in the latter case were able to facilitate cooperation through interpersonal ties. The chapter, therefore, suggests that strong interpersonal relations, if bolstered by a localization of social ties and long-term funding opportunities, can foster interorganizational cooperation for humanitarian aid.

Hans Peter Schmitz, George E. Mitchell, and Bin Chen study NGO mergers and acquisitions (M&A) and show how social interactions and relational contexts enable this organizational strategy. Rationalist and functionalist approaches to mergers and acquisitions, which adopt a substantialist view of NGOs, see M&A as a strategic practice that leverages organizational resources and capacities to better position the NGOs in the market. Relational approaches take into account how the relational contexts in which NGOs are embedded constitute and shape their organizational interests and incentives to consider M&A. To illustrate their relational understanding of M&As, they explore the case of Corus International—a merger between formerly independent non-profit (Interchurch Medical Assistance (IMA) World Health, Lutheran World Relief) and for-profit organizations (Charlie Goldsmith Associates (CGA) Technologies, Ground Up Investing, and Farmers Market Brands). The merger strategically positioned the new entity in the market and increased its financial sustainability. More importantly, Corus emerged as a new organizational form, representing a family of for-profit and non-profit entities with new and distinct technological and investment-focused capacities previously absent from their traditional grant-based and donative portfolios. Thus, the merger not only produced innovative effects in advancing this new approach to development but also identity effects in reconstituting the mandate of the group and how it understands its public purpose.

Configurations

While the concept of configurations is a common feature of relational theory (e.g., Emirbayer 1997; Jackson and Nexon 1999), its definition remains unclear (Salehi 2022). For Jackson and Nexon (1999, 304), configurations are best understood as ‘aggregations of processes.’ Pratt examines norms as *normative configurations* composed of ‘an arrangement of ongoing, interacting practices establishing action-specific regulation, value orientation, and avenues of contestation’ (Pratt 2020, 61), rather than a reified social object. Salehi (2022, 237) suggests configurations are dynamic, ‘emerge through the force of essential interdependence of actors,’ and generate power and changes in power relationships. Taken together, a common definition emerges: configurations are dynamic arrangements of ongoing and interacting social positions, practices, or processes. For example, Munro (2020) examines an NGO working on HIV/Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (AIDS) outreach in West Papua to understand why Indigenous Papuan NGO employees were increasingly replaced by non-Indigenous migrant settlers of Javanese heritage and shows how a configuration of racializing processes—historicizing notions of race, racializing discourses, and professionalizing relations of care—excluded Papuan workers from the job market and reproduced hierarchies.

The chapters included in Part II of this volume consider relational configurations from three different perspectives: positional configurations are seen as arising from recurrent social ties between positions, processual configurations are considered

as resulting from recurrent combinations of processes, and practice configurations are explored as arrangements of repeated practices. Studying configurations helps improve understanding of how relational patterns of positions, processes, and practices can become stabilized or destabilized over time, and how they subsequently constitute relational structures.

Nina Reiners' chapter ([Chapter 5](#), this volume) examines how expert committees influenced the development and adoption of the three general comments on the rights to food, health, and water adopted by the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. Through a mixed-method approach using network analysis and case studies, the chapter finds that in the absence of an established broader advocacy network and a coherent strategy, human rights-based advocacy in the committees evolved through interpersonal ties. Specifically, she shows the importance of the engagement, expertise, and social skills of individual representatives of organizations, interpersonal networks, and overlapping biographies to explain patterns of NGO–NGO interactions for social rights advocacy. Reiners reveals the politics behind these outcomes and shows three different social ties in the cases—conflicting, disregarding, and co-opting—which produced varying effects.

Huimin Cheng, Ye Wang, Ping Ma, and Amanda Murdie (2021; and [Chapter 6](#), this volume) examine brokerage chains as an example of configurations where each brokerage type—coordinator, gatekeeper/representative, liaison, itinerant—reflects a different configuration of social ties. Coordinators connect two actors within one community, gatekeeper/representative brokers connect their community to an outside community, liaison brokers connect two actors from separate communities in which they are not a member, and itinerant brokers are external to a specific community but connect members within that community. These patterns produce different dynamics within the network and shape the networking process and its outcomes ([Cheng et al. 2021](#)). In this volume, H. Cheng et al. ([Chapter 6](#)) examine twenty Global South organizations and focus on how country, community, and organizational factors help some NGOs develop inter-community brokerage ties. Their findings suggest that organizations from historically powerful countries in the Global North are more likely to take a disproportionate share of inter-community brokerage roles, whereas Global South organizations are less likely to take on the brokerage roles that may help them build connections and resources across communities.

In their chapter on the role of NGOs in the Ethiopian civil war (1974–1991), William E. DeMars and Dennis Dijkzeul ([Chapter 7](#), this volume) analyse instances where patterns of NGO cooperation were amalgamated with patterns of conflict into relational networks that lasted for several years and reached large scales at both sides of the conflict. These amalgamated practices were 'entanglements of humanitarian practices with societal affinity practices and sovereignty practices that can reinforce each other over time' (DeMars and Dijkzeul, [Chapter 7](#), this volume, p. 167). DeMars and Dijkzeul emphasize the analysis of practices to uncover connections between the micro-level of NGO relations with their political and societal audiences/partners, the meso-level of NGO networks, and the international macro-level, with each level of NGO practices generating distinct humanitarian and political

consequences. They find that relatively stable configurations of NGO–NGO interactions and practices emerged in the disruptive context of war, famine, and mass migration and that global networks of international NGOs operated on both sides of the war in Ethiopia. Ultimately, however, these configurations dissolved. Contrary to received IR wisdom, these NGO practices and networks are not easily replicable in other contexts, which limits transferring NGO experience from one country to another.

Sites of Interaction

Common to relational approaches is a third building block that conceptualizes complex sites where social ties and configurations overlap. Previous relational approaches have used different terms for this third building block. For example, Jackson and Nexon (2019, 307) employ the term projects,¹ defined as ‘a configuration with agent properties, a social entity with the ability to make choices and exercise causal power’. In more recent writings, Nexon and co-authors McConaughy and Musgrave (2018) call these formations ‘assemblages’. Projects or assemblages in their work include states, empires, federations, confederations, and conciliar systems (Jackson and Nexon 1999; McConaughy et al. 2018). We depart from this terminology because they refer to structural outcomes of relationships rather than the relations themselves.

We call this third building block *sites of interaction*, which we define as relational settings produced through a patterned mix of social ties and configurations among social actors, processes, and practices; these interactions are constitutive of the social space and produce its relational power. Sites of interaction are typically situated across scales. Scales are distinct from levels of analysis in that scales involve processes of increasing or reducing resources, capacity, or activity. An actor might be located on the national level but engage in activities that scale up to the regional or global level, or down to the municipal level (see also Pallas and Bloodgood 2022). This means any actor might be working across, and on, multiple scales at any given time, and these interactions affect their claim-making and power (Balboa 2014; DeMars and Dijkzeul 2015). Sites of interaction are present within different forms of global orders and might be physical sites where NGOs interact, like meta-associations (see K. R. Cheng et al., Chapter 9, this volume) or figurative spaces such as a policy nexus where different policy domains—for example, water–energy–food (Stein and Jaspersen 2018), security–development–humanitarian (Deloffre 2020; Hampson et al. 2020), or science–technology (Orsini et al. 2017)—intersect.

Part III of this volume brings together chapters that investigate sites of interactions. Andrea Schapper’s chapter (Chapter 8, this volume) focuses on super-networks as social sites produced through the social interactions of several transnational activist networks (TANs) and the NGOs participating therein. This super-network convened seven different nongovernmental constituencies with a view to preparing the negotiations of the climate agreement in Paris in 2015. The formation of a ‘super-network’

provided them with a cooperative communicative structure that went beyond the different TANs and allowed them to pursue a collective advocacy strategy. The participating constituencies were Indigenous peoples' rights networks, environmental actors, gender advocates, faith-based groups, trade unions, land rights activists, and youth representatives who had previously pursued independent strategies. Drawing on expert interviews and participatory observations at the strategic meetings of the super-network and at subsequent climate negotiations, as well as a content analysis of primary documents and data, the analysis traces how the alliance developed and implemented a package approach. The package approach formulated and advanced one priority message containing seven human rights and sustainability principles, which reflected the objectives of the seven participating non-state constituencies. The super-network's package approach was successful, and the priority message and all principles were incorporated into the 2015 Paris Agreement. The study of this specific site of NGO interactions demonstrates the mobilizing effects of long-established relational histories within and between TANs and how the intensified communication within such spaces transforms the perceptions of individual and collective identities of NGOs.

The chapter by Katherine Rose Cheng, Emily Finchum-Mason, and Mary Kay Gugerty ([Chapter 9](#), this volume) investigates NGO meta-associations as important sites of interactions. The chapter focuses on how meta-associations foster social interactions between member organizations with diverse agendas, norms, and interests. Drawing on data from a content analysis of key documents and interviews with staff of two major NGO meta-associations, the chapter shows how meta-associations structure relational opportunities that foster the development of shared goals. These relational spaces are also where conflicting and competing norms, priorities, and understandings must be negotiated. The authors argue that membership in meta-associations provides legitimacy, opens civic spaces for those under repression in their home countries, and offers 'ladders' of access to other transnational actors. At the same time, meta-associations depend on the active participation of their members and seek to facilitate inclusive member interactions.

The chapter by Susan Appe and Ana Borges Pinho ([Chapter 10](#), this volume) investigates Brazilian counterterrorism policy, and more specifically, Brazil's Criminal Justice Network (CJN), as a social space constituted by social interactions. Their chapter examines how Brazilian civil society groups, working in an increasingly challenging and restrictive environment, mobilized in response to international pressure from the Financial Action Task Force upon the Brazilian government to adopt a counterterrorism law. The adopted version of the law was considered much less damaging to organized civil society than the original draft, in part due to the role played by the CJN. The network's existing relationships led to swift coordination; CJN's position within the Brazilian civil society landscape, as well as its relational capacity to bridge to the Ministry of Justice and London-based Article 19, created its agency and ability to act. Furthermore, these interactions helped produce new NGO spaces and configurations in Brazil and led to the creation of the Collaborative Advocacy Network to foster further advocacy.

Building on scholarship that has applied a relational lens to the study of NGOs (e.g., Hilhorst 2003; DeMars and Dijkzeul 2015; Hadden 2015), this volume brings renewed attention to the value of examining these relationships and advances relational theorizing by conceptualizing the type, form, and effects of social interactions. These relations tell us about the dynamics of global politics and explain the contingent processes underlying an array of global governance outcomes, from the adoption of social and economic rights, environmental treaties, and counterterrorism laws, to the provision of humanitarian assistance. Our analytical framework offers the conceptual language for labelling and studying these relational phenomena as observed among NGOs or more broadly.

Note

1. In the NGO world, the word ‘projects’ usually refers to the outputs and outcomes decided by funding agencies, which shape how NGOs organize their work (e.g., Krause 2014). We thus avoid using this term for conceptual clarity.

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PART I
SOCIAL TIES

2

NGO–NGO Conflict

The Legal Case of Survival International v. WWF

Domenico Carolei

Introduction

This chapter examines a rare case of legal conflict between two major nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), Survival International (SI) and World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF). It focuses on a complaint filed by SI against the WWF, under the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises, in 2016. Through this complaint, SI accused the WWF of facilitating human rights abuses of Indigenous groups in Cameroon. This unprecedented complaint involves two world-leading NGOs and was the first-ever filed by an NGO against another NGO using the OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises, which are meant to apply only to multinationals.

The purpose of this chapter is to examine this unprecedented conflict contributing to the discussion on NGO–NGO interactions in global politics, and more specifically on inter-NGO conflicts in three ways.

First, this chapter contributes to the ‘social ties’ unit of analysis of this book by documenting the innovative ordering effects of a conflicting relationship between two NGOs. It shows how conflicts can be productive in reconfiguring social spaces, contrary to the common belief that assumes that conflicting relationships result mostly in undesirable outcomes. The productive power of the SI v. WWF case fills regulatory voids at the international level and transforms the institutional structure of the OECD Guidelines system, intended as complaints procedures for multinationals, to adjudicate rights-based claims against NGOs. This move both expands the meaning and use of this international legal instrument and broadens the category of rights-bearers in global politics to include NGOs. To elaborate, it expands the use of the OECD Guidelines beyond their intended recipients (multinationals), whilst simultaneously placing NGOs in the category of rights-bearers in global politics, along with multinationals and the more traditional duty-bearers under international human rights law, notably, states. Indeed, the legal dispute between SI and the WWF provides a unique example of a normative conflict which revolves around an adversarial understanding of how certain human rights standards should apply to an NGO. While normative conflicts are well-understood among organizational

scholars, inter-NGO conflicts that revolve around questions of compliance with international human rights standards in international legal forums are unusual, and the conflict between SI and the WWF represents the first one of this kind. By examining the legal narrative of this dispute, this chapter illustrates that this inter-NGO conflict is based on an adversarial interpretation of norms which developed and escalated progressively on three dimensions. First, the application of a set of norms, that is: whether a human rights framework, meant for multinationals, applies to the WWF, and to an NGO more broadly. Second, the degree of normative commitment, that is: the extent to which the WWF had complied with certain OECD standards in its operations. Third, the resolution of conflict through mediation talks, which ultimately broke down.

Second, this chapter contributes to the definition of ‘NGOs’ provided in this book. In addition to having transformative and innovative effects in reconfiguring social spaces, NGO conflicts can shape the meaning of the term ‘NGO’. Putting forward the argument that the WWF bears similarities with how multinationals operate to demonstrate that the OECD Guidelines apply to NGOs, SI expands how the public purpose of NGOs is understood and the WWF’s use of NGO as a ‘claim-bearing’ label (Hilhorst 2003). This finding corroborates the definitional strategy, built upon a relational approach, adopted by Deloffre and Quack in the introductory framework chapter (Chapter 1, this volume). The two editors define NGOs by looking at the results of NGO–NGO interactions, moving away from traditional notions based on fixed attributes of NGOs as entities. This chapter highlights and confirms further why a more open definition of ‘NGO’ is necessary for academic and public discourse. Ultimately, it demonstrates that this category of actors is more fluid than current definitions suggest.

Third, this chapter provides an analysis of transcalarity in that NGOs are using global scales, and more specifically a legal instrument, not to foster cooperation but to enact conflict: SI could not appeal to national legal instruments and uses the global legal system to seek redress, relying on an international instrument that typically applies to multinationals. When it comes to the sites of interaction, multi-scalar institutional contexts can affect NGO–NGO interactions by, for example, shaping their resources and activities, and that, simultaneously, these interactions can transform, change, or preserve certain institutional structures (see Deloffre and Quack, Chapter 11, this volume). Since transnational NGOs, including SI and the WWF, operate across borders in multi-scalar institutional contexts, they are subject to multiple domestic regulations, including the regulation of their home countries (where they are legally headquartered to operate abroad) and those of their host countries (e.g., where they have national and regional offices or partners). This chapter shows that the choice of SI to adjudicate a conflict, and hold WWF accountable, by relying on an international instrument that typically applies to multinationals, is the result of the difficulties to regulate and hold NGOs liable at the domestic level as well as of regulatory gaps that exist at the international level.

The remainder of this chapter is structured as follows. The next section provides a literature review of organizational conflicts, focusing on inter-organizational

interactions. After that, this chapter looks at normative conflicts and, more specifically, at human rights as a cause of normative conflicts. Then, it gives an overview of the regulation and the legal accountability of NGOs, providing an analysis of transcalarity as to why SI used the global legal system, and not a national legal instrument, to foster an NGO–NGO conflict and hold the WWF accountable under the OECD Guidelines. Following this, the chapter examines the dispute between WWF and SI within the OECD system showing how this normative conflict developed on three dimensions: application, level of commitment, and resolution. Finally, it examines the innovative ordering effects of the case of SI v. WWF, focusing on the outcomes of this conflict.

Exploring the Landscape of Organizational Conflicts: A Literature Review in NGO Studies

In a nutshell, ‘a conflict exists whenever incompatible activities occur’ (Deutsch 1973, 10). A conflict can be defined, in greater detail, as a ‘struggle or contest between people with opposing needs, ideas, beliefs, values or goals’ (Diez et al. 2006, 565). A conflict can arise between individuals or groups, within (intra) and without (inter) organizations and can be described as an ‘ongoing process involving not only opposed interests, but also, and at least in some instances, negative feelings and negative thoughts about one’s adversary’ (Baron 1990, 199). In this volume, Deloffre and Quack (Chapter 1, Table 1.1, this volume) provide a taxonomy of the nature of social ties developing a range of possible NGO–NGO relationships. Within this range of interactions, ‘conflicting’ relationships are classified with three main labels: incompatible, contradictory, or in friction.

Organizational conflicts are well-understood among organizational researchers, and in the NGO scholarship more broadly. Researchers have studied intra-organizational conflicts between headquarters and the field offices (Suzuki 1998), and internal divergences between the NGO’s management and their members over the organization’s mandate and mission (Wilets 1994). As to inter-organizational interactions, academics have examined conflicts and cooperation between NGOs and governments (Bashaw 2001; Brass 2016), NGOs and corporations (Yaziji and Doh 2009), NGOs and the police (Thomson et al. 2016), NGOs and trade unions (Braun and Gearhart 2004), and NGOs and social movements (Demirovic 1998; Steffek 2012; Lopes de Souza 2013). There are also some studies that investigate cooperation and conflict between NGOs belonging to the same transnational and regional networks (Bandy and Smith 2005; Cullen 2005). A decent amount of research has been done in the area of competition between NGOs (Aldasheva and Verdier 2010; Nunnenkamp and Öhler 2012; Poret 2019).¹

As to inter-organizational conflicts (IOCs), researchers have identified the specific causes that trigger conflicts, the most obvious of which is inter-organizational interdependency (Stern and Gorman 1969; Mohr and Spekman 1994; Lumineau

et al. 2015). Habib (1987) notices that the causes behind IOC's can be multiple and wide-ranging, including role deviance, allocation of scarce resources, a divergence of goals, poor communication, and drives for autonomy. For example, Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) Belgium decided to be more autonomous from MSF France because the creation of Liberté Sans Frontières—a think tank focused on ‘Third-Worldism’—was considered overly political by MSF Belgium for a medical emergency organization. Interestingly, this claim for greater autonomy led MSF France to sue MSF Belgium in court to forbid the use of the MSF name in Belgium, but MSF France lost the case (Binet and Saulnier 2019, 50).

Looking at the social movement literature, Barkan identifies two sets of causes behind the tension that arose between moderate and radical groups of the Civil Rights Movement: (1) rivalry for funds, members, and publicity and (2) ideological and pragmatic differences over policies and tactics of the movement (Barkan 1986). Moreover, Tsasis (2009) shows that personality clashes, value differences, and divergent goals could all trigger IOC's between NGOs. While not investigating NGO–NGO conflicts directly, the literature on the politics of human rights presents several examples of the different causes behind IOC's. For instance, Glasius (2002) documents how an IOC, triggered by divergent values, erupted between feminist and pro-life (and pro-family) groups on the definition of gender-related crimes, when drafting the 1998 Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court. To provide a further example, the challenge of advocating for economic and social rights generated an IOC between activists as to how this category of rights should be advanced, both methodologically and tactically, by NGOs. This divergence sparked a debate between Ken Roth (Human Rights Watch) and Leonard Rubenstein (Physicians for Human Rights), which took place in a series of exchanges in *Human Rights Quarterly* in 2004 (Roth 2004a, 2004b; Rubenstein 2004).

In addition to the causes, the organizational studies literature has examined the effects of the conflict, both of an interpersonal and inter-organizational nature, indicating positive and negative effects (Mele 2011; Omisore and Abiodun 2014; Hussein and Al-Mamary 2019). Conflicts can lead to many adverse consequences, the most obvious of which is the intensification or the internalization of the conflict. Negative effects include diverting resources from organizational goals, distrust, resource consumption, and an adverse impact on the organizational performance. Other times, conflicts might lead to positive effects such as reconciliation, better decision-making, and social changes. By the same token, conflicts could increase trust and lead to more value creation. Overall, the existing literature helps us in understanding the NGO–NGO conflicts in a comprehensive way. It sheds light on various types of intra- and inter-organizational conflicts, including their causes—such as personality clashes or rivalry over funds and members—and their effects, which can be both positive and negative. Yet the innovative ordering effects of the NGO–NGO conflicts and their impact in reconfiguring social spaces and institutional settings, particularly in the context of international human rights norms, remain understudied.

Compliance with Human Rights as a Form of Normative Conflicts

Drawing from the literature that categorizes IOCs based on their forms, it was suggested that conflicts between organizations could emerge over the perceived lack of integrity of the counterpart, a phenomenon known as ‘transgression’ (Ganesan et al. 2010). When it comes to transgression, organizations act either unethically or opportunistically, and these two manifestations represent different facets of lack of integrity: unethical behaviour refers to a deviation from acceptable societal norms of fairness and honesty (e.g., exploiting workers), whereas opportunism concerns the violation of specific relational norms directed against the counterpart (e.g., suppliers cutting out channel members by selling directly to major customers) (Ganesan et al. 2010). Accordingly, norms can be the cause of, and generate, conflicts. Broadly speaking, norms exist to regulate conduct, setting a prohibition, an obligation, or a permission, and thus generate behavioural expectations as to how actors (individuals and organizations) ought to behave. Consequently, a normative conflict can spark off where actors (usually the beneficiary and the target of the norm) hold different normative expectations of how the target of the norm ought to behave in a given situation. Winter et al. (2012) have classified normative conflicts into two kinds: the first results from different expectations regarding how general normative obligations should be fulfilled (normative content), the second from distinct expectations as to how the norm should restrain actions based on self-interest (level of normative commitment).²

By providing a framework of rules prescribing how states ought to behave, international human rights norms can be the cause of IOCs as they generate expectations on norm-compliance.³ International human rights law outlines legally binding obligations upon states and, simultaneously, grants rights to individuals. It also provides a series of non-legally binding responsibilities upon non-state actors, such as multinationals: the OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises are an example in that respect. When a human rights violation occurs, it is up to the individual—the right holder—to hold an entity accountable before national courts and, after domestic remedies have been exhausted, before international human rights forums such as the European Court of Human Rights or the United Nations (UN) human rights treaty-bodies system, which provides for an individual complaint procedure. In addition to the individual complaint procedure, a state can lodge a complaint against another state through the so-called inter-state complaint procedure. This procedure is available within the UN treaty-bodies system. However, this mechanism had not been used until 2018, when the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination received, for the first time, three inter-state complaints.⁴ A similar complaint procedure exists at the European Court of Human Rights, but it is rarely invoked by the signatory states. This demonstrates that IOCs between states are not the most common method for addressing human rights violations in international legal forums. Instead, the individual complaint procedure

is the primary means for raising issues related to compliance with human rights obligations.

In the international arena, NGOs are particularly well placed in assisting victims of human rights violations because they operate as human rights watchdogs, monitoring compliance with human rights norms by states and non-state actors. Consequently, IOCs between NGOs and states can arise in the form of a judicial dispute over a failure to comply with human rights norms by state authorities. In that case, NGOs can file legal complaints, conduct third-party interventions, and submit opinions in *amicus curiae* briefs before national and international courts. In the same way, IOCs can emerge between NGOs and multinationals where there is a discrepancy between the corporate commitment to respect human rights and an adverse impact on human rights as a result of business operations. For example, it is estimated that over 350 human rights complaints have been submitted by NGOs against multinationals for failures to comply with the OECD Guidelines in the past twenty years (OECD Watch 2020). According to the OECD Watch Complaints Database (n.d.), SI used the OECD Guidelines complaint procedure on two occasions against multinationals. In December 2008, SI filed a complaint against Vedanta Resources plc highlighting the negative impact of the mining operations on the enjoyment of human rights by the Dongria Kondh, a tribe living in India (NCP UK 2008). In March 2016, SI filed a complaint on behalf of tribal peoples living in Ethiopia and Kenya against Salini Impregilo, alleging the company's involvement in Indigenous rights abuses (NCP Italy 2016). Even the WWF has a relational history with the OECD Guidelines procedure as a complainant. In October 2018, the WWF alleged that SOCO International's (now Pharos Energy) oil exploration activities in Virunga National Park (Democratic Republic of Congo) did not contribute to sustainable development and were incompatible with the park's World Heritage Site status (NCP UK 2013).

While the OECD complaint filed by SI against the WWF is a normative one and is adjudicated through an international human rights instrument, inter-NGO conflicts that revolve around questions of compliance with human rights standards in international legal settings are unusual. NGOs are expected, stereotypically, to serve as the guardians for human rights, whilst presumptions are made that when human rights abuses occur, they are usually committed by states and multinationals. Furthermore, the OECD complaint filed by SI against the WWF is a unique case of inter-NGO conflict for another reason: as already stated in the Introduction, it is the first complaint ever filed by an NGO against another NGO using a legal instrument meant to apply solely to multinationals. As documented below, the choice to adjudicate this inter-NGO conflict using an international legal instrument designed for multinationals was causal and it is related to the way NGOs are regulated and held legally accountable. The next section of the chapter overviews the regulation and the accountability of NGOs, explaining why SI used the global legal system, and more specifically the OECD Guidelines, to hold the WWF accountable.

The Regulation and Legal Accountability of NGOs: The Use of the OECD Guidelines to Adjudicate NGO–NGO Conflict

Regulating NGOs, while promoting their legal accountability through regulatory intervention, is a challenging task. NGOs are governed by the regulations of their home country (where they are headquartered) and the host country (where they operate). Monitoring their activities becomes challenging, as the home country has limited authority overseas. Moreover, in crisis situations like conflicts or natural disasters, the host country may struggle to provide justice to victims of NGOs' abuse due to weakened state mechanisms.

Furthermore, national governments might abuse their powers to regulate NGOs. Governments typically regulate NGOs in three areas: their registration and dissolution, their advocacy and political activities, and the extent to which they can engage in economic activities ([Bloodgood et al. 2014](#)). Increasing state regulation to enhance NGO accountability is often impractical, as it risks leading to restrictive government policies aimed at curbing NGO activities for political reasons, a trend not limited to authoritarian states, as scholars ([Swiney 2019](#); [Glasius et al. 2020](#)) and the Council of Europe ([Ferstman 2019](#)) have documented.

A further issue is the limited capacities of national charity regulators and watchdogs, such as the Charity Commission for England and Wales, to enact accountability. To elaborate, the regulation and the oversight of the NGO sector is performed, at the national level, by charity regulators whose power is to grant and revoke the charity status and sanction NGOs in the case of misconduct. Yet charity regulators are often underfunded to perform their oversight tasks and have limited geographical and jurisdictional scope to assess NGOs' misconduct overseas ([Phillips 2019](#), 6). The limits of charity regulators to promote the legal accountability of NGOs emerged when the Charity Commission for England and Wales launched an inquiry into allegations that the UK branch of the WWF may have been complicit in the violence perpetrated against Indigenous people overseas, after BuzzFeed News ([Warren and Baker 2019](#)) and SI reported the matter in 2019. As reported by a number of media, including *The Guardian*, the Charity Commission's inquiry concerned whether WWF-UK conducted proper 'due diligence' to ensure that grant money sent overseas did not contribute to any of the alleged human rights violations ([McVeigh 2019](#)). This investigation focuses on ensuring WWF-UK, the British division of WWF International, properly checked the backgrounds of individuals and organizations receiving funds or contracts. However, the inquiry by the Charity Commission is limited to WWF-UK only and does not encompass the wider WWF International network. Additionally, the Charity Commission lacks authority to prosecute or adjudicate human rights issues, highlighting the investigation's limitations. The limits of this investigation were highlighted by Stephen Corry, former director of SI, who commented that 'it's a step forward that the Charity Commission is finally launching an investigation, but we're not holding our breath' ([Survival International 2019](#)). At the

time of writing, the Charity Commission had not published any information on its website regarding the opening of this inquiry or a report on its outcome.

Looking at international law, the regulation and the accountability of NGOs is equally difficult. International law recognizes NGOs' roles in a number of treaties, such as Article 71 of the 1945 Charter of the United Nations, but does not impose direct obligations on them, from which their liability could arise for a shortfall in compliance. Under international law, the legal system is state-centric and NGOs, like any other non-state actor, do not possess a legal personality. For this reason, NGOs cannot be subjected to the same accountability standards meant for states, including the international human rights regime. International obligations for NGOs arise from partnerships with organizations like the UN Economic and Social Council, as outlined in ECOSOC Resolution 1996/31, but the focus on NGO rights and the lack of an international legal personality often leads to neglecting NGO accountability in legal discourse (Noortman 2019, 194).

Another reason why the demand for greater accountability has been ignored in the international legal discourse is that NGOs are typically framed as the 'good guys' of the international arena (Reinisch 2005, 62), with few persons questioning the human rights impact of NGOs on the populations they work with, their legitimacy to speak in international forums, and their transparency (Reinisch 2005, 62). NGOs are less regulated in international human rights law than other non-state actors such as multinationals, which have been subjected to non-binding standards including the 1976 OECD Guidelines and the 2011 United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (UNGPs) (UN Human Rights Council 2011; OECD 2023). On the contrary, no instrument sets the human rights responsibilities for NGOs nor includes concrete mechanisms to hold them to account (Lindblom 2011).

The dispute between SI and WWF clearly illustrates this regulatory vacuum, since SI had to invoke a legal instrument—in the form of the OECD Guidelines—originally meant for multinationals. Because of the difficulties related to the regulation and the legal accountability of NGOs at the national level discussed above, and given the absence of an international legal instrument on the human rights responsibilities of NGOs, SI had no other choice than seeking redress using the global legal system, and thereby relying on an international instrument that applies to multinationals.

Survival International v. WWF: A Normative NGO–NGO Conflict

In February 2016, SI submitted a 228-page complaint to the OECD in Switzerland, where WWF International is headquartered, asserting that the Baka—an Indigenous group who live in the rainforest in southeast Cameroon—had been denied access to their homeland and subsequently abused by local eco-guard officers. This occurred after the Cameroon government established protected areas with the vital support of the WWF to make way for a national reserve (Survival International Charitable

[Trust vs. WWF, Complaint Submission 2016](#)). The divergence in the respective organizational missions of the two NGOs inevitably impacted this conflict. The WWF is dedicated to wildlife conservation and minimizing human impact on the environment, whereas SI advocates for the protection of Indigenous rights, aiming to amplify their voices and secure their land rights. In certain situations, these two missions may become incompatible. For instance, environmental protection might necessitate advocating for a formal ban on hunting certain wild animal species, a practice undertaken by some Indigenous groups such as the Baka. From a normative perspective, this complaint provides a unique example of a normative conflict which revolves around an adversarial understanding of how certain human rights standards should apply to an NGO. This legal conflict developed and escalated particularly on three dimensions: (1) whether a set of norms apply to the WWF, (2) the degree to which certain human rights standards were adhered by the WWF, (3) the resolution of the conflict through the mediation process.

Applying the OECD Guidelines to an NGO

Originally, the OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises had been created to handle complaints against multinational enterprises and were not designed to address any issues of NGO accountability. Accordingly, the first aspect SI had to establish was how a normative human rights framework, meant for a different class of organizations, could apply to the WWF and NGOs, more broadly. Relying on an extensive interpretation of the definition of multinational enterprises under [Chapter 1](#) (4) of the OECD Guidelines, SI emphasized that the Guidelines were potentially applicable to the WWF and more broadly to any private entity, other than conventional corporations, operating internationally in all sectors of the economy regardless of its size, ownership, and structure ([Survival International Charitable Trust vs. WWF 2016](#), Annex IV, para. 8). More specifically, SI pointed out that the WWF was an independent foundation under [Chapter 3](#) of the Swiss Civil Code, that it was entered in the Commercial Register of the Canton, and that it coordinated a network of over eighty WWF national offices around the world ([Survival International Charitable Trust vs. WWF 2016](#), para. 10). SI claimed that conservation was an increasingly significant sector of the economy and that the WWF had adopted a market-based approach to conservation and had business plans for its major projects ([Survival International Charitable Trust vs. WWF 2016](#), paras 10–14). In the media released commenting on the OECD complaint, SI raised critical points about the WWF's operations and authority. SI's criticism was multifaceted and concerned the WWF's operational scale, funding sources, and the impact of their initiatives on Indigenous peoples. First, SI labelled the WWF as an 'industrial scale' NGO ([Barkham 2017](#)), a characterization implying a departure from grassroots activism towards a more corporate-like structure. Another significant accusation by SI was that the WWF prioritized securing corporate cash over establishing partnerships with Indigenous and

tribal peoples (Survival International 2016). Most critically, SI challenged the WWF's authority by asserting that 'no international NGO claiming to act in the common good should support any initiative that robs people of their lands' (Ewans 2016, para 13). In its statement, the WWF claimed to take 'any and all allegations of human rights violations extremely seriously' (Barkham 2017, para 8) and that they 'have worked over the years to verify any alleged abuses, and we have taken all appropriate measures to address allegations brought to our attention, including communicating these to the appropriate authorities' (Barkham 2017, para 8). Additionally, the WWF had voluntarily agreed to the mediation process before the OECD, although it disagreed with turning the OECD Guidelines conventionally designed for commercial companies 'into a mechanism for resolving issues between two nonprofit organizations' (Barkham 2017, para 15). The WWF's participation in the mediation implies recognition of the legitimacy of external oversight and demonstrates a commitment to accountability, despite the OECD Guidelines being instruments typically used in the business world. The WWF's stance also asserts the uniqueness of the NGO sector; by challenging the direct application of business-oriented guidelines, it underscores the need for a nuanced understanding of NGO operations and the appropriateness of applying business accountability standards to NGOs.

The OECD allowed the complaint against WWF based on two primary considerations. First, the WWF International is a global network of organizations with offices in more than eighty countries, thus meeting the transnational nature criterion required by Chapter 1 (4) for the applicability of the OECD Guidelines (NCP Switzerland 2016, 8). Second, even if the WWF's operations may not per se qualify as being of a commercial nature, the WWF's approach to conservation was to a certain extent market-based. For example, the income of the WWF's network is generated from royalties and selling collectors' albums, and from the use of the panda emblem for the sale of environmentally friendly products (NCP Switzerland 2016). In doing so, the OECD set out three cumulative criteria to evaluate what kind of NGO should be subjected to complaints within the OECD system: (1) the NGO must operate in more than one country through national offices, associate or affiliate organizations based in multiple countries, or through various forms of cooperation with local independent partners spread worldwide, (2) the NGO must operate or be registered within a signatory state of the OECD Guidelines, and (3) the NGO must carry out commercial activities, even if it has a non-profit aim (Carolei 2018). By documenting how the WWF operates in the same way as a multinational, SI broadened the category of rights-bearer in global politics to not only include NGOs, but also expanded how the public purpose of NGOs is understood, challenging the WWF's use of NGO as a 'claim-bearing' label (Hilhorst 2003). In this regard, the normative conflict described enables us to better understand NGOs as a claim-bearing label, while showing how inadequate traditional definitions of NGOs can be in framing the fluidity and multifaceted nature of the NGO sector. Accordingly, NGOs are best understood and defined by adopting a relational approach, as advanced by Deloffre and Quack in this book (Chapter 1, this volume), which proposes to focus on the outcomes of NGO-NGO interactions, including conflictual ones.

The Degree of Human Rights Commitment

After determining that the OECD provides a normative framework to assess the human rights impact of an NGO, the key question was to assess the extent to which this framework was adequately complied with by the WWF.

The OECD complaint was based on field research conducted by SI in Cameroon and upon extensive discussions with the Baka, local organizations, as well as with other stakeholders ([Survival International Charitable Trust vs. WWF 2016](#), Annex IV, para. 6). The complaint filed by SI was articulated into two branches, namely: a ‘land issue’ and an ‘eco-guard’ issue.

The first branch of the complaint (‘land issue’) regarded the way in which the national government, in close consultation with the WWF, had introduced protected areas in the rainforest of southeast Cameroon. Based on evidence gathered by SI, the establishment of the protected areas was conducted without the free, prior, and informed consent of the Baka, who had been denied access to the traditional territories and natural resources on which they depend ([Survival International Charitable Trust vs. WWF 2016](#), paras 51–57). According to SI, the WWF should have known that its logistic support of the demarcation of the national reserve and the subsequent deployment of eco-guards would result in adverse human rights impacts ([Survival International Charitable Trust vs. WWF 2016](#)). Essentially, the WWF failed to conduct an adequate human rights assessment with due diligence, as it did not consult local communities directly affected by its actions as required by the 2011 OECD Guidelines, Chapter IV, Human Rights, Paragraphs four and five ([Survival International Charitable Trust vs. WWF 2016](#), paras 82–94).

The second branch (‘eco-guards issue’) was related to the violent abuse to which the Baka had been subjected by the eco-guards who patrolled the protected areas. According to SI, the eco-guards had been trained and supported both financially and logistically by the WWF ([Survival International Charitable Trust vs. WWF 2016](#), para. 26). In particular, SI contended that the WWF’s support to the eco-guards, who were supposed to patrol and focus on commercial poachers and professional hunters, led to violent abuse of the Baka, contributing to adverse human rights impacts and resulting in a subsequent failure to address such impacts when they occurred, under the 2011 OECD Guidelines, Chapter IV, Human Rights, Paragraphs 1, 2, 3, and 6 ([Survival International Charitable Trust vs. WWF 2016](#), paras 62–75, paras 95–109). According to several witnesses, the eco-guards confiscated various objects belonging to the villagers such as guns, metal cables, and even machetes (which are not used for hunting elephants or other protected species), while other villagers were tortured and abused both physically and verbally ([Matsuura 2017](#)).

As concerns the land issue, the WWF opposed the claims advanced by SI, asserting that evidence gathered did not take into consideration the complexity of the zoning process and it also neglected the extensive consultations undertaken by the WWF with the Baka, prior to the establishment of protected areas, which resulted in significant amendments of the initial project ([NCP Switzerland 2016](#), 4). As to the eco-guards issue, the WWF expressed its willingness to verify credible allegations of

abuse and has taken up instances of verified abuse with the Cameroonian authorities (NCP Switzerland 2016, 5). On this matter, the WWF made clear that even if WWF-Cameroon provided advice to the Cameroon government on the protection of natural resources, it was not able to set the respective agenda and determine priorities. Lastly, the WWF explained that the deployment of eco-guards was a decision taken by the Cameroonian government on its own and over which the NGO had no influence, and neither logistical nor financial support to the eco-guards was provided (NCP Switzerland 2016).

The Resolution of the Conflict

Despite that both NGOs initially accepted the OECD system as a conciliation forum in which to resolve the dispute, mediation talks broke down. In September 2017, SI issued a press release, announcing that they would withdraw from the mediation underway after talks with WWF had failed to secure WWF's agreement to consent with the Baka on how to manage the conservation zone (Survival International 2017). A few days after the press release, the Swiss National Contact Point (NCP) reported that SI breached confidentiality rules, because if the parties decide to participate in the mediation, they agree to respect the rules on confidentiality under the Procedural Guidance of the Swiss NCP (NCP Switzerland 2017a). At the same time, the Swiss NCP highlighted that SI's description of the mediation was biased and that, as a mediation office, the NCP operated impartially above the two NGOs. As a result of that, the Swiss NCP announced that it would close the case (NCP Switzerland 2017a). In November 2017, the Swiss NCP published a Final Statement including a set of recommendations for the two NGOs (NCP Switzerland 2017b). The fact that the mediation talks failed highlights one of the limits of the OECD Guidelines, as achieving an agreement relies on both parties' consensus. According to the 2020 OECD Watch Report, only six cases out of twenty-eight reached an agreement (OECD Watch 2021). Interestingly, the case SI v. WWF presents some similarities with the 2016 complaint filed by SI against Salini regarding Indigenous rights abuses in Ethiopia (NCP Italy 2017). On that occasion, SI asked to revise the terms of reference concerning the confidentiality provisions between the two parties involved in the mediation process, in particular the terms that prevent them from advertising or commenting on the case with the public, the media, and third parties while mediation talks were ongoing (NCP Italy 2017). In the view of SI, the terms and provisions of confidentiality were too rigid and could prevent NGOs from apprising the Indigenous people, on behalf of whom the complaint was being filed, in respect of important developments occurring during the mediation talks. However, the NCP refused to amend the terms of reference, thus rejecting SI's request, by emphasizing the importance of preserving confidentiality during the mediation talks. As a result of this denial, SI communicated that it would not sign the terms of reference for the mediation talks which would lead to the abandoning the proceedings (NCP Italy

2017). In the final statement, the Italian NCP recommended to SI to carefully consider the OECD complaints mechanism's purpose to foster dialogue and reach joint agreements through mediation talks when considering filing complaints in the future (NCP Italy 2017, 79–80).

Despite this recommendation aimed at fostering dialogue and preserving the confidential nature of the mediation process, SI withdrew from the mediation talks underway with WWF. Yet, the Swiss NCP reported that in July 2017—before the mediation talks failed—the two NGOs had reached agreement on two key points (NCP Switzerland 2017b, 4–5). First, the WWF's Project Complaint Resolution Process, the whistleblower policy, and the Cameroon civil society organization's human rights abuse denunciation mechanism would commence working together to put pressure on the Cameroonian government to ensure the online publication of relevant information about the free, prior, informed consent of the Baka (NCP Switzerland 2017b). Second, SI would provide regular feedback to WWF, based on the information gathered from the Baka (NCP Switzerland 2017b).

Nonetheless, the two parties could not reach agreement on how to implement a set of different actions, especially how the WWF and the Cameroonian government should deal with the issue of consent in the event of an unsatisfactory consultation with the Baka (NCP Switzerland 2017b, 5).

Within the Final Statement, the Swiss NCP made a series of recommendations, inviting both NGOs to keep engaging in dialogue, especially around the protection of the human rights of the Baka (NCP Switzerland 2017b, 6). It also encouraged both NGOs to implement the actions agreed during the mediation meetings (NCP Switzerland 2017b). Simultaneously, it recommended to the WWF to ensure open and transparent processes regarding the issues of consent of the Baka and putting pressure on the Cameroonian government to publish the pertinent information in that respect (NCP Switzerland 2017b). Finally, the Swiss NCP recommended that SI should respect the rules of confidentiality when considering any future submission of a complaint within the OECD system (NCP Switzerland 2017b).

The Innovative Ordering Effects of SI v. WWF

Despite a stalled mediation process, the conflict between SI and the WWF had the productive power to reconfigure social spaces, thereby creating new pathways for NGO regulation and governance. This NGO–NGO conflict bridged regulatory gaps in global governance, using an instrument intended as complaints procedures for multinationals to adjudicate rights-based claims against NGOs. Essentially, the normative conflict between SI–WWF transformed the institutional structure of the OECD Guidelines system which resulted in two tangible effects. First, it expanded the meaning and use of the OECD Guidelines beyond their intended recipients, widening the definition of multinational enterprises under the OECD Guidelines to surpass the dichotomy between profit and non-profit. Second, it broadened the category of

rights-bearers in global politics to encompass NGOs, who now bear human rights responsibilities towards rights-holders as much as multinationals do.

As to the use OECD Guidelines, a number of developments have occurred. Over the past few years there have been several complaints under the OECD Guidelines against non-profit entities other than the WWF, including the Fédération internationale de football association (FIFA), and multi-stakeholder initiatives, namely Bonsucro and Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil (Carolei 2022). In deciding these complaints, the pertinent NCPs held that the OECD Guidelines apply to the above-mentioned entities, although being formally non-profits (Carolei 2022). At the organizational level, the WWF appointed an independent panel of experts to review the accusations of human rights abuses. The review panel was led by Judge Navi Pillay, a former UN High Commissioner for Human Rights. The panel also included Professor John Knox, a former UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights and the Environment. In November 2020, the panel issued a number of recommendations, including strengthening the WWF's social safeguards and human rights policy and also establishing grievance mechanisms for the local communities, such as an independent ombudsman (WWF 2020). However, John Knox (2021) observed that the WWF's new Social Policies and Standards, modelled on the World Bank, presents basic flaws and that it should start over, building on the UNGPs and human rights norms. It is worth noticing that there is an obvious connection between the OECD Guidelines and the UNGPs. Following the adoption of the UNGPs in 2011, the OECD Guidelines were reformed. The Guidelines now include the corporate responsibility to respect human rights, formulated in the same way as in the UNGPs, creating a form of convergence of business and human rights standards (Bernaz 2017, 202). Using business and human rights instruments to enable accountability for human rights, whether in respect of NGO or multinationals, will allow these legal instruments to emerge stronger and to further evolve. Indeed, as this chapter has shown, they have already evolved in their application beyond their intended recipients (Carolei and Bernaz 2021).

As mentioned above, the conflictual relationship between SI and WWF also broadened the category of rights-bearers in global politics and international human rights law. In doing so, this OECD complaint transformed the WWF from human rights guardian to right-bearer, emphasizing that NGOs have human rights responsibilities towards rights-holders. By demanding the use of the OECD instruments beyond multinationals, SI also expanded how the public purpose of NGOs is understood and, more specifically, the WWF's use of NGO as a 'claim-bearing' label (Hilhorst 2003), showing similarities between the WWF and how multinationals operate. In essence, using this accountability mechanism modified traditional definitions and understandings of what an 'NGO' is. This finding validates the relational approach adopted by Deloffre and Quack (Chapter 1, this volume), enabling us to rethink definitions of NGOs without focusing on their attributes as entities, but rather on their interactions as agents and the outcomes of such interactions. Furthermore, it confirms that this category of actors is more fluid than traditional definitions propose, departing from static definitions of NGOs as an object or unit of analysis. A more

open definition of NGO, like the one proposed by Deloffre and Quack ([Chapter 1](#)) in this book, is more appropriate in capturing the nature of NGOs and how they operate in global politics. Through their social interactions in global politics, including conflictual relationships, NGOs are agents capable of self-defining their key definitory features, making them unique among other types of organizations.

Looking at the broader significance of this NGO–NGO conflict, there have been important developments in terms of donors’ accountability. The UN Development Programme Social and Environmental Compliance Unit (SECU)—one of the main sponsors of the WWF’s project in the region—received a complaint regarding allegations of human rights abuses of the Baka living in Congo and Cameroon (August 2018). SI helped the Baka to file a complaint. The SECU’s investigation obtained credible evidence of threats of violence against the Indigenous Baka and subsequently issued a series of recommendations, some of which were directed to the WWF and aimed at ensuring greater transparency of the NGO’s activities in that region ([United Nations Development Programme 2020](#), para. 64). In July 2019, the German government suspended funds allocated to one wildlife reserve, the Salonga National Park, managed by the WWF ([Warren and Baker 2019](#)). In July 2021, The European Union suspended its funding to WWF’s activities in Messok Dja in the Republic of Congo and a complaint mechanism was put in place in the Lobéké national park in Cameroon ([European Parliament 2021](#)). In October 2021, the US Congress Natural Resources Committee conducted a bipartisan investigation into the WWF’s allegations of human rights violations overseas ([US Congress 2021](#)). In March 2022, the Subcommittee on Water, Oceans, and Wildlife of the US House Committee on Natural Resources held a hearing on introduction of a new bill titled ‘Advancing Human Rights-Centered International Conservation Act 2022’ ([Congress.Gov 2022](#)). The aim of the bill is to prohibit the director of the United States Fish and Wildlife Service from funding entities that commit, fund, or support gross human rights violations. In July 2022, it was received by the Senate, read twice, and referred to the Committee on Environment and Public Works.

Concluding Remarks

Representing the first complaint within the OECD Guidelines system filed by an NGO against another NGO about their compliance with international human rights standards—meant to apply to multinationals—the dispute between SI and WWF helps us to better understand NGO–NGO conflicts, their causes, and effects.

Even if NGOs can barely be regulated and held liable under national laws, for the reasons specified throughout this chapter, some institutional settings of the global system can be used to adjudicate NGO–NGO conflicts and hold them accountable for human rights abuses. Accordingly, the global system does not solely provide an avenue to enact certain types of interactions, typically NGO–NGO cooperation, but also for NGO–NGO conflicts.

While conflicts are usually perceived as producing undesirable outcomes, they can also have transformative powers and reconfigure social spaces in innovative ways. NGO–NGO conflicts can enact upon institutional structures in ways that may transform, gradually change, or conserve them. In that respect, the interaction between SI and the WWF transformed the institutional structure of the OECD Guidelines system from a forum initially designed to deal with complaints against corporations to an avenue where NGO–NGO conflict could be dealt with. As documented at great length, the transformative and ordering effects of this conflict manifested in two ways. First, it expanded the use of the OECD Guidelines beyond their intended recipients (multinationals). Second, it widened the category of rights-bearers in global politics, rendering NGOs both human rights guardians and rights-bearers. This normative shift carries implications in the way NGOs are defined, challenging traditional notions of ‘NGOs’ anchored to their attributes as entities. In essence, the normative conflict between SI and the WWF proves that NGOs, through their social interactions in global politics, are agents capable of defining their definitory features and attributes.

Finally, this normative conflict teaches us an important lesson regarding the regulation and the accountability of NGOs. The dispute between SI and WWF illustrates how underregulated NGOs are at the international level because SI had to rely on a legal instrument, meant to apply to multinationals, to hold a peer organization accountable for human rights abuses. As documented in this chapter, this conflict shows how NGOs can fill regulatory gaps through their interactions, as the OECD allowed the use of the Guidelines beyond multinationals. In that respect, the SI–WWF conflict demonstrates how a regulatory and accountability gap is filled by an NGO–NGO interaction and that, even in what seems like a regulatory vacuum, there are strategies for addressing concerns that may shift ordering patterns. [Godard \(2009\)](#) expects NGO–NGO collaborations or connections to fill structural gaps. But, in the case of SI and the WWF, it is the conflict that is filling a regulatory gap. There is an interaction, but the nature of it is conflictual, rather than collaborative, which expands our understanding of how gap-filling occurs. In the absence of specific forums to deal with NGO accountability at the international level, the OECD Guidelines now represent an attractive avenue to address human rights issues of NGOs. Nonetheless, the fact that mediation talks failed between SI and the WWF indicates that the OECD Guidelines should not be seen as a silver bullet to deal with NGO accountability and present limitations. To enact NGO regulation and accountability further, the Guidelines should work closely together with new independent accountability mechanisms tailored for NGOs, including the establishment of international ombudspersons for the humanitarian and the development sector.

Notes

1. [Johnson \(2016, 745\)](#) nicely frames the distinction between conflict and cooperation: ‘conflict arises if the actors lack shared values and draw from different resource pools. Unlike

competitive relations where resource gains for one actor are a loss for the other actor, in conflictual relations the actors have distinct resource bases from which to draw as they square off over their divergent values concerning the institutional status quo. Because the parties can gain replenishment in their respective pools without “starving” each other, they can remain adversarial for an extended period. Whereas competition involves mere rivalry, conflict involves outright opposition.’

2. It is worth noticing that the term ‘normative conflict’ might also be used by lawyers when multiple and conflicting rules exist to regulate how one ought to behave in a given circumstance. Legally speaking, this phenomenon is known as ‘conflict of norms’, and it is characterized by the existence of a rule that prescribes something, while a second rule prescribes the opposite.
3. Human rights norms can also be the reason for interpersonal conflicts between right-holders. This is typically the case of competing rights, in which the parties to a dispute claim that the enjoyment of particular human rights would interfere with another’s rights. Put simply, this is the so-called ‘it is my rights against yours’ scenario (e.g., a person’s right to privacy that conflicts against someone else’s right to freedom of expression). Contrary to most human right disputes, where only one side makes a human rights claim (e.g., a right-holder complaining against a public authority that his/her rights have been violated), competing rights give rise to a judicial dispute where both sides rely on a human rights claim. To resolve this type of dispute, a judge is called to perform the difficult task of balancing conflicting rights.
4. See, UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, *State of Qatar v. Kingdom of Saudi Arabia*, 27 August 2019 (CERD/C/99/5); UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, *State of Qatar v. United Arab Emirates*, 27 August 2019 (CERD/C/99/3); UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, *State of Palestine v. State of Israel*, 12 December 2019 (CERD/C/100/3).

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The Power of Interpersonal Ties

INGO Relations in the Greek Refugee Crisis

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Introduction

At the height of the refugee crisis the Greek chapter of Amnesty International noted that collaboration is ‘the key. We cannot succeed without the support of other organizations ... even in terms of research it is more fruitful to work within a platform in which we systematically exchange information’ ([Amnesty International 2016](#)). Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), an organization considered reluctant to collaborate with others, has highlighted that ‘even if the goals of different NGOs differ, there is a tendency for the creation of networks and for setting common targets related to the provision of support to asylum seekers’ ([Gansbergen and Breuckmann 2017](#), 159). Likewise, a former partnerships manager at the International Rescue Committee (IRC) noted that the IRC invested significantly in Greece in terms of time and resources during the 2016–2020 period towards the creation and advancement of collaboration with most actors in the field.¹

General wisdom stipulates that collaboration is a very powerful feature that enhances effectiveness and efficiency, bringing about better results. In the field of humanitarian intervention, the issue of cooperation, or at least of coordination, is being highlighted at almost every occasion, with the 2015–2020 European/Greek refugee crisis being no exception. Interestingly, a significant part of the relevant literature highlights competition as the prevailing framework within humanitarian aid (see for example [Reindorp and Wiles 2001](#); [Cooley and Ron 2002](#); [Moshtari and Gonçalves 2017](#)). As highlighted in Deloffre and Quack ([Chapter 1](#), this volume), coordinating relationships among nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) are defined as mutually adjusting, harmonizing, or acting in synchrony, meaning that an acknowledgement of the importance of other actors exists and that all actors try to create a common sphere of operations. For example, at a campsite to which different NGOs have secured access, humanitarian agencies create a series of coordination mechanisms to minimize duplication of efforts and to enhance value generation for affected communities. In contrast, cooperation is understood as a much deeper level of interaction. Actors are working together in the pursuit of similar goals through joint effort and planning, and pooling resources for mutual benefit. In the example

of a campsite, this would mean creating common statements and requests towards the relevant state or main funder (usually the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, UNHCR), or creating common funding proposals. In a European Commission report on emergency support ([European Commission 2018a](#)) the issue of cooperation among all stakeholders and between actors in the field (primarily NGOs) was highlighted as an important element for the emergency response's efficiency. Yet it is not rare for relations between various international nongovernmental organizations (INGOs) in humanitarian emergency theatres to be characterized by intense competition over the same resources (for example, for the European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (ECHO) or UNHCR, or for other donors' funding) and for a more privileged position in the decision-making framework (including access to senior state officials). At times this even involves spreading 'negative whispers' on the quality of the services offered by the other INGOs.

This chapter analyses the effects of interpersonal relations among personnel in NGOs on collaboration patterns, with a focus on the Greek refugee crisis (2015–2020). It applies a relational approach to NGO interactions which specifies different types and levels of social ties and the processes through which these are maintained or transformed. While the relations established between NGOs and states (e.g., [Young 2000](#)), international organizations (e.g., [Steffek 2013](#)) or even enterprises (e.g., [Soule 2009](#)) have been in the focus of various studies, and while a set of studies have highlighted the importance of NGO–NGO relations (e.g., [Stroup and Wong 2016](#)), most analyses understand NGOs to be organizations, thereby neglecting the importance of interpersonal relations. Building on [Schneiker \(2017\)](#), this chapter highlights the importance of relations between individuals representing NGOs in the development of cooperation initiatives that seem, at first glance, difficult to produce. The questions we shall pose are: how can patterns of cooperation be explained in cases of NGOs with deep rivalries? What is the role of individuals (and of their biographies) in these cases, and what are the potential limitations?

In other words, if interpersonal ties are influencing relations among INGOs, what is their effect? The latter is examined through focusing on three separate fields that are of increased importance in NGO operations, especially those in the humanitarian field: (1) fundraising (core function of all NGOs), that is, the submission of joint proposals for funding, (2) advocacy campaigns, with emphasis on joint statements (specifically important to NGOs focusing on humanitarian assistance, as it directly affects their ability to operate in the field) and, (3) common projects (important due to the history of competition for securing funding between relevant NGOs). By analysing developments in these distinct fields of NGO operations, the chapter attempts to highlight the effect of the role of individuals towards the formulation of coordination/collaborative initiatives.

The study focuses on the presence of key individuals that seem to be supporting the evolution of more dense patterns of interactions among INGOs in the context of the 2015–2020 Greek refugee crisis. The case of the Greek refugee crisis is ideal

for examining patterns of interaction because it allows examination of the interactions between INGOs that are newly joining the field, INGOs with established local offices, and local NGOs with a longstanding presence that vary in their capabilities. As Moshtari and Gonçalves (2017) argue, the short timeframes of humanitarian responses affect the ability of NGOs to invest enough resources that allow for more fruitful collaborations. In this sense, the Greek case is a challenging case for collaboration because emergency settings are typically characterized by high personnel turnover.

The study shows that overall, the longstanding interpersonal ties of local NGOs proved of higher value than the ‘hurried’ contacts created by INGOs arriving ad hoc in an emergency situation. Based on the Greek case study, the chapter argues that interpersonal ties, or ‘bottom-up coordination’, are an essential mechanism through which cooperation and coordination occur in advocacy and joint programming. In effect, it is noted that there are no significant joint efforts in the fundraising field, with relations varying from competition to co-optation, while there are cases of coordination, and even of collaboration, in both the advocacy and the common projects fields that are worth further exploration. Of course, these relations-shaping mechanisms are subject to each case’s institutional framework, whilst being more influential under specific conditions that vary by field of activity. Going more into detail, interpersonal ties in our case study do not seem to overcome weaknesses towards increased collaboration among NGOs as far as fundraising activities are concerned—at best, the nature of their relations in this case ranges from co-optation to (more often) competition. On the other hand, interpersonal ties provide a positive effect in the advocacy field, within a resulting environment of coordination or cooperation. Likewise, they constitute a more important factor than organizational interests in the field of common projects, resulting in a coordinating or cooperating environment.

Through this analysis the chapter shows how interpersonal relationships enhance both mobilizing and ordering effects of INGO interactions, sometimes enhancing inclusion and in other cases fostering exclusion. What is revealed is that interpersonal relationships can have a positive effect in an array of activities, shaping interactions and bridging actions of organizations with different overall organizational interests.

The Refugee Crisis in Greece

In 2015, an unprecedented influx of refugees altered the landscape of the refugee/migrant sector in Greece. Finding itself as the gateway to an extensive movement of displaced people mainly coming from Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan, with over one million refugees and migrants crossing its borders, Greece abruptly entered into a humanitarian crisis. This sudden influx of people landing on Greek shores and elsewhere, having no or few resources, and requiring both food and health support, led to an unprecedented crisis. After initial care, these individuals required guidance, shelter, and support to either apply to be recognized as refugees or to continue their

trip towards Northern Europe. The fact that most of these individuals landed on ill-prepared Greek islands which were already experiencing deteriorating conditions in their healthcare and social provisions systems due to the prior socioeconomic crisis of 2010–2015, exacerbated the effects of the crisis.

The influx of refugees and migrants continued until February 2016, when the borders between Greece and North Macedonia closed, trapping thousands of refugees in a remote border area in Northern Greece (Idomeni). During the same year, the arrival of migrants and refugees decreased notably (by over 90 per cent) ([European Commission 2018b](#)). The main reason was the agreement between the European Union (EU) and Turkey, known as the ‘EU and Turkey Statement’, which aimed at blocking the illegal entry of migrants/refugees into Greece, also specifying a scheme for deportation to Turkey of those not eligible for refugee status (Valvis et al. 2021).

The overall situation significantly ameliorated during 2017, especially refugees’/migrants’ living conditions. The number of sea arrivals sharply decreased, while attempts were made to improve conditions in the camps by securing better access to healthcare, sanitation, and education services. During the subsequent years, 2018–2020, flows remained rather low but were still existent, continuously putting pressure on a system still unfit to properly handle the situation. To date, according to the [UNHCR \(September 2024\)](#) around 20,000 people are ‘contained’ in camps in just a few Greek islands on the Northern Aegean Sea, while circa 238,000 are spread around Greece.

In all respects the Greek state, and to a certain degree Greek civil society too, was unprepared to handle the developing situation and the skyrocketing needs of the people. In the first phase of the humanitarian response, both the Greek state and professional (I)NGOs were accused of failing to respond effectively to the crisis. On the one hand, the Greek government failed to develop a coherent strategy for the migration issue, based upon the belief that Greece is a transit country rather than a final destination ([Skleparis and Armakolas 2016](#)). Concurrently, the reaction of major Greek NGOs was also limited, eschewing to engage with the crisis, largely because they were already implementing aid programs for those affected by the economic crisis on the Greek mainland, and were unable to immediately boost their operations on the islands ([Skleparis 2015](#)).

In addition, many donors did not view Greece as a country in need. Oxfam representatives declared in early 2015 that ‘while we understand that many in Greece are in difficulty, the sort of financial support these people need is not within Oxfam’s remit. Therefore, we do not currently have plans to operate in Greece’ ([Devaney 2015](#), para. 21). As the situation increasingly deteriorated and funding was made available, many INGOs, including Oxfam, initiated operations throughout Greece. Oxfam in particular started operations in western Greece a few months later, offering support to refugees settled in the region of Ipeiros.

The entrance of various INGOs during 2016 altered the landscape of the operations, while an almost parallel initiation of operations from Greek NGOs was recorded. On most occasions, INGOs were contracted by either UNHCR or ECHO²

to provide humanitarian support and, later on, protection, housing, water, sanitation, hygiene, and other operations. INGOs cooperated in turn with local nongovernmental organizations (LNGOs) for the provision of such services on the ground.

According to the [European Commission \(2018c\)](#) data on funding in Greece, the Danish Refugee Council was the principal recipient, receiving almost 28.5 per cent of European funding available to NGOs in 2018. The IRC was placed second with 18.1 per cent of the budget, while the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) received 9.5 per cent and Oxfam and Médecins du Monde (MdM) received 8.5 per cent (see [Figure 3.1](#)).

From 2017 onwards, various INGOs withdrew from Greece, mainly due to the amelioration of the situation and the decrease in international funding. Hence, organizations such as Oxfam, Save the Children and NRC gradually made their exit, although several other organizations remained in Greece, for example, the IRC, MSF, and the Danish Refugee Council (DRC), to name a few. Interestingly, and as will be further elaborated, the latter's decision to maintain operations in Greece led to an overall deeper interaction with local NGOs, but not between INGOs, common presence to coordination meetings being excluded.

An interesting dimension of the Greek landscape is that the country was hosting local offices of several INGOs prior to the refugee crisis. For example, MdM, MSF, ActionAid, and Greenpeace were operating local offices, mainly focusing on fundraising and raising awareness. While MdM focused on project implementation and fundraising from local sources, such as companies and charitable foundations, MSF, ActionAid, and Greenpeace were successful in attracting

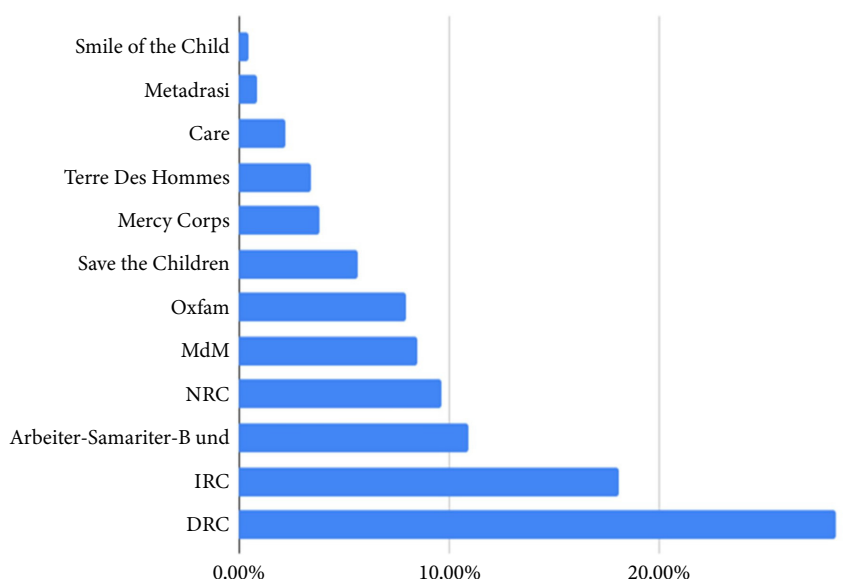


Figure 3.1 EU funding allocation among (I)NGOs on the Greek site (2015–2018)

Source: [European Commission 2018c](#) (data processed by author).

small donations from a great number of individual donors. These branches were employing primarily Greek personnel and were somewhat active in debates and developments within the Greek NGO ecosystem, meaning that they had frequent interactions with LNGOs and also with each other. An executive director of an INGO that was operating in Greece prior to the crisis stated in an interview in late 2018 that they were expecting INGOs that had entered Greece due to the refugee crisis to utilize the momentum in order to remain in the ‘Greek market’ after the crisis for fundraising reasons, an expectation that has yet to materialize. The fact that a series of INGOs completely withdrew from Greece meant that any progress achieved in the field of INGO–INGO interaction could not be reinforced, or even preserved, by a continuation of interactions at the local level.³

As the economic crisis (2010–2015) was enhancing societal needs in Greece, some of these INGO branches went beyond acting primarily as fundraising mechanisms and initiated support projects directed at the Greek population. For example, ActionAid would establish a community centre in the heart of Athens, while MSF would commence offering health services to the less privileged. Though there is no evidence of coordination that led to this division of labour, it is clear that each INGO did not attempt to enter the ‘sub-sector’ of the other, that is, the more social services-focused approach of ActionAid or the more health services-focused strategy of MSF. This, in turn, strengthened the need to talk to each other more frequently, although no significant cooperation schemes were introduced.

In effect, the developments in the field gradually led to the creation of two main and parallel ‘configurations’ of actors. As explained in Deloffre and Quack (Chapter 1, this volume), configurations are understood as a particular pattern of ties, processes, or practices that are produced by a given set of actors which at the same time affect the actors and their processes of interaction. In this chapter, configurations are employed to study how enhanced interpersonal ties affected collaboration and cooperation among INGOs operating in Greece.

The first configuration consists of major INGOs that entered the Greek site and started managing significant funding coming from IGOs such as UNHCR and ECHO. These INGOs did not have a prior presence in Greece and their relations with local actors were based on a ‘sub-contracting’ or ‘service provision’ relationship, leading to overall weak and less durable connections with other actors in the field. Despite some exceptions, this configuration is characterized by bilateral transactional relationships between INGOs and funders, by contracting out to local NGOs for service provision, and by INGO competition for funding. Because of its ad hoc nature, we title this configuration as ‘ad hoc configuration’.

The second configuration, titled as ‘established configuration’ includes a series of INGOs like MdM, MSF, ActionAid, Greenpeace, Terre des Hommes (TdH), and Intersos that employed either smaller task forces in Greece or were already present prior to the crisis. While also receiving major funding from UNHCR and ECHO, this group of INGOs had better connections to local communities and local funders, they employed Greek staff, and were more open to collaborations.

Limits of Top-Down Coordination in Ad Hoc Configurations of INGOs

In essence, due to the noted high-level of turnover within INGOs working in the humanitarian field, the literature assumes that interpersonal ties are not easily produced and, when created, usually consist of rather weak relations. As [Moshtari and Gonçalves \(2017\)](#) put it, the element of interpersonal ties is of moderate importance vis-à-vis overall INGO-INGO cooperation due to the high levels of turnover in the sector. Findings from the case study confirm this for ad hoc configurations of INGOs that entered Greece without local ties. In this configuration, top-down collaboration through coordination meetings orchestrated by the UNHCR and by municipalities prevailed. While these meetings offered occasions to develop interpersonal ties, they typically remained weak and meetings failed to produce lasting coordination between actors. In effect, top-down coordination meetings did not help to create anything except minor collaboration effects. This was partially because of inconsistencies in participation, personnel turnover, and existing competition. In more specialized meetings, due mainly to the same level of participants and better consistency, positive effects were enhanced, but again, these effects were rather weak.

Indeed, weak interpersonal ties were a reality for INGOs that did not have offices in Greece prior to the refugee crisis. Such ties could be developed on various occasions, though the heavy workload of a humanitarian crisis renders time for interpersonal exchange a luxury. Nevertheless, opportune occasions to meet occurred at the various coordination meetings that were organized mostly by the UNHCR. In its attempt to foster coordination in the field, UNHCR would regularly gather most actors in the sector and organize them by specific thematic areas: protection, nutrition, water, housing, and health ([Kitching et al 2016](#)). In these meetings, as highlighted by all interviewees, interactions were enhanced and some sharing of best practices occurred. This ‘forced coexistence’ had positive effects in terms of getting to know each other, mostly on a personal level, according to an expert on the refugee sector and former key programme officer of the philanthropic foundation operating in Greece.⁴ In reality, such activities would build upon an ordering effect, filling part of the missing coordination within the theatre of operations.

Nevertheless, most joint activities would focus on pressuring the host, which in the majority of cases was the UNHCR, for further support and/or funding; after each meeting, participants would continue their work with limited alterations. This ineffectiveness after coordination meetings can also be attributed to the level of seniority of participating representatives. Commonly, after the initial meeting each organization would then send to subsequent meetings lower-level personnel due to the time restrictions of more senior members. This meant that in the coordination meetings no actual decisions besides data exchange could take place, which led to a loss of momentum and to potentially decreased chances of initiating new collaborations. The mid-level representative would briefly report back and continue with his/her heavy workload, as the deputy director of a structure organization⁵ in Greece noted.⁶

A high-level official from IRC also highlighted the fact that in these meetings it was difficult to achieve increased value due to the lack of significant homogeneity. In a 2016 meeting, the inability of UNHCR representatives to provide tangible solutions regarding winterization was apparently decreasing the value of any high-level INGO representatives' participation, partly because of the imperfect coordination mechanism with Greek national authorities. The situation was better in more specialized working groups such as in the field of mental health.⁷ In effect, it is regular meetings among similarly positioned peers that represent an important practice in enhancing NGO–NGO coordination. Again, some ordering effects could become more evident in direct correlation with the specialization of the working group, and with the gradual enhancement of the level of interpersonal ties within these groups.

In addition to the UNHCR initiative, relevant coordination meetings were also organized by several municipalities. The Municipality of Athens, for example, created the Athens Coordination Center for Migrant and Refugee issues (ACCMR) in which more than ninety organizations, almost all of which were INGOs, took part.⁸ The local level meant that after initial meetings, representation would be passed on to mid-level personnel. Hence, although INGOs like ActionAid and IRC dedicated resources towards the fruitful operation of the Center, any collaboration that was brought about consisted of one INGO working with some LNGOs. This was leading to an exclusionary effect—in ACCMR the predominant presence of IRC led to other INGOs becoming less active or not participating at all. According to the fundraising director of one of the biggest NGOs in Greece, the meetings and interpersonal relations created through all these initiatives did not lead to more substantial collaborations; as competition between NGOs continued to exist, no significant cultural changes could be identified.⁹

In essence, all these top-down coordination meetings failed to produce what they were supposed to, that is, coordination among main agents. In contrast, as highlighted in the next section, coordination meetings initialized through a bottom-up approach that enclosed the dynamics of interpersonal ties did actually bring about more tangible results. This occurred much more frequently in established (I)NGO configurations with long-lasting connections to local actors, the analysis of which shall be taken up in the following section.

Possibilities of Bottom-Up Coordination in Established (I)NGO Configurations

In established (I)NGO configurations, interactions supported by interpersonal ties played a significant role in bottom-up coordination. INGOs that have opted to devote more time in the Greek theatre of operations, with the anticipated localization of middle, and even higher-level personnel, positively enhanced their relations with both INGOs and local NGOs in terms of cooperation and collaboration effects. However, interaction types and the role of interpersonal ties also varied significantly between

specific areas of (I)NGO activities. Hence, emphasis is given to identifying cases of cooperation or collaboration in three separate fields of activity driven by different organizational goals: (1) fundraising, (2) advocacy campaigns, and (3) common projects.

Fundraising

Overall, cooperation is also rare in bottom-up interactions in the funding field. Yet while scholarship on the political economy of humanitarian action expects low levels of cooperation when funding is uncertain or scarce (Bob 2002; Cooley and Ron 2002), the collected data points in a different direction. While there was little cooperation on funding when resources were abundant during the crisis, more bottom-up cooperation emerged in the field as funds became more scarce and resources were provided by different funding bodies. Moreover, this reality of the fundraising landscape seems to be altered when considering less traditional funding channels, as will be explained further. Why do we take note of low levels of collaboration in fundraising activities in a period in which we are witnessing a system comprising high levels of funding (i.e., the initial period of any given humanitarian crisis), but then we see actors increasingly prone to collaborate in the next phases of a crisis in which funding is becoming more scarce? To answer this question, we will need to look at the role of interpersonal ties.

In terms of several sources of funding, there is no data highlighting any serious attempts of collaboration among the relevant actors at the height of the crisis. On the contrary, the analysis of published results on a series of calls reveals a tendency to non-collaboration. This is depicted by (1) the fact that there are no records of successful, joint proposals in a series of calls that require the formulation of consortia and (2) the fact that major actors dominated UNHCR and ECHO funding that does not require the creation of consortia, but rather of ‘hub-and-spokes’ systems. Such systems entailed one large NGO getting a fund and then subcontracting part of the work to other smaller NGOs.

Indeed, different funding channels such as the European Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF), the European Programme for Integration and Migration (EPIM), ECHO, and UNHCR are not providing evidence to support the argument that INGOs were pushed by calls for proposals to cooperate with each other. For example, throughout the 2015–2019 period only two cooperation initiatives in the AMIF, both in 2018, were recorded. More specifically, Oxfam (Italy) and Safe Passage International (UK) were among the eight partners of a consortium to implement a project titled ‘Private Sponsorship for Integration: Building a European model’, while in the same call Save the Children (Italy) partnered among others with the British Red Cross (UK).

Though public information only includes successful proposals, it seems unlikely that many joint proposals of consortia consisting of major INGOs were not approved, among more than 150 projects being funded (AMIF 2022, data processed by author).

This development highlights the low levels of interest of INGOs to join forces in a series of calls that request collaborative approaches (note that in the awarded projects no single applicant proposal is found). Likewise, funding available via ECHO was mostly directed to projects implemented by single entities ([European Commission 2022](#)).

The same picture is derived from the analysis of the five yearly reports of UNHCR Greece Response Plans ([UNHCR n.d.](#)) and the Financial Tracking Services (FTS) (2016–2020) ([OCHA n.d.](#)). More specifically, in 2016 according to FTS around (USD) \$455 million were distributed to forty-six organizations to cover specific field needs, with no joint proposal being recorded. More interestingly, INGOs that undertook the sites' management responsibility were more prone to delegate specific features of the sites to LNGOs than to INGOs. Hence, when in 2018 just 25 million euros ([UNHCR n.d.](#)) were disseminated outside the national state funding scheme, the possibilities of collaboration in the proposals phase were even more limited. Nevertheless, it is important to stress that according to the [UNHCR 2016](#) report, the coordination efforts of the United Nations agency covered 197 different stakeholders, many of which were related to INGOs.

Indeed, the procurement system of UNHCR did not allow for any collaboration initiatives among INGOs. A part of them, focusing on similar fields, competed for the same funding (primarily ECHO funding) but cooperated in other areas (as explained in following sections). For example, NRC, IRC, and DRC competed for ECHO funding to implement housing schemes, but at the same time were teaming up, along with other NGOs, to push for UNHCR to prioritize support to third country nationals based on vulnerability and not on the latter's entrance into formal procedures.

Most key field actors chose to cooperate with LNGOs on the ground instead of addressing the gaps in services through other INGOs. As one interviewee highlighted 'we have a very specific procedure for interacting and cooperating with LNGOs, INGOs, etc. In Greece we have only implemented with local organizations but not with INGOs. In contrast with other crises in the past, it was not fruitful to collaborate with INGOs in the Greek case.'¹⁰

In an attempt to identify the role of interpersonal relationships in the area of fundraising, responses from the majority of interviews pointed to the fact that fundraising departments are enjoying operating at the lowest networking level: one interviewee mentioned that 'the main fundraising channel is that of institutional donations, meaning that what you need is people with a great command of use of tools such as the EC's logical framework'¹¹ and, of course, of the English language. You will not find many extrovert people with such skills, so low levels of ties with their counterparts are to be expected.'¹² Adding to this reality is the fact that most high-level procurements/calls for proposals did not drive interested NGOs to collaborate with each other as expectations for numerous cooperation initiatives are always low. In essence, fundraising, especially in the initial steps of a humanitarian crisis, is of existential importance for organizational survival and to ensure the programs are properly funded at the outset. In a heavily competitive environment,

such as humanitarian crises funding, acting on your own is almost compulsory—especially during the first steps of the crisis, as a former senior project manager at an INGO operating in Greece added.¹³

Interestingly, when the humanitarian crisis landscape in Greece started to shift towards that of a field in which actors would focus more on development issues (rather than exclusively humanitarian ones), a tendency to collaborate on fundraising became more noticeable. The move to more long-term development funding pushed for a more collaborative approach to fundraising, and to that end interpersonal ties, especially in the cases in which these were already established, or becoming stronger, undertook a more important role.

As ECHO and UNHCR funding decreased or moved to the Greek Ministry of Migration, INGOs that chose not to exit Greece started to ‘localize’ themselves. This meant employing more Greek personnel in higher management positions and scanning fundraising opportunities from other EU and Greek sources. According to one interviewee, the cases of IRC, and very recently of DRC, are revealing: when NGOs started to rely less on ECHO and UNHCR funding, interpersonal ties became more important in the field of fundraising, primarily due to the necessity to formulate joint proposals. For ECHO and UNHCR funding, key players within organizations were mainly country directors (Greece) in cooperation with regional or international headquarters (e.g., Denmark for DRC) or representatives in Brussels.¹⁴ But for Greek-based or EU-funding channels an INGO required some enhanced knowledge of the national/local environment which was usually brought in by local staff or mid-level personnel. These people often have the ability to better connect with their peers in other NGOs and can thus play an important ‘bridging’ role between their NGO and another one. As the fundraising strategy is focused on brainstorming for new projects to be formulated, people on the ground constitute valuable sources of ideas and of contacts. Hence, it is interesting to witness a trend to be more open to collaborations at a time in which funding is less easily acquired.¹⁵ Interestingly, this progress of funding availability and a change in main characteristics acts as an activator, or a reinforcement, of linking pins (Schneiker and Joachim 2021), that is, staff-level individuals are taking action on the micro level, as Biermann (2017) highlighted. In other words, it is not necessarily competition for funding that reduces collaboration, but the way funding is decided upon that matters, that is, more local forms of financing seem to improve coordination and cooperation.

The discussion of fundraising shows that while NGOs compete with each other for funding, the type of donor and mechanisms through which they make funding decisions matter in shaping NGO interactions. When NGOs apply for international funding, this is handled by personnel in their respective global headquarters, leading to a lower likelihood of interpersonal connections to be formed. This, in turn, leads to fewer efforts in the field of fundraising. However, when NGOs compete for local funding and where local participation is valued in decision-making, collaboration on joint funding applications is more likely.

Advocacy

Advocacy of NGOs took specific forms during the Greek refugee crisis. While successive Greek governments were not able to quickly mobilize to cover the needs that had been created, the main actors had to follow specific rules. In addition to political positions imposed by the Greek state, EU policies also shaped the refugee response: initially Greece was a transit country, as long as the Balkan route was open, and then changed to a first point of contact with European space through the EU–Turkey Statement of 18 March 2020. Hence, actors in the humanitarian field had to issue positions in relation to both the Greek state and the EU. In other words, this humanitarian case included an institutional agent that was more difficult to affect (the Greek state and the European Commission)—not forgetting that they also served as the main funder of all humanitarian projects in the field. Thus, besides the typical ‘behind the scenes’ attempts to push for specific developments, INGOs had to work against an organized state system governed by specific policies. Their main tool used in working towards this end has been the process of issuing joint statements and trying to generate public support for cases of what they understood as misconduct of the EU as a whole, or Greece in particular, against refugees’ rights. According to one interviewee, joint letters were a new trend within the Greek landscape, both in the humanitarian sector and in other sectors, with NGOs joining such INGO-led initiatives with increasing ease. In the past, this feature was mostly visible in the environmental sector in Greece.¹⁶

As another interviewee stated, contrary to many other humanitarian crises, INGOs had to proceed with numerous joint statements that were not focused on appeals for additional funding (which is the typical case in other situations). Research has revealed very regular joint statements with a variance of signatories.¹⁷ The need to join forces in advocacy campaigns is, of course, largely connected to the fact that pushing for change against the actions of a developed state (Greece) or the EU as a whole is something not fit for any single INGO. To overcome this power deficit in respect of an obstacle in the way of their shared goals, many NGOs would opt to join forces (Brown and Ashman 1996) leading to co-optation or even to cooperation, as explained by Deloffre and Quack (Chapter 1, this volume).

Table 3.1 presents some key joint statements related to the refugee crisis and the Greek case from 2016 to 2020 with the relevant INGO signatories (in each joint statement a significant number of LNGOs were also signatories). Interestingly, there is a pattern in these joint statements: specific INGOs were almost always present, while others were less regularly present. For example, TdH, ActionAid, MdM, and Inter-sos¹⁸ have signed most of the selected joint statements (as well as many more not presented in Table 3.1). Note that these INGOs represent more middle-sized INGOs that have less ‘gravitas’ and they are considered by most of their Greek partners to be more open and accessible, as opposed to other organizations. However, and to the contrary, Save the Children refrained from signing joint statements after leaving Greece, with the exception of the generic joint statement of 6 March 2020. Oxfam

Table 3.1 Key joint statements with INGO signatories

Statement	Joint Statement: NGOs Strongly Condemn New EU Policies to Contain Migration (ActionAid et al. 2016)	Greece Joint NGO Transition Statement: Refugees at Stake Due to Poor Planning (CARE et al. 2017)	Call for Refugees' Rights to be Protected (ActionAid et al. 2020a)	Protect the Most Vulnerable to Ensure Protection for Everyone (ActionAid et al. 2020b)	Joint NGOs Statement Regarding the Urgent Need for a Comprehensive Integration Policy (IRC et al. 2020)	Joint NGO Statement for Conditions on the North Aegean Islands: Conditions at Moria Are 'Shameful' (Caritas et al. 2020)	Joint Statement of 48 NGOs Regarding the Fire at the Registration and Identification Centre at Moria (ActionAid et al. 2020c)
Date	June 2016	25 July 2017	6 March 2020	25 March 2020	8 Sept 2020	13 Sept 2020	14 Sept 2020
INGOs signatories	ActionAid CARE Intersos MdM NRC Oxfam Save the Children TdH	CARE IRC MdM MSF NRC Save the Children	ActionAid CARE Caritas DRC Intersos IRC MdM MSF Oxfam Save the Children TdH	ActionAid Caritas Intersos IRC MdM Oxfam TdH	IRC Intersos TdH	Caritas DRC IRC MdM Oxfam TdH	ActionAid Intersos IRC MdM TdH

Source: Author's own compilation.

also decreased, though not to the same degree, its participation in joint statements after exiting. This difference between two INGOs categorized as large was attributed in an interview to the special personal ties members of Oxfam had with a few Greek NGOs, HumanRights360 being the most prominent one.

On the other hand, one major INGO, MSF, never signed these joint statements, in part because of its internal approval procedures, which are described by many of its Greek office employees as 'difficult and bureaucratic'. That MSF had heavily politicized EU decisions over the Greek/European refugee crisis meant that in many cases they would not have the time to evaluate proposals for joint statements or that they would prefer to do it by themselves.

It is interesting to explore the role of interpersonal relations in these initiatives. According to one interviewee, the former advocacy manager at a medium-sized Greek NGO and a researcher in the field of civil society, most of these joint statements are initiated by two to three organizations who then invite others to join by signing them. Larger organizations usually have the leading role (due to more available resources). Most joint letters related to the refugee sector are discussed and agreed over coordination fora, one of the most prominent ones being the Advocacy Group.¹⁹

The 'usual suspects', that is, the initiators of these joint letters activities, include more specialized organizations of the refugee/humanitarian response sector and are of average size. Their initiative seems to be reinforced by the fact that they do not have the 'gravitas' to bring about change on their own, while positioning is in principle more participatory for other organizations. These efforts for joint statements almost always included an open process during which, for a specific period of time, any organization could send comments to the initial text. In most cases initial texts would form the largest part of the final statement, together with some amendments. Much of the time, amendments were made in terms of ('offensive') language used to accommodate the views of others, thus creating a sense of some legitimacy for the initiators. Higher Incubator Giving Growth & Sustainability (HIGGS), for example, a local NGO which was not very involved with the refugee crisis, was quickly admitted to the Advocacy Group given its leading role in creating a joint statement in response to the unveiling of a new governmental registry for refugee/migration assistance NGOs that had been difficult to join.²⁰ Which INGO would sign the joint statement early on would affect how widely accepted the joint statement would be. In essence, having several INGOs signalling that they will probably sign the joint statement would have an inclusionary effect.

Interestingly, some larger INGOs (IRC, DRC, Oxfam, etc.) were more selective about which letters to co-sign. They have also been recorded as sending their own separate letters/statements to the relevant Greek authorities on some occasions. Medium-sized INGOs such as Intersos and TdH were always prone to either co-sign, support with constructive comments, or even initiate such joint advocacy activities. This reflects the fact that the personnel of Intersos, which is comparably new to the sector, was quickly led by Greek executives. Likewise, TdH was affected to behave in such a manner by the fact that the advocacy function was then led by Melina

Spathari, a well-known Greek field expert with a long working history in various Greek NGOs (including MSF). Interestingly, Spathari is also co-founder of a Greek NGO titled 'Common Ground' which primarily aims at enhancing collaboration among the NGO ecosystem in Greece.²¹

To answer why MSF has refrained from participating in most joint statements, one needs to take into account that this specific INGO is not very comfortable with collaborating and usually paves its own advocacy path. Some interviewees gave the organization the title of 'humanitarian diva'. Nevertheless, there are some key persons in MSF who have established some personal relationships with key people from other NGOs. For example, Veizis, among the oldest members of MSF staff and members in Greece, is a well-known and respected figure in the Greek NGO ecosystem. Due to his seniority, he has established good relations with most INGOs, especially those that were established in Greece prior to the refugee crisis (Huliaras 2020). Though he is a modest person, he is also talkative and known for joining a dialogue. This stands in contrast to the presence of MSF in the Advocacy Group, in which there is no positioning of their representatives; indeed, this is true of those who are of lower seniority than Veizis, too.²²

According to one of our interviewees, there were at times too many initiatives related to joint letters and overall advocacy activities.²³ Hence, it is understandable for some INGOs not to join each one of them, but instead to focus on the most important ones. In high-level issues, such as the EU–Turkish Statement or the protection of the rights of refugees amidst the COVID-19 issue, and amidst the increase of tension between Greece and Turkey, discussions between senior staff (from MSF's side this included Veizis) meant an activation of personal relationships to make the joint letters happen. Hence, under the pressure of events the process would deviate from the standard (and long) procedure of internal discussions in each INGO on whether to join and lead to a successful completion of talks. On such occasions, interpersonal relations accelerated procedures or even led to collaborations, creating, in reality, a mobilizing effect. One interviewee from a prominent Greek NGO in the field of migration/refugees added that for these more 'serious' cases he would pick up the phone and contact key people in INGOs he had met when these organizations were operating in Greece, such as Oxfam and the Cooperative for American Remittances to Europe (CARE), to inform them about the need to sign the letter.²⁴ Interestingly, there is a certain general acceptance of what can constitute a 'serious case': namely, a development in the Greek and/or the European context of grand magnitude that would seriously affect the overall operational environment, including cases of significant human rights abuses or deviation from international law and accepted codes of conduct. In such cases, bureaucratic processes would often be put aside and personal contacts would be utilized—usually starting with a direct email and/or phone call or message on WhatsApp.

In the field of advocacy, we can also spot a series of bottom-up initiatives that were related to coordination in a more continuous way than the signing of joint letters, although such initiatives also facilitated collaborations. For example, despite being created by NGOs focusing on the refugee crisis in Greece, the above-mentioned

Advocacy Group was also joined by medium-level NGO representatives. Again, despite the fact that some major INGOs such as IRC and DRC were taking part in this group, the collaborative initiative had created an inclusionary effect which led to many more organizations joining. This meant that although some ties were created, no decision could be taken during the first introduction of an issue to the group. This would have decreased the responsiveness of the group and in some meetings no follow-up was seen. Besides the Advocacy Group, Greenpeace set in motion a series of meetings between ten of the most active INGOs and NGOs in the sector operating in Greece. Invitees were influenced by the interpersonal relations of Greenpeace's executive management with other relevant actors, omitting for the first meeting some important INGOs. Representation was set at the top management level, hence it surmounted the issue of conflicting meetings. Once more, the gravitas of the Greenpeace brand and its already established position in the Greek NGO ecosystem (part of the established configuration) created an initial inclusionary effect. Nevertheless, the initiative did not have any tangible outcomes, as the initiator had not earmarked any resources for backing the meetings. As everyone expected input regarding possible next steps from Greenpeace (which was never the intention on their part), no tangible positive effects were recorded. Hence, not only the existence of resources, but also their availability, was highlighted as crucial—Greenpeace did not make available any resources for this initiative; neither did the initiator of the first meeting make a new set of calls to bring back all participants to the table. This omission was not later repeated during a common project that was implemented in collaboration with MSF, as presented below. Nevertheless, the initiative is understood as a prequel of the Greenpeace 'Break Free' campaign one year later, which brought together fifty-five NGOs operating in Greece advocating for the environment, and against inequality and violence.²⁵ This 2017 campaign, although not directly targeted at the refugee crisis, was also empowered by MSF and ActionAid: the fact that these two organizations have established offices in Greece with permanent Greek-speaking personnel allowed for an easier decision to join a campaign that was seemingly indifferent towards them.²⁶

In essence, advocacy was a more fruitful area for enhancing collaboration through interpersonal ties. On the one hand, advocacy required a more collaborative stance from all participants, especially in Greece where INGOs were aiming at changing positions of actors as robust as the EU/European Commission and the government of a developed state. A free-for-all mentality would not produce value for anyone. On the other hand, multiple occasions in which coordination was required led to an intensification of personal ties, leading to an ordering effect over the advocacy front. This build-up of interpersonal relations was, after all, driving the cases of joint letters 'fatigue', as it was phrased by one interviewee.²⁷ When 'serious cases' were on the line, people would pick up their phones and push for decisions to be made faster, despite contrasting or even competing specific organizational goals. This was the case of the joint letter against the new rules for NGOs entering the registry of the Greek Ministry of Migration (which gathered the signatures of many INGOs), even though the new conditionalities would have driven several smaller NGOs out

of the registry, and which would have made more funding available to the remaining, larger organizations. Hence, in terms of competition, refraining from supporting this joint letter would seem the most beneficial action for some INGOs. Nevertheless, phone calls and pressure from people with whom they had strong relations led them to stand by other organizations' advocacy efforts. As another interviewee mentioned, such a strong production of joint letters would not have been possible in the absence of key people who had mobilized everyone else and assisted in speeding up processes.²⁸ People such as or Spathari, mentioned above, acted as brokers who capitalized on their positioning within the ecosystem: they were both Greeks acting with an international network. This 'super-facilitator' attribute is highly connected to linking pins and specific characteristics of such people: (1) they are not just members of a given NGO but they are also 'located at "the interface between organizations"' (Schneiker and Joachim 2021, 602), (2) they enact the role of entrepreneurs/practitioners, meaning that they not only receive and transmit ideas and messages, but that they also decode and alter such ideas and messages to better fit the given cause, (3) they are able to speak the language of other organization(s), and, finally, (4) they enjoy expansive personal networks (Schneiker and Joachim 2021). Through these attributes, super-facilitators can support relationship build-ups in all stages, through start-up, expansion, and consolidation, employing a different set of their characteristics in each phase. In the Greek case, these specific persons enhanced the overall mobilizing effect, rendering the system more prone towards collaboration.

Common Projects

During the period under focus, a few common projects that included INGO–INGO collaboration were identified. These included (1) a collaborative project of Search & Rescue (S&R) of refugees in distress in the North Aegean implemented by Greenpeace and MSF, (2) MSF distributing essential products provided by IRC to refugees in the Greek island of Lesbos after a huge fire on a local refugee camp, and (3) a field assessment in the Greek islands implemented by Intersos but supported by MSF. The examples below provide an analytical lens on the role of interpersonal ties, as partially explored in the previous sections, and how they are related to established configurations within the Greek field.

Among the most prominent examples is the Greenpeace–MSF joint project in the North Aegean. The two INGOs collaborated to rescue refugees onboard rubber dinghies coming from the Turkish coast. Each INGO covered one important component of the project: Greenpeace led the 'S&R' dimension, while MSF provided expertise on the provision of health services. Though the collaborative nature of Greenpeace is well recorded, as is the openness of Greenpeace Hellas' executive director Charalampides, it does not explain why they selected to cooperate with MSF and not any other INGO, not even MdM, which was present in Greece prior to

the refugee crisis. The whole project was initiated by MSF's then general director, Provopoulou, who contacted Charalampides to discuss the current situation of the refugee crisis. Both persons were interviewed and highlighted that they knew and trusted each other. These relations were reinforced by the fact that the two organizations were related to the established configuration: they were both INGOs with an already long-standing presence in Greece. Further, they indicated that because each one was pushing the other, what they were discussing was able to be quickly realized. From MSF's side, though several potential interventions were discussed in their famous internal 'debates', it was the presence of Charalampides that gave more energy to Provopoulou to push for her organization to commit to this project.²⁹ Indeed, the relationship between the two key persons led towards an ordering effect, filling the gap of a governance structure required for the final approvals to be gained. For Greenpeace, the fact that they were already in various discussions with MSF was the perfect precondition to act quickly; Greenpeace International could commit resources easily as they trusted their local offices. The only point raised by Greenpeace was that there should not be publicity from their side with regard to the common project.³⁰

In addition, significant efforts were made to make the project implementation as smooth as possible, and for the positive interpersonal ties of the two heads to be reflected upon the field personnel of both organizations. Though the two organizations have very different cultures and ways of operating, the project was rather successful, covering a significant need for S&R at a crucial period of the main refugees' wave to Greece. To one of the interviewees, this experience yielded more insights on how they should operate: 'Indeed as an emergency organization you need to be able to be on the ground instantly but we cannot always be on our own—allies are required among other INGOs, local society, social movements, etc.'³¹

Another interesting example is IRC's collaboration with MSF in the distribution of required products and materials after a huge fire in Lesvos main camp in Moria. The fire had burned the camp almost entirely, creating huge needs in the provision of products such as sleeping bags, tents, hygiene products, and other necessities. According to one interviewee, they had available resources and assets but no team on the ground. The needs were imminent, so they decided to collaborate with MSF who had a long-term presence in Lesvos and were critically integrated in the local environment. Asked why they selected to cooperate with MSF and not with another INGO or LNGO, the answer was clear: 'I felt comfortable with contacting MSF as we have already established relations.'³² Nevertheless, the head of IRC in Greece also added that when a joint proposal is being discussed, there is more scrutiny involving potential past collaborations, and whether the prospective partner's culture is aligned to IRC's, to reputational issues, and so on. In the case of IRC, the local office too has the lead without the need of any international sign-off. In effect, an existing interpersonal relationship among key people in both organizations, as well as the fact that IRC Greece had enough flexibility to act locally led to the establishment of this collaboration project. It is important to stress that IRC had localized its personnel in Greece (moving it from the ad hoc configuration to the established configuration);

this meant that a Greek was in charge of operations in the country and that this person had already good relations with many of her peers.

Finally, Intersos' activities in Greece highlight the significant role of individuals upon the subject matter. According to most interviewees, Intersos in Greece is among the most open and collaborative of INGOs seeking to support joint initiatives, irrespective of their initiator (INGOs or LNGOs). While they have not submitted joint proposals in partnership with other INGOs, they were ready to take over operations in a very collaborative manner during the exit of NRC in 2018. According to one former senior project manager at Intersos Hellas, they are very open to collaborations in all fields, although during the initial period (2016–2018) they focused on setting up their main programmes. Interestingly, this was the main period in which the Greek personnel did not have full command of the local office. According to the former senior project manager, 'the way the funding is structured makes joint proposals very difficult. On the other hand, in big sites (e.g., camps) there is very fruitful coordination with other INGOs.³³ Among different INGOs, they maintain good contacts with MSF, as the current general secretary of Intersos International is an ex-MSF head of mission and thus has connected the Greek office with MSF Greece. Veizis was mentioned as the key contact person. Thus, when Intersos wanted to conduct a field assessment in the islands of the North Aegean where it does not have any presence, they relied on contacts and resources from MSF. In an interesting development during the last months of 2020, Intersos Greece positioned Veizis as its country director.

Likewise, the then newly appointed country director of DRC in Greece, Cauchi, was the ex-country director of Intersos. Cauchi left Greece for a period after her position in Intersos and returned to DRC. One interviewee highlighted that although DRC has its headquarters in Athens and Intersos in Thessaloniki, he still feels very comfortable contacting DRC for a potential cooperation, though no opportunity has occurred yet.³⁴

According to one interviewee, it is not very likely that an international staffer would move from one INGO to another in the same theatre of operations. Also, sometimes this person may not leave the first INGO on good terms.³⁵ Frequent changes in INGOs' representatives do not allow for the creation of durable and in-depth relations, and many times personnel need to start all over again. As another interviewee stated, the turnover is not helpful in establishing relations among NGOs—but when IRC started nationalizing expats' contracts from mid-2017 onwards, leading eventually to a core personnel group of Greeks, collaborations became somewhat easier. In reality, both statements are, indeed, highlighting the importance of interpersonal ties vis-à-vis organization level relationships.³⁶

Concluding Remarks

This chapter highlights the importance of interpersonal relations for achieving INGO–INGO collaboration. To do this, the role of interpersonal ties in bottom-up

Table 3.2 Summary of key social and interpersonal ties per area of activity

Area of activity	Nature of social ties	Role of interpersonal ties
Fundraising	Co-opting and competing	Weak effect
Advocacy	Coordinating and cooperating	Positive effect
Common projects	Coordinating and cooperating	Positive effect

Source: Author's own compilation.

and top-down strategies of coordination was analysed across ad hoc and established configurations of INGOS. Furthermore, three specific areas of activities were shown to be relevant: (1) fundraising, (2) advocacy, and (3) common projects.

Table 3.2 summarizes the key social and interpersonal ties found in each area of activity: the results diverge in terms of the dynamics that interpersonal ties can produce towards a more collaborative ecosystem.

Thus, in the existential area of fundraising, organizational goals, which are pushed by the direction of the funding system to support single organization proposals, tend to block any significant collaboration initiative, especially regarding bigger INGOS. Strong interpersonal ties do not seem to bring about any strong positive effects. On the other hand, the ad hoc/established dichotomy also seems to have a levelling effect in the field of fundraising. However, in contrast to existent literature, the findings suggest that the absence of cooperation is not necessarily linked to the scarcity of resources. On the contrary, in the case of the Greek refugee crisis, interpersonal links became more important as funding became less abundant, though more long-term oriented, and shifted to different funders. This suggests that the type of funders and the structure of funding programmes might be an important institutional factor shaping the space in which interpersonal relations can foster NGO cooperation or not. In addition, the existence of specific people within the Greek landscape allowed for at least some level of ordering effect to take place, with cases of joint proposals being noted once interpersonal relations' importance gained points.

Where advocacy activities are concerned, personal ties do play a more significant, and at times crucial, role in enhanced collaborations, either through speeding up processes or in producing strong mobilizing effects. Key individuals can act as facilitators of joint initiatives, as they can easily contact their peers to push for their positive stance over a certain issue, forming a mobilizing effect over the developments within the Greek landscape. This is even more robust for those in the ecosystem who enjoy more 'gravitas' and have more years in the field, and who have thus developed stronger relations with a greater number of people. In the Greek theatre of operations regarding INGOS, such positions were attributed to high-level personnel of INGOS' local offices, such as ActionAid, MSF, and Greenpeace. Further, through the years this spread to INGOS that selected to stay in Greece, such as IRC, DRC, and—to a degree—Intersos. This development both counterbalanced the negative effect of the high turnover in the ecosystem involving the build-up of interpersonal relations

and was enhanced by it, as it led to more interconnected people across the sector. In other words, the passage from ad hoc to established configurations led to an increase in the importance of interpersonal ties and their effect over INGOs' cooperation and collaboration.

Likewise, common projects, when a reality, were facilitated by the ability of some people to create bridges among different INGOs, thus surpassing the heavy decision-making and due diligence mechanisms that often lead to loss of momentum and to inertia. In effect, they facilitated a dual mobilizing and ordering effect, making several common projects a reality and at a faster pace than one might expect. Again, a stronger role was recorded among INGOs with presence in Greece prior to the 2015 crisis, a feature that further emphasizes the dimension of interpersonal relations.

To conclude, the Greek case study offered a rare opportunity to witness the potentially powerful effects that personal ties can have upon the (normally unwilling) NGO ecosystem to intensively collaborate. The study of personal ties disclosed a series of conditions that are not often attained by other case studies: namely, the existence of key people who have relatively strong ties with each other, in a more or less fixed environment, and that thereby produces motivating reasons for collaboration.

Notes

1. Interview, 20 April 2018.
2. The European Community Humanitarian Office (ECHO) is the principal EU organ for delivering humanitarian aid. It was created in 1992 and since 2010 has been transformed into the Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection department of the European Commission or European Union.
3. Interview, 12 November 2018.
4. Interview, 18 November 2018.
5. Structure organizations are NGOs that support other NGOs in various forms, that is, capacity building, trainings, donations, and so on.
6. Interview, 25 September 2020.
7. Interview, 18 June 2020.
8. For more information see [ACMMR \(n.d.\)](#).
9. Interview, 20 June 2020.
10. Interview, 12 June 2020.
11. Logical framework or log frame is the main project design tool utilized by the European Commission. It consists of a matrix in which scope, objectives, expected results, and activities are interconnected with indicators, means of verification, and assumptions, providing a clear design on how a project will be implemented and what will be achieved. Log frame is usually an annex to any EU grant agreement.
12. Interview, 25 September 2020.
13. Interview, 28 June 2020.
14. Interview, 25 September 2020.
15. Interview, 21 June 2022.

16. Interview, 18 November 2020.
17. Interview, 12 June 2020.
18. Intersos is a relatively new and medium-sized INGO established in 1992. So far, they have carried out humanitarian aid projects in forty-five countries and four continents. They did not have a presence in Greece until the crisis but established an office during 2016.
19. Interview, 21 October 2020.
20. Interview, 08 October 2021.
21. Interview, 25 September 2020.
22. Interview, 21 October 2020.
23. Interview, 12 November 2018.
24. Interview, 20 January 2020.
25. Interview, 18 December 2019.
26. For more information see [Greenpeace Ελλάδα \(2017\)](#).
27. Interview, 12 November 2018.
28. Interview, 8 October 2021.
29. Interview, 26 October 2020.
30. Interview, 18 December 2019.
31. Interview, 26 October 2020.
32. Interview, 12 June 2020.
33. Interview, 28 June 2020.
34. Interview, 28 June 2020.
35. Interview, 26 October 2020.
36. Interview, 12 June 2020.

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NGO Mergers and Acquisitions

A Social Relational Perspective

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Introduction

Mergers and acquisitions (M&A), a special case of NGO–NGO interactions, can play an important role especially for service-focused nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) with a goal of enhancing impact (Sow 2021). Among international NGOs, high-profile M&A include Plan International’s 2012 acquisition of the Centre for Development and Population Activities (San Martin 2020), Save the Children’s 2013 merger with Merlin (Anyangwe 2013; Mair 2013), and the mergers between Project Concern International and Global Communities (Global Communities 2021) as well as Lutheran World Relief (LWR) and Interchurch Medical Assistance (IMA) World Health (2019), described below. While M&A promise to enhance the collective impact of NGOs (Accenture Strategy 2021), there are significant cultural obstacles (Mitchell et al. 2020) which can be better understood by adopting a relational perspective regarding their operations. Existing theoretical frameworks highlight a range of possible explanations for M&A, but rarely consider the role of professional or personal relationships across organizational boundaries. The presence or absence of cross-organizational ties often play an essential role in why M&A are considered, how they unfold, and what their results are.

The absence of a relational understanding of M&A often results from viewing NGOs as separate organizations, constituted as non-profits facing constraints on their ability to raise funds by issuing equity shares or borrowing from commercial financial markets. These constraints hinder the capacity of NGOs to achieve operating scales commensurate with the size of the social or environmental problems that many NGOs seek to address. M&A represent a viable strategy for scaling-up and more quickly acquiring new capabilities necessary for organizational relevance and mission success. A relational approach to M&A moves beyond viewing NGOs as insular, individual organizations and explores how they are constituted and legitimized by relationships with their peers and other partners. Social ties present prior to and during the M&A process play an essential part in explaining outcomes and define how merging entities understand their own identities and how the emerging new organization is perceived by its external environment.

While completed M&A are in themselves significant, they only represent the tip of the iceberg of all activities related to this type of NGO–NGO interaction. For all completed M&A there are many more failed attempts, often due to the significant institutional and cultural barriers to the practice (Smith Milway et al. 2014). M&A as a relational practice is growing in importance, although there remain significant barriers among NGOs highly invested in what they perceive to be unique missions and organizational identities (Priester 2020). Considering the ambitious missions of many NGOs (Schmitz 2020), it is puzzling that M&A has not become a more widely adopted strategic practice. M&A can help NGOs to increase their capacities and cocreate greater legitimacy for their services or advocacy. Many of the barriers to M&A are associated with an insular view of NGOs, which highlights what each organization (and its leaders) may have to win or lose. However, a relational approach shifts attention to how M&A are constitutive of NGO agency that is required for mission accomplishment.

The practice of M&A is an inherently relational process as it involves the negotiation of a new organizational identity (Chen and Krauskopf 2022). As the case of Corus International below shows, M&A can legitimize the continued presence of an NGO by reinforcing a claim-bearing label of principled action empowering communities across the globe (Deloffre and Quack, Chapter 1, this volume). Corus emerged in 2020 from a number of M&A to expand its technical and strategic repertoire, achieve economies of scale, and mitigate increasing operational risks. M&A also have significant effects by prompting a new, emerging organization to reconsider its boundaries and engage in more innovative practices. Corus expanded its portfolio to include impact-investing and direct-marketing to its donors. The new entity began to replace less productive and increasingly illegitimate practices of the past (i.e., unsustainable resource transfers) with a more holistic set of activities that promise to end perpetual aid and dependency of local communities (Accenture Strategy 2021).

The ideal M&A process in the NGO sector will be driven by a focus on enhanced mission accomplishment, rather than how to survive or better compete in shrinking grant or donor markets. For researchers, M&A are a special site for studying NGO–NGO interactions because they can be transformative with regard to stakeholder relationships. As we show below with the case of Corus International, M&A create not only new, larger entities, but changes in agency and interactions with major partners, including stakeholders abroad. Of course, it remains to be seen if the creation of Corus through the merger and acquisition of multiple entities is truly transformative for mission accomplishment. The introduction of market-based exchanges through direct-marketing or impact-investing may not empower local communities and may generate new forms of power inequality. At the sectoral level, M&A can reduce diversity in the NGO field, which could generate more competition for funding among an increasingly smaller number of large groups (Bush and Hadden 2019).

The next section summarizes theoretical accounts relevant to NGO M&A activities, including transaction cost economics, resource dependence theory, contract failure theory, institutionalism, population ecology, managerialism, and organizational culture. It establishes a menu of theoretical factors that may help explain why

M&A occur (or not) in the NGO sector. The following section provides a brief overview of the costs and benefits of M&A for NGOs as discussed primarily in the practitioner literature. A subsequent section then elaborates on the social and relational aspects of M&A, which are often ignored in theoretical accounts of NGO behaviour. We offer then a case study of Corus International, which emerged from a number of mergers and acquisitions between 2019 and 2021. This case illustrates the strengths of a relational approach to analysing NGO actions, in particular regarding the ways organizational connections are constitutive factors not only in facilitating the emergence of a new entity, but also in explaining specific identity and innovative ordering effects. Finally, the conclusion briefly summarizes the main points and suggests directions for future research.

Explaining NGO M&A Activities

M&A in the non-profit context differ substantially from similar activities in the for-profit world. Notably, NGOs have no shareholders extracting profits, and the value that NGOs create is often non-market-based or non-financial in nature. Compared to the for-profit sector, this typically creates a less favourable context for M&A because the mission focus creates a greater need for maintaining distinctive brands and unique organizational identities (Lecy et al. 2010). At the same time, NGO practitioners and scholars have long aspired to generate greater organizational and collective impact based on more collaboration to accomplish mission goals. For example, the so-called collective impact approach has identified specific joint actions, including adopting common goals, establishing shared measurement systems, engaging in mutually reinforcing activities and continuous communication, and establishing backbone support organizations (Kania and Kramer 2011). And while deeper collaboration for impact represents one viable option for NGOs, it also faces significant transaction costs in sustaining complex relationships among independent entities (Stachowiak and Gase 2018) over the long term. As an alternative, M&A offer one possible approach to scaling impact with greater efficiency without complex and cumbersome collaborative structures. Below, we elaborate on key theoretical perspectives identifying specific aspects of NGO M&A initiation, processes, and success.

Transaction Cost Economics

Transaction cost economics (TCE) presents the ‘firm,’ or more generally, the formal organization, as a means of improving efficiency by reducing the transaction costs that must be incurred through repeated contracting among multiple independent entities (Williamson 1981). Indeed, the existence of an organization itself can

be seen as a product of repeated interactions among independent entities becoming routinized and formalized through a process akin to M&A. Through M&A, previously independent entities join together, thereby internalizing and dramatically reducing the costs and frictions associated with searching, negotiating, and monitoring in repeated contracting. The new entity thereby gains transactional efficiency that improves performance relative to many entities working separately.

Applied to M&A in the NGO sector, TCE's focus on asset specificity can be of central importance as NGOs have carefully cultivated brands and relationships generating specific values attractive to others. For example, expertise in water sanitation is difficult to translate into operational excellence in anticorruption advocacy. Moreover, different NGOs often cultivate very specific fundraising methods (e.g., child sponsorships) or programme activities to build unique communities of supporters (Lecy et al. 2010). For example, faith-based organizations like World Vision serve a different donor market than the more secular Oxfam, even though both have similar capacities and overlapping missions. An M&A may thus be motivated by an NGO's desire to access the specific assets of another NGO, such as different funding pools or types of expertise. For example, Save the Children acquired Merlin's core competencies in areas of reproductive and child health, nutrition, and health service delivery to broaden its appeal to individual and institutional donors (Anyangwe 2013). TCE implies that M&A are motivated by the prospect of significant cost savings and economies of scale, in addition to acquiring new capabilities. However, TCE has also long been challenged by alternative theoretical perspectives, such as resource dependence theory, which may better reflect the nature and challenges of the non-profit enterprise.

Resource Dependence Theory

Resource dependence theory (RDT) introduces issues of power dynamics and control into explanations of organizational behaviour (Malatesta and Smith 2014). The theory asserts that NGOs are fundamentally concerned with managing their external dependencies and uncertainties to maintain or expand autonomy (Mitchell 2014b). In contrast to TCE, NGO leaders are not only concerned about efficiencies and capacities, but autonomy and relational power. M&A represent a potential means of protecting organizational autonomy through transformative rather than piecemeal action. NGO leaders will not just consider efficiency gains, but also the post-merger positioning of the new entity within the broader sector. Merged entities are expected to be larger, more autonomous, and more powerful than the original organizations.

M&A may take three general forms: vertical integration between a contract issuer and contract receiver, horizontal expansion through the merging of two competitors or collaborators, and diversification through the expansion of services geographically or the acquisition of new capabilities. In each case, the merging organizations

expect to face decreased uncertainty in their external environment as a result of the M&A, as they bring more critical resources under their own sphere of control. RDT provides NGOs leaders with specific directions on how to manage external relations to enhance relative power and autonomy. M&A serve as a specific tool to secure organizational survival, although they offer limited insights into the role of organizational identity and legitimacy shaping NGO behaviour (Deloffre and Schmitz 2019). TCE and RDT both offer specific sets of organizational goals driving the initiation of M&A, but they are less concerned with subsequent issues shaping the processes and success of M&A.

Contract Failure Theory

Contract failure theory (CFT) complements TCE and RDT by elaborating on the essential predicament faced by NGOs constituted as non-profits. NGOs typically adopt the specific institutional form of the non-profit or charitable organization, which simultaneously creates a niche for survival and also restricts their access to resources needed for mission success. Although national legal requirements differ across countries, all non-profits have in common some version of the non-distribution constraint, or the prohibition against private inurement. According to contract failure theory (Hansmann 1980; Weisbrod 1988), the non-distribution constraint gives non-profits a competitive advantage over for-profits. Donors wishing to purchase charitable outputs will not trust for-profits because businesses could increase profits by sacrificing service quality or quantity, contrary to donor intent. Non-profits are legally prevented from distributing any profits, giving donors assurances that their resources will be (largely) dedicated to the intended cause. Charitable outputs may also be unobservable and unmeasurable due to excessive information costs (Mitchell and Calabrese 2020). For example, donors to an international NGO may find that independently verifying the actual impact of their giving may far exceed the value of the donation itself. Although the non-distribution constraint does not ensure high quality of services provided, it establishes stewardship of donor funds as a central defining feature of the non-profit enterprise.

The organizational niche created by the non-distribution constraint constitutes the sector, but also severely constrains mission success. While non-profit board members have formal fiduciary control over a non-profit, they cannot exercise personal claims on non-profits' assets. Thus, non-profits cannot issue equity in the traditional sense, eliminating a major source of conventional financing to support scale-up. This capitalization restriction is so severe that it has been cited as the primary justification for exempting non-profits from taxation (Hansmann 1981). Given that non-profits cannot sell equity shares and have limited access to debt (particularly donative non-profits that lack income from service fees and government contracts), it can be difficult for them to grow quickly and efficiently. Indeed, most transnational NGOs in the United States, for example, are relatively small, with only a few organizations

accounting for most of the sector's resources (Mitchell 2019). As the non-distribution constraint both constitutes and restrains NGOs, M&A offer an alternative growth strategy that could at least partially compensate for the endemic undercapitalization of the sector.

Institutionalism

Institutional theory suggests that M&A are driven by external pressures driving organizations to converge in their practices and form, even in the absence of material conditions supporting homogenization (DiMaggio and Powell 1983). Isomorphic tendencies are particularly prevalent when there is uncertainty about how to achieve success and organizations are forced to seek alternative bases of legitimation. The non-profit sector presents a situation of comparatively high uncertainty regarding various key issues affecting organizational survival, including funding and organizational performance (Mitchell and Calabrese 2020). Amid such uncertainty, non-profits frequently focus on projecting trustworthiness and conforming to perceived sectoral norms associated with fiscal probity (Mitchell and Calabrese 2019). Non-profits look to their external environments for legitimating ideas and practices likely to appeal to their donors. For example, many non-profits prominently display on their websites third party watchdog and accreditation information, including claims of overhead minimization (Mitchell 2013). In the NGO sector, discursive practices often reflect the rise and fall of specific buzzwords, such as 'participatory development', which can be used 'opportunistically, by appealing to donors' favoured terms to gain resources' (Schnable et al. 2021, 27–28).

As bureaucratization increases, organizations may also become more similar, given that their forms and functions are exposed to isomorphic pressures (DiMaggio and Powell 1983). NGOs may consider M&A because they are forced by donors (coercive isomorphism), because M&A become normalized in professional training and expertise (normative isomorphism), or because environmental uncertainty leads NGOs to copy other organizations that they perceive to be more prestigious or successful (mimetic isomorphism). As illustrated in Table 1.1 (in Chapter 1, this volume, p. 9), M&A can be the result of social ties producing competition or co-optation, or they can be a result of indirect coordination as NGOs observe changes in the sector and actions taken by their peers.

Population Ecology

Population ecology also emphasizes the external environment as a central factor in explaining NGO behaviour. If a particular sub-field is sparsely populated with smaller NGOs, collaboration is much more likely, while growing numbers of

organizations and greater population density will lead to more competitive attitudes and behaviours (Bush and Hadden 2019). From this perspective, organizational forms and behaviour change over time not as a result of adaptation, but selection. Mergers among equals to enhance effectiveness should be more common at lower population densities as organizations are more likely to collaborate on an equal footing. At higher levels of population density, acquisitions should be more prevalent as less competitive organizations will prefer such an outcome to organizational demise.¹ In contrast to institutionalism, M&A are driven by overall population patterns, rather than resulting from shifts in normative understandings of appropriate behaviour. Changes in the external environment greatly shape organizational outcomes (including organizational birth and death), while managers have limited capacities to effectively adapt to those changes.

Managerialism

Managerialism is ‘an ideology prescribing that organizations ought to be coordinated, controlled, and developed through corporate management knowledge and practice’ (Roberts et al. 2005, 1849). In its normative modality, managerialism involves conforming to best practices or industry standards, following rules of thumb, and doing what is thought to be appropriate for a given context. In its instrumental modality, managerialism involves ‘goal-directed and impact-oriented’ action that is rationally calculated to achieve specific desired results (Mitchell 2018, 1041). From this organizational management and governance perspective, both cultural and strategic factors play significant roles in conditioning whether M&A receive serious consideration and whether M&A are ultimately completed successfully. While organizational and sectoral cultural norms often present barriers to the consideration of M&A, they promise major mission-related benefits such as improved impact and efficiency (Mitchell et al. 2020, 211–229). A managerialist perspective focuses on the motivations and rationales of NGO leaders, board members, strategists, and other practitioner-stakeholders as they seek to lead, govern, manage, and advise high-performing organizations.

Various studies have identified the importance of executive leadership and board perspectives in deciding whether or not mounting external pressures to consider M&A will be translated into action (Chen and Krauskopf 2013). The role of match-makers or boundary spanners engaged in brokering can also be critical, as explained in the case example of Corus International, below. Although explanations of M&A often emphasize external factors, internal drivers may be equally important, such as the desire of leaders to increase their power through M&A (Golensky and DeRuiter 2002). Thus, M&A can be driven by the strategic goals or normative values of key practitioners within NGOs and their abilities to forge effective change coalitions that can bring M&A to fruition.

Organizational Culture

Related to managerialism, organizational cultures established and socially reproduced by NGO practitioners are also important factors affecting M&A. Research has shown that concerns over cultural incompatibilities are often a major obstacle to NGO collaborations (Mitchell 2014a). Perceptions of organizational uniqueness and fears of losing not just control, but overall identity and purpose can prevent organizational leadership from even considering M&A as an appropriate strategic option, while personal feelings and perceptions, including egos, can impose further obstacles (Mitchell et al. 2020, 211–229).

Many NGO organizational cultures value organizational uniqueness, identity, and survival to such an extent that M&A may be perceived in terms of (personal) loss rather than a gain and a necessary synergy in moving closer towards accomplishing a mission. In this sense, organizational culture is a key perspective explaining why M&A are often not considered in the first place, why an initiated M&A process may stall, or why internal frictions may persist long past the completion of M&A. As a result, cultural assessments are an essential part of pre-merger due diligence activities (Fubini 2014).

Different theoretical accounts summarized in Table 4.1 emphasize motivations and factors primarily relevant to the initiation of M&A, rather than subsequent M&A processes and success. Perspectives from these theories primarily highlight core factors making M&A more or less likely. Theories differ with regard to key drivers

Table 4.1 Theoretical accounts of M&A

Transaction cost economics	Focus on gains in efficiency and impact attained by acquiring a valuable asset from another organization
Resource dependence theory	Focus on autonomy and control over critical resources for survival
Contract failure	Focus on capitalization constraints and use of M&A for scale-up
Institutionalism	Focus on adaptation to external normative environment driving M&A proclivities
Population ecology	Focus on selection effects due to changes in population density, including increased prevalence of M&A when population pressures lead to increased risks for organizational demise
Managerialism	Focus on managerial responses driven by normative or instrumental concerns, including using M&A as a legitimating practice and/or to enhance impact, efficiency, and fundraising capabilities
Organizational culture	Focus on cultural compatibilities between different organizational entities

Source: Author's own compilation.

of M&A, including efficiency (TCE), autonomy (RDT), resources (contract failure), normative changes (institutionalism), population density (ecology), personal perceptions of NGO leaders (managerialism), or compatibility of organizational cultures and identities. Many of these accounts have explanatory value, which is also visible in the Corus International case study below. However, understanding M&A as social practices that challenge and dismantle organizational boundaries requires a much greater attention to the role of personal ties and social relations in defining the meaning of factors identified by existing theoretical accounts.

A Social Relational Approach to M&A

A social relational approach to understanding NGOs adds a more dynamic perspective to commonly applied theoretical concepts. It considers not just what incentives NGO leaders and staff may have when considering M&A, but also how these incentives themselves are constituted and altered by the way NGOs are embedded within wider social networks. These existing social ties affect cost–benefit analyses or the personal views about organizational identities. For example, as we show below in the case of Corus International, such social connections can shift perceptions away from concerns about loss of power and unique organizational identity towards an openness to engage in M&A. The goal of this is acquiring needed capabilities and embracing a fundamental transformation of the organizational form.

Social ties tell us something about why NGO actors may hold specific views about M&A due to their perception of potential partners and how they elect to emphasize either relations within their own organization or relations with the outside world (Mitchell et al. 2020, 192–210). For example, NGOs may embrace a conflicting understanding of social ties in relation to groups with similar mission goals. Such an understanding may seem rational as a way of protecting one's own brand and convincing donors of a unique organizational approach. However, the nature of social ties has to fundamentally shift to a more coordinating and cooperating outlook if M&A are to become an option for organizational transformation. This is also shown in Table 1.1 of the framework chapter in this volume (Chapter 1, this volume, p. 9).

Benefits and Challenges of M&A Among NGOs

M&A in the non-profit sector have gained increasing attention in recent years, but also face a number of challenges unique to the sector (Cortez et al. 2009). An annual report on M&A activities in the United Kingdom and Wales identified only fifty-eight completed M&A among more than 168,000 registered non-profits in 2018–2019. Sixty-three per cent were classified as takeovers, while 18 per cent were listed as mergers among equals (Phillips 2019). According to a 2021 survey of InterAction

member organizations (primarily US-based international development and humanitarian NGOs), 43 per cent of chief executive officers (CEOs) reported that they were either assessing, planning for, or executing significant change with respect to M&A, while 55 per cent reported no significant change. Only 2 per cent of CEOs' organizations were in the final stage of evaluating recent significant change pertaining to M&A (Willig and Mitchell 2021). The key barriers to a broader exploration of M&A are institutional (e.g., how NGOs are constituted as non-profits) and normative (e.g., how major stakeholders such as donors understand the role of the NGO). Institutionally and normatively, NGOs often follow a substantialist logic which assumes an a priori existence of an organization observing non-profit laws and instantiating donor interests. M&A as a relational process can challenge some of these traditional ideas of the NGO and facilitate a more open and mission-based conversation about how a merger may positively affect legitimacy, identity, inclusive practices, and innovation.

Some of the potential benefits of M&A include increasing programming quality through a consolidation of complementary services, having larger and broader programmes that enhance visibility and influence, acquiring new skill sets and expansion of diversity, realizing efficiencies and superior value for stakeholders, and improving financial stability (Priester 2020). These benefits can translate into improved performance along multiple dimensions. As NGOs are increasingly ambitious in their mission statements and their stakeholders have greater expectations that promises be fulfilled (Bond 2020), M&A represent one path for fundamentally transforming an organization and getting closer to accomplishing its goals. Indeed, discussions about M&A have become more commonplace in the sector because they promise a transformative answer to many of the existential challenges faced by NGOs, including demands of decolonization and localization (Pailey 2020; Cummings et al. 2021; RINGO Project 2021).

M&A are often advocated for on the basis of realizing potential synergies, defined in terms of the new entity providing more value than the sum of the entities prior to M&A. Unlike the for-profit sector, where the benefits of M&A are largely financial, in the non-profit sector the most relevant or desired M&A benefits may be non-financial in character. Three types of these non-financial synergies stand out as being especially relevant for NGOs (Feldman and Hernandez, 2022).² First, relational synergies are realized when M&A result in improved relations with specific external partners. For example, rather than two organizations competing for support from a particular funder, a combined organization is governed cooperatively and can pursue funding with a single integrated strategy and with (slightly) less competition. Second, network synergies materialize by adding new network ties or removing costly and redundant ties. NGOs operate within complex networks of peers, funders, communities, and other stakeholders, and where social connections can bring significant value to organizations, particularly in terms of expertise. Acquiring new social ties can expose organizations to new perspectives, ideas, and opportunities. This is particularly relevant for the trans-border activities of international NGOs,

which face regular demands to listen to local communities, decolonize aid practices, and broker between vastly different cultural contexts (Houghton 2016; Kumar 2020). Third, non-financial synergies in the form of increased legitimacy can help organizations secure funding, improve brand recognition, and obtain access to decision makers, formal approvals, beneficiary participation, and other substantial benefits. M&A between organizations with different functions or roles can also bring about significant non-market synergies. More traditional M&A benefits include internal synergies, mainly in the form of efficiency gains, and market power synergies that derive from increased scale, such as improved purchasing power or increased leverage over stakeholders.

Possible negative consequences of growth supported by M&A include increasingly complex governance structures with a loss in dexterity, the consolidation of (agenda-setting) power among fewer players, a growing distance between leadership and those the organization claims to serve, forced changes in the identity of grassroots partners, and a loss in innovative capacity due to greater bureaucratization. In addition, it is possible that M&A are beneficial for the organizations involved but have negative consequences for the sector overall (Blonigen and Pierce 2016). For example, a growing concentration of resources may prevent the entry of new organizations. It can also reduce intra-sectoral collaboration, because the larger organizations may have already acquired the capabilities they need internally and are unwilling to incur the additional time and expense (transaction costs) of managing external collaborations. In the end, M&A may create larger and more efficient individual NGOs, but the resultant maintenance and exclusionary effects can also undermine the overall collective effectiveness of the sector by reinforcing existing power inequalities, such as between Global North and Global South partners.

The effects of completed M&A are one important issue for further study, but failed attempts at M&A are also worthy of attention. In the non-profit sector, failed M&A are due to a range of reasons, some more easily addressed than others. First, a lack of matchmaking agents or experience with M&A represent a major reason in explaining why such a process may not even be considered. Such ‘structural holes’ prevent the emergence and maintenance of new social ties allowing organizations to creatively reimagine their own identities and future within a new entity. Second, even if initial discussions are under way, leadership may not exercise effective due diligence to fully assess the likely long-term consequences (Endowment & Foundation National Practice Group 2021). Third, M&A require significant up-front investments before any benefits are realized. Many non-profits simply do not have the cash resources or the outside donor support willing to fund such an ‘overhead’ process.³ Fourth, and perhaps most importantly, virtually all NGOs have developed unique organizational cultures with an emphasis on autonomy and independence. M&A may be seen to be antithetical to the underlying norms of the sector—for example, valuing uniqueness—and resulting in NGOs marketing themselves to very specialized donor markets. Culturally, M&A may be viewed as a form of organizational failure or demise, sacrificing identities and commitment that motivated staff and donors in

the past (Mitchell et al. 2020, 211–229). Attempts at M&A highlight how NGO–NGO interactions often raise complex challenges resulting from establishing an organization that takes pride in its own approach to accomplishing a social or environmental mission.

Many of the benefits and obstacles related to NGO M&A, including potential synergies, are almost purely relational in nature. NGO M&A potentially affect not only the identity, scale, and capacities of NGOs, but also how NGOs interact with their peers, funders, intended beneficiaries, and the public at large. Several of the most valuable potential drivers of M&A create value through relational means, such as by introducing new relationships with external parties and expanding social networks. As non-profits, NGOs can still significantly benefit from M&A even in the absence of tangible financial efficiencies. This can occur even though such benefits are often cited as justifications for pursuing M&A in both the for-profit and non-profit sectors. Arguably, it is via the M&A process through which the relational synergies and benefits that drive NGO value become most apparent.

Sociality, Scale, and Temporality

Clearly, many of the benefits and obstacles associated with M&A in the NGO sector are social and relational, rather than merely substantial and financial in nature. For mission-based organizations such as NGOs, synergies derived from improved relations, expanded networks, and other non-financial dimensions such as cocreated legitimacy can each contribute significantly to organizational performance. Many commonly cited obstacles to NGO M&A also derive from social sources. Organizational culture is a major factor affecting not only the success or failure of M&A activities, but also whether an organization's leadership even considers M&A as a strategic option at all. Cultures can exaggerate perceptions of organizational uniqueness and increase sensitivities toward cultural incompatibilities between organizations that can inhibit M&A.

The past several decades have seen NGOs committing to increasingly complex strategies and ever more ambitious missions (Schmitz 2020). The immense scale of the social and environmental problems that many NGOs seek to address necessitates that they themselves operate at a commensurate scale. Although cultural values within the NGO sector often prize local and informal activism, major global problems such as wealth inequality and the climate crisis require large, coordinated campaigns with millions of active supporters for maximum impact. Even at regional, national, and sub-national scales, NGOs are often pitted against deeply entrenched and more resourceful adversaries, including governmental and for-profit actors operating with fewer or different constraints. While many NGO scholars and practitioners remain sceptical or ambivalent about issues of consolidation and scale in the NGO sector, interview research with transnational NGO leaders has found that larger NGOs have superior reputations for organizational effectiveness among

their peers (Mitchell and Stroup 2016). It stands to reason that smaller-sized NGOs working on relatively large-scale problems could benefit from achieving larger scales themselves. Similarly, the rise of digital activism pushes traditional NGOs to fundamentally reconsider their role as intermediaries between donors and aid recipients (Hall et al. 2020), which suggests a fundamental rethinking about issues of scale and contribution may be required.

But NGOs face a variety of tensions to scaling up. Operating at larger scales with a more professionalized bureaucracy risks alienating important audiences whose support may be needed for mission success (Stroup and Wong 2017). Moreover, for NGOs that do decide to scale, they face significant capitalization constraints relative to other organizational forms. While governments can raise money through compulsory taxation and businesses can issue equity and debt, NGOs have no or limited access to these financing mechanisms. In addition, donors prefer to see the vast majority of resources spent on programming, rather than investments in capacities or scaling-up operations. Some NGOs, such as Charity: Water, regularly promise to donors that 100 per cent of private donations support programmes (Charity: Water 2021). This practice puts pressure on other NGOs to underinvest in their infrastructure, which further limits capacities to accomplish missions. M&A represents one potential path to scale, but the NGO sector generally lacks the extensive and sophisticated institutional infrastructure to support M&A that the business sector enjoys.

M&A are themselves a process. They take place over often considerably lengthy periods of time from the pre-merger phase to the implementation and post-M&A phase, and can be viewed as a dynamic site of relational negotiation between individuals and entities and their partners and supporters (Mitchell et al. 2020, 211–229). In the pre-merger phase, stakeholder considerations include existing relations, the supportiveness of the external environment, intrinsic motivation, board consensus, the extent of anticipated synergies, costs, anticipated timeframes and benefits, alternatives, and cultural change. Activities include discovery conversations, securing funding to support the process, soliciting input and feedback, creating a change coalition, and retaining consultants as facilitators. During the implementation and post-M&A phase, stakeholder considerations include generating and maintaining support, strategic and contingency planning, addressing legal, financial, and business systems, securing funder support, managing transparency, control and branding, addressing staff retention, and managing opportunity costs. Key activities involve due diligence research, continued leadership and communication, and board member development and recruitment. Moreover, after successful M&A completion, different types of synergies become realized at different times (Feldman and Hernandez 2022). Some social benefits may emerge early, such as network synergies, while efficiency benefits may only emerge later, assuming they emerge at all. The nature of M&A as a process unfolding over a discrete period of time, from inward exploration to completion or failure, provides observers with a window into the nature of NGOs as entities whose identity and values are constituted by social relations.

Corus International: A Relational Account of Sector-Crossing M&A

To better illustrate the essentially social, rather than merely transactional nature of NGO M&A, this section provides a relational account of M&A activities that led to the creation of a new entity, Corus International. The process of creating a new organization based on existing for-profit and non-profit entities illustrates how social relations at individual and organizational levels are pervasive in shaping M&A activities.

On 1 October 2019, Corus International was formed as a parent entity bringing together formerly independent non-profit and for-profit subsidiaries that include IMA World Health, LWR, CGA Technologies (formerly Charlie Goldsmith Associates), Ground Up Investing, and Farmers Market Brands. Preceded by the merger of IMA and LWR in early 2019, this new entity was created to work ‘more holistically to achieve greater impact’ (Corus International 2021, 3) in addressing the intersection between health and poverty. While LWR was primarily active in rural development and emergency aid, IMA operated in the health field with limited overlap with LWR’s programming. Daniel Speckhard, who served as CEO of LWR, had previously pursued more short-term collaborations with partners to accomplish three related goals: (1) a more holistic approach that allowed the organization to have more impact, (2) improved quality of programming, and (3) increased financial stability. However, Speckhard found short-term partnerships insufficient to substantially increase impact, and began seeking advice from external consultants about how to approach potential M&A with another organization. As Speckhard explained, it was important to stop thinking like a stand-alone ‘deliverer of support and services’ and embrace the idea ‘that we need to bring a wider set of skills, knowledge, and experience to the table to do this well’ (Devex Editor 2019, paras 22–23).

Prior to the merger, IMA World Health and LWR were medium-sized US-based NGOs and had revenues of about (USD) \$95 million and (USD) \$50 million, respectively. Although IMA World Health was the larger organization at the time of merger, it struggled with significant liabilities compared to assets and low working capital (Charity Navigator 2021). IMA World Health ended up with these financial challenges after its ‘annual revenue [had] more than quadrupled’ (Speckhard and Santos 2019, para 3) since 2011. Similar to other NGOs of its size (Mitchell et al. 2020, 224–227), IMA World Health was very successful in acquiring US government grants to implement projects, but had insufficient resources (e.g., unrestricted funds) to sustain and expand an organizational infrastructure matching its rapidly expanding activities.

IMA and LWR had a common history going back decades before the merger. They shared a faith-based background and worked in adjacent areas of international development. While LWR was engaged in mainstream anti-poverty and emergency relief work, IMA World Health had specialized technical expertise in public health in high-challenging contexts, including the Democratic Republic of Congo. LWR was founded in 1945 to send relief aid to European Protestants and the general

population affected by World War II. Like many other NGOs founded during or shortly after World War II, LWR shifted its activities during the 1950s and 1960s to address poverty in Latin America, Asia, and Sub-Saharan Africa. IMA was established in 1960 as a ‘coalition between Protestant churches and church-based organizations’ (Corus International, Inc. and Affiliates 2021, 11), which included LWR as a founding member.

At the initial stages of the merger discussions, the CEOs followed the advice of consultants and first developed a brief joint agreement about what was to be achieved by bringing the two organizations together (Conner Advisory 2019). The merger between LWR and IMA World Health promised a more synergistic approach by not simply creating a larger NGO, but by taking advantage of complementarities between the two entities. While LWR focused on traditional aid programming and emergency responses in support of rural livelihoods, IMA World Health had expertise in public health issues. Combining those two activity areas promised to better serve local communities by addressing their needs more holistically (Accenture Strategy 2021, 17). Additional perceived benefits of the merger, especially for these mid-sized NGOs, included achieving economies of scale with regard to human resource management or accounting and diversifying funding sources to mitigate organizational risks due to unpredictable resource streams.

Based on consultant advice, the two organizations then advanced the merger process by inviting external professionals to conduct interviews to assess the organizational cultures of both entities. This included considering issues of underlying values, work habits, and attitudes in areas of innovation, decision-making, and collaboration. The top leadership also decided to prepare staff about a year before the merger process to generate a sense of what transformational change may look like. Backchannel communications and personal relations across the organizations and their boards were essential to completing the merger agreement. These communications were facilitated by individuals with strong relational ties to both organizations. This included Tim McCully, former executive vice president at LWR, who had previously served as board chair of IMA World Health, and the late Wendy Rothenberger, who served as vice president of human resources at LWR while her twin sister was a board member at IMA World Health.

Once the merger process unfolded, it revealed two key challenges and learning opportunities. First, as the leadership was focused on the overall strategy and rationales for the merger, staff were often most interested in what it all meant for them personally, including their job security, changes to who they reported to, and other issues affecting their daily work. Although leadership ramped up its communications with staff, the gap between overall merger strategy and its reality took significant time to address (Conner Advisory 2019). Second, as the merger unfolded, issues of organizational culture were considered on a separate track without clear connections to the overall goals of the merger. Although leadership had anticipated that differences of organizational culture needed to be addressed, the process of doing so was handled very differently across the separate organizations and led to extensive debates

among staff and board members concerned about preserving what they viewed as essential values (Conner Advisory 2019).

Shortly after the merger of LWR and IMA World Health, the new entity acquired Charlie Goldsmith Associates (CGA), a UK-based technology company specializing in management systems for basic government services, including cash transfers and the tracking of school attendance and health records. This acquisition was only possible because of prior personal connections between the founder of CGA, Charlie Goldsmith, and IMA leadership. Two other for-profit entities were created by LWR/Corus to expand its innovative capacities to raise funds and complement traditional non-profit programming with expanding economic opportunities: Ground Up Investing LLC (GUI, founded in 2017) allows donors to choose impact-investing as an alternative to traditional donations, while Farmers Market Brands LLC (FMB, founded in 2021) facilitates direct marketing of coffee to consumers, including Corus-affiliated churches and donors. FMB works with coffee farmers participating in LWR projects to increase their economic security by marketing their products to LWR donors. Apart from the merger between LWR and IMA World Health, the establishment of Corus as an umbrella for multiple non-profit and for-profit entities signifies innovative ordering effects going well beyond the merger itself. Corus represents an attempt to not just bring together two INGOs, but to generate different types of relationships with the local populations being served. For example, by adding direct marketing and impact investing, the new entity promises to de-emphasize aid dependency and shift towards building more sustainable relationships between local communities and their supporters abroad.

Daniel Speckhard became the new president and CEO of the merged entity, while the former CEO of IMA World Health, Rick Santos, initially served as a special advisor and then left to become president and CEO of Church World Service in early 2021. Only a few months after the completion of the merger, in June 2020, the US Agency for International Development (USAID) selected IMA World Health as lead agency of a five-year cooperative agreement worth up to (USD) \$200 million to improve the health and well-being of women and children in fragile and conflict-affected settings. Prior to the merger, the organization may not have had the capacity to manage such a major grant and collaboration.

By the end of 2021, Corus emerged as a new type of INGO representing a family of entities with new and distinct technological and investment-focused capacities previously absent from the traditional grant-based and donative portfolios of LWR and IMA World Health. This may not only radically change the identity of Corus as an NGO, but also create a push for much greater innovation resulting from M&A as a transformative relational practice. As Daniel Speckhard put it in a 2019 interview: ‘The “customer” or “client” service approach and mentality, versus the donor–recipient relationship, is increasingly what host-country counterparts are demanding, even in complex humanitarian situations’ (Devex Editor 2019, para 14). It remains to be seen if this embrace of more commercialized relations will affect how Corus uses the claim-bearing-label of being a principled NGO that appeals to donors by servicing their individual needs for ‘doing good’. By relying more

on impact-investing and direct-marketing as income generating strategies, Corus attempts to shift away from the traditional emphasis on non-profit ‘trustworthiness’ (Mitchell and Calabrese 2022) to a more outcome-driven approach of transforming relations between local communities and donors abroad.

Different theories discussed above offer some useful insights into this case, including pointing to the financial challenges that may have prompted IMA World Health and LWR to explore M&A at the time they did. However, none of these existing explanations adequately consider a relational perspective or non-financial synergies, which are central to understanding how IMA and LWR viewed their own and each other’s organizational identities. Existing frameworks take the organization as the starting point, and then consider possible factors making M&A more or less likely. In contrast, the relational perspective developed here takes individuals and their cross-organizational relationships as the starting point to better understand how connections across these organizations not only constituted their identities, but also created a process of creative imagination. This ultimately led to combining forces and generating an innovative entity that brought together non-profits and for-profits with complementary strengths and capacities.

Conclusion: A Relational Approach to NGO M&A

M&A in the NGO sector are fundamentally driven by the relational character of NGOs and the nature of the organizational synergies that successful M&A practices can potentially unlock. A multidisciplinary literature drawing on transaction cost economics, resource dependence theory, contract failure theory, institutionalism, population ecology, managerialism, and organizational culture studies can help inform a scholarly research agenda on M&A in the NGO sector. However, the nature of social ties is frequently neglected in dominant theories because such connections are more ephemeral and difficult to trace. As elaborated in greater detail in Deloffre and Quack’s framework chapter (Chapter 1 in this volume), a relational approach recasts an understanding of what defines NGOs by emphasizing social ties, configurations, and sites of interactions. M&A processes are designed to fundamentally transform all three components both with regard to the merging entities, but also their social environment (Deloffre and Quack, Chapter 1, this volume). In doing so, M&A have substantial effects on sociality, scale, and temporality (see also discussion in Deloffre and Quack, Chapter 11, this volume). Sociality highlights the social and relational characteristics of NGOs that drive potential synergies; scale draws attention to capitalization constraints, sectoral cultural values and paradoxes, and the immensity of the social and environmental problems NGOs seek to address; and temporality emphasizes that M&A are processes and sites of dynamic negotiation in which organizations are transformed by their relations with other entities.

The case of Corus International provides key insights into how a relational approach to NGOs builds on, but also moves beyond, more traditional and substantialist explanations. Resource dependence, for example, assumes the organization

and its interests as the starting point of considering M&A. In contrast, Corus emerged partly as a result of resource constraints and concerns about organizational survival, but partly also as a result of how the two merging NGOs were constituted by long-standing relations going back to the founding of IMA World Health in 1960. Driven by a focus on improved effectiveness, Corus represents not just an example of how M&A are deeply social activities, but also how organizational identity transformation and innovation in activities resulting from these relations translated into a new type of agency (Hofferberth 2018, 128). Considering the recent completion of this example of M&A, there are also important trade-offs to consider. Corus represents an example of consolidation among organizations in the faith-based sector with significant ordering effects of an innovative nature.

Future research can apply a relational approach to understanding NGO M&A by drawing on multiple theoretical perspectives that offer explanations of these practices; by examining more closely the barriers to and potential synergies of M&A; and by applying the concepts of sociality, scale, and temporality to provide more comprehensive, multidimensional accounts of M&A. While NGO M&A represent a challenging research topic due to an enhanced need for confidentiality, the study of M&A in the NGO sector offers a fruitful frontier in NGO research. It has the potential to add fundamental insights about the nature of NGOs as mission-driven organizations constituted by their external and internal stakeholders as well as their 'non-profitness'.

Notes

1. Data on organizational failure or exit is not available in the United States, although research has suggested that exit appears to be relatively rare (Harrison and Laincz 2008).
2. According to Feldman and Hernandez, 'Synergy in M&A arises when the value of the acquirer and target as a single entity exceeds the summed value of the two firms operating individually: $\text{Value}[A+T] > \text{Value}[A] + \text{Value}[T]$ ' (Feldman and Hernandez 2022, 550).
3. For example, research on US-based non-profits finds that most lack adequate operating reserves (Calabrese 2013).

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PART II
CONFIGURATIONS

NGO–NGO Interactions through Individuals

Patterns and Effects for Social Rights Advocacy

Nina Reiners

Introduction

Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) advocating for the implementation of the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (ICESCR)—the international normative framework for social rights—are a rather diverse set of actors with different foci. Their work is often spatially bound, specialized in one of the treaty's rights, for example, on education or labour conditions and in many cases away from the United Nations (UN) headquarters. Their configurations are more determined by individual advocacy aims than by a universal strategy. Holding governments accountable under the obligations of the treaty is difficult for NGOs considering the imprecise and vague norms and the fact that ICESCR is the only human rights treaty with a progressive realization clause ([Chapman 1996](#); [Young 2019](#)). ICESCR leaves interpretative room for governments to 'progressively realize' their obligations using their 'maximum available resources' ([UN 1966](#)). This has consequences for the protection of these rights, and resulted in 'an emphasis among both human rights activists and researchers on making economic, social, and cultural (ESC) rights more justiciable, usually by creating a legal right' ([Baer 2015](#), 355). For social rights NGOs, successful advocacy depends on clear obligations and a consensus regarding who needs to do what ([Hertel 2006](#); [Jurkovich 2020](#)).

This article asks how interactions between individuals advocating on behalf of NGOs in an international institution shape the institution's decision-making. In particular, the chapter focuses on advocacy for social rights, directed at the monitoring committee of the above-mentioned ICESCR. I analyse how different positional configurations evolved in a similar setting, and to what extent these configurations influenced the outcome. This question is relevant for two reasons. First, while NGOs and international human rights institutions have always had a close relationship ([Schmitz and Sikkink 2013](#); [McGaughey 2018](#)), advocacy for economic, social, and

cultural rights has experienced less attention in research on international human rights advocacy compared to NGOs, civil, and political rights (Nelson and Dorsey 2008). Advocacy for economic, social, and cultural rights also counts as more ‘creative’ (Hertel 2017, 238) because NGOs are less prominent than political and civil rights NGOs, and have fewer resources to achieve their aims. Second, the research programme set forth in this volume invites closer examination and theorization of how different types of social ties among NGOs produce different effects. Such ties are often formed at the individual level of NGO representatives, but are so far neglected in our analyses of NGOs.

I will analyse such different types of NGO–NGO interactions for the progressive development of the ICESCR. In the early 2000s, the expert body monitoring the ICESCR sought to overcome the interpretative room left by the treaty and adopted several outcome documents reflecting the body’s interpretations of what the rights entail and what states would need to do to implement them. This makes treaty interpretations an attractive target for NGO advocacy, who can submit statements and participate in public discussions of these interpretations in front of the UN expert body in Geneva (Reiners 2022). Between 1999 and 2002, the expert body adopted general comments¹ on the right to food, to health, and to water. We know from similar expert-based deliberation in the context of private law-making and standard setting (Schmidt and Werle 1998; Block-Lieb and Halliday 2017; Yates and Murphy 2019) that this is a world in which the engagement, expertise, and social skills of the individuals that represent organizations in these contexts matter a lot. We also know that these representatives often wear several hats in the expert committees, which means they have overlapping relationships to the different organizations and institutions for whom they speak. The drafting of treaty interpretations is a complex matter and the fact that these closely related rights were pinned down next to each other in such a short time deserves a closer look and promises insights on social rights advocacy. The expert body setting is rather distinct from the settings in which NGOs join forces to build advocacy coalitions or influence international treaty texts at the moment of their making—typically both very politicized and public moments. The expert-committee’s work, in contrast, is much more mundane and less in the focus of public attention.

I use a mixed-method approach to understand NGO–NGO interactions for social rights advocacy: first, I map the actors involved in the drafting and adoption of the three treaty interpretations on food, health, and water through a network analysis. This analysis gives an overview of NGOs involved in one or more general comments, and to which other actors they refer to in public discussions. I analyse patterns and effects of their interactions in three cases drawing mainly on content analysis of primary documents and on interviews conducted with NGO members, treaty body experts, and staff of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR).

The chapter finds that in the absence of an established broader advocacy network and a coherent strategy, human rights-based advocacy in the expert committee

evolved in a rather personalized manner. Overall, patterns of NGO–NGO interactions for social rights advocacy were found to be more on the conflictive than on the cooperative spectrum of social ties, ranging from indifference (health) to co-optation (water) to open conflict (food). The analysis demonstrates the value of a relational approach by identifying configurations of NGO–NGO interactions often overlooked in the prevailing literature on advocacy networks. A goal- or outcome-oriented approach would consider the adoption of the three general comments a successful outcome of NGO advocacy; however, in taking a relational approach, this chapter reveals the politics behind these outcomes and shows three different social ties in the cases—conflicting, disregarding, and co-opting—which produced varying effects. It also highlights the role of interactions between individuals in their roles as NGO representatives, particularly in settings where they cannot rely on, or network with, vibrant advocacy networks operating outside of human rights bodies.

Configurations of NGO Interactions through Individual Ties

As outlined by Deloffre and Quack in the framework chapter of this volume, NGO interactions reflect different types of social ties (Deloffre and Quack, [Chapter 1](#), this volume). Applying their typology among NGOs reveals social ties which can range from NGOs disregarding or actively divorcing each other, showing patterns of conflict, to more cooperative interactions, as well as social ties between two NGOs that are issue- or time-specific. Of course, not all actors have the same means to enter such interactions. Social rights NGOs are on average smaller than international NGOs and depend more on the actions of their individual members than on their organization's authority ([Stroup and Wong 2017](#)). The organizational structure of NGOs requires a closer look at interpersonal interactions, facilitated through the fact that often only one representative of the NGO appears in front of the treaty monitoring body. I study NGO–NGO interactions vis-à-vis the ICESCR monitoring bodies which allows me to draw from the literature on NGO relationships with international organizations ([Steffek 2013](#); [Johnson 2016](#)) but in a specialized setting, namely an entity consisting of independent experts. As discussed above, this is a setting in which the engagement, expertise, and social skills of the individuals who represent organizations in these settings matter a lot. So far, interpersonal networks and overlapping biographies have not received much attention when it comes to understanding why and how NGOs relate. I will focus my analysis on the ties between individuals that form different types of interactions on behalf of their organizations. My analysis applies a process-focused framework to investigate NGO interactions and the patterns through which the different effects of interactions are produced. In this approach, roles are not givens or a priori attributes that constrain interactions, but something that actors develop through interactions.

Social Rights Advocacy: NGOs and the Interpretation of the Rights to Food, Health, and Water (2000–2002)

Cooperation of civil society at the inter- and transnational, as well as the domestic level, for example as conceptualized in the norm spiral model (Risse et al. 1999, 2013) or in transnational advocacy networks (Keck and Sikkink 1998), is said to have a favourable effect on state commitment to, and compliance with, human rights. With the majority of literature on NGOs located in the field of human rights, there is a wealth of knowledge about success factors and strategies and, albeit to a lesser degree, their failure to achieve their goals. While most of this knowledge concentrates on NGOs working for civil and political rights, Nelson and Dorsey shifted attention to the ‘new rights advocacy’ (Nelson and Dorsey 2008) and gave a detailed picture of how and why NGOs in development work on human rights across all institutional scales. As many of these ‘new rights’ organizations are less prominent than NGOs and networks advocating for civil and political rights² and need to get along with fewer sources, we lack knowledge of their strategies. How do social rights NGOs interact with other NGOs to reach their goals in advancing social and economic rights standards? Are they joining forces, or do they compete vis-à-vis the international level?

Over the last decade, economic, social, and cultural rights have undergone rapid normative development, accompanied by strong global mobilization (Ratjen and Satija 2014; Hertel 2017). The Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR), the monitoring body consisting of eighteen independent experts, may issue interpretations of the treaty’s norms. These are non-binding in legal terms, but through these so-called ‘general comments’ the committee can clarify meaning and scope of a norm and, at their best, bring changes in law and in politics that are beneficial in the lives of many (Reiners 2022). As noted, the CESCR is an expert body of eighteen independent experts that monitors the implementation of the ICESCR by the state parties. The CESCR is also mandated to adopt general comments, which have evolved into authoritative treaty interpretations of the Covenant (Bodig 2016; McCall-Smith 2016).

In contrast to the treaty bodies’ other instruments, like concluding observations to state reports or views on individual complaints, general comments do not form part of a reporting cycle, and they do not react to one specific report or individual complaint. Instead, they address all state parties to assist them in fulfilling their obligations under the respective covenants. These instruments are a powerful tool for the progressive development of human rights (Reiners 2022). Yet, no formal rules exist as to when, how, and by whom such a general comment should be elaborated. Their drafting is not a recurring part of the meeting agenda of the treaty bodies. Furthermore, treaty body members are not compensated for their work beyond the sessions, so the drafting depends on individual commitment. Treaty body members frequently cite a lack of time and lack of support from the UN secretariat as the main reasons for the rare use of these instruments (Reiners 2024). Individual agency for the drafting

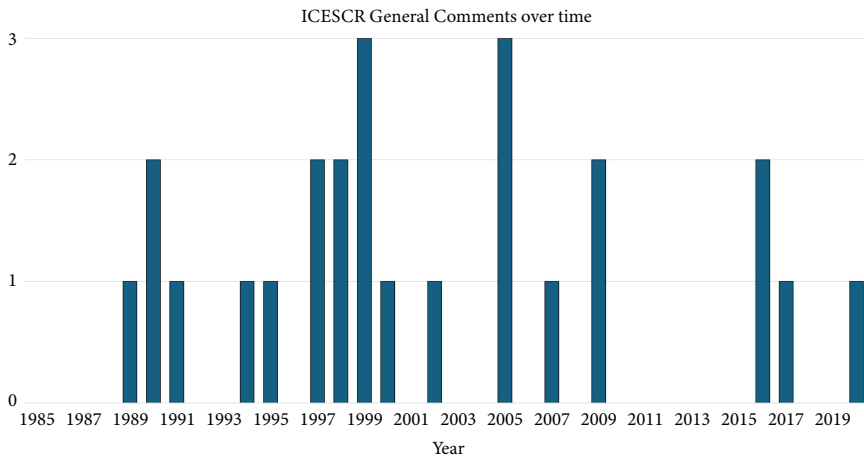


Figure 5.1 ICESCR general comments over time

Source: Author's own composition.

of a treaty interpretation then depends then on who has an interest and time. This practice is reflected in [Figure 5.1](#).

Between 1999 and 2002, the CESCR adopted five such General Comments. One was clarifying reporting obligations under article 14, and four dealt substantively with the normative content of rights enshrined in the Covenant. Among the four substantive interpretations, one was adopted on the right to education as articulated in article 13 of the Covenant in 1999. The other three were related interpretations of article 11 (the right to food), article 12 (the right to health), and both articles in the case of the right to water. The relatedness of the three interpretations is assumed to also attract the same NGOs to their drafting processes. The normative and legal impact of each interpretation has been subject to research (e.g., [Söllner 2007](#)), highlighting their relevance for the works of NGOs.

NGO interactions usually become visible in cooperation or coalition form, namely when several NGOs join forces and submit a joint report to the treaty bodies creating a state report. To highlight opposing views, one strategy could be to weigh the quantity of statements submitted in favour of a draft interpretation against the number of NGOs opposing it (e.g., the right to life discussion in the Human Rights Committee in 2018 showed that a majority of NGOs was against a right to safe abortion under the article 8 on the right to life, see [Zilli 2019](#)). However, less is known about how differences and similarities in NGO goals play out in the open, in front of the international institutional setting they are seeking to influence, and with what effect.

The analytical framework applied in this chapter combines positional and process analysis³ and is twofold: for one, I will conduct a network analysis of three actor networks connected to the discussion of draft interpretations in front of the expert body monitoring the ICESCR. (Re-)interpretation of economic and social rights has been framed as a 'risk' for advocates compared to civil and political rights because

of ‘the progressively realized character of economic rights and their often debated baselines’ (Hertel 2017, 241) which limited advocacy to a monitoring of violations approach (Chapman 1996). Yet, through treaty interpretations by CESCR, NGOs also have the opportunity to take part in the development of social and economic rights to facilitate their monitoring work at the domestic level.

In terms of data, I focus my analysis mainly on summary records of the meetings to see how an NGO is positioned in this interactive discourse. Through their interactions at the front stage (Goffman 1959), NGOs enable an understanding of their usually invisible conflicts and politics behind the scenes. Comparing three cases of NGO interaction in front of expert committees will be carried out in the second step. My analysis draws mainly from official documents of the sessions at which the drafts were discussed and adopted. For each general comment, one of the experts on the committee acted as the rapporteur for the drafting process. Rapporteurs for drafts can be elected by the expert committee but usually, as in the present three cases, they volunteer for this role. Being a rapporteur for a general comment is an additional task without further compensation and requires developing a first draft and discussing it with the committee and relevant actors. The draft is then revised until its adoption by expert consensus. General Comment No. 12 (GC12) was adopted by CESCR at the twentieth session on 12 May 1999 and is contained in the document E/C.12/1999/5. GC12 refers to article 11 of the ICESCR. The rapporteur was Mr Philippe Texier. General Comment No. 14 (GC14) was adopted by CESCR at the twenty-second session on 11 August 2000 and is contained in Document E/C.12/2000/4. GC14 refers to article 12 of the ICESCR. The rapporteur was Mr Eibe Riedel (CESCR 2001, para. 639). Finally, General Comment No. 15 (GC15) was adopted in November 2002, referring to both articles 11 and 12. Eibe Riedel was also the rapporteur for this document, which innovatively established a normative framework for the right to water under the Covenant.

As Figure 5.2 shows, public discussions and consultations on the drafts respecting General Comments 12 and 14 date back ten years before the adoption of the first general comment in this series, whereas GC15 was discussed only months prior to its adoption.

Mapping Social Rights Advocacy

More than 235 actors attended one or more of the events officially documented by OHCHR and referred to in the outcome documents of the three general comments. Among them are the CESCR treaty body members, individuals representing international organizations, state delegates, professionals, and civil society representatives. In order to make key actors within this ecology visible and detect direct relations among NGOs, I first conducted a static network analysis. The analysis is based on data gathered from all public summary records of the days of general discussion, summary records of meetings in which the CESCR reported on the progress, and

CESCR General Comments Nr. 12, 14, 15

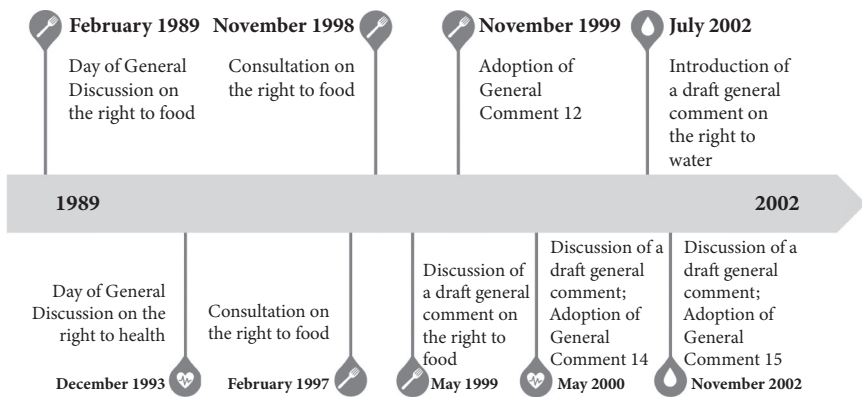


Figure 5.2 Timeline of drafting processes

Source: Author's own composition.

the general comments themselves.⁴ I made visible all individuals mentioned in the summary records (expert body members, NGO representative and other individual speakers) as a node. I labelled them by name and included further attributes, like type of organization and main location/headquarters at the organizational level as well as gender, profession, nationality, and regional group on the individual level. To make their ties, or lack thereof, visible (which in social network analysis is referred to as the edges), I went through these documents and included all connections in the following way: individual to organizations, and individual/organization to general comments. Then, I established an interaction between individuals who were mentioned as participants in the same meeting. Each individual speaking publicly to the committee and the other individuals present thus interacts with CESCR; when NGOs were referencing each other in their reports or statements I also included this connection in the edge table. Further, when central actors referred to background documents like drafts or codes of conduct, I went through the author's list of the document and included these connections too.⁵

The findings suggest that the three general comments evolved through relatively separate networks. Not all included NGO representatives as central actors, pointing towards a rather small number of people connecting all three general comments. The identification of these brokers (Cheng et al. 2021) helps to pre-structure the case studies. With these findings from the network analysis in mind, I will now investigate in greater detail patterns of NGO interactions in each of the drafting processes.

General Comment No. 12 (Right to Food): NGO–NGO Conflict

The right to food is of concern to a broad range of NGOs. Yet the network analysis showed that only a few appeared in front of CESCR to discuss the direction

of the draft general comment. We find a positional pattern of two NGOs in conflict over the interpretation of the right to food. Nevertheless, this configuration produces legitimacy and ordering effects.

The broker in this process was the Food First Information and Action Network (FIAN), an NGO dedicated thematically to the right to food that was set up in parallel to the CESCR, which became operative a year later. FIAN exists because of a conflict within another NGO. It was founded by members of Amnesty International in Germany, who were realizing the need for an organization working to make economic and social rights justiciable and not just as some tool for 'being kind to poor people' (Klum 2016, para. 3). Then-president of FIAN, Anita Klum, remembers in 2016:

So they asked themselves: Why not build an organization like Amnesty International—but devoted to food as a human right? Its focus is not aid, but the human rights of hundreds of millions and the eradication of those structures and circumstances that produce hunger and malnutrition over and over again. (Klum 2016, paras 4–10)

In 1983, a loose pilot network of church and Amnesty International groups was created, and all individuals participated in their personal capacity, without a mandate from their organizations. FIAN's formal setup then resembled much of the organizational structure of Amnesty International and included strategies like urgent actions, case work, and advocacy campaigns. Although FIAN was meant to be more partisan than Amnesty, it used the advice of lawyers and researchers for its founding phase and the creation of the first national sections. The work of CESCR was from the beginning a reference point and target of FIAN's advocacy work.⁶ Although the headquarters in Heidelberg is only a four-hour train ride away from Geneva, an office of FIAN International was set up in walking proximity to the UN treaty bodies in Palais Wilson.

It thus comes as no surprise that FIAN sought to influence the development of the right to food through a new interpretation of article 11 (the right to an adequate standard of living). The discussions on such an update to the meaning of what this right entails regarding food started in 1989 with a Day of General Discussion devoted to the right during CESCR's third session.⁷ A decade of advocacy and multilateral meetings followed, with the 1996 World Food Summit as the main event to collect civil society voices on the issues of food security. As a result of this summit, the NGO Forum called for a Code of Conduct and a Convention on Food Security. Three international NGOs took the lead in the drafting of the code: the International Jacques Maritain Institute, FIAN International, and the World Alliance for Nutrition and Human Rights (WANAHR) (Rae et al. 2007). The final draft code, presented in late 1997, was supported by over 800 NGOs.

This collaboration between the three NGOs for the Code of Conduct shifted into a more conflictive relationship for the draft general comment. FIAN's key role in the

drafting of GC12 was highlighted in 1997 by Philip Alston, then-chairman of CESCR, during the day of general discussion on the normative content of the right to food. He opened the session by explicitly thanking FIAN for the role in developing the Code of Conduct, but leaving out the NGO WANAHR, which was also present: ‘He commended, in particular, the Foodfirst Information and Action Network (FIAN), had [*sic!*] undertaken a major NGO initiative in drafting a code of conduct on world food security which, in his opinion, laid the foundation upon which the work of the international community could move forward’ (CESCR 1997b, para. 2).

Two years later, when the first discussion of a draft of the General Comment was publicly discussed in Geneva, the then chairwoman invited FIAN’s representative to introduce the draft: ‘The CHAIRPERSON said that the Foodfirst Information and Action Network (FIAN) had made a significant contribution to the draft text and invited its representative to introduce the draft general comment’ (CESCR 1999b, para. 47).

This was an outstanding gesture by CESCR and to the best of my knowledge unprecedented. When another draft, submitted by an academic and expert from the former FIAN collaborator, NGO WANAHR, was suggested as the draft for adoption by several actors, CESCR member Eibe Riedel instead argued to work with the NGO draft, giving FIAN a seat at the table for final revisions—and leaving out WANAHR and its representative: ‘Mr. RIEDEL said that although there were many points of similarity between the two drafts, they had different accents and different approaches. He therefore suggested forming a small working group with the representatives of FIAN and Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and two or three Committee members, to prepare a composite draft’ (CESCR 199c, fn 33).

To prioritize one NGO is a remarkable decision from a member of the expert committee. WANAHR was a small NGO promoting a human rights approach to food and nutrition problems, mainly focusing on advocacy and outreach work. It was founded in 1992 by Asbjørn and Wensche Barth Eide in Oslo under the umbrella of the Norwegian Centre for Human Rights at the University of Oslo, and last records of its activities were seen in 2002 (Union of International Associations 2002). Part of the explanation for this decision to prioritize FIAN over WANAHR is probably the rapporteur Eibe Riedel’s closer relationship to FIAN and to Michael Windfuhr, one of the founders of FIAN. Riedel held a chair for international law at the University of Mannheim, which is only a couple of kilometres away from FIAN International’s office in Heidelberg. They are both central figures for German economic and social rights advocacy, and FIAN and Riedel’s chair collaborated in joint projects (De Schutter 2014, 569). The privileged role of FIAN vis-à-vis CESCR and CESCR member Eibe Riedel did not result in NGO coalition-building. FIAN was pushing for a draft and WANAHR for another one. Other NGOs were only present for single meetings to make a statement. FIAN and WANAHR are the only NGOs for the right to food interpretation contributing with substantial claims to the outcome document.

In the summary records of the sessions for 1999, CESCR acknowledged several individuals for their support:

The Committee wishes to express its particular gratitude to Mr. Gerald Moore (FAO), Mr. Asbjørn Eide (member of the Sub-Commission on Promotion and Protection of Human Rights), Mr. Michael Windfuhr (FIAN—Foodfirst Information and Action Network) and Mr. Philippe Texier (Committee member) for their work on the draft, as well as to all those who submitted written comments on it. (CESCR 2000, para. 419)

Michael Windfuhr and Asbjørn Eide were the representants for FIAN and WANAHR. Asbjørn Eide appeared in numerous functions in front of CESCR: next to the representative of WANAHR, he spoke as a human rights scholar specializing in law and social sciences, in front of CESCR. He did this as representative of the Norwegian Institute of Human Rights at the University of Oslo, and thus in his role as academic. He was at the time of the final discussions also a member of the UN Sub-Commission on Human Rights, a then-think tank of the UN Commission on Human Rights. Mr Eide's contribution to the general comment was significant to the extent that CESCR members referred to one draft for discussion in the public meeting as the 'Eide draft' (CESCR 1999c, fn 26–29).

Michael Windfuhr, the representative of FIAN, was introduced as the *de facto* drafter of the general comment on the right to food. He was asked by the CESCR chairperson to introduce the draft, a step rarely taken by treaty bodies. Even rarer is it to give this honour to a member of civil society. While Asbjørn Eide's draft was referred to as the 'Eide draft', Windfuhr's draft was referred to as the 'Committee's draft' (CESCR 1999c, fn 28–30). During the public discussion, Windfuhr defended his draft as follows: 'The Committee's draft also spoke of the access of every individual to an income and dignity enabling him to feed himself, whereas the Eide draft spoke only of adequate food' (CESCR 1999c, fn 30).

This partisan and sociocritical position on the right to food was what inspired him and others to found FIAN in the first place. The directional network analysis shows that Windfuhr and Eide did not directly refer to each other's drafts in the statements. Yet, both presented arguments which can be seen as a reaction to the other draft. Mr Windfuhr also pointed out several times that many concerns were already addressed in documents he submitted earlier to CESCR. He later explained the absence of cooperation between NGOs in economic and social rights in a manual on NGOs and the right to food in which he states:

To get an overview of the variety of approaches to implementation of the right to food in concrete situations, it is important to differentiate those national and international NGOs and movements that explicitly use a rights approach in their daily work from those that, while working with issues strongly related to the right to food, use more developmental, or 'implicit', approaches. So far, only a few

NGOs are using an explicit rights approach to food and nutrition issues at the international level. (Windfuhr 1998, 7)

He continues to include a list of NGOs who do use this approach and mentions FIAN, WANAHR, and the Global Forum on Sustainable Food and Nutrition Security, as they attend the regular sessions of CESCR to report on violations of the right to adequate food. He highlights the special role of his NGO, FIAN, claiming that ‘the most regular user is FIAN. FIAN applies a strict violations approach, which means that it intervenes in situations where states are breaching their obligations to respect, protect or fulfil the right to adequate food’ (Windfuhr 1998, 7). This strict violations approach, which he identifies as unique for FIAN, was distinct from WANAHR’s approach. Additionally, FIAN emerged from a non-compromise situation on fighting for the right to food for everyone. With the CESCR privilege on top, there was no need for FIAN to collaborate with other NGOs.

General Comment No. 14 (Right to Health): NGO–NGO Indifference

Only a couple of months after the adoption of the GC12, CESCR adopted GC14 on the right to health.⁸ The rapporteur was Eibe Riedel (CESCR 2001, para. 639). We find a configuration of indifference, a key attribute of the disregarding relational type (Deloffre and Quack, Chapter 1, this volume), in NGO interactions for the treaty interpretation of a right to health, and can ultimately observe no effects. The case highlights an increased level of difficulty for NGOs to influence human rights interpretations when an international organization, here the World Health Organization (WHO), is actively involved.

Efforts to adopt an interpretation of the right to health were already made in the early 1990s, with former CESCR member Philip Alston being a driving force behind it (CESCR 1993a, para. 29). On 6 December 1993, CESCR held a Day of General Discussion on the right to health (CESCR 1999d, para. 46), targeting ‘minimum core content and non-discrimination dimensions’ as a protection floor (CESCR 1993b, para. 1).⁹ CESCR chairperson Philip Alston invited the committee to address the right to health in the light of ‘the trend towards free market economics and the pressures to trim social budgets and to permit economic factors to become dominant’ as well as ‘to respond to critics who maintained that the right to health was valid only in so far as it contributed to economic progress’ (CESCR 1993b, para. 2). This day was well attended by civil society organizations and medical professionals, together with many representatives from church organizations. WHO suggested to convene in a second workshop on the right to health as a human right (one had already been held in 1978) (CESCR 1993b, para. 68) and to cooperate with CESCR to exchange information on the right to health (CESCR 1994, para. 10). CESCR, however, hesitated to follow up on the discussion. Several members expressed their uneasiness with the inactions: there was criticism by Mr Philip Alston in 1994 that the discussion of the

right to basic healthcare (during the first substantive session of the Preparatory Committee for the World Summit for Social Development) was not sufficiently discussed in the context of human rights. Furthermore, Philippe Texier, in 1997, summarized that CESCR failed to make progress on the right to health (CESCR 1997a, para. 11). Later that year the WHO held a two-day informal consultation on health and human rights, the first one at the WHO to be convened specifically to address health and human rights (Hunt 2016). One representative from the non-profit organization Rights and Humanity, Julia Häusermann, presented at this occasion a framework on health and human rights (Häusermann 1997), which participants described as the key document for the two days (Hunt 2016). While CESCR named Rights and Humanity in their acknowledgement of organizations and individuals providing input to the drafting process (CESCR 2001, para. 640), no further reference can be found that this framework played a role in the discussions. Ms Häusermann also did not appear in front of CESCR to make a statement on that topic. While she was neglected in CESCR's acknowledgements, legal scholar Brigit Toebe was mentioned. Toebe published a book in early 1999 on the international right to health which included a draft general comment on the right to health (Toebe 1999).

At CESCR's session in April 1999, chairperson Virginia Bonoan-Dandan invited her committee to consider a draft general comment on the right to health and to name a rapporteur for the process (CESCR 1999a, para. 16). This invitation was taken up by Eibe Riedel, who also pointed out 'that he was currently working on a draft study on the right to health that would contain preliminary points for a discussion' (CESCR 1999d, para. 11). There was also a call to submit written proposals to him, as well as an announcement to seek cooperation with the WHO (CESCR 1999d, para. 17). A year later in May 2000 a draft was ready to be discussed among representatives of specialized agencies, NGOs, and individual experts (CESCR 2001, para. 640).

While GC14 had the highest number of NGO participants during the discussions, NGOs were less central for the drafting of GC14 than for the other two general comments analysed in this chapter. The network analysis highlights the central role of the WHO in the process and the summary records, in contrast to the other general comments, confirms that CESCR expressed its gratitude foremost to the WHO. This is in line with research on global health which sees the field as less influenced by civil society organizations but highlights the central role of formal international organizations (Holzscheiter 2017). Many experts speaking during the discussions were also from the WHO's ecology, like medical research institutes, professional associations, or legal scholarships.

The NGOs participating in the process, which eventually led to the adoption of GC14, introduced health-related aspects of their work during the discussions, yet without mobilizing a broader NGO network, or even mentioning the position of other NGOs as similar during their statements. Additionally, the rapporteur for the draft, Eibe Riedel, was himself an expert on health who worked on the topic, which generally reduces the need for external input to a drafting process (Reiners 2022). In sum, the discussions were dominated by the WHO who organized informal

meetings together with CESCR and legal experts. The NGOs neither competed nor collaborated, they simply could not be observed to interact with each other.

General Comment No. 15 (Right to Water): NGO–NGO Co-optation

Unlike the right to food or the right to health, a human right to water was not included in the core human rights treaties. NGOs had advocated for decades on this lack of formal acknowledgement in human rights law (Reiners 2021). We find co-optation in NGO interactions for the treaty interpretation, with legitimacy effects for the co-opting and identity effects for the co-opted NGO.

In 2002, CESCR adopted GC15 on the right to water to close this gap in international human rights law. The intent to draft such a general comment was announced a year before its adoption and a discussion on a first draft took place with selected experts. No day of general discussion preceded the adoption, nor was an open call for statements and submission issued beforehand. It can thus be argued that the NGOs connected to GC15 have been pre-selected by CESCR, and as such can be regarded as highly relevant in the drafting process.

The first draft was prepared by the rapporteur for the general comment, Eibe Riedel, in close collaboration with two NGOs,¹⁰ both of which were specialized in economic and social rights. One of these was FIAN, which had already worked together with CESCR on the GC12 respecting the right to food, and was thus known to the committee and present in Geneva. The other one, the Centre on Housing Rights and Evictions (COHRE), was a rather small NGO, which specialized in housing rights and was based in Geneva.

In the beginning, COHRE was presented by its director Scott Leckie. While he was involved in GC14 as a representative of the Habitat International Coalition, he moved on to founding his own NGO, COHRE. The COHRE director handed the draft over to his colleague, as he was already involved in other projects, while the FIAN representative, Michael Windfuhr, was similarly busy with other projects and thus unable to assume coordination responsibility for the drafting process. Both engaged only with the core group from time to time. While COHRE played a central role because the NGO found a replacement, no representative secured FIAN a central role in the process.

To facilitate this drafting, Scott Leckie sought out a secondary, outside NGO collaborator, Virginia Roaf, an expert on water and land issues. Roaf was recently employed at a development aid organization specializing in water issues (WaterAid), and notably had no prior experience in human rights work.¹¹ She was approached by Mr Leckie while discussing another project of her NGO.¹² Leckie took this opportunity to invite her to contribute to GC15's drafting process—an instance of NGO–NGO representative interaction and, revealingly, an initiative with which its members could engage at the behest of the official decision-makers, namely the treaty

body. The main work of drafting and discussing the general comment was then taken over by Scott Leckie's colleague and senior legal officer at COHRE, Malcolm Langford. Eibe Riedel and Malcolm Langford jointly discussed several draft versions which they prepared based on topical discussions regarding the scope of the right to water. The rapporteur, as the group's operating member of the treaty body, considered the committee's experience with states and their point of view as expressed in reports and during the dialogues. The COHRE officer took an advocacy perspective and included wide-ranging standards in his draft versions. As a legal expert, he knew about domestic court decisions on water issues and their interrelatedness with fundamental human rights. CESCR's GC15 is a good example in the way individual actions are often overlooked when analysing NGOs. Interviews with treaty body members, representatives from other international organizations, and civil society actors who were affiliated with the right to water all identified Malcolm Langford as chiefly responsible for the draft, but emphasized the key role of the outside collaborator who worked alongside the main drafter—Virginia Roaf, the expert on water and land issues from WaterAid. At that time WaterAid had no history of working with the UN human rights system.

In the final report, marking the meeting before the GC15 was adopted, CESCR thanked Malcolm Langford for his 'untiring assistance', without also acknowledging COHRE (CESCR 2003, para. 659). Next to a long list of individuals and organizations who CESCR also acknowledged for their input and support, it is striking that Virginia Roaf and WaterAid are missing from this list, despite her role in the core drafting group.¹³ While her interaction with Langford and Riedel might be beneficial for her and the NGO WaterAid at a later point, for the drafting process on this GC15 her expertise was incorporated into the drafting without giving her due credit, or even recognition for it, publicly. Co-opting in NGO–NGO interactions manifested at the individual level might therefore help us see gendered biases in NGO–NGO interactions (AbouAssi et al. 2019).

Discussion: Patterns of NGO–NGO Configurations

My analysis points to three different configurations of NGO–NGO representative interactions vis-à-vis expert bodies for human rights interpretation. I will briefly discuss what the cases of social rights advocacy tell us about patterns and effects of these configurations (see Table 5.1). The food case shows a conflictive relationship between NGO representatives. Yet the conflictive relationship ruptured social ties (FIAN breaking off from Amnesty) and generated conflicting discourses and interpretations of the right to food that led to fragmentation. It ultimately produced (1) legitimacy effects (the recognition of FIAN by the CESCR) and (2) innovative ordering effects (the incorporation of FIAN's comment into the draft). For the NGO in competition, however, the effects were rather exclusive for shaping the content of the general comment. The health case was dominated in its discourse and the process by the WHO and their interaction with the CESCR. No NGO–NGO interactions were observable, and therefore neither were effects. The water case shows us how informal settings

Table 5.1 Patterns of NGO–NGO configurations across cases

	GC 12 Food	GC 14 Health	GC 15 Water
Nature of social ties	Conflict	Indifference	Co-optation
Empirical manifestation	• FIAN ‘the committee draft’ • WANAHR ‘the Eide draft’	• Highest number of NGOs participating but WHO central • No mobilization among NGOs	• COHRE requesting technical expertise from WaterAid • No recognition of WaterAid
Pattern	• NGOs have conflicting discourses and interpretations • One NGO has privileged access	• A formal international organization dominates the discourse • NGOs do not interact with each other	• NGOs only interact in informal settings • NGOs have similar interpretations • One NGO has privileged access
Effects	Primary: Legitimacy effect Ordering effect Secondary: Innovative effect Exclusionary effect	No observable effects	Primary: Legitimacy effect Identity effect Secondary: Exclusionary effect Innovation effect

Source: Author’s own compilation.

facilitated co-optation. Without having a public meeting opportunity to present input on the record, one NGO provided input without acknowledgement. This had innovative identity effects on the co-opted NGO and legitimacy effect on the co-opter who was exclusively awarded recognition.

Conclusion

This paper analysed how NGO–NGO interactions for social advocacy produced different effects through distinct patterns of interactions. Several findings stand out and give opportunities for further research, but also require more discussion of the context conditions.

First, NGO–NGO interactions for social advocacy are more on the conflictive than on the cooperative spectrum of social ties. This can be explained through the landscape at the time of the analysis. Only a few NGOs were working on economic and social issues with a human rights focus directed towards the international level at that time. They lacked network opportunities outside the human rights bodies. Second, NGO–NGO interactions for social advocacy take place at the individual

level and reproduce structural biases. This seemed an empirical finding with regard to gender. Future research could also explore how other factors play into producing different effects. Third and relatedly, NGO–NGO interactions for social rights advocacy take place via their position towards the decisionmaker representing the international level. The independent experts on human rights monitoring bodies provide space for personal interactions to channel advocacy. Indeed, the analysis of the summary records provided many details on the personification of the social rights dynamics.

A focus on NGO–NGO interactions through individuals further helps us understand broader implications for human rights advocacy. In a sense, this chapter provides evidence for arguments that the social rights NGOs ‘failed’ to bring a coherent strategy to tackle global inequalities through a human rights-based approach. The processes leading to CESCR’s adoption of its interpretations of a right to food, health, and water between 1999 and 2002 were neither accompanied by a civil society network dedicated to social rights advocacy nor by individual NGOs seeking collaborations with each other to add more weight to their statements. Instead, the configurations of their interactions ranged from indifference (health) to co-optation (water) to open conflict (food). My analysis also showed that in advocacy for economic, social, and cultural rights, which is considered a domain of ‘creativity’ (Hertel 2017), ruptured social ties and conflicting discourses and interpretations of the right to food led to fragmentation (FIAN breaking off from Amnesty International), but ultimately resulted in recognition of FIAN by the CESCR and incorporation of their comment into the draft.

As such, the article allows for several contributions: first, it departs from advocacy perspectives that see a networking structure as necessary for their effectiveness. Second, it offers descriptive data on social rights NGOs using the UN for norm progress. Finally, the article also contributes to broader debates about the role of NGOs in the making of international human rights law. In terms of limitations, my analysis took place in a time and a setting when NGOs were much less organized—or professionalized—than they are today. The sector is constantly evolving and demanding change from NGOs in order to stay relevant (Mitchell et al. 2020). The findings of my analysis should thus be seen in their temporal context, while future research might follow up on how more professionalized NGOs, organized in networks, interact in order to see their desired interpretation of social rights reflected upon.

Notes

1. This is the term for the interpretations adopted by the treaty body overseeing CESCR which shall clarify obligations under ICESCR for the states parties, but often have legal and political influence beyond that (Bodig 2016; Desierto 2017).
2. Shareen Hertel compared the two human rights advocacy movements by invoking the picture of a museum in which there are halls full of artworks by old masters, which are easily recognizable by the observers. New rights advocacy movements, to follow this metaphor, do not fit the frames—and need reframing (Hertel 2017).

3. The analysis originally appears in ‘The Power of Interpersonal Relationships: A Socio-Legal Approach to International Institutions and Human Rights Advocacy’ ([Reiners 2024](#)).
4. The documents used have the symbols E/C.12/1997/SR.46; E/C.12/1997/SR.47; E/C.12/1999/SR.21.
5. For example, in a discussion on the right to food in 1997, CESCR chairperson Philip Alston highlighted the report on the 1996 World Food Summit, and the Programme of Action as drivers for the work of the committee.
6. ICESCR has become the core of the objective in the FIAN statute: ‘FIAN International advocates for the human right to adequate food and nutrition on the basis of the International Bill of Human Rights, in particular the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural rights (Article 11), its Optional Protocol, and General Comment No. 12 as adopted by the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, and other relevant human rights documents’ ([FIAN International 2017](#)).
7. No records are available for this meeting regarding who participated and what was discussed.
8. General Comment No. 13 on the right to education was adopted in December 1999.
9. Several discussion papers were prepared but are not accessible in the treaty body database. (E/C.12/1993/WP.17–25).
10. The author’s notes of a background talk with the rapporteur.
11. ‘[H]e just said: “But don’t you want to write a General Comment with us on the right to water?” And I said: “What is that?” — “You know I’m not from a human rights background, I’ve had no experience of human rights at all in development work.” Interview in September 2015.
12. ‘I was working at WaterAid in London. ... My experience was land, land as a particular problem for access to water in formal settlements. ... I contacted Scott Leckie of COHRE because I met him previously and I thought he would be up to help me think through some of the issues.’ Interview in September 2015.
13. On this role, see [chapter 4](#) in [Reiners 2022](#).

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Pathways to Brokerage

A Relational Approach to Understanding Global South Inter-Community NGO Networking

Huimin Cheng, Ye Wang, Ping Ma, and Amanda Murdie

Introduction

On their websites and promotion materials, many nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) highlight the power of networked connections to other NGOs. For example, the organization Youth for Unity and Voluntary Action (YUVA), a broad human rights organization that started in India in 1984, has ‘networks and campaigns’ grouped together as one of their core organizational approaches. The approach ‘stems from a belief in the power of Networks and Collectives, as a key solidarity strategy to overcome the shrinking socio-political spaces for Indian civil society’ (YUVA n.d.a, para. 4). Similarly, the Africa Legal Aid (AFLA) organization, an NGO with offices in the Netherlands, Ghana, and South Africa, displays on their webpage their ‘extensive and impressive network’ with which ‘AFLA has shared its expertise’ in order ‘to ensure maximum impact’ (AFLA n.d.a, paras 1–2). The Ain o Salish Kendra—Law and Mediation Centre takes a very similar approach in its materials, focusing on how ‘national, regional, and international networks’ help them influence ‘policies, justice, and universal human rights’ (Ain o Salish Kendra 2021, para. 2). According to these three organizations and many others like them, networking allows NGOs to better deliver on their organizational objectives and can help organizations overcome limits in domestic political structures.

How do we understand the networking behaviour of Global South NGOs like YUVA, AFLA, and Ain o Salish Kendra? Especially when resources are scarce, what factors lead an organization to make networking a strategic priority? While much international relations (IR) scholarship recognizes transnational advocacy networks as potentially powerful (Keck and Sikkink 1998; Risse et al. 1999), we still know very little about behaviours within the network itself, especially when we focus on organizations outside of a very small handful of Global North countries. Deloffre and Quack’s (Chapter 1, this volume) relational approach to NGO–NGO interactions

provides a powerful roadmap with which to open up the ‘black box’ of the NGO network, and problematize how NGOs connect to each other in a world with unequal resources and historical power differences.

We see our research on the NGO network benefiting from Deloffre and Quack’s (Chapter 1, this volume) relational approach. Our recent work looks at the nature of NGO–NGO interactions between and within endogenously forming communities (Cheng et al. 2021). In our work, NGO–NGO interactions in practice become NGO–NGO–NGO chains, with brokers acting as intermediaries between otherwise unconnected organizations. We find that organizations from historically powerful countries in the Global North are more likely to not only be part of the network but also to take a disproportionate share of powerful inter-community brokerage roles. Even when Global South organizations can establish NGO–NGO connections, they are less likely to take on the brokerage roles that may help them build connections and resources across communities. In this way, the nature of social ties and the configurations of communities and brokerage relations that result lead to exclusion in the NGO world. A lack of Global South involvement in the NGO network likely stifles innovation, limits grassroots connections, justifies civil society backlash, and reinforces the power hierarchies of the traditional political systems that NGOs are often fighting against.

In this chapter we use insights from Deloffre and Quack’s (Chapter 1, this volume) relational approach to re-examine our earlier findings and focus on the characteristics that allow Global South NGOs to connect in meaningful and powerful ways across communities. We examine the twenty Global South organizations identified in our earlier work as having the highest percentage of inter-community brokerage ties. A deeper look at these organizations and the structures where they are embedded can help us gain insights into the transformative nature of NGO–NGO interactions.

Below, we review brokerage and community dynamics and situate our earlier work into Deloffre and Quack’s (Chapter 1, this volume) relational approach. Drawing on their approach, we examine how country, community, and organizational factors help some Global South NGOs develop inter-community brokerage ties. We find that civil society-related political opportunity structures help encourage the type of inter-community brokerage types that empower Global South organizations. Similarly, certain NGO communities are better than others at encouraging Global South inter-community brokerage. By investigating the factors that encouraged certain NGO–NGO interactions to form, we are able to offer insights into the exclusionary effects of specific types of NGO interactions and possible ways to counteract such exclusion. When Global South organizations are better represented across communities, the power of the overall NGO network increases.

A Relational Approach to NGO Communities and Brokerage Interactions

NGO Communities and Brokerage

Although networks of NGOs are central to much of our understanding of how international advocacy works, large-scale examinations of network connections are rare and typically tied to a particular issue area and time period. In an effort to move beyond issue-specific research, in a recent piece in *International Studies Quarterly* (ISQ), we used information on NGO meeting attendance from the United Nations' (UN) integrated Civil Society Organizations (iCSO) System. The iCSO database has information on over 24,000 organizations. We focused on the 3,903 organizations connected through UN meetings from 1992 to 2017.

Using the iCSO database allowed us to examine how emergent communities develop within the overall network over time. Communities are defined as groups of actors 'that are more tightly connected to each other than they are to the rest of the network' (Mucha et al. 2010, 876). Our contention was that distinct communities of connected NGOs should emerge over time as organizations create shared problem-solving repertoires of knowledge and practice. We discovered four communities in our overall network: Community 1: Place-Based and Faith-Based NGOs; Community 2: Textbook NGOs; Community 3: Research and Policy NGOs; Community 4: Environmental Action NGO Community.

After identifying these four NGO communities, we expand on the concept of brokerage within NGO studies, focusing specifically on different types of brokerage roles within and between communities. A broker is an organization that serves to connect others that would not otherwise be connected. We draw on work from sociology to outline four distinct types of brokers: coordinators, gatekeepers/representatives, liaisons, and itinerant brokers (Gould and Fernandez 1989). Each brokerage role serves to connect organizations within or between communities in different ways. Figure 6.1 provides an illustration of these different types of brokerage connections, focusing on the role of the organization labelled 'A'. In the coordinator role, organization A connects two organizations, all in the same community. In the gatekeeper/representative role, organization A connects an organization within its community to one outside its community. In the liaison role, organization A connects two organizations, all of which are in different communities. And, finally, in the itinerant role, organization A connects two organizations in the same community while it remains in a different community.

We gain much theoretical leverage from disaggregating brokers into their distinct types and focusing on the ways in which brokers connect organizations both within and across communities. We think a particularly useful first cut is focusing on the differences between intra-community brokers (coordinators) and the various types of inter-community brokers (gatekeepers/representatives, liaisons, and itinerant brokers). In our minds, inter-community brokerage is crucial to how we currently understand international advocacy. We contend that the canonical

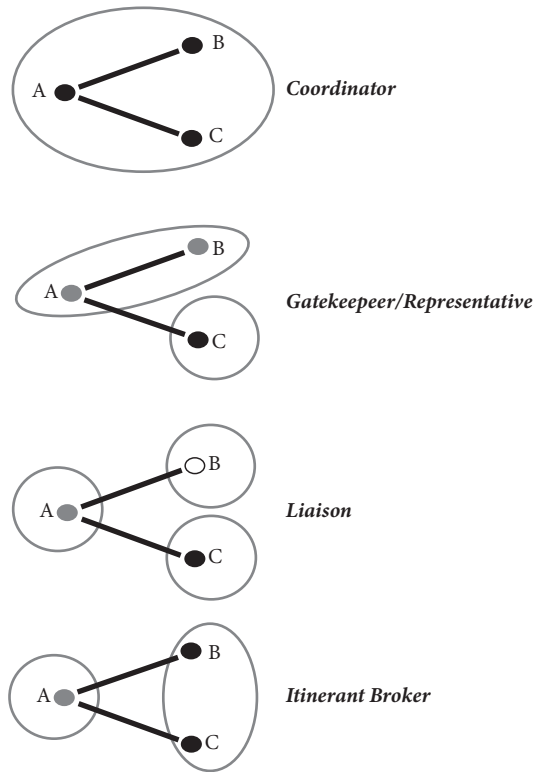


Figure 6.1 Gould and Fernandez's (1989) brokerage roles

Source: Author's own compilation based on Gould and Fernandez (1989) and Cheng et al. (2021).

transnational advocacy network framework of Keck and Sikkink (1998) assumes inter-community brokerage: it is the ability of an organization to leave its home group and form connections in outside communities that starts the boomerang and spiral model processes that have been argued to be central to human rights improvement (Keck and Sikkink 1998; Risse et al. 1999). Although our field has not conceptualized inter-community brokerage roles, the importance and relational power of inter-community brokerage underpins most of our existing theoretical work on transnational advocacy, even if it has not been discussed using those terms (see Deloffre and Quack, Chapter 1, this volume on relational power).

Further, while brokers within a community can help to transmit information and resources between like-minded groups, we contend that brokers connecting to others between and across communities are likely more powerful agenda-setters, innovators, and leaders in the broader NGO sector. For example, inter-community brokers might bring new practices to a community or could stop an idea from taking root in a specific community. An inter-community brokerage role could thus help an organization shift advocacy attention and resources, as well as push its personal

agenda, between communities. Further, communicating with multiple audiences requires special skills that could privilege larger, more established organizations (Stroup and Wong 2017). Occupying inter-community brokerage roles could create a powerful feedback loop, where organizations with certain skills and resources are able to get more power and resources through their brokerage roles (Stovel and Shaw 2012; Sullivan and Stewart 2017).

Previous examinations of brokerage within IR saw brokers as one homogenous group, and did not acknowledge the differences in power and position that can occur when an organization is acting as a broker for others within the same community or between communities (Avant 2016; Goddard 2018). While some existing work on the NGO network used the term ‘gatekeepers’, this work did not conceptualize gatekeepers as one of multiple brokerage roles that organizations can occupy both within and between communities (Bob 2005; Carpenter 2011, 2014). Existing work also did not empirically establish whether organizations were gatekeepers via network science methods.

By unpacking brokerage into distinct roles between and within communities, we found several interesting dynamics for NGO scholars. For each organization in our sample that took on a brokerage role, we identified which specific brokerage role type it took on the most. First, the various NGO communities have different distributions of brokerage types. Community 1: Place-Based and Faith-Based NGO Community, and Community 4: Environmental Action NGO Community, have the largest percentages of intra-community coordinator brokers. Community 2: Textbook NGOs includes arguably the best-known organizations, like Amnesty and Open Society; its organizations took on a large percentage of inter-community gatekeeper/representative roles. Community 3: Research and Policy NGOs, a community of many research-based organizations that are often left out of IR and NGO studies, also has a high percentage of organizations in gatekeeper/representative roles, as well as other intra-community brokerage role types.

Second, we found that pre-existing power matters for whether an organization occupies more powerful inter-community brokerage roles. Past research showed that Global South NGOs are more likely to be excluded from the overall NGO network in the first place (Shumate and Dewitt 2008; Murdie 2014; Hadden and Bush 2021). We found something even more troubling: for those Global South organizations that become part of the overall network, their lack of pre-existing power and resources may make it difficult to develop the inter-community brokerage roles that could provide the most power and resources to them. We think this finding is especially important for those interested in improving representation from the Global South. If Global South NGOs are less likely to occupy powerful inter-community brokerage roles, this calls into question whether NGOs are really an alternative to the hierarchical, colonial-heritage, Western-centric state systems that such organizations often purport to provide protection against. Without attention to community and brokerage dynamics, efforts to improve Global South NGO representation may backfire, further benefiting the small number of mainly Global North organizations that occupy inter-community brokerage roles.

Insights from Deloffre and Quack's Relational Approach

The relational approach of Deloffre and Quack ([Chapter 1](#), this volume) provides a rich theoretical lens through which to extend our existing work. Their theoretical argument starts with the idea that the role of NGOs in transnational politics cannot be properly understood by just focusing on NGOs as agents. Instead, we need to focus on NGO–NGO interactions, understanding that agency is constructed by the ‘interactions and relationships’ of organizations (Deloffre and Quack [Chapter 1](#), this volume, p. 12). Agency is therefore a variable and not a given: an organization's power to affect world politics is not driven only—or even primarily—by its own status and resources, but by its relations with others around it.

Deloffre and Quack's ([Chapter 1](#), this volume) conceptualization of NGO agency works well with our existing work and can help extend the theoretical importance of our findings on brokerage and community. In line with their argument, agency is not located in NGOs, but in their interactions, providing organizations with ‘power, authority, and legitimacy’ (Deloffre and Quack, [Chapter 1](#), this volume, p. 1). We contend that brokerage is a type of interaction which provides power to organizations. A particular brokerage role can not only transform the organization that is the broker but can also transform the organizations it serves to connect. Because certain brokerage roles extend beyond a particular community, brokerage interactions have the potential to transform the way organizations think, interact, and operate across various sectors and concerns. For example, a brokerage interaction may affect whether a certain innovation is transmitted to multiple organizations or fundamentally stopped from diffusing any further into a community. An actor's agency may be expanded or contracted as a result of the brokerage interactions it is part of. More importantly, an actor's agency would also be affected by brokerage interactions it is not a part of, including those both within and between communities.

Deloffre and Quack's ([Chapter 1](#), this volume) review of the literature finds relational analyses differ based on their unit of analysis, either (1) positions, (2) processes, or (3) practices. Second, relational analyses are either (1) static or (2) dynamic. Along with this typology, we see our existing work as largely positional, both in terms of theory and in terms of empirics. Our focus is on the overall network created by NGO–NGO interactions at UN meetings, as discussed above, and the positions of NGOs in communities and brokerage roles. However, for the study of emergent communities and brokerage, it is not a question of process over position but more a realization that positions and processes are endogenous and cannot be completely separated. Deloffre and Quack's ([Chapter 1](#), this volume, p. 3) discussion of configuration helps us to understand this overlap between process and position. Configurations are ‘aggregations of processes’ that can be positional in the sense that they reflect a specific pattern of social ties (see also [Jackson and Nexon 1999](#), 304). In this way, the process becomes the position in the aggregate.

Further, as our work focuses on positional configurations, we see it as capturing both the static and the dynamic nature of networks. While brokerage roles are fluid and dynamic, historical power and static attributes can make some roles more or less

likely. As such, positions do matter and, in some sense, are static or ‘sticky’. Positions are not deterministic, however, and certain NGO–NGO interactions can make positions more or less important in determining future processes. Our examination of brokerage roles and their relationship to pre-existing power disparities between the Global South and Global North illustrate this argument. While a dynamic process leads certain communities to emerge, static, positional characteristics still make it more likely that certain organizations will take on inter-community brokerage roles.

Similarly, communities are evolving and emerging; the communities that we observed as emerging during the 1992 to 2017 time period may change and evolve as time continues. Growing similarities in interests and practices may lead to the merging of two communities. Different rates of interactions and underlying goals may lead a current community to splinter in the future. We see this as consistent with the broad literature on transnational communities of practice, where the utility of the community and its role in collective problem-solving may change as new actors and issues emerge over time (Adler 2005; Djelic and Quack 2010).

Drawing on their typology of relational analyses, Deloffre and Quack (Chapter 1, this volume) suggest three analytical entry points for examining NGO–NGO interactions: social ties, configurations, and sites of interaction. For the social, Deloffre and Quack (Chapter 1, this volume) outline a range of interactions or ties between actors, varying from passive disregard at one extreme, to collaboration at the other extreme. On this continuum, we see our network analysis as falling within the ‘brokering’ category, or ‘arranging, negotiating, or facilitating an agreement, contract, or transaction between actors that would otherwise remain unconnected.’ (Deloffre and Quack, Chapter 1, Table 1.1, this volume, p. 9).

As mentioned, work on communities and brokerage fits well within the analytical category of positional configuration as discussed in Deloffre and Quack (Chapter 1, this volume). Both the communities that form as a result of social ties and the various brokerage roles that connect organizations within and between communities are configurations; they are positions that are the aggregation of past processes.

As to what Deloffre and Quack (Chapter 1, this volume) call ‘sites of interaction’, we see many similarities between Deloffre and Quack’s (Chapter 1, this volume) discussion of work across scales and the idea of inter-community brokerage roles. Instead of scaling up to the international level or down to the local level, inter-community brokerage roles involve shifting across communities. Like the multi-scalar work discussed by Deloffre and Quack (Chapter 1, this volume), inter-community work also involves specific skills and could create a paradox of scale where success in one community may limit success in another community (Balboa 2018). An inter-community broker, for example an organization that operates at both the domestic and the international levels, has to be savvy in its communication across communities.

We think this idea can be extended to the study of inter-community brokerage roles: certain political opportunity structures may make it easier for an organization to occupy a certain brokerage role. We know that political opportunity structures and

resources make civic action less costly (Benford and Snow 2000; Meyer 2004; Tarrow 2011). The potential costs of interactions are reduced while the potential benefits of civic action are more likely to materialize. For example, in a country with less repression towards civil society, organizations may be more likely to extend scant resources to networking activities and NGO–NGO interactions. At the same time, any NGO–NGO interactions an organization engages with may lead to more impactful policy advocacy, as leaders in countries with open political opportunity structures are more beholden to civil society voices (Bell et al. 2014; Pacheco-Vega and Murdie 2021). It follows that the same political opportunity structures that encourage overall NGO–NGO interactions will also make it more likely that certain organizations will become inter-community brokers. An NGO in an environment that is supportive of civil action will have both the tools and the freedom to undertake networking activities, especially activities across communities or scales.

The political opportunity structures and resources which encourage collective action—including NGO–NGO interactions—are not necessarily limited to states. Among the group of organizations that are able to interact, we contend that the community structures in which NGOs are embedded can also serve to enable or constrict additional NGO–NGO interactions. As our earlier work showed, certain communities have higher percentages of inter-community brokerage roles. For example, organizations in Community 3: Research and Policy NGO Community had more than double the percentage of organizations in gatekeeper/representative roles than Community 4: Environmental Action NGO Community. Organizations in communities with a high degree of inter-community brokerage may be socialized into a certain practice of NGO–NGO interactions: ‘distinct communities may help NGOs develop repertoires of knowledge and tactics that help achieve shared goals’ (Cheng et al. 2021, 22). The community itself will provide opportunities and resources which encourage certain types of processes and connections.

Pathways to Brokerage

Expectations for Top Performers

We use these insights from Deloffre and Quack (Chapter 1, this volume) to investigate the characteristics that make inter-community brokerage roles more likely for those organizations that are the least likely to be in these roles. Namely, we examine the pathways that encourage Global South organizations to be inter-community brokers. As mentioned, Global South NGOs often lack the pre-existing power which would encourage participation in the NGO network in the first place: their positions and nature of social ties lead to exclusionary effects. Even those Global South organizations that are part of the network and occupy brokerage roles may be pigeonholed into more intra-community roles. Nonetheless, some Global South NGOs are able to cultivate inter-community brokerage roles. By focusing on these ‘over-achieving’ inter-community broker organizations and comparing them to Global

South NGOs not in inter-community brokerage roles, we are able to better understand the pathways to the process-based positions we currently observe in the network. Focusing on these organizations and their pathways to brokerage can provide us with insights into how to improve representation and power for organizations in the Global South, avoiding the exclusionary effects that could flow from the NGO–NGO social ties and configurations. Focusing on these inter-community brokers also allows us to examine the potential transformative effects central to Deloffre and Quack's (Chapter 1, this volume) relational approach to NGO–NGO interactions.

Table 6.1 provides a list of the top twenty Global South organizations with the largest percentage of inter-community brokerage roles. Table 6.1 also shows the country each organization listed as its headquarters' address in the UN iCSO system, and the community that each organization was a part of. Information on the distribution of inter-community brokerage roles for each organization is also provided.

Building on our application of Deloffre and Quack (Chapter 1, this volume), we contend that there are both position and process-based characteristics that will encourage the NGO–NGO interactions necessary for inter-community brokerage. We contend that inter-community interactions are one form of multi-scalar interaction, with NGOs moving horizontally across various communities instead of vertically from domestic to international audiences. It follows then that the Global South NGOs that are top performers in inter-community brokerage roles should be more likely to be from countries with supportive political opportunity structures. Compared to other Global South NGOs, we should observe that our sample of high-achieving inter-community brokers should be from countries that are comparatively more open to civil action and have more resources for NGOs generally.

Second, communities should also provide an opportunity structure that either encourages or discourages inter-community brokerage. As somewhat akin to communities of practice, each of the four emergent communities we identified in our ISQ paper will place their own values and knowledge on specific types of inter-community interactions. As such, some NGOs may be encouraged by their community structure to participate in more inter-community networking. We contend that the process-based NGO communities that emerged as a result of NGO–NGO interactions in our network should also be associated with NGO top performers from the Global South. To put this another way, we should observe more Global South NGOs that are top performers hailing from certain communities. In this way, the organizations are being transformed by their interactions, as suggested by Deloffre and Quack (Chapter 1, this volume).

Further, looking within the black box of the organization, we expect that top performing inter-community brokers will have made networking a priority within their organizational documents. The organization itself may have already internalized the benefits of NGO–NGO interactions and be involved in collaborative projects with other civil society actors. Since agency is fluid in Deloffre and Quack's (Chapter 1, this volume) theory, we see organizational documentation concerning network connections to be driven by both process and position.

Table 6.1 Top twenty Global South inter-community brokers from [Cheng et al. \(2021\)](#)

NGO name	Country	Major inter-community brokerage role	Community
African Business Roundtable	South Africa	Liaison	1
Chinese Society for Sustainable Development	China	Gatekeeper	1
Sudan Council of Voluntary Agencies	Sudan	Liaison	3
Youth for Unity and Voluntary Action	India	Liaison	4
Brahma Kumaris World Spiritual University	India	Liaison	3
Nurses Across the Borders	Nigeria	Liaison	4
International Institute for Human Rights, Environment and Development	Nepal	Liaison	3
Fundacion para la Defensa del Ambiente	Argentina	Liaison	4
Africa Legal Aid	Ghana	Itinerant	4
Girls' Power Initiative	Nigeria	Itinerant	3
Women Environmental Programme	Nigeria	Liaison	3
Dayemi Complex Bangladesh	Bangladesh	Itinerant	3
Women Cultural Social Society	Kuwait	Liaison	4
Bangladesh Nari Progati Sangha	Bangladesh	Itinerant	3
Women's Right to Education Programme	Nigeria	Liaison	3
Worldwide Network Nigeria: Women in Development and Environment	Nigeria	Liaison	3
Ain o Salish Kendra—Law and Mediation Centre	Bangladesh	Itinerant	3
Global Alliance Against Traffic in Women	Thailand	Itinerant	3
International First Aid Society	Nigeria	Liaison	3
Bangladesh Women Chamber of Commerce & Industry	Bangladesh	Itinerant	3

Source: Authors' own compilation.

Empirical Investigation

In line with these implications, we investigate the country, community, and organizational factors which could encourage inter-community brokerage in Global South organizations. We see this investigation as suggestive instead of definitive; future work at the organizational level will help strengthen our findings.

At the country level, we explored the political opportunity structures in the countries where our top twenty organizations are headquartered and compared the environments there to those of other Global South countries with organizations in our sample. As [Table 6.1](#) shows, there are only eleven countries where our top twenty organizations are headquartered, with six of the top twenty organizations all from Nigeria. We use the Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) Version 10 dataset to identify NGO-related measures of political opportunity structures ([Coppedge et al. 2020](#)). The V-Dem variables we use all start with expert-coded ordinal measures, where country experts are asked about a particular country's performance on a specific topic. The various expert responses are combined using a 'Bayesian item response theory' modelling technique ([Coppedge et al. 2020](#), 182). A few of the measures we use are composite indices created by combining individual V-Dem variables. For each of the indicators used, a higher score indicates a country with a more open political opportunity structure. The composite index measures vary from 0 to 1 while the component parts (expert-coded measures) vary from roughly -3.5 to 3.5 in our sample.

[Table 6.2](#) shows the eight V-Dem indicators we use to examine NGO-related political opportunity structures. We start with the broadest measures, which are indices comprised of various V-Dem expert-coded components. First, the Freedom of Expression and Alternative Sources of Information Index is the broadest index we use; it combines measures on government censorship, journalist harassment, media bias and censorship, freedom of discussion, and freedom of academic and cultural expression ([Coppedge et al. 2020](#), 356). We think this broad indicator should capture the various rights and structures that could help spread information about civil society and make organizing easier. Second, we use the Freedom of Association Index ('thick' version); this measure captures barriers to parties and elections as well as civil society organization (CSO) entry and exit barriers, and repression. V-Dem defines CSOs to include 'interest groups, labour unions, spiritual organizations if they are engaged in civic or political activities, social movements, professional associations, charities, and other nongovernmental organizations' ([Coppedge et al. 2020](#), 50). Third, we look at the Political Civil Liberties Index, which captures censorship, discussion, barriers to parties, CSO barriers to entry and exit, and repression.

Fourth, we use the Core Civil Society Index, an index that combines expert-coded measures concerning CSO's participatory environment, entry and exit barriers, and repression. We then examine these three measures independently. The measure for CSO participatory environment looks at the 'involvement of people' in CSOs, using a scale that varies from a situation where 'most associations are state-sponsored'

to one where ‘there are many diverse CSOs and it is considered normal for people to be at least occasionally active in at least one of them’ (Coppedge et al. 2020, 183). V-Dem’s measure of CSO entry and exit looks at the extent of government control of the entry and exit of organizations ‘into public life’, where a low score indicates more monopolistic control and a higher score indicates that civil society is not impeded by the government—as long as it is not planning a violent overthrow of the regime (Coppedge et al. 2020, 181). The CSO repression measure captures violent actions and deterrence to CSOs, ranging from a situation like ‘Stalinist Russia’ to one where organizations are free to operate without ‘sanctions or harassment’ (Coppedge et al. 2020, 182). Finally, we look at one additional CSO variable from V-Dem which we think is especially important for capturing ideas from our discussion of political opportunity structures. Namely, we examine the V-Dem measure CSO consultation, which looks at whether CSOs are ‘routinely consulted by policymakers on policies relevant to their members’ and can vary from no real consultation to a situation where CSOs are ‘recognized as stakeholders in important policy areas and given voice on such issues’ (Coppedge et al. 2020, 181–182).

Our network analysis covered the years 1992 to 2017, therefore in Table 6.2 we list the mean levels of these various variables for (1) the whole 1992–2017 time period, (2) 1992 only, and (3) 2017 only. We split the sample into two groups: (1) those countries where our top twenty organizations are headquartered and (2) other Global South countries without a top twenty organization. For each pair of means, we use t-tests to compare the two groups’ mean levels, using a version of the t-test that allows for unequal variances between the two groups (Welch 1947). Our hypothesis is that the mean levels of the various indicators of political opportunity structures should be higher in the countries where we find top twenty organizations than in the Global South countries without a top twenty organization.

As shown in Table 6.2, in almost every instance, we find that the various mean measures of political opportunity structures in the Global South countries where we find a top twenty inter-community broker are greater than the values in Global South countries without a top twenty inter-community broker. For the broad composite index measures, however, these differences are not statistically significant. Nonetheless, for two of the CSO-specific variables, we do find support for our hypothesis, perhaps indicating that CSO-specific opportunity structures are the most important for encouraging the type of NGO–NGO interactions that result in inter-community brokerage. Specifically, when looking at the mean levels of the V-Dem CSO participatory environment variable for the whole time period and at the start of our time period, we find that Global South countries with a high-performing inter-community broker have a statistically significant higher level of involvement of CSOs in the state. Similarly, when we look at the mean levels of CSO consultation for the whole time period, at the start year, and at the end year, we find that countries with a top twenty organization have a statistically significant higher level of CSO voice and consultation with policymakers. In other words, when organizations are able to interact domestically and consult with policymakers, we find that they are more likely to be high performers in inter-community brokerage. This could also relate to why so many

Table 6.2 Civil society-related political opportunity structures

	Average value in sample (1992–2017)		Start value (1992)		End value (2017)	
	<i>Countries with top 20 Global South inter-community brokers</i>	<i>Countries without top 20 Global South inter-community brokers</i>	<i>Countries with top 20 Global South inter-community brokers</i>	<i>Countries without top 20 Global South inter-community brokers</i>	<i>Countries with top 20 Global South inter-community brokers</i>	<i>Countries without top 20 Global South inter-community brokers</i>
Freedom of expression and alternative Sources of information index (v2x_freexp_altinf)	0.685 (0.076)	0.596 (0.023)	0.594 (0.085)	0.528 (0.025)	0.625 (0.084)	0.606 (0.024)
Freedom of association thick index (v2x_frassoc_thick)	0.608 (0.095)	0.597 (0.024)	0.492 (0.103)	0.499 (0.027)	0.579 (0.105)	0.615 (0.025)
Political civil liberties index (v2x_clpol)	0.650 (0.083)	0.617 (0.023)	0.566 (0.085)	0.554 (0.026)	0.604 (0.098)	0.621 (0.025)
Core civil society index (v2xcs_ccsi)	0.668 (0.079)	0.612 (0.023)	0.593 (0.080)	0.552 (0.025)	0.624 (0.087)	0.610 (0.025)
CSO participatory environment (v2csprtcpt)	1.086 (0.297)*	0.465 (0.094)*	0.780 (0.366) [#]	0.131 (0.106) [#]	1.037 (0.330)	0.626 (0.100)
CSO entry and exit (v2cseeorgs)	0.919 (0.405)	0.689 (0.117)	0.480 (0.360)	0.414 (0.125)	0.673 (0.392)	0.664 (0.128)
CSO repression (v2csreprss)	0.802 (0.359)	0.533 (0.107)	0.244 (0.371)	0.300 (0.121)	0.436 (0.424)	0.482 (0.117)
CSO consultation (v2cscnsult)	0.834 (0.271)*	0.289 (0.094)*	0.487 (0.338) [#]	−0.008 (0.105) [#]	0.756 (0.239) [#]	0.401 (0.103) [#]

*p<0.5 on a Hypothesis test that the group mean for the countries with top 20 organizations > group mean of countries without a top 20 organization.

[#]p<.1 on a Hypothesis test that the group mean for the countries with top 20 organizations > group mean of countries without a top 20 organization.

Source: Authors' own compilation

of the top twenty organizations are from Community 3: Research and Policy NGO Community, in that these organizations would be able to benefit from a political system where they are able to interact domestically and consult with policymakers.

We then move to look for an association between top twenty status and community for the Global South organizations in our sample. Our argument again is that certain communities will create an environment that encourages a specific type of NGO–NGO interaction, that of inter-community brokerage. Table 6.3 shows a cross-tabular summary of Global South organizations and their communities, broken down to look at those organizations that are in the top twenty versus those organizations that are not in the top twenty.

We find strong evidence that top twenty organizations have a fundamentally different distribution of communities than the rest of the Global South organizations in our sample. While only 11.08 per cent of non-top twenty Global South organizations are in Community 3: Research and Policy NGO Community, 65 per cent of our top twenty inter-community brokers are in this community. In some regards, this is surprising, indicating that there is something unique and special about this community that may encourage this specific type of NGO–NGO interaction. At the same time, our earlier network analysis had already shown the uniqueness of this community. Community 3: Research and Policy NGO Community was the only community we found that did not have any intra-community brokers. If links are not direct in this community, organizations broker relationships outside of the community. This community had many professional and think tank organizations within it; it could be that these organizations are primed for inter-community brokerage and could encourage the practice among their community peers.

We see this community-level finding as potentially very important for those interested in increasing the power and representation of Global South NGOs in UN bodies. If funds existed to encourage Global South organizations to network and collaborate with others, it might be that the organizations in Community 3 are most primed to internalize the support and use it in ways that increase their reach.

Our final examination of the pathways driving inter-community brokerage is at the organization level. As a first step, we gathered all available information on our top twenty Global South inter-community brokerage role organizations, including their missions and activities. With the help of a research assistant in January 2021, we did a systematic search of all webpage and online information for all of the top twenty organizations.¹ A careful examination of this material revealed a number of important characteristics which could have helped in creating a pathway to inter-community brokerage roles and NGO–NGO interactions.² First, the vast majority of the organizations examined had professional websites, often in multiple languages. These professional websites may be both a cause and an effect of NGO–NGO interactions, with organizations wanting partners that they can easily find and that appear to have resources and skills for collaboration. At the same time, an organization with many NGO partners may gather resources which make websites and other public relations tools easier to create and maintain.

Table 6.3 Cross-tabular examination of community and top twenty status in Global South organizations

Community	Global South organizations (not top 20)	Top 20 Global South organizations
Community 1: Place-Based and Faith-Based NGO Community	96	2
Community 2: Textbook NGO Community	119	0
Community 3: Research and Policy NGO Community	43	13
Community 4: Environmental Action NGO Community	130	5

Source: Authors' own compilation.

Second, twelve of the twenty organizations had websites that made explicit mentions of activities consistent with the more cooperative NGO–NGO interaction types from Deloffre and Quack ([Chapter 1](#), this volume). For example, the Girls' Power Initiative of Nigeria provides a long list of its organizational partners, including both governmental and nongovernmental organizations; international funders are also listed. Similarly, the Women Environmental Programme of Nigeria highlights a fifty-two-country, five-year project with four other organizations and the European Commission called Women2030 or 'Women CSOs Networking to Realize Sustainable Development Goals.' The project is designed to encourage organizations to work on 'gender-responsive' post-2015 sustainable development goals, including work on climate agreements ([Women Environmental Programme n.d.](#), para. 3).

The examples of NGO–NGO interactions we examined often show a long-term process of engagement and cooperation. For example, YUVA (n.d.b, para. 1) outlines a decades-long iterative process of information gathering on local conditions, research, and dissemination of best practices 'relating to transparent and participatory governance surrounding water and environment' with partner organizations. AFLA's (n.d.b, para. 6) documentation goes even further, illustrating how past processes of NGO–NGO interaction facilitate the organization's current network position and advocacy success: 'AFLA has the know-how, experience, network, and proven track record to enlist a world-class faculty of experts and resource persons, both in-house and through its extensive networks, to make its rights and accountability initiatives resoundingly successful.'

AFLA (n.d.a, paras 1–2) has a long track record of cooperation with international governmental and nongovernmental organizations, including the International Criminal Court, the International Criminal Court Bar Association, and the



Figure 6.2 Word cloud—NGO–NGO interaction examples in Global South inter-community brokers

Source: Authors' own compilation.

United Nations International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda. Much of these interactions involve information sharing and peer learning, including assisting other NGOs with ‘targeted legal assistance’ (AFLA n.d.a, para. 3). In multiple places in AFLA’s (n.d.a, para. 6) documentation, the organization makes clear that its past interactions and processes of collaboration have enabled its current position, allowing it to be a ‘leading voice’ in advocacy within the African continent. As AFLA’s documentation shows, an organization’s current network position and power are driven in part by its past processes of interaction.

Figure 6.2 is a word cloud made from the text of the NGO-NGO interaction examples in our top twenty inter-community brokerage organizations. We think these examples highlight the importance that the leadership and funders of these organizations place on collaboration and other forms of NGO-NGO cooperation. Many organizations have both long-term experiences working collectively with other NGOs and make networking central to their organizational missions. Many of the examples of NGO-NGO interactions are multi-scalar, with organizations having partners at both the local level and the international level.

Pathways to Equality

While not news to NGO professionals, discussions of the shortcomings of NGO officials and peacekeepers in human security disasters are becoming much more widespread (Autesserre 2014; McMahon 2017). NGO officials often come from a small number of Global North countries and may only, or primarily, interact with others from Global North countries, even when physically on the ground in Global South countries. At the same time, there is growing criticism of the way NGOs communicate their messages, and a number of studies have concluded that NGO advocacy may contribute to reinforcing nationalist sentiments in certain populations (DiBlasi 2020; Snyder 2020; Terman 2023). These discussions are occurring simultaneously through a diffusion of laws and practices aimed at ‘closing space’ to civil society actors, often justified by anti-Western populist leaders and movements as protecting against foreign influences (Carothers and Brechenmacher 2014). All these critiques and issues are part and parcel of the idea that we are at the ‘end of the golden age of NGOs’ (Roche and Hewett 2013, 1).

Left unchanged, the nature of NGO–NGO interactions at UN meetings could feed into these critiques. A small number of Global North countries serve as the headquarters for the vast majority of NGOs interacting at UN meetings. The nature of NGO–NGO social ties has had exclusionary effects on Global South NGOs. When they are part of the network, Global South organizations often take intra-community brokerage roles. These brokerage roles may be useful for the dissemination of knowledge about a particular problem, but it does not provide an organization with the same opportunities to agenda-set or gatekeep across communities. Intra-community brokerage is critical for transnational advocacy; it allows for ideas and information to flow outside of an organization’s home group. Global North organizations are more likely to hold the inter-community brokerage roles that could be critical for the diffusion of resources and ideas within the broader NGO network. Instead of countering traditional power configurations, the NGO network may reflect a hierarchical power structure, where the Global North retains power and prestige.

Improving Global South involvement and position within the NGO network is important for both normative and practical reasons. Normatively, increased Global South involvement and power helps support norms of equality and representation and ensures that the voices of all stakeholders are heard in UN venues. Practically, increased Global South participation and power in UN-related NGO networks protects against common critiques of Western bias and self-interested goals of leading NGOs. A more diverse set of voices will produce more complete, grounded policy prescriptions and help ensure that the goods and services NGOs often provide are those that are in fact the most needed by the populations they purport to serve. A broad set of cross-disciplinary research finds that diversity helps improve organizational output (Ely and Thomas 2001; Jackson et al. 2003; Herring 2009; Herring and Henderson 2014; Page 2019). Similarly, a key finding of NGO, aid, and foreign intervention work is that local buy-in and consultation improve outcomes (Swedlund 2017; Börzel and Risse 2021). As such, without improving the representation of

Global South organizations in NGO–NGO interactions, we risk limiting the overall potential of the NGO network in world politics.

Drawing on Deloffre and Quack's (Chapter 1, this volume) relational approach, we offer some insights which could be used to strengthen the power of Global South NGOs by improving their ability to take on inter-community brokerage roles. We find that civil society-related political opportunity structures at the country level help inter-community brokerage and, therefore, affect positional configurations. When actors are able to participate and voice their concerns domestically, they are better positioned to participate in the processes driving inter-community brokerage. Similarly, we find that some emerging communities empower inter-community brokerage among Global South members, perhaps creating practices and procedures which encourage communication across community boundaries. Inter-community brokers often have a long track record of NGO collaboration that is proudly displayed on their organizational websites and materials. If funds exist with the goal of improving Global South NGO involvement in the UN or in other international arenas, channelling funds to organizations with these country, community, and organizational characteristics may prove the most advantageous.

Our findings speak to the endogenous nature of positions and processes and provide some additional insights relevant to Deloffre and Quack's (Chapter 1, this volume) framework. First, NGO–NGO interactions do not happen in a vacuum; the environment NGOs are in, and the environment where the interactions are occurring, influence the nature of the interaction. Certain historical factors like pre-existing power distributions could influence current processes which may disrupt or entrench interaction types. Similarly, the relational effects of NGO–NGO interactions do not stop with just the two organizations that are participating in the interaction but reverberate into the community or communities of organizations that are part of the network. We contend that more future work on NGO networking needs to move beyond the individual dyad and examine the possible chains and pathways between both connected and unconnected organizations. We hope this work starts a broader discussion on how to improve Global South representation and involvement.

Notes

1. Thanks to University of Georgia PhD student Jackson Tilley.
2. One idea we had for future research was to compare this website information with a random sample of twenty other global South organizations.

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NGO Self-Organization and Orchestration in Ethiopia

Dynamics of Cooperation and Conflict

William E. DeMars and Dennis Dijkzeul

Introduction

War, famine, and mass killing ravaged northern Ethiopia from 1974 to 1991, and the entire conflict was permeated with international nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). The political consequences were dramatic and well known: Eritrea on the Red Sea achieved national independence under the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF), and the Tigrayan People's Liberation Front (TPLF) overthrew the Stalinist, Soviet-allied Ethiopian government. The defeated 'Derg' government had itself overthrown Emperor Haile Selassie in 1974 by discrediting his rule using a British television news film of the 1973 Ethiopia famine. Ironically, the Derg's own famine was revealed to the world in 1984 by another British news film, the celebrated Michael Buerk/Mohammed Amin British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) broadcast, *Ethiopian Famine* (Franks 2014). However, this revelation, instead of directly and quickly undermining the regime, made it a partner with a myriad of international humanitarian organizations fighting the famine.

International NGOs pervaded northern Ethiopia throughout the war, pursuing multiple principled mandates to counter famine or forced displacement, or to promote economic development, human rights, agricultural policy, and environmental protection. NGOs in general came out of the war as heroes, with exalted international reputations as versatile first responders to global crises. They had far exceeded the normative and practical ideals of their official mandates and missions in crucial respects: networks of NGOs had concentrated the attention of the world on the Ethiopian famine, delivered food aid on both sides of the war, and eventually exposed the war as the chief cause of the famine.

We argue, however, that many deeper political dynamics of NGOs in Ethiopia have not yet been fully explored or explained. Specifically, NGO interactions and interpenetrations with other actors—including the Derg, the Cold War superpowers, rebel movements, and a range of societal partners—have not been well

understood. Explaining these broader network dynamics poses a challenge to current international relations (IR) theories. Hence, in addition to illuminating the Ethiopian case, this chapter also seeks to serve a broader theoretical interest in understanding how such extensive and complex NGO and network relations evolve over time—even in dangerous and disruptive contexts such as war, famine, and mass migration. Drawing on dialogue with colleagues in this book project, we use conceptual tools from relational and practice theory to illuminate the NGO practices of both cooperation and conflict behind key episodes of NGO self-organization and orchestration on both sides of the war in Ethiopia.

In brief, we will show that patterns of cooperation were amalgamated with patterns of conflict in the same NGO practices: at the micro-level of NGO relations with their political and societal partners, at the meso-level of NGO networks, and at the international macro-level, with each level of NGO practices generating distinct humanitarian and political consequences.

This chapter consists of five additional sections. The second section explains how relational and practice theories can be applied and adapted to illuminate international NGOs in general, and critical but unnoticed aspects of the historical case of Ethiopia in particular. In the third section, we give a snapshot overview of the [NGO networks in northern Ethiopia in 1984](#), just before the massive increase in humanitarian aid directed to alleviate the famine. The fourth section analyses the dynamic, historical development of NGO self-organization and orchestration on the Ethiopian government side. And fifth, we do the same for the cross-border humanitarian operation on the rebel side of the war. Finally, we present the main conclusions and promising directions for further research.

Relational Practice Theory Approaches to Studying NGOs

We explain elsewhere how IR theory, across all three of the conventional IR schools, has long distorted and hidden much of the politics of international NGOs ([DeMars and Dijkzeul 2015a, 2015b; DeMars and Dijkzeul 2016](#)). Very broadly, IR realists mostly assume that NGOs simply do not matter in world politics. Reacting against realism; constructivists tend to overstate the influence of actor identities and ideas to the exclusion of material and institutional factors; and liberals over-rely for explanation and policy on the diffusion of universal international norms and institutions that guarantee their own implementation and effectiveness. International practice theory promises some remedy for the largely unfruitful IR theory debate on NGOs ([DeMars and Dijkzeul 2016](#)).

In the literature on the ‘practice turn’ in social theory, Ann Swidler made a pivotal move in 2001 by suggesting that some social practices are “‘anchoring practices” which play a key role in reproducing larger systems of discourse and practice.’ To identify these anchoring practices, she proposed that ‘we pay particular attention to the situations in which practices anchor or reproduce constitutive rules, rules that define things as what they are’ ([Swidler 2001](#), 99). In an early book on international

practices, [Sending and Neumann \(2011\)](#) applied Swidler's insights to a major inter-governmental organization, identifying the anchoring practices of the World Bank with respect to its expert knowledge and official reports on national economies, developed in dialogue and contestation with its member states.

Focusing now on NGOs, in agreement with Deloffre and Quack ([Chapter 1](#), [Chapter 11](#), this volume), we propose that practices of 'NGOing' ([Hilhorst 2003](#), 1) are rooted in two relational anchoring practices that all international NGOs perform constantly, whatever their normative mandates, geographical extension, or particular operational practices may be: NGOs are constituted and reproduced when they (1) perform competently in relation to their partners as private actors claiming to pursue public purposes, and (2) bind themselves to societal and political partners in several countries (Deloffre and Quack, [Chapter 1](#), this volume; [DeMars and Dijkzeul 2016](#)). The first NGO anchoring practice is largely discursive, but it still requires that a particular NGO's political and societal partners accept relationally, and at least provisionally, these legitimating claims of pursuing universal public purposes. The second anchoring practice is more material and financial, with each NGO embodying a host of practical material and informational links between donor and recipient countries.

Many examples of NGO partners will emerge in the empirical sections below. But generally, the most common NGO political partners include the national governments of the home country and the headquarters country for each international NGO, other donor governments, and whatever government institutions, soldiers, rebels, or warlords that control NGO access to their beneficiaries. NGO societal partners may include any religious, ideological, economic, or cultural communities that feature prominently in a particular NGO's historical origins, staff recruitment, beneficiary identities, strategies of access, or fundraising ([DeMars and Dijkzeul 2015a](#), 31–38).

NGO networks sometimes reach larger scales and deeper levels of institutionalization and may endure for years or even decades. We develop here a preliminary conceptualization of such extended networks as entanglements of three kinds of practices that reinforce each other and develop an enduring life of their own: humanitarian practices of NGOs, inter-governmental organizations, and donors; societal affinity practices between NGOs and their societal partners; and sovereignty practices of governments, rebel groups, and warlords that interact directly or indirectly with NGOs and societal partners. The global networks of international NGOs operating on both sides of the war and famine in Ethiopia became part of such broader network configurations, on the government side operating with the Derg in Addis Ababa, and in the cross-border operation operating with the EPLF and TPLF rebels through Eritrea and Tigray.

By using a practice theory approach, with these NGO anchoring practices guiding research, we challenge three conventional assumptions about NGOs in world politics: that NGOs are unitary actors, that NGO networks are defined by their members' mutual recognition of each other as articulating common norms, and that NGOs are weak actors whose importance is primarily their success or failure in achieving official goals.

First, rather than being unitary, at a micro-level, NGOs are influenced by and mingle with their societal and political partners, and with the partners' conflicting latent agendas. This is a structural feature of the NGO organizational form, not a disorder that can or should be cured or reformed, and it reflects the relational ontology of NGOs. Relationism holds that configurations of ties or relations are ongoing processes and the building blocks of analysis. Thus, entities are embedded in, produced, and transformed by relations (Deloffre and Quack, [Chapter 1](#), this volume). We propose that international NGOs are produced and transformed by their relations in networks with the societal and political partners; and also that their partners' latent agendas are embedded in the NGOs (DeMars and Dijkzeul 2016). Because NGOs are not unitary actors as conventionally assumed, the analytical point of departure is less their publicly articulated norms and official goals, and more their specific partnering activity with societal and political actors in several countries.

In line with the framework chapter, our account of NGO networks builds on the concepts of configurations of practices and social ties. We suggest that such social ties, created by continuous series of material and symbolic transactions, can also link international NGOs with non-NGO partners. In addition, as NGO networks grow and change, they create the potential for mobilizing effects by members to foster social coordination (Deloffre and Quack, [Chapter 1](#), this volume). We add that the agency for social mobilization may emerge not only from NGOs in the network, but also from any of their societal or political partners in the network.

We propose that international NGOs carry not only the public agendas of their political and societal partners, but also their partners' latent agendas, which may conflict with each other and with the NGOs' official mandate. We borrow this idea of latent agendas from Brian H. Smith (1990), who analysed dozens of NGOs that were headquartered in Europe or North America and operated in Latin America in the later Cold War period. As we have argued elsewhere, 'Smith opens up NGOs to reveal internal organizational conflict between partners in the societies and governments of their home countries, and also among the Latin American host country governments and societies' (DeMars and Dijkzeul 2015a, 20). In Smith's words:

There are multiple agendas being pursued by several groups at once, and several of the actors are not unitary but made up of clusters of subgroups with different objectives that must be balanced, sometimes in creative tension. ... Moreover, some of the multiple goals of the actors are manifest and public, while others are latent and sometimes hidden to public view—even to other partner groups in the system. (Smith 1990, 279–281)

Expanding on both Smith (1990) and Hilhorst (2003), we portray NGOs as permeable organizations, internally divided, and pervaded by tensions and conflicts among their partners. NGO political partners and societal partners attempt to attach latent agendas to their NGOs.

First, regarding political partners: NGOs are much more available than conventionally assumed to mix recognizable humanitarian practices with what we

call ‘sovereignty practices’ that encompass state formation, establishing domestic institutions, territorial and social control, and developing international relationships that shape and sustain them. We build here on Mark Shirk (2014, 9) who defines sovereignty as ‘a bundle of practices that draw, redraw, and maintain boundaries of political authority’ (see also Jackson 2007). In short, sovereignty practices are political and military actions characteristic of actors that are ruling or seeking to rule. Political partners seek to advance their power goals through their NGO partners in a latent manner.

Our Ethiopian case well illustrates such mixing of humanitarian and sovereignty practices in an institutional amalgam that includes the superpowers, their allies, the Derg, rebel groups, and their humanitarian wings. More generally, NGOs may be highly principled, and at the same time their operations in the field may require practical cooperation with actors that may be, not merely self-interested, but sometimes also corrupt (Dijkzeul 2015). Such operations can be justified by the unspoken normative assumption in the literature on NGOs that democracy is an ideal regime type, and that NGOs both drive and result from democratization (Toepler et al. 2020).

For affinity practices between NGOs and their societal partners, theoretical development is thin.¹ Long-standing personal ties, the same faith, a shared history, or a sense of solidarity can inspire and shape affinity practices. In sum, NGOs and other actors work with both open and latent agendas which are crucial to fully understanding the interaction of sovereignty and affinity practices and their sometimes complex and contradictory effects (see Deloffre and Quack, Chapter 1, this volume).

By attaching to partners at the micro-level, NGOs synergistically generate networks at the meso-level. Virtually all NGO researchers recognize the importance of NGO networks. However, in our second challenge to a conventional assumption, rather than defining NGO networks by the observation that their members echo a shared normative discourse (Keck and Sikkink 1998), we conceptualize a network as that comprising any common partners—including hidden partners, normatively anomalous partners, or even normatively deviant partners, such as warlords, international criminal entities, or intelligence agencies. Our broader concept entails a simultaneously cooperative and conflictive network that reaches an exceptional level of scale, persistence, and policy significance.

If our analysis is correct, then real NGO networks are much larger, more heterogeneous, and more conflictive than they are assumed to be in conventional theories of NGO networks, which presuppose networks as consisting exclusively of actors with shared norms. Concerning the constitution of NGO networks, we differ significantly from Keck and Sikkink (1998), who argue that transnational advocacy networks are constituted by normatively homogenous NGOs and other actors (for other critiques, see Carpenter 2014; DeMars and Dijkzeul 2015a, 2015b; Engelkamp and Glaab 2015; Bob 2019; Pallas and Bloodgood 2022).

Challenging the third assumption of NGO weakness, we recognize that at the macro-level, the power of NGO networks is predominantly indirect and structural. At this level, NGO networks inhabit the regional and global international system, shaping states less by persuading them to follow their normative goals, but more by

their radical availability as opportunity structures, which almost ineluctably attracts states to attempt to manipulate or incorporate NGOs into their political strategies. Precisely because NGOs are not unitary but penetrated by their latently conflictive partners, and because real NGO networks are not normatively homogenous but significantly conflictive, NGOs and their networks can sometimes powerfully—but in case-specific and often unexpected ways—shape wars, states, and international politics.

Thus, we conceptualize NGO networks, and the more relationally intensified, broader networks, as multi-scalar institutions in world politics (Deloffre and Quack, [Chapter 1](#), this volume). Across all three scalar interactions—micro, meso, and macro—international NGOs structurally embody a complex, varied, and changing institutionalization of both cooperation and conflict (DeMars 2005; Dijkzeul and DeMars 2011; DeMars and Dijkzeul 2015a, 2015b, 2016; Dijkzeul and Fauser 2020).

As stated, NGOs were cast as the heroes in the conventional telling of the Ethiopian case. But more importantly, the narrative of NGO cooperation amidst, yet unaffected by, conflict, contributed decisively to the (ultimately failed) post-Cold War policy formula that exalted NGOs as the ideal organizational form for international humanitarian responses to the conflicts in failing states that appeared in the 1990s and 2000s. These included, among other hostilities, ethnic and warlord conflicts.

Contrary to conventional NGO configuration stories that ignore normatively anomalous actors and their influence in NGO networks, we argue here that NGOs got the aid through because their choices and practices amalgamated with the particular practices of their societal and political partners (DeMars and Dijkzeul 2015a, 2015b). These choices, practices, and partners were non-replicable and non-normative in their specificity and consequences. Implementing similar NGO practices in later conflicts did not have, and could not have had, similar consequences to what they had in Ethiopia. Indeed, for us looking back at these events today, NGO practices in Ethiopia are incomprehensible in their full social and political meaning and consequences without considering both the sovereignty practices of NGO political partners, and the NGO practices of affinity with their societal partners.

NGO Networks in Northern Ethiopia in 1984

[Figure 7.1](#) provides a geographical context of Ethiopia, while [Table 7.1](#) delineates the overarching structure of the several NGO networks, as well as their strengths and weaknesses, as of July 1984. This was two months before the Derg government made the official decision to unveil the famine to the world through Western media, and to seek Western humanitarian food aid (Clapham 1990, 191–192). [Table 7.1](#) is thus a snapshot of the NGO networks in 1984, before the BBC film.

[Table 7.1](#) reveals critical strengths and weaknesses of the NGO networks in 1984. First, only two NGO networks or families were deeply institutionalized across the geopolitical and geohumanitarian landscapes. The Lutheran World Federation network and the Caritas International network had lead agencies delivering food relief



Figure 7.1 Ethiopia during the Cold War

Source: [Henze 1984](#). ©Wilson Quarterly, reprinted with permission from Wilson Quarterly/Winter 1984. All rights reserved.

aid on both the government (Gov = Ethiopian government) and the rebel side of the war and the associated cross-border humanitarian operation (CBO = Cross-Border Operation). Lutheran World Federation and Caritas International also had local societal partners (Soc = societal partners) in the form of local Lutheran or Catholic communities on both sides of the war. Second, the International Committee of the Red Cross was well established very early on both sides of the war. However, it operated alone, and its aid eventually became redundant after the expansion of the relief NGO networks on both sides of the war. Third, there were no internationally active Islamic humanitarian relief NGOs in existence at the time to link with the Muslim populations of Ethiopia and Eritrea. Finally, the human rights NGO networks were the weakest of all active NGOs.

The human rights strategy was attempted only by a few small and uninfluential NGOs. War on Want, a small, solidarity NGO affiliated with the left wing of the British Labour Party, helped ERA and REST make contacts in London, promoted the EPLF and TPLF revolutions, and publicized Ethiopian atrocities. It acted as a solidarity organization that supported every aspect of the EPLF and TPLF revolutions.

Table 7.1 NGO networks in the 'Ethiopian famine', July 1984

Network	GOV lead agency	GOV SOC partner	CBO lead agency	CBO SOC partner
<i>Church NGO Networks in Ethiopia</i>				
Lutheran World Federation (Geneva)	Lutheran World Relief (USA)	Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus	Norwegian Church Aid (NOR) / Swedish Evangelical Mission (SEM)	EECMY in Eritrea and Tigray (⇒ERD/ERA/REST)
Caritas Internationalis (Roman Catholic / Rome)	Catholic Relief Services (USA)	Catholic Diocese of Adigrat, Wollo	Catholic Agency for Overseas Development (CAFOD, UK)	Catholics in Eritrea and Tigray (⇒ERD/ERA/REST)
World Council of Churches (Geneva)	WCC and World Vision (USA)	Ethiopian Orthodox Church	No NGO	No Partner
<i>Secular NGO Networks in Ethiopia</i>				
Oxfam	Oxfam (UK)	Created by technical & media practices	No NGO	No Partner
Save the Children Fund	Save the Children Fund (UK)	Created by technical & media practices	No NGO	No Partner
<i>Global Human Rights NGOs Focused on Ethiopia</i>				
Amnesty International	(NONE: focused on prisoners in cities)	No Partner	(NONE: focused on prisoners in cities)	No Partner
Human Rights Watch	(NONE: only after 1988)	No Partner	(NONE: only after 1988)	No Partner
<i>Solidarity Human Rights NGOs Focused on Ethiopia</i>				
Associated with British Labour Party	No NGO	No Partner	War on Want (UK)	No Partner
US Anthropologists for human rights	No NGO	No Partner	Cultural Survival (USA)	No Partner
<i>International Committee of the Red Cross</i>				
International Red Cross & Red Crescent Movement	ICRC (CH)	Ethiopian Red Cross and Red Crescent Society	ICRC (CH)	No Partner

Note: GOV = Government Side; GOV SOC Partner = Government Societal Partner; CBO = Cross-Border Operation; CBO Soc Partner = Cross-Border Operation Societal Partner; EECMY = Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus; WCC = World Council of Churches; ERD = Emergency Relief Desk; ERA = Eritrean Relief Association; REST = Relief Society of Tigray.

Source: Authors' own compilation.

In 1988, Cultural Survival, an American NGO organized by human rights-minded anthropologists, revealed the forced collectivization efforts of the villagization of agricultural policies, and the violent resettlement program by the Ethiopian government, with data from the testimony of Eritrean refugees in Sudan and Ethiopian refugees in Somalia (Clay et al. 1988).

Indeed, during the 1980s there was no internationally credible global human rights NGO that addressed rural atrocities in Africa on a regular basis. Amnesty International concentrated on prisoner issues, which drew their focus to cities. Two precursors of Human Rights Watch existed during most of the 1980s—Helsinki Watch (established 1978), focused on Europe, and Americas Watch (established 1981), focused on Latin America. However, Africa Watch was only founded in 1988 with the consolidation of Human Rights Watch. The result was that no voice spoke credibly and internationally about the rural human rights atrocities in the Ethiopian counterinsurgency war until a few months after the war ended in 1991 (de Waal 1991).

Two major orchestration efforts, one for the government side and one for the cross-border operation, facilitated in crucial ways the final steps of constituting, legitimating, and reifying—in sum, institutionalizing as social facts—the overall NGO network structure. The large donors in the United States and Europe were then able to use this structure to massively fund famine relief in Ethiopia after October 1984.

NGOs and Networks on the Government Side

How did NGOs and networks build and reach this shape of network configuration in 1984? The organic webbing of international NGO network relationships to Ethiopia was generated over many years before and after the 1984 famine by NGOs performing routine anchoring practices of binding themselves to both societal and political partners in several countries. Such diverse partner relationships, rather than international norms or primarily government donors (which are only one type of partner among many, and not necessarily the most decisive), were the primary drivers of NGOs in the Ethiopian case.²

At the broadest level of international social ties, Ethiopian Emperor Haile Selassie was highly respected in Europe and the United States as an African anti-fascist leader, particularly when he resided in Britain during the fascist Italian occupation of Ethiopia from 1936 to 1941. This constituted a diffuse, but powerful, form of both political and societal partnership between Ethiopia and the West.

Three Christian churches in Ethiopia became the societal partners for three networks of international relief NGOs, which later allowed other NGOs and governments to contribute to the famine through chains of mediating NGOs. The Roman Catholic population of Ethiopia was only about 330,000 in the 1970s, but its ecclesiastical structure was well articulated at the local, national, and international levels. The Ethiopian Catholic Secretariat had been a member of Caritas Internationalis

since 1965, and both Caritas Germany and Catholic Relief Services (CRS) of the United States had long histories of providing aid to Ethiopia. The Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus, counting 800,000 Ethiopian members, had received relief assistance from Lutheran World Federation agencies since 1973. Finally, the Ethiopian Orthodox Church comprised almost half of the country's population of fifty million, and it created a humanitarian organization at the national level, but its local level relief structure was weak (Solberg 1991; Black 1992; Bachman 1995).

There is also a macro-level geopolitical partner dimension that materially shaped NGO configurations. For seven years, from 1974 to 1981, large territories of Ethiopia (as shown in Figure 7.1) changed hands militarily several times. In July 1977, Siad Barré in Somalia betrayed his Soviet sponsors and utilized his Russian weaponry to mount a massive military invasion of the Ethiopian Ogaden region, controlling 90 per cent of the territory by September. While the Ethiopian military focused on the Somali invasion, the EPLF took control of 95 per cent of Eritrea. However, by 1982, the Derg—with massive Soviet military aid and thousands of Cuban troops—defeated and expelled the Somali military in the Ogaden, and reoccupied all major cities in Eritrea (without, however, defeating the EPLF) (Patman 1993, 114–115; Henze 2000, 287–299).

These macro, geopolitical factors meant that humanitarian access to the victims was entirely contingent on the changing fortunes of warring parties, the decisions of their international sponsors, and on their humanitarian strategies. While the wars in Eritrea and Tigray attracted growing levels of international journalistic, governmental, and humanitarian responses, the Ogaden War garnered no such direct and on-the-ground international attention.

Some international NGOs were more deeply institutionalized at the local level in Ethiopia, as well as internationally, which was a decisive factor in the run up to the dramatic public exposure of the severity of the famine in 1984. For example, CRS, the US member organization of the Caritas Internationalis network, played a lead role in evading the Ethiopian government's blackout on any official acknowledgement of the famine in early 1984. It obtained fresh information on increased famine from both local and international Catholic relief workers in Mekele, Tigray, and then used that information to lobby the Reagan administration's US Agency for International Development (USAID) to permit American food aid to be delivered to Ethiopia, but only through NGOs (DeMars 1993, 119–130).

In a parallel process, two secular British NGOs—Save the Children Fund-UK and Oxfam-UK—brought a research team from the British International Disaster Institute into Ethiopia in early 1984 to conduct their own survey of hunger relief food needs, which they shared with other NGOs and European governments. However, only after the Derg decided to open Ethiopia to Western food aid and media in September 1984 were Oxfam and Save the Children able to bring BBC reporters to a feeding centre in Korem, Wollo, which resulted in the famous 1984 Michael Buerk/Mohamed Amin BBC television film. The Ethiopian famine was further publicized in global popular culture by two iconic music singles in 1984 and 1985: *Do They Know It's Christmas?* and *We Are the World*, and the *Live Aid* concert in July

1985 (Miller 2013). Thus, certain individual journalists and their news organizations were also indispensable NGO societal partners at critical junctures.

Therefore, without the NGOs that were already deeply institutionalized in Ethiopia, and were already following the latent agendas of their societal and political partners, the Ethiopian famine might have remained hidden for much longer, or it might have not been revealed to the world at all. Furthermore, a system of institutional conduits for sending international humanitarian aid that was acceptable to both Chairman Mengistu and President Reagan could not, and would not, have been created without the international NGOs already implanted on the ground in the famine regions of Ethiopia. This network of NGOs functioned as an opportunity structure for government policy at the macro-level. Yet it was also a meso-level structure that was made by the active agency of many NGOs and their political and societal partners at the micro-level.

A few days after the October 1984 BBC broadcast, James Grant at United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and James Ingram at the World Food Programme recommended to United Nations (UN) Secretary General Javier Pérez de Cuéllar the appointment of the recently retired Finn, Kurt Jansson, as UN assistant secretary general for emergency operations in Ethiopia. Jansson created the UN Office of Emergency Operations in Ethiopia (OEOE). With almost no budget and a handful of employees, he gave an elaborate social performance that was crucial for getting Western food aid flowing to the areas and populations under military control of the Derg.

Jansson made his greatest impact in elite negotiations, by staking out a unique position of neutrality between the Ethiopian government and donor governments. During his first six weeks as head of OEOE, Jansson's time and attention were devoted almost entirely to cultivating the donors in Geneva, New York, and Addis Ababa, rather than investigating the reality of famine on the ground in Ethiopia. In fact, he discovered no new information about the actual famine situation. Jansson legitimized the need assessments and created the narrative that allowed the major aid donors in the United States and Europe to release the large volumes of food aid that they had already decided at a political level they were ready to provide (Kent 1987).

Jansson had the widest range of diplomatic, political, and NGO contacts, and Ethiopian government contacts, of anyone in Ethiopia during 1985. He also had frequent and cordial access to Chairman Mengistu, a privilege denied to most Western ambassadors. When a specific event or controversy threatened the flow of assistance, Jansson used his access to Mengistu to work out a solution mutually acceptable to the government and the donors. In return, Jansson said nothing that would challenge Mengistu's political fictions that the war and the rebels did not exist in Ethiopia, and that the starvation was caused by drought rather than by the Ethiopian military's counter-population warfare tactics (Jansson 1987). Still, Jansson was not fooling any of the savvy actors. The donor embassies and humanitarian agencies in Addis Ababa all knew what was happening on both sides of the conflict. They knew, for example, that the cross-border operation from Sudan was delivering as much food as possible given the military realities.³

It is important to understand that the OEOE was not a real inter-governmental organization. Instead, it was a very effective illusion of an inter-governmental organization; a simulacrum with the internal structure of a small NGO but lacking any operations on the ground.

In some cases there is a threshold effect whereby the people, individual NGOs, and donors at the micro-level constitute something larger, something that is more than the sum of its parts, that creates its own consequences at this higher level. This requires further conceptualization beyond what we can provide here. The humanitarian NGOs on the ground in Ethiopia were doing what they always do at the micro-level—establishing working relationships with societal and political partners in many countries for delivering food aid. By doing so, they also constituted a meso-level network that delivered Western food aid to Ethiopian peasants, who were also frequent military targets of their own government when not immobilized in a feeding camp. This meso-level social institutionalization—riddled with conflict and violence, but purposed to repair violence—required orchestration by Jansson and Mengistu to continuously relegitimize itself. Unintentionally and ironically, Jansson and Mengistu and the humanitarian operation on the government side also legitimized a parallel relief operation ... on the rebel side of the war.

NGO Networks and Orchestration in the Cross-Border Operation

The two rebel groups that eventually attracted the cross-border operation, the EPLF and TPLF, undertook two crucial actions early on, one military and one political, to orchestrate the conditions for the later actions by NGOs. First, instead of creating humanitarian wings labelled as Red Cross or Red Crescent Societies as was common practice among insurgent groups at that time, they created humanitarian wings that resembled NGOs in their external practices and discourse. The EPLF created the Eritrean Relief Association (ERA) in 1975, and the TPLF created the Relief Society of Tigray (REST) in 1978. ERA and REST had great acronyms that were memorable in English; both were competent as simulacra of NGOs; and both set up offices in a few European capitals. Ironically, however, ERA and REST were only NGOs externally. Within Eritrea and Tigray, they were integral local agencies of the EPLF and TPLF rebel government welfare structures. In their second crucial action, both the EPLF and TPLF either militarily eliminated, or merged with, their rebel rivals by 1981. Consequently, military offensives gave ERA and REST monopoly humanitarian access to newly acquired territory and the populations of Eritrea and Tigray. Both crucial actions set the stage for the cross-border operation to develop beyond a loose NGO network into a larger and tighter network configuration. Crucially in this respect, the apolitical and non-violent identity of many international NGOs is revealed to be a somewhat fluid, rather than a static, commitment, particularly when their relations with political partners are understood as part of the broader network configuration.

Lutheran missionaries with the Swedish Evangelical Mission (SEM) had been active in Eritrea since 1866. Following this tradition, Sture Normark served as a SEM missionary, teaching in a high school in Eritrea from 1964 to 1975, when he was evacuated from Asmara with his family during the joint ELF–EPLF siege of the city.⁴ Eritrean Lutheran refugees in Sudan and Sweden petitioned SEM to act, as did ERA representatives in Stockholm. The Lutheran World Federation NGO network still viewed the cross-border operation as too sensitive politically, but the World Council of Churches was already willing to help on a small scale. In December 1975, Normark met two Lutheran founders of ERA in Khartoum, one of whom he knew well from his missionary days. Through them, SEM and Sudan Council of Churches founded the Eritrean Relief Desk in Khartoum in 1977.

Norwegian Church Aid (NCA) had become active in the Sudan Civil War in the early 1970s and remained to assist economic rebuilding. Eritrean Lutheran ERA representatives approached the NCA Sudan director in Khartoum in 1977, urging NCA to assist Eritreans. In their response, NCA representatives used cash to buy 500 tonnes of grain at a time from the markets in Gedaref, Sudan, then hired commercial Sudanese trucks for the 160 km route to the border, where ERA would transfer the grain to its own trucks.

After the pioneering and politically risky work by SEM and NCA to engage with ERA in 1977, within two years the governments of both Sweden and Norway and a few other European NGOs were contributing modestly, and discreetly, through them to the emerging cross-border operation.

SEM and NCA were following not only their salient agendas to bring food to the hungry, but also their latent agendas of filial religious solidarity with fellow Lutherans in Eritrea, one of their constitutive societal partners. Hence, this account shows the theoretical and practical importance of NGO anchoring practices of binding themselves to societal partners and their latent agendas.

At the same time, the latent agendas of their home governments of Sweden and Norway were also being expressed through SEM and NCA. During the Cold War the five Nordic countries—Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Finland, and Iceland—were committed to a foreign policy of ‘Third World solidarity’, which contributed to a recognizable ‘Nordic aid model’. In the case of the cross-border operation to Eritrea and Tigray, NGOs took the lead in this Nordic ‘exceptionally close symbiosis’ of civil society action and government policy (Marklund 2016, 2, 22). Thus, for these Nordic NGOs, SEM and NCA, the latent agendas of both their societal partners and their home governments as political partners reinforced the same move to help build what would become the cross-border operation. This was a highly unconventional and controversial set of networking practices in its initial stages.

Explicit and authoritative orchestration—as an organizational form distinct from, but made possible by, the organic NGO partnering we have been describing so far—began in the cross-border operation a few years before 1984. SEM took the lead in 1981 in creating the Emergency Relief Desk (ERD) in the Khartoum offices of the Sudan Council of Churches, which expanded on the previous Eritrean Relief Desk to include access through REST to civilians living in TPLF-controlled Tigray.

Each year from 1977 through 1980, Sture Normark had left his pastorate in northern Sweden for a field trip into Eritrea to monitor the former Eritrean Relief Desk. Then he became the founding Executive Secretary of the ERD in Khartoum, serving from July 1981 to July 1982, with eight founding NGOs of the new ERD from Europe, and notably, Lutheran World Relief, based in the United States (Duffield and Prendergast 1994, 6).

Over time, Normark through ERD socially constructed, both materially and discursively, what became known as the ‘cross-border operation’ using several tactics of information politics. ERD created an NGO-style structure of formal needs assessment for all rebel-held Eritrea and Tigray together (rather than separately by ERA for Eritrea and REST for Tigray as before), and unified accountability and reporting. This provided for the first time a unitary aid conduit for international NGOs to reach both Eritrea and Tigray, with the political cover of not having to deal directly with ERA or REST.⁵

ERD portrayed a soothing semblance of apolitical peace and continuity—when cross-border relief routes were cut by Ethiopian army attacks; when a military rift flared between the EPLF and the TPLF; and when a Sudanese presidential coup interrupted the relief operation. With ERD, other church NGOs could now pass aid through a triple screen of NGO humanitarian insulation from the politics of directly aiding rebel insurgencies: first, NCA and SEM, with support from their home-country governments; second, ERD; third, ERA and REST.

In response to the opportunity created by this new organizational network, four international networks or ‘families’ of NGOs evolved to feed the ERD aid conduit, while also using NGO access to provide aid on the Ethiopian government side. The Caritas Internationalis Catholic network, based in Rome, had CRS of the United States as the lead agency on the government side and CAFOD of Britain as the lead agency to the cross-border operation. Assigning a different Caritas lead agency to cooperate with belligerents on both sides of the war meant that all the other well-funded Caritas NGOs in Europe and North America could make their own contributions to famine aid on either or both sides of the war. So too could their respective governments contribute if they wished—indirectly and sometimes covertly—through their national Caritas NGOs. As mentioned above, the other three NGO familial networks were Lutheran World Federation, which became increasingly active; the secular NGO families of Save the Children Fund and Oxfam; and, unevenly and intermittently, the World Conference of Churches, which networked with the Ethiopian Orthodox Church.

These NGO family networks solved the ethical and political dilemma that each individual NGO would otherwise have faced alone: if they operated exclusively on the government side, they would be neglecting the hungry people who could only be reached cross-border; but if they openly contributed to the cross-border operation they would be expelled from the government side. Other than the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), only one major international humanitarian organization, Oxfam-UK, pursued its own humanitarian operations on the ground

on both sides of the war. Oxfam-UK worked with great publicity on the Ethiopian government side. However, it also worked, with almost clandestine discretion, in the cross-border operation out of Sudan, one of the few NGOs operating independently of ERD (Vaux 2016).

Just like the earlier NGO networks on the government side, the NGOs in the cross-border operation carried micro-level latent agendas of their societal or political partners, or both. NCA, SEM, ERD, and the three networks of European church NGOs were all motivated by latent agendas of historical ties and contemporary affinity with Ethiopian Lutherans under siege from the war and from the Ethiopian government's Stalinist repression of religion. In tension with their normative goals, American NGOs, particularly Lutheran World Relief, also discreetly carried the US government's latent agenda to apply the Reagan Doctrine by raising the cost to the Soviet Union of maintaining its client states in the Third World and of supporting their expensive wars.

After the BBC film aired in 1984, a billion dollars of relief aid poured in from Western people and governments, and 90 per cent of it went to the government side. However, even receiving a small fraction of the total aid for Ethiopia, the cross-border operation through ERD increased tenfold, to (USD) \$100 million in 1985. The United States under the Reagan administration became the largest donor and directed American grain through the cross-border operation through Lutheran World Relief, the US affiliate of Lutheran World Federation.

In the Cold War context, Reagan administration officials clearly understood the relevance of the cross-border humanitarian operation to serve the purposes of the Reagan Doctrine.⁶ After October 1984, the US National Security Council directed the Refugee Bureau of the State department to place a 'Ref Coord' (Refugee Affairs Coordinator) in Khartoum, Sudan, to facilitate the cross-border operation with negotiations and flexible funding.⁷ This was justified as serving the emerging humanitarian frame of aiding 'internally displaced persons' to prevent refugee flows across borders. The US Ref Coord in Khartoum was tasked to expedite the cross-border operation by facilitating negotiations, receiving intelligence from EPLF and TPLF commanders on areas of warfare, population displacement, and hunger, and providing flexible funding to clear bottlenecks. American government Ref Coords were in place until the Ethiopian war—and the Cold War—ended in 1991.

In sum, Sture Normark through ERD, and Kurt Jansson through OEOE played analogous roles as 'orchestrators', that is, socially skilled individuals who articulated and embodied the humanitarian relief consensus with brilliant and persuasive performances on the two sides of the war.⁸ They pursued roughly parallel projects by articulating and institutionalizing the technical aid consensus on the provision of food, and by managing or suppressing (sometimes by constructively dissembling or ignoring selected realities) the serious anomalies to normative consensus on the goals of this aid that erupted in the midst of and because of the war. In this way, Normark and Jansson each incorporated practices that commingled both conflict and cooperation among the various actors in these networks. Interestingly, each one acted

independently, without communicating or coordinating with the other side to do so. As a result, they instituted broad NGO configurations that amalgamated the two superpowers, the rebel movements, the Derg, and other actors.

From this perspective, three central points become clear. First, despite what was perceived as a crucial ‘lesson learned’, namely that NGO roles in Ethiopia—and particularly in the cross-border operation—could be successfully replicated elsewhere, this broad configuration was situation-specific and was not and could not be replicated. Contrary to the NGO literature in IR (Keck and Sikkink 1998), NGO roles and configurations do not travel easily, because organizationally permeable NGOs are intertwined with the practices of local and international actors. Second, although these broad networks seem permanent for the actors involved, they only function for a limited period of time, which is another reason why they cannot be replicated. So far, IR has failed to notice this lack of replicability and by overgeneralizing has left out much of the local context. Finally, this examination also shows that many of the vaunted principles of humanitarian NGOs, including neutrality and independence, are negotiated into varying forms in the field and can change with the geopolitical context.

Conclusion

After the end of the war in 1991 the cross-border operations into Ethiopia, Eritrea, and Tigray were taken as a positive model for humanitarian action. Oxfam’s Tony Vaux, reflecting in 2016, acknowledged that back in the 1990s, ‘Encouraged by the positive experience of cross-border activity with rebel groups in northern Ethiopia, Oxfam looked for other potential partners in Africa.’ However, they found none. In sharp contrast to ERA and REST, Vaux concluded, ‘the ‘humanitarian wings’ for other rebel groups were merely fictions to attract funding and had no reality or respect on the ground from political and military forces’ (Vaux 2016, 66).

In other words, after decades of hard experience, Vaux acknowledged quite directly that the assumption of replicability behind all the ‘lessons learned’ documents and ‘codes of conduct’ was simply false. NGOs did not and do not get to choose which governments, rebel groups (or warlords since the early 1990s) are available on the ground for them to partner with, directly or indirectly. And not a single rebel group in Africa or elsewhere replicated the strategy of linking authentic humanitarian relief with revolutionary politics practiced by EPLF/ERA and TPLF/REST. Crucially, this assessment does not denigrate NGO humanitarian work in the cross-border operation as a failure. Instead, our account here of the astonishing tactical creativity and flexibility of international NGOs on both sides of the war and famine in Ethiopia portrays their work as much more operationally challenging, politically harrowing, and morally heroic than merely following humanitarian mandates and implementing international norms.

In this case study, the promise of practice and relational theory for studying international NGOs is strongly borne out. Practice theory posits that practices are

socially meaningful patterns of action, performed more or less competently, that embody, act out, and reify background knowledge and discourse on the material world. International norms may provide meaning, motivation, and justification for certain practices. However, we show that NGO action is not necessarily, or even usually, based on universal norms, principles, or rules. Instead, in this case, practices of humanitarian action on the government side and the rebel side of the war became institutionalized in entanglements with the sovereignty practices of the adversaries in the war and their international supporters—including both superpowers—and the affinity practices of crucial societal partners, which were based on long-standing social ties such as belonging to the same Church or through personal acquaintance. These entanglements of practices often did not carry the same meanings for all the partners.

We conceptualize these broader network configurations as entanglements of humanitarian practices with societal affinity practices and sovereignty practices that can reinforce each other over time. They are made of particular NGO commitments and constructions that appear to be firmly and deeply institutionalized for several years, and then disappear quickly when conditions change. The humanitarian networks on the Ethiopian government side, and the humanitarian cross-border operations from the rebel side of the war, became such unusual NGO network configurations. More research is needed to fully explain these puzzling amalgams, including their formation and the paradox of their ephemerality and transience.

Utilizing a practice theory lens, we focused close attention on the NGO anchoring practices of linking with both societal and political partners in several countries, and those partners in turn attaching their latent agendas to the resulting NGO network. Our analysis highlighted a micro-level of NGO relations with their immediate partners, and a meso-level of the resulting networks. In this case at least, the layering of meso-level NGO networks over time also absorbed and shaped the regional and global international systems and actors at the macro-level, but more by inhabiting the system and serving as available conduits for resources and information than by lobbying and pressuring state policy.

Our Ethiopia case study, using relational practice theory, reveals more of the NGO politics than other accounts. Both cooperation and conflict are brought to light; first, within each NGO at the micro-level of conflict between partner latent agendas; second, across the networks with NGOs and their societal and political partners; and third, in the reshaping of states and their relationships between Ethiopia, Eritrea and their neighbours, as well as the Cold War superpowers, the United States and the Soviet Union.

The Ethiopia war and famine evinces three additional implications from the relational anchoring practice of NGOs forming links with societal and political partners in several countries. First, the societal partners of most NGOs were often equal in analytical importance to NGO political partners—the state governments that provide funding, territorial humanitarian access, and organizational models.

Second, NGO networks extended beyond the limits of the actors that publicly echoed the normative discourse of the NGOs to include all connected actors, even

normatively anomalous ones. For example, they were flexible in following their normative mandates or humanitarian principles in ways that tailored their operations to their partners, be they governments, military actors, or affiliated religious, ethnic, or cultural communities.

Finally, formal, and direct orchestration was evident in the roles of Sture Normark in shaping the cross-border operation as the first director of the ERD from 1981 to 1982, and of Kurt Jansson in shaping the architecture of the humanitarian operation on the government side from 1984 to 1985. Effective orchestration of an NGO network, which combines legitimacy, mobilizing, and ordering effects, requires an actor with access and agency across micro, meso, and macro-levels. It is also significant that multiple networks of development and humanitarian NGOs had already established and institutionalized their presence in Ethiopia through routine practice relationships and infrastructure well before direct orchestrators arrived on the scene. This prior self-organized investment, without formal and central orchestration, and usually impelled by NGO bonds with a societal partner, had constituted the organizational infrastructure that offered to both Reagan and Mengistu unconventional alternatives of policy and action. Mengistu and Reagan changed the definition of their respective national self-interests, not primarily in response to NGO lobbying or normative claims, but more in response to the policy opportunities and implementation possibilities that NGO networks had created. Therefore, in this case, NGOs transformed governments and their policies through an indirect causal path at the macro-level. That is, by first inhabiting the international system, NGOs changed the systemic social and political opportunity structures of, and consequences for, both material and discursive state action. In the conceptual language of the theoretical chapter by Deloffre and Quack ([Chapter 1](#), this volume), international NGOs in Ethiopia during this period legitimized working on both sides of the war, mobilized new NGO configurations, and shaped government policies of both Cold War superpowers as well as the Ethiopian state. NGOs also helped in establishing a new state, Eritrea. They thus made major contributions to global governance, but in a unique way that, despite initial great hopes, could not be replicated in other crisis countries.

One far-reaching implication of this research is that if we IR scholars do not understand the complex, international, and networked politics of NGOs as permeable actors, then we do not really understand the politics or policies of major powers or other states. Our analysis suggests at least three additional lines of further research. First, work is needed to compare in more detail the NGO strategy that was followed in Ethiopia with the three alternative strategies (of human rights advocacy, the ICRC, and direct political solidarity) that were marginalized by the NGO strategy. Second, while this chapter describes the innovative relational NGO network configurations of the Ethiopia case, we have only scratched the surface in identifying the motives and causes that explain their endurance, and when and why they end. More research is needed on the factors that help stabilize such unusual configurations, or perhaps ‘amalgams,’ on how they disappear, and how unique they are to the

specific context. Finally, our case raises questions about NGOs or other organizations that present elaborate, semi-fictional performances of humanitarian practices in the service of feeding the hungry or for other motivations. How prevalent have they been in humanitarian operations? When and for what purposes may they be justified as constructive dissembling, and when do they undermine humanitarian goals or international order?

Notes

1. But see [Smith \(1990\)](#) for more detail.
2. This section and the next utilize interview and documentary research conducted by William E. DeMars in the United States, Europe, and Ethiopia between 1988 and 2001, and draws particularly from [DeMars \(1993\)](#).
3. Interviews by William E. DeMars, August 1991, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.
4. Interview by William E. DeMars with Sture Normark, 6 April 1991, Uppsala, Sweden.
5. Interview by William E. DeMars with Sture Normark, 6 April 1991, Uppsala, Sweden.
6. Interview by William E. DeMars with Frederick Wettering, former Africa Director US National Security Council, 1981–1984, at the International Studies Association Annual Meeting, 21 February 2001, Chicago, IL, USA.
7. Interview by William E. DeMars with Frank Moss, former US Department of State Refugee Affairs Coordinator in Khartoum, Sudan, 1985–1987, 3 October 1995, Washington, DC, USA.
8. The literature on international organizations as ‘orchestrators’ is well developed for inter-governmental organizations but quite thin for NGOs ([Fligstein 2001](#); [Abbot et al. 2015](#)).

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PART III
SITES OF INTERACTION

Super-Networks as Sites of TAN–TAN Interaction in International Climate Politics

Andrea Schapper

Introduction

‘Don’t try to divide us—because we are united’ were the words of a representative of the women and gender constituency when describing the close collaboration of various transnational advocacy networks (TANs) at the 2015 Paris climate negotiations.¹ Although there is usually a diverse range of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and TANs with varying objectives active at the international climate conferences, most of the observer constituencies decided that they would speak with one voice in Paris. They focused on one core message containing several human rights and sustainability principles that they would repeat continuously. Whatever constituency had the opportunity to speak, the observer constituencies reiterated the same principles that states could not ignore or neglect anymore. The observer constituencies were indivisible.

In this chapter, I conceptualize this form of collaborative interaction between different transnational advocacy networks as a super-network. A super-network² can be understood as a mobilizing structure above TANs. In a super-network, TANs decide to optimize their political opportunities and apply tactics together at a higher mobilization level. Because different and sometimes even diverse TANs apply tactics together—like repeatedly bringing in the same core message—the effect of these tactics on inter-governmental decisions can be particularly high. The super-network as a concept describes highly mobilized TAN–TAN collaboration.³ It recognizes that, similar to ‘NGOing’, that is, the everyday practices, internal workings, and discursive repertoires of NGOs (Hilhorst 2003; Deloffre and Quack, Chapter 1, this volume), there are ‘TANing’ processes that do not only comprise the establishment of an internal network, but also include the manifold outside interactions, communications, and politics between different TANs.

This chapter focuses on super-networks as sites of TAN–TAN interaction in international climate politics. It will mainly examine the following research question: how

do super-networks emerge and how do TANs interact with one another in these networks?

Empirically, this chapter is based on a case study of the inter-constituency alliance and their attempt to include a human rights and sustainability framework into the 2015 Paris Agreement. This case study is politically significant because cross-constituency collaboration has previously been rare within the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) negotiations, and because the alliance was successful in including the human rights and sustainability message in the preamble of the Paris Agreement.

The case study is built on twenty-five expert interviews and participant observations (Kawulich 2005) at the strategic meetings of the inter-constituency alliance and other collaborative transnational advocacy networks (like the Human Rights and Climate Change Working Group) at four different Conferences of the Parties (COPs) before, during, and after the Paris agreement was adopted, that is, COP 19 in Warsaw (2013), COP 21 in Paris (2015), COP 23 in Bonn (2017, hosted by the Fiji Islands) and COP 26 in Glasgow (2021), including follow-up online interviews with key experts between 2013 and 2020. These key experts are representatives of the inter-constituency alliance, and I interviewed at least two experts (sometimes more) from each constituency, the initiator/coordinator of the inter-constituency alliance and representatives from participating international organizations (IOs), like the Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights (OHCHR) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). The interviews conducted were semi-structured, in-depth expert interviews (Meuser and Nagel 2009; Witzel and Reiter 2012), and I evaluated them using a qualitative content analysis (Mayring 2014). I also draw on a content analysis of primary documents and data (Bowen 2009) comprising policy briefs and strategy papers of member organizations of the inter-constituency alliance, UNFCCC outcome agreements, Twitter campaigns relating to #Stand4Rights used by the inter-constituency alliance during the Paris negotiations, information circulated via the email lists of the inter-constituency alliance, and field notes from conference calls.

This chapter is structured in the following way. I will first review some of the extensive literature on TANs and will identify TAN–TAN interaction as a research gap. Then I will introduce the case study on the inter-constituency alliance at the 2015 Paris climate negotiations. The case study will focus on the initiation of TAN–TAN collaboration via brokers and political entrepreneurs, the interactions between different, sometimes even diverse TANs, and on the tactics applied when mobilization is particularly high. Finally, the chapter will discuss what is new about super-networks and then draw concluding remarks.

TANs and TAN Interactions: What Are the Research Gaps?

TANs can be grasped as communicative structures, in which a range of activists guided by principled ideas and values interact (Keck and Sikkink 1998, 1). These

ideas and values are central to the networks, and they determine criteria for evaluating whether particular actions and their outcomes are just or unjust (Keck and Sikkink 1998). TANs create new linkages, multiply access channels to the international system, make resources available to new actors, and help to transform practices of national sovereignty by changing governmental policies. Within these networks, international and local NGOs, foundations, the media, churches, trade unions, academics, and even members of regional organizations or IOs collaborate. Although a diverse range of actors can participate, networks are usually driven by advocacy-oriented NGOs that mobilize collective action (Smith and Jenkins 2011; Stroup and Murdie 2012). With their proximity to local population groups, flexibility to act, and specialized expertise, they have comparative advantages over state actors but still require a certain degree of responsiveness to the international institutions they engage with (Steffek et al. 2010). TANs' engagement in global governance can improve participation, inclusiveness, and legitimacy of IOs (Steffek and Hahn 2010). Their overall objective is to change the policies of states and IOs (Keck and Sikkink 1998, 9) and to transform communicative power into new legal frameworks (Fraser 2014). They revert to a range of strategies that can be understood as tactics, approaches, and activities of networks or a combination thereof (Binderkrantz 2005) to influence policies in IOs. Important network tactics are often based on information politics but also include symbolic politics, leverage politics, and accountability politics (Keck and Sikkink 1998, 16–25).

Since the pathbreaking study on transnational advocacy networks has been published by Keck and Sikkink in 1998, a significant number of scholars have worked on TANs in a range of different policy fields, including human rights (Wong 2012; Allen-doerfer et al. 2020); human security (Carpenter 2014; Murdie 2014); women's rights and gender politics (Joachim 2003; Lang 2009); migration and trafficking (Piper and Uhlin 2002; Noyori-Corbett 2017); labour issues (Hertel 2006; Seidman 2007); trade (Nolan García 2011); the environment (Park 2005; Balboa 2018); climate change (Hadden and Jasny 2019; Schapper 2021); cluster munitions and landmines (Bolton and Nash 2010); nuclear disarmament (Schapper and Dee 2024) and biodiversity (Fuentes-George 2016). Thus, the concept of TANs still plays a significant role in IR research until today.

In addition to studies on TANs in these policy fields, there have been important contributions on other forms of transnational cooperation. This includes research on alliances, coalitions, and transnational social movement organizations (e.g., Fox 2005; Smith and Bandy 2005; Fox 2010). Fox (2010) points out that some of these terms are not distinguished clearly enough. He suggests grasping networks, coalitions, and movements as forms of cooperation 'along a continuum of varying degrees of organizational density and social cohesion.' (Fox 2010, 487). Whereas networks share goals and exchange ideas, information, and solidarity in a rather flexible and loosely organized way, coalitions and alliances, terms which are often used synonymously, engage in specific joint action and targeted campaigns with more frequent and organized exchanges (Fox 2010). Smith and Bandy (2005, 12), however, argue that TANs, as described by Keck and Sikkink (1998), are specific networks

that involve denser and more enduring network activity as well as structured communications and coordinated action.

In contrast to that, transnational social movement organizations are more formally organized structures of collaboration with routinized communication and resource flows as well as clear decision-making procedures. They can emerge from networks or alliances as sustained collaboration, formalized structures, routinized exchange, resources flow, and decision-making processes may be necessary to address a pressing issue (Smith and Bandy 2005; Smith 2013; Smith et al. 2017).

Although research on TANs and other forms of transnational collaboration is significant in so many different policy fields, TANs have only very rarely been considered as actors that can link policy fields (Smith and Bandy 2005; Schapper 2021). Whereas individual studies have shown intersectoral collaborations between NGOs and within social movement organizations (Smith and Bandy 2005; Nelson and Dorsey 2008) or clashes of network activities (Bob 2012), IR scholarship has so far neglected TAN interaction across policy arenas. Empirical analyses have mainly focused on individual TANs in specific areas, despite the concern that this would ‘artificially enforce [boundaries]’ and prevent us from understanding a network as a collective whole (Plummer et al. 2020; Cheng et al. 2021, 3). Although scholars recognize that intersectoral collaborations and the combination of insider and outsider strategies can increase the power of TANs (Mitchell et al. 2020), our knowledge on TAN interaction across policy fields is still very limited. This is in line with broader concerns about a lack of understanding concerning how TANs engage in networking, the nature of their network ties, what structures they build and the impact of these structures on power, change, community, and exclusion (Cheng et al. 2021; Deloffre and Quack, Chapter 1, this volume).

The chapters of this volume aim to contribute to our limited knowledge on NGO–NGO interaction. We might expect that NGOs interact in networks if this enhances their opportunities for goal attainment and problem solving or increases capacities, resources, and the chance to manage environmental constraints. NGOs might also be more likely to interact if they are engaging in the same forum. However, the editors argue interaction modes vary and need to be more thoroughly analysed. Therefore, ontological primacy is given to the relations and various modes of interaction between NGOs (Deloffre and Quack, Chapter 1, this volume).

Following those lines of enquiry and the relational approach pursued in this edited volume, the current chapter will address, in particular, our lack of understanding of TAN–TAN interaction as a research gap. It will focus on certain forms of TAN networks—conceptualized as super-networks—as sites of TAN interaction in which brokers develop more sophisticated collaborative structures over time. I argue that the concept of super-networks is important in order to grasp TAN mobilization across policy fields, reflecting network collaborators’ continuous efforts to establish advanced tactics based on common positions and core messages to successfully influence international agreements. Super-networks have mobilizing, identity, legitimacy, and ordering effects and will shape different policy areas in the future.

Interaction in a Super-Network: The Case Study of the Inter-Constituency Alliance

The concept of a ‘super-network’ has been inductively developed by conducting an in-depth case study on the inter-constituency alliance and its attempt to include a human rights and sustainability framework into the 2015 Paris Agreement. This alliance between officially registered observer constituencies at the UNFCCC can be considered a unique form of collaboration between transnational advocacy networks from various policy fields. At the UNFCCC, constituencies are clustered, loosely organized groups of officially registered NGOs that act as admitted observers in the negotiation process (UNFCCC 2020). Different NGOs can follow diverse, sometimes even competing interests, or they can decide to join forces, exchange information and resources, and collaborate on shared objectives. Within each constituency, NGOs collaborate and share official speaking time at the negotiations, which means that they have to agree on common standpoints. I argue that each constituency at the UNFCCC can be understood as a TAN because it links different NGOs with common objectives and values, for example, environmental protection as the main norm promoted by environmental NGOs (ENGOS), and tries to influence state behaviour to implement this norm.

Unprecedented within the climate change arena, so far, is the form of cross-constituency collaboration that could be observed at the 2015 Paris negotiations. Here, five of the nine registered clusters, including ENGOS, Indigenous Peoples’ Organizations (IPO), trade unions (TUNGO), the women and gender constituency (WGC) and youth NGOs (YOUNGO), as well as two additional observer networks (without official constituency status) comprising faith-based organizations (recognized as an informal NGO group by the UNFCCC Secretariat since 2016, UNFCCC 2020) and the Climate Land Ambition and Rights Alliance (CLARA) built the so-called inter-constituency alliance. These seven partners can be understood as seven TANs advocating for seven human rights and sustainability principles. These included ecosystem integrity, Indigenous peoples’ rights, just transition of the workforce, gender equality, intergenerational justice, human rights, and food security. Almost every constituency (except for faith-based groups) brought in one principle and the overall message was often generally referred to as the human rights framework.⁴

Figure 8.1 depicts the inter-constituency alliance including its interacting partners and the principles they brought into the alliance.

The alliance successfully advocated for the adoption of a human rights and sustainability framework in the 2015 Paris Agreement, despite the resistance of several state delegations. This was only a partial success because, initially, the alliance lobbied for an inclusion of their principles in article 2 of the agreement which determined its purpose. Two days before adoption—ironically, on International Human Rights Day (10 December 2015)—all seven principles were moved to the text in the Preamble of the Paris Agreement (Vidal and Vaughan 2015).

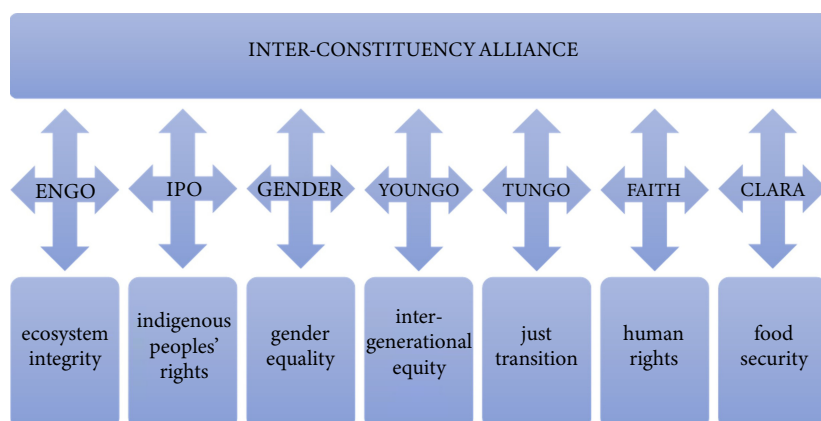


Figure 8.1 Inter-constituency alliance

Source: Author's own compilation on the basis of interview data.

Important for the purpose of this chapter, however, is to focus on the inter-constituency alliance as a site of interaction. Network representatives considered the strong collaborative mobilization structure they had created with the inter-constituency alliance as a success in itself.⁵ The collaborative efforts, indeed, were unique: The inter-constituency alliance encompassed seven UNFCCC constituencies, but one of its constituencies alone, ENGOs, comprised more than 600 partner organizations already (UNFCCC 2020). Hence, the largest part of NGOs registered for the 2015 climate negotiations were part of the inter-constituency alliance.

Emergence and Interactions

Even prior to the 2015 Paris negotiations, some constituency representatives engaged in regular communication about strengthening human rights in the climate change and other environmental regimes. Many conversations took place in the Human Rights and Climate Change Working Group (HRCCWG), a hybrid cluster of experts and activists that foster the link between climate change and human rights institutions in several arenas, including the UNFCCC, the United Nations Environmental Programme, and the Human Rights Council. The HRCCWG has existed since 2009 and can be understood as an informal exchange forum for NGOs, representatives from Indigenous peoples, faith-based groups, environmental organizations, trade unions, academics, and experts from the UN Human Rights Council, including the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights and the Environment. Via this forum, different constituencies have already been loosely connected through information exchange, monthly coordination calls, email lists, social media campaigns, and have used the ongoing discussion to prepare previous COPs: 'In the COPs, we have been working on human rights and climate change way before Paris. So I think getting the

text into the preamble is to a good percentage thanks to that work that has happened [previously].⁶

In addition to the HRCCWG, there were also other constellations of cooperation in existence prior to the Paris negotiations.⁷ Several individual representatives of different constituencies, including youth groups, women and gender activists, Indigenous peoples, and trade unions, had initiated an exchange on how to strengthen participation rights for observer constituencies. These individuals developed personal relationships that evolved from discussions about the right to speak at COP and other international forums: ‘I think there [was] a personal relationship well in advance and I’m talking about even three, four years before Paris that we were taking on. And we were often together and caucusing and having conversations [about] our right to speak and [the] defence of our rights.’⁸

What we can observe here are processual and positional configurations, as described in the framework chapter (Deloffre and Quack, [Chapter 1](#), this volume). Recurring exchange initiated a reflection process among members of various constituencies on how to increase participation opportunities at the UNFCCC. These configurations were shaped by social ties, especially common experiences, and personal relationships, but were mainly based on an ongoing dialogue on enhanced access to participation—which eventually became a building block of the inter-constituency alliance.

Against this background, these constituencies also stood together when, at COP 20 in Lima, states threatened to take out Indigenous peoples’ rights from the negotiation text. When Indigenous groups asked NGOs and TANs for support against this action, constituency representatives progressively realized that they had been focusing more on influencing outcome agreements via interaction with their different governmental allies—than on collaborating across constituencies. In this way, every constituency had concentrated on different parts of the text and the state representatives that supported certain textual amendments:

What we realized was that governments didn’t really want us to come together because they would all basically say: ‘well, if you collude with the others, we are not going to support you’. But at the same time, we realized that if we were not doing that, all those governments will oppose the language of the other. ... But the thing is that we need to really stick to it. And that is when we actually started, and we brought the paragraph together and then in the end in the Paris agreement.⁹

Following the 2014 Lima negotiations, a meeting of like-minded constituencies was set up in February 2015 in Geneva, followed by another meeting in Geneva in June 2015 initiating the alliance-building process.¹⁰ The idea of these meetings was to see each other outside the negotiations in order to have more time for a collective planning process. Initially, only some of the constituencies came together to discuss the potential of using a collective human rights and sustainability frame in the negotiations. These were faith-based organizations, representatives of Indigenous

peoples, the women and gender constituency, and other individual experts of the HRCCWG. After the first meetings of constituency representatives in Geneva, one of the initiating actors of the inter-constituency alliance, who is experienced in cross-constituency coordination, reached out to other constituency focal points (i.e., the designated contact point of each network) to foster alliance-building:

We tried to see if we could do some collective planning; like identify what are the next steps and who wants to do what ... but what people seemed really interested in was the idea of having, first of hearing each other, and then having one unified message that we could all use. ... This is how far we were going to go: Agree to one sentence that has the language that every group agrees in terms of their own proposal.¹¹

At the Bonn Intersessional negotiations in June 2015, all seven constituencies were already on board and the inter-constituency alliance commenced its work by making concrete suggestions for human rights language and sustainability principles in the negotiation text.¹²

Thus, the inter-constituency alliance came into being after constituencies decided to shift their focus from interaction with state representatives to TAN–TAN collaboration. In this way, nongovernmental actors imitated governmental coalition-building inside the climate negotiations. Their loosely organized interaction patterns within the HRCCWG shifted to a high level of mobilization, based on common principles and standards, and regular interaction and exchange. Constituencies now used the higher-level mobilization structure (the inter-constituency alliance) and their lower-level mobilization structure (established state–society interactions) as individual networks to persuade and pressure governments into adopting the human rights and sustainability framework.

Brokerage

When considering the initiation of NGO–NGO or TAN–TAN collaboration, the role of brokers and brokering processes is crucial. Brokers can be understood as political entrepreneurs spanning boundaries and connecting different social spaces (Emirbayer and Mische 1998, 1007–1008, Deloffre and Quack, Chapter 1, this volume). Political entrepreneurs actively promote networks, collaborative action, and campaigns. Those who take a key role in initiating network campaigns have often already gained valuable experiences in previous campaigns (Keck and Sikkink 1998, 12–14) and are well connected in the NGO landscape. They mobilize material and immaterial resources, engage in costly networking activities, and have detailed knowledge of the opportunity structures they are operating in (Keck and Sikkink 1998, 31). Due to their previous networking experiences, political entrepreneurs can mobilize a heterogeneous international constituency. This bolsters the overall mobilizing structure because it weakens arguments that a network or campaign only

represents very particular interests; additionally, it diversifies the methods, strategies, and tactics of contention being used (Tarrow 1994, 19).

The main broker spanning the boundaries between the different networks engaged in the 2015 inter-constituency alliance was an environmental rights NGO that took the role of a coordinator (Cheng et al. 2021; Chapter 6, this volume). One very experienced representative of that NGO initiated and coordinated inter-constituency collaboration. Especially in the ‘start-up’ of the alliance, they acted as a boundary-spanner and entrepreneur and can, thus, be understood as a linking pin between the different UNFCCC constituencies (see Schneiker and Joachim 2021). The alliance initiator drew on substantial previous experiences within different constituencies, like YOUNGO and ENGO, and strategically used important knowledge of the UNFCCC procedures for civil society participation, accumulated over many years of activism, as well as significant personal relationships with key nongovernmental and state actors to establish and strengthen the inter-constituency alliance.¹³ During in-depth interviews, many constituency representatives emphasize the initiator’s open personality, rich experiences, and unique skills in facilitating conversations.¹⁴ As they worked for an NGO that exclusively focuses on institutionalizing human rights in the environmental and climate regimes, they could draw on valuable expertise in this subject matter. Representatives of constituencies described the environmental rights NGO as a central actor in the inter-constituency alliance because their work focuses solely on linking the climate change/environmental and human rights regimes, whereas other NGOs concentrate on many different aspects in their work.

[The initiator] is actually coordinating this work for years. Doing climate change and human rights so he ..., it’s the focus of his work. So therefore, the impact and the knowledge and the level of expertise he has in this domain makes him a very relevant actor. ... So that makes him a central actor for that; he uses a lot more energy than me ... our energy is diverted in many directions.¹⁵

In addition to the coordinating actor, who could draw on valuable thematic expertise, previous experiences in different constituencies and with optimizing civil society participation in the institutional forum of the UNFCCC, there was also a core group of brokers representing each constituency. These representatives had a mandate to take decisions in the collaborative super-network. They built new cooperative mobilizing structures on the basis of previous, years-long, conversations about enhancing participation rights in the UNFCCC,¹⁶ personal relationships with some key participants described as ‘good friend[s],’¹⁷ thematic expertise,¹⁸ as well as openness and experiences in facilitating conversations across various networks¹⁹. This core group representing each constituency built their brokerage role on efforts to strengthen civil society participation within the UNFCCC as a forum over many years. Linking the constituencies at the Paris negotiations constituted a special mobilization momentum, the preparatory work had, however, taken place in many informal (and formal) cross-constituency conversations over time.

This means that we can observe different brokerage roles here: there was one coordinating broker (Cheng et al. 2021) for example, the environmental rights NGO, that thematically focused its work on establishing links between the human rights and climate change regimes, and offered specific thematic expertise at this intersection. Within that NGO was an individual initiator who could build on previous experiences within different constituencies, was familiar with observer participation rights (and how to enhance them) at the UNFCCC, and could forge strong personal relationships with important governmental and nongovernmental decision-makers. In addition to this, there was a brokerage position in each constituency serving as cross-constituency ‘linking pins’ (Schneiker and Joachim 2021). These brokers were also individuals who initiated and maintained a dialogue concerned with strengthening participation rights in the climate negotiations over many years.

Via brokering processes the unique mobilizing structure of the inter-constituency alliance was built. Some of these processes, especially cross-constituency exchange, started many years ago with informal conversations about enhanced participation opportunities for civil society, and then culminated in concrete networking between the different observer groups with specific objectives for shaping the Paris Agreement. Other brokering processes were immediately relevant just before the 2015 climate negotiations, like those initiated by the environmental rights NGO, involving coordinating and bringing the constituencies together prior to the climate conference, and then agreeing with them on a common advocacy strategy and a package of concrete human rights and sustainability principles.

Without these brokers and brokering processes, communication between the constituencies would have remained limited, cross-constituency mobilization would not have occurred, and the inter-constituency alliance would not have been established.

Political Context and Opportunity Structures

Keck and Sikkink (1998, 7) emphasize that analysing political opportunity structures is necessary for understanding the emergence of social movements and evaluating their success. When analysing political opportunity structures, it is important to consider also the wider political context of mobilization (Eisinger 1973; Kriesi 2004; Meyer 2004) and the social and organizational context in which networks are embedded. Previous research suggests that political context plays an important role in shaping international negotiations (McKibben 2013).

Political opportunity structures can be understood as access to (state) institutions and the broader institutional context that can provide opportunities or obstacles for frame resonance and political influence. According to Sydney Tarrow, political opportunity structures are defined as:

consistent—but not necessarily formal, permanent or national—signals to social or political actors which either encourage or discourage them to use their internal resources to form social movements. ... The most salient kinds of signals are four:

the opening up of access to power, shifting alignments, the availability of influential allies, and cleavages within and among elites. (Tarrow 1996, 54, italics in original)

This definition clearly emphasizes that political opportunity structures contain more consistent elements, such as institutional access, but also comparatively fluid elements, like expansions in access to power, alignment shifts, increasing availability of allies, or emerging cleavages. Thus, at least certain elements of it are dynamic and can be changed and optimized. Political opportunity structures provide material and ideational resources for political action; they can create windows of opportunity, shape strategies, or marginalize certain ideas and frames (Joachim 2003, 251). If we consider the dynamic character of part of the political opportunity structures, then brokers, TAN representatives, and forms of TAN collaborations can thereby influence and optimize these resources by searching for more influential allies, strategically shifting alignments, and using cleavages between state actors to their advantage. This will help them in enhancing access to power for the furthering of their own political agendas.

Political Context

When analysing the political context in which the 2015 Paris climate negotiations took place, one could conclude that the contextual conditions were favourable to the participation of nongovernmental observers. France as a host country was very open to observer engagement and did not intend to enact many restrictions on the work of civil society activists until the Paris terrorist attacks on 13 November 2015 (about two weeks before the start of the climate negotiations at the end of November) left about 130 people dead and more than 400 injured (BBC 2015). Due to the increased public interest in the negotiations of the new climate agreement, the French hosts and the UNFCCC Secretariat had admitted a very large number of diverse organizations, leaving the observer delegations of single organizations smaller than they used to be.²⁰ However, by the start of the COP on 30 November 2015, the threat of terrorism and the ongoing state of emergency in France severely limited civil society activities outside the UNFCCC, such as climate marches, demonstrations, and protest actions. At the same time, several observers report that the terrorist attacks in France had fostered a feeling of solidarity between different groups inside the COP. A representative of faith-based groups confirms that: ‘The fact that we arrived just after all this violence in Paris, kind of built up a spirit of solidarity amongst all the people there.’²¹

This sense of solidarity was further accelerated by the high expectations among the international public and civil society that the outcomes of the Paris negotiations were important because the post-2020 climate agreement was to be adopted. This also prompted observers to work closely together to achieve a meaningful outcome: ‘Paris was really very important. ... If we didn’t get to try it for Paris, then we would be paying the consequences for a few years. ... So it was a good moment to focus on doing our [work] together.’²²

This means that the political context of COP 21 can be described as a favourable environment for TAN collaboration. The inside political context of the negotiations was characterized by a spirit of solidarity and a strong will to build alliances to influence the outcome agreement.

Political Opportunity Structures

As part of an official UNFCCC constituency, observer organizations have advanced formal access. Constituency members enjoy different opportunities of providing input to the process, via written submissions, organizing side events, and making statements during formal proceedings (UNFCCC 2020). At previous COPs, organizations had used the possibility of making submissions and statements to highlight their own individual concerns, sometimes even competing for governmental attention to their specific demands. By collaborating in the inter-constituency alliance and following the same objective, civil society organizations enhanced their own opportunities for institutional access. Via submissions and statements, each constituency could now repeatedly bring in their message about the importance of a human rights and sustainability frame. This focused the attention of states on the significance of the frame and increased the overall speaking time (of several constituencies combined) that could be devoted to this. The initiator of the inter-constituency alliance described this with the following words: ‘That means when you have the UNFCCC secretary asking, hearing two questions by each constituency, they will hear our point four times. So our issue will come repeatedly.’²³

This inter-constituency collaboration also meant that civil society groups with very different priorities worked together closely. Whereas trade unions (TUNGO) in the past, for instance, had focused on a green economy that protected workplaces and enabled a just transition of the workforce, Indigenous peoples (IPO) emphasized the protection of natural resources as more important than economic concerns. Collaboration between these actors and the focus on one core message that combined their interests increased institutional access, especially in relation to enhanced speaking time, and strengthened civil society voices against state actors:

The fact that a trade unionist who is coming from Illinois to a climate conference and suddenly hearing the Indigenous peoples’ representative saying ‘Oh remember, Indigenous peoples’ rights only make sense in the context of just transition for workers.’ That is something that was incredibly empowering and motivating and feeling that no matter what the UNFCCC does, we have already reached a degree of solidarity that is unusual and is powerful and that is something that gives us hope and inspires our work at home. I think it accelerated the integration of agendas.²⁴

For some constituencies, this new solidarity and united focus on TAN–TAN collaboration meant that they were undergoing an alignment shift. Whereas it was not unusual for certain clusters to cooperate, like human rights and faith-based groups, it was a substantial change for others, such as Indigenous peoples and trade unions, as mentioned above.

A crucial success factor for the work of the inter-constituency alliance was their engagement with influential allies in IOs and among state representatives. In October 2014, in preparation for COP 21, the special procedures mandate holders of the Human Rights Council had already addressed a letter to all state parties of the UNFCCC demanding that ‘A new climate change agreement must include human rights protection for all’ (OHCHR 2014, 1). At the 2015 negotiations, the Special Rapporteur for Human Rights and the Environment, John Knox, was present and engaged in promoting the human rights framework. The OHCHR sent a ‘key message on human rights and climate change’ to state representatives highlighting the legal obligations and responsibilities of states at the intersection of these two policy fields (OHCHR 2015). OHCHR staff members even engaged in advocacy work at the negotiation site in Paris itself by initiating informal talks on governmental obligations in relation to a human rights framework with state delegations: ‘We think this is an issue of consistency and policy coherence that it is important that these two legal frameworks are brought together and in fact should complement each other.’²⁵

To summarize, the inter-constituency alliance could progressively increase power access due to a favourable political environment, improved institutional access, and by strategically shifting their alignments and collaborating among constituencies over time, with heightened mobilization during the Paris negotiations, but also by including influential actors from international organizations. They used the more fluid elements of the political opportunity structure, such as alignments and allies, to enhance their own success opportunities.

Tactics and Effects

In addition to information politics, symbolic politics, leverage politics, and accountability politics (Keck and Sikkink 1998), the inter-constituency alliance applied an approach that can only be used in a super-network, when many different TANs collaborate and build a higher mobilizing structure. This new tactic applied by the inter-constituency alliance is called the package approach. By formulating one key message that contained all of the principles each participating constituency was fighting for, the alliance could successfully advocate for its demands. This approach was unusual because it meant that each constituency was lobbying for its own idea but also for the principles other groups have suggested. In this way, networks with different objectives stood in close solidarity and integrated various civil society perspectives: ‘This is how far we were going to go: Agree to one sentence that has the language that every group agrees in terms of their own proposal. ... But any time any of us will have interaction [with state negotiators], we will mention the entire package.’²⁶

Because the alliance mentioned the package in every interaction with state delegations, it became much more difficult for the negotiators to ignore or deny it. And as each constituency repeated the entire message in its official speaking time, it was

constantly reiterated. The alliance imitated state behaviour as a negotiation block and felt empowered by the fact that they could speak up for other constituencies that also spoke up for them.²⁷

Due to the package approach and this unique form of solidarity between the observer constituents, the alliance received considerable media attention and could mobilize an interested international public: ‘That’s why the stands or the press conferences were in general really well-attended because our message was very clear: it’s all of us or none.’²⁸

Eventually, all the seven principles became part of the Preamble of the Paris Agreement, despite a number of state delegations initially opposing it. This was the first time human rights have been incorporated into a binding environmental instrument (Atapattu and Schapper 2019).

Through the process of interacting, the inter-constituency alliance shaped a unique collaborative identity. Individual constituencies felt empowered by the fact that other constituencies were fighting for their values—and the rights and sustainability principles promoted by other observers also became part of their own advocacy work.²⁹ Their identity as an alliance was significantly strengthened and the package approach underlined this unity: ‘You can’t just pick which right to push forward; it’s either all or none. It was also a way to say: don’t try to divide us, because we are united.’³⁰

In addition to these identity effects, collaboration in the inter-constituency alliance also fostered mobilizing effects. Through various common press releases and interviews, the alliance actively worked on fostering media attention and interest in the adoption of human rights in the Paris Agreement.³¹ This had a mobilizing effect inside and outside the negotiations. Interviewees claimed that there was, for the first time, an increased public interest in the adoption of human rights in the new climate instrument.³²

Because so many different constituencies representing a range of issues and social groups interacted in the alliance, individual organizations and constituencies clearly felt that they had enhanced their legitimacy—as they were representing the concerns of many people who were, in various ways, negatively affected by climate change and climate policies.³³ The human rights and sustainability framework itself also has ordering effects as human rights have now also entered the implementation guidelines of the Paris Agreement, and environmental and social safeguards need to be observed when designing new climate policies. We can also increasingly observe successful climate litigation cases, which are based on the Preamble of the Paris Agreement that calls for respecting, protecting, and considering human rights obligations in all climate-related action (Wegener 2020). This means that analysing the inter-constituency alliance reveals that all the primary effects described in the framework chapter, including identity, mobilizing, legitimacy, and ordering effects, are present (Deloffre and Quack, Chapter 1, this volume).

The nature of these effects was mainly inclusionary, as almost all the observers registered with the UNFCCC, including some additional groups like faith-based organizations and land rights advocates, became part of the alliance. One main exception

are business and industry NGOs (BINGOs) who were excluded because alliance participants thought their approach to the negotiations was not sufficiently focused on human rights, justice, and sustainability.³⁴ Therefore, despite the inclusion of most observer groups within the climate change negotiations, some exclusionary effects were also visible. The package approach can be described as an innovation because constituencies enhanced their speaking time (and empowered civil society voices towards state actors) by repetitions of the same message with the seven core principles whenever the opportunity occurred to speak.³⁵ Hence, the nature of TAN–TAN interactions in the alliance were mainly of an inclusionary and innovative nature (Deloffre and Quack, [Chapter 1](#), this volume).

What is New about Super-Networks?

The concept of a super-network is important to describe how various TANs from different policy fields collaborate to build more sophisticated mobilizing structures. TANs that do not always cooperate and sometimes even have different objectives decided to interact and to build a mobilizing structure above TANs, to coordinate and agree on a common, overarching policy goal, that integrates individual aims of TANs under a human rights and sustainability framework. Only if we understand these new mobilizing structures in a better way will we also be able to grasp new practices and tactics applied by super-networks that go beyond information, symbolic, leverage, and accountability politics as described by [Keck and Sikkink \(1998\)](#). The package approach applied by the inter-constituency alliance at the 2015 Paris negotiations, for instance, could only become effective if most TANs worked together and repeatedly advocated for the same message, formally, in their official speaking time at the COP and, informally, in all communications with state actors. This means that the super-network mirrors the behaviour of state coalitions, like the Group of 77 or the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS).³⁶ It also means that TANs, instead of focusing on interacting with those states with whom they have built up productive working relationships, undergo an alignment shift and now rather concentrate on collaboration with other TANs. Initially, they even considered this as a very risky strategy because some state actors told them that they would not support their demands anymore if they did that:

I remember us having this conversation about ‘are we conscious that if we try to put a proposal together with all of our bits in a single paragraph, we also risk losing support from some of the governmental supporters?’ And we said ‘well, the prize is bigger than the risk’.³⁷

Speaking with one voice across a variety of TANs makes the super-network particularly strong. Because the United Nations are required to accommodate diverse voices and in the inter-constituency alliance diverse civil society groups speak with one voice, state actors could not ignore their concerns anymore³⁸—and in the end,

adopted the human rights and sustainability framework into the Preamble of the Paris Agreement.

The case study on the 2015 inter-constituency alliance suggests that (1) TAN–TAN collaboration and mobilization in a super-network is particularly strong when important international agreements are negotiated. In these cases, individual TANs may find it crucially important to include their own ideas and core principles into an agreement. And they may be able to compromise with other TANs on what else is included in the package and advocate for principles of other TANs in the same way as for their own. The likelihood that a super-network that operates across policy fields emerges is particularly high when important international accords—those which will influence policy development over the next years or decades—are being shaped.³⁹ In these cases, structures such as political opportunities (like the negotiations of an agreement) and actors, such as brokers and TAN representatives, mutually constitute and shape each other, resulting in the establishment of a super-network.

The case study on the inter-constituency alliance also demonstrates that (2) super-networks do not emerge within a short period of time. They are built on previous TAN–TAN collaborations, for example, the more informal and hybrid HRCCWG that had been active since 2009, or the informal exchange of constituency representatives on how to improve participation rights at the UNFCCC, which was active for several years before the inter-constituency alliance emerged. Super-networks can thus be described as a unique form of mobilization at a specific, meaningful point in time that is based on previous TAN–TAN interaction. Previous interaction and exchange between members of the various constituencies lead to the emergence of personal relationships, trust, the acquisition of thematic expertise, and continuous strategic exchange on how to optimize participation opportunities in the UNFCCC—important pre-conditions for super-network mobilization.

With the (3) increasing emergence of super-networks, for example, the Right to Healthy Environment Coalition and the Convention on Biodiversity Alliance, we know that not only TANs but also super-networks interact. There are TANs or individual NGOs that are members of several super-networks at the same time.⁴⁰ They bring knowledge and advocacy messages from one forum to another. At COP 26 in Glasgow in October/November 2021, for instance, the inter-constituency alliance that advocated for human rights in article 6 of the Paris implementation guidelines on market mechanisms, used messages that had been successful only weeks earlier in the Human Rights Council when states, for the first time, recognized a human right to a healthy environment (UN 2021). This new human right was advocated for by another super-network, the ‘Right to a Healthy Environment Coalition’. Therefore, not only TAN–TAN interaction but also interactions (and inter-linkages) between super-networks will form important observations for the future.

When comparing and contrasting super-networks with TANs (Keck and Sikkink 1998) and transnational social movement organizations (Smith and Bandy 2005), the following observations can be made. TANs are single issue networks, comprised of individuals, NGOs, foundations, trade unions, and media representatives. They

rely on political entrepreneurs to mobilize over a limited period of time in order to achieve policy change. In contrast, social movement organizations are larger forms of transnational collaboration involving individuals, NGOs, associations, and movements. They are characterized by denser forms of communicative structures and exchange, and they operate on a long-term and sustained basis. As they include diverse actors, they need brokers to foster solidarity and to achieve unity.

Table 8.1 Comparison between TANs, transnational social movement organizations, and super-networks

	Transnational advocacy networks (Keck and Sikkink 1998)	Transnational social movement organizations (Smith 2013 ; Smith and Bandy 2005 ; Smith et al. 2017)	Super-networks (Schapper 2021 ; Schapper and Dee 2024)
Commonalities			
Form of collaboration	Transnational collaboration to overcome dominance of nation states, connecting people across borders		
Vision	Common vision, shared principles; linking Global North and South		
Communication	Regular communication in person and/or remotely		
Scale	Operating across scale, linking local, national, and global scale		
Allies	International organizations, single government representatives		
Challenges	Internal inequalities, hierarchies, and power imbalances		
Differences			
Collaborating units	Individuals, civil society organizations, foundations, media, faith-based actors	Individuals, civil society organizations, movements, associations	Mainly networks
Organizational structures	Less formalized	More formalized	Less formalized
Temporality	Limited period of time	Long-term, sustained	Emergence over time but short-term mobilization
Frames	Single-issue	Multi-issue	Explicit issue linkage
Approach	Common objectives for policy change	Attempt to achieve unity despite diversity	Package approach
Key actors	Political entrepreneurs	Brokers for solidarity	Brokers for issue linkage
Outcome	Policy change	New institutional arrangements	New principles and rights

Sources: Author's own compilation on the basis of Keck and Sikkink 1998; Smith and Bandy 2005; Schapper 2021; Schapper and Dee 2024.

They focus on multi-issue frames, and they advocate for new institutional arrangements (Smith and Bandy 2005). Super-networks are, again, different. They comprise collaborating TANs, which interact in a less formalized way than social movement organizations. They emerge over time, but mobilization peaks in specific short-term periods, for example, when new international agreements are negotiated. Super-networks rely on brokers to bring together TANs from various policy fields to link issues and apply a package approach, encouraging diverse actors to speak with one voice and advocate for common demands. These include new principles and rights, which can have ordering effects.

Table 8.1 highlights the commonalities and differences between these different forms of networks and organizations.

Conclusion

The present chapter has introduced super-networks as sites of TAN–TAN collaboration in international climate politics. It has adopted the relational approach pursued in this edited volume, and it has particularly addressed our lack of understanding regarding TAN–TAN interaction, and highlighted the research gap in this area. In this chapter I argue that in a favourable political context TANs with different, sometimes even diverse, objectives can decide to collaborate, optimize their political opportunities through alignment shifts, and to build sophisticated mobilization structures such as super-networks. Understanding super-networks as a higher mobilization structure is important as it helps us grasp the unique practices and tactics that they can apply, like a package approach, which is then very difficult for state actors to ignore. Super-networks build on previous TAN–TAN interactions, but mobilization is particularly strong when unique political opportunities, like the negotiation of new international agreements that will shape policy development in the future, arise.

This chapter builds on a case study concerning the 2015 inter-constituency alliance, which succeeded in advocating for the adoption of a human rights and sustainability framework in the preamble of the Paris Agreement. Research for this case study included live and online interviews and follow-up interviews, participatory observations at the strategic meetings of the HRCCWG (2013–2021), and the inter-constituency alliance (2015), as well as a document analysis of Twitter feeds, strategic papers, UNFCCC submissions, and other policy briefs.

The case study has revealed that super-networks are built on (and profit from) previous forms of TAN–TAN collaboration. Their mobilizing structures for influencing the outcome of a particular international agreement, however, are unique and often involve important alignment shifts that may be temporary and also particularly important for influencing the international accord at stake. After a particular agreement is adopted, mobilization decreases again and becomes more irregular and informal, although it does not necessarily terminate altogether.

Collaboration in a super-network is often initiated by one or several brokers. In the case of the inter-constituency alliance, there was one key initiator, but also a core group of brokers from each constituency that played an important role in establishing

the alliance. Brokers built their collaboration on previous personal relationships, thematic expertise, procedural knowledge of participation in the UNFCCC, and ongoing discussions on how to strengthen participation rights for observer constituencies in the climate regime.

Super-networks, as a unique form of mobilization, focus on, and are built around, values that different TANs can agree on, such as human rights, environmental protection, or intergenerational equity. TANs may compromise to work with partners they do not usually work with (and even promote the principles of these partners) to successfully influence an international agreement, as they are aware this might be a unique opportunity to do so. Very often, emerging agreements and new norms then shape policies in the field for decades to come. In the future, with the continuing professionalization of TANs, we will see more super-networks emerge, especially when international agreements are to be adopted. It will be important to comparatively investigate different forms of super-networks and the relationships between them.

Notes

1. Interview, Representative Women and Gender Constituency, 8 November 2017.
2. The term refers to the Latin word ‘super’, which means above.
3. Super-networks such as collaborating TANs, are different from meta-organizations or collaborating organizations (see also Gugerty, [Chapter 9](#), in this volume). TAN cooperation is less formalized but can, when the political opportunities arise, lead to the establishment of strong mobilization structures.
4. Interview, Representative of Indigenous Peoples’ Caucus, 8 April 2020.
5. Interview, Coordinating Actor Inter-Constituency Alliance, 26 March 2020.
6. Interview, Representative of Faith-Based Groups, 20 March 2020.
7. Interview, Former Representative of TUNGO, 21 December 2020.
8. Interview, Former Representative of TUNGO, 21 December 2020.
9. Interview, Former Representative of TUNGO, 21 December 2020.
10. Interview, Coordinating Actor Inter-Constituency Alliance, 26 March 2020.
11. Interview, Coordinating Actor Inter-Constituency Alliance, 26 March 2020.
12. Interview, Coordinating Actor Inter-Constituency Alliance, 26 March 2020.
13. Interview, Coordinating Actor Inter-Constituency Alliance, 26 March 2020.
14. Interview, Representative of YOUNGO, 17 December 2020.
15. Interview, Representative of Faith-Based Groups, 20 March 2020.
16. Interview, Former Representative of TUNGO, 21 December 2020.
17. Interview, Coordinating Actor Inter-Constituency Alliance, 26 March 2020.
18. Interview, Representative of Faith-Based Groups, 20 March 2020.
19. Interview, Representative of YOUNGO, 17 December 2020.
20. Interview, Representative of YOUNGO, 17 December 2020.
21. Interview, Representative of Faith-Based Groups, 20 March 2020.
22. Interview, Representative of Faith-Based Groups, 20 March 2020.
23. Interview, Coordinating Actor Inter-Constituency Alliance, 26 March 2020.
24. Interview, Coordinating Actor Inter-Constituency Alliance, 26 March 2020.
25. Interview, OHCHR, COP 21 in Paris, 10 December 2015.

26. Interview, Coordinating Actor Inter-Constituency Alliance, 26 March 2020.
27. Interview, Former Representative of TUNGO, 21 December 2020.
28. Interview, Former Representative of TUNGO, 21 December 2020.
29. Interview, Coordinating Actor Inter-Constituency Alliance, 26 March 2020.
30. Interview, Representative of WOMEN AND GENDER, 8 November 2017.
31. Interview, UNICEF, 4 February 2016.
32. Interview, UNICEF, 4 February 2016.
33. Interview, Former Representative of TUNGO, 21 December 2020.
34. Interview, Former Representative of TUNGO, 21 December 2020.
35. Interview, Coordinating Actor Inter-Constituency Alliance, 26 March 2020.
36. Interview, Representative of Faith-Based Groups, 20 March 2020.
37. Interview, Former Representative of TUNGO, 21 December 2020.
38. Interview, OHCHR Representative, 8 November 2021.
39. Interview, Representative of Faith-Based Groups, 20 March 2020.
40. Interview, OHCHR Representative, 8 November 2021

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Coordinating Civil Society?

How NGO Associations Navigate Transnational Collaboration

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Transnational NGO Associations in Global Perspective

Global civil society has become increasingly complex in recent decades as cross-boundary, cross-sector networks become important actors in global governance (Keck and Sikkink 1998; Willetts 2013). Networked governance offers the potential to make traditionally vertical hierarchies of power more distributed and provides civil society actors with greater opportunities to develop structures and modes of interaction better suited to address deeply entrenched, cross-boundary problems, including climate change and sustainable development. In this chapter we examine how one form of transnational organizing—transnational nongovernmental organization (NGO) meta-associations—function as a site of interaction in which NGOs make claims about legitimacy and engage in collective action. In relational terms, the power of this action has the potential to produce social and political effects.

Transnational NGO meta-associations (hereafter referred to as ‘TNGO’ associations) are membership organizations whose members are composed of national and regional NGO associations; they are ‘meta’ organizations in that they are associations of associations, rather than of individuals. These meta-associations act as sites of interaction that structure opportunities through which collective, shared goals of members can be activated and realized, but also through which conflicting and competing norms, priorities, and understandings must be negotiated. A key characteristic of these associations is that they must work across scales. As multi-scalar institutions, TNGO associations negotiate the potentially diverging interests of their members as they try to achieve collective aims. To fully achieve these aims, however, TNGO associations cannot rely only on centrally driven coordination activities, since the central TNGO office typically has limited staff and capacity and so relies on members for much of the organizational implementation. TNGO associations are thus sites of interaction rather than well-bounded organizations, since they are networks requiring active participation of members to achieve association goals. Following the theme of this volume, we seek to understand what configurations of

practice shape these sites of interaction and how variation in practice fosters member relationships in the absence of significant material resources or legal authority. To do so, we examine the configurations of practice used by two major TNGO associations, Forus International and the Affinity Group of NGO Associations (AGNA), and explore the effects produced through these configurations. We examine the sets of practices that emerge as part of efforts to mobilize and coordinate action among members in pursuit of collaborative effort.

While a limited literature exists on the roles that national-level NGOs associations play in structuring civil society, little empirical research examines the roles that TNGO associations play in structuring NGO–NGO relationships and mediating their roles in global governance. There is also very little work that studies the relatively unique structure of these ‘associations of associations’ that simultaneously operate globally and nationally. Using a relational approach to NGO–NGO interactions, we aim to provide a more comprehensive view of how TNGO associations practices may produce different qualities and intensities of social ties among diverse national NGO association members.

In addition to the relational framework of this volume, we incorporate two insights from the literature on organizational behaviour and public governance to guide our inquiry. We conceptualize TNGO associations structurally as meta-organizations that are composed of organizations (Ahrne and Brunsson 2005). We combine the meta-organizations perspective with an emerging literature on collaborative platforms (Ansell and Gash 2018). Collaborative platforms are a kind of flexible scaffolding on which organizations can build patterns of coordination and collaboration that are dynamic and able to easily shift over time, arguably fitting the process-based and relational approach of this volume.

This chapter begins with an overview of the existing literature on NGO association structure and constraints as informed by the membership organization and collective action literatures. We then argue that a relational approach to NGO associations is necessary to fully characterize the contributions that TNGO associations make in coordinating global civil society. We bring in the literature on meta-organizations to better understand the structure of these associations, then explore how TNGO associations facilitate collaborative dynamics between members using the lens of collaborative platforms. Using two exploratory case studies of TNGO associations—AGNA and Forus International—we examine how the configuration of practices available to TNGO associations facilitate and constrain NGO–NGO interaction.

Theoretical Perspectives on Transnational NGO Associations

Perhaps the most salient feature of TNGO associations is that they are constituted as formalized membership associations. Previous literature on membership associations has an essentially substantialist focus and examines a common organizational challenge: how to balance the drive to attract membership and participation with

the desire to produce public goods and advance the common interests of members (Young 2001). As a result, a frequent starting point for understanding membership associations is to view them as collective action institutions in which member organizations contribute to public goods provision. From this perspective, interest groups provide public goods that are widely shared and non-excludable, such as policy advocacy. Interest group activity therefore poses challenges of collective action: why would any individual or group contribute to the provision of these public goods when they might obtain the benefit without contributing?

Olson's original work on collective action (Olson 1965) proposes several mechanisms for overcoming collective action problems in associations. These include coercion and compulsory membership (as in many unions) as well as patronage, in which larger organizations with a larger stake underwrite the efforts of others. In the absence of coercion or patrons, groups may use what Olson termed 'selective incentives': provision of private benefits to members that non-members cannot access. These might include private benefits from which non-participants can be excluded, or access to training or infrastructure. The dilemma of association structure from this perspective is to provide selective incentives sufficient to support membership levels that will produce a surplus that can finance public goods such as advocacy.

The literature on associations of private-sector firms has also examined the collective action dilemma (Maxfield and Schneider 1997), often termed the dilemma of the 'twin logics' of membership and influence (Schmitter and Streeck 1999). The logic of business association membership also involves an Olsonian balance, but somewhat reverses the logic. Rather than selective incentives financing public goods, the business association literature suggests that associations must first have sufficient policy influence that members will want to belong. The logic of influence requires that associations have sufficient membership acting with sufficient unity such that the association can exercise influence over public authorities: membership recruitment is built on the promise of influence. Empirical evidence suggests that business associations are most able to resolve collective action dilemmas and provide public goods when they have high membership density relative to the potential population of members, and when they offer valuable private benefits to members (Donner and Schneider 2000; Barber et al. 2014).

The transnational literature on associational effort has also taken up the issue of organizing and maintaining collective action. Keck and Sikkink's (1998) early work on transnational advocacy networks showed how shared norms and a commitment to principled action stimulate collective action across a range of issues. Anheier and Themudo (2002) argue that network forms of organization provide membership organizations with greater flexibility and autonomy than more hierarchical forms of organization, but others note that networked forms tend to include more formalized rules for consultation, information-sharing, and account-giving than less formal supporter-based models (Dobush and Quack 2010). Murdie (2014) argues that human rights networks are important sources of public goods for participants, enhancing their advocacy efforts, particularly for organizations at the centre of the network. Transnational networks may also play important bridging roles in diffusing

new practices across countries (Appel 2015) or acting as governance networks creating space for NGO participation in inter-governmental organizations (Willettts 2013). But the focus of much of the literature on transnational advocacy focuses on the strategies, tactics, and outcomes of advocacy or governance, rather than on relationships among the actors composing the network (Prakash and Gugerty 2010).

Our approach seeks to combine elements of structure and process to understand how the practices of TNGO associations condition the interactions of NGOs. Previous studies of NGO networks examine how structure affects power and legitimacy of network participants, suggesting that actor position within a network is a key element of agenda-setting power (Carpenter 2011; Stroup and Wong 2017). From this perspective, authority within a network is structural and positional. The TNGO associations we study are different from transnational advocacy networks in that they are relatively permanent and ongoing formal organizations. This does not imply that relationships are fixed; rather, relationships must be constantly renegotiated within the institutional constraints imposed by the association structure. Roles of individual NGO members are likely to shift across issues and evolve over time and are therefore fluid (Emirbayer and Mische 1998). We focus on the ability of TNGO associations to connect with political and societal actors across time and space, bridging state-society and national-transnational distinctions. The dual focus on external public advocacy and membership coordination is reminiscent of the anchoring practices identified by DeMars and Dijkzeul (2015). This fluid set of relationships comprising a TNGO association, we argue, takes place within a particular multi-scalar configuration and we now turn to two frameworks from organization and management studies that help us understand these configurations.

TNGO Associations as Meta-Associations

Meta-organizations are organizations composed of organizations (Ahrne and Brunsson 2005). Within a meta-organization, each member retains a considerable degree of organizational autonomy but is motivated by some means to act in the interests of the collective. While meta-organizations take many forms, they typically involve interaction among members, collective action, and the creation of a collective identity (Berkowitz and Dumez 2016). Meta-organizations are characterized by relatively horizontal distributions of authority, which may facilitate member participation as each member organization contributes to the collective decision-making (Ahrne and Brunsson 2005). We adopt insights from the meta-organizations literature to inform our work because this framework centres the mutually constitutive nature of meta-associations: members need the TNGO association to advance their claims, but the TNGO association is largely dependent on members for engagement and influence.

Ahrne and Brunsson (2005) highlight the importance of members in meta-organization function; they argue meta-organizations are at greater risk of internal conflict and competition than organizations of individuals because organizational identities are more clearly defined and differentiated than individual identities. This

propensity for internal conflict presents unique constraints that meta-organizations must navigate in order to retain membership and, thus, legitimacy. In meta-organizations, member organizations often hold considerable resources in relation to the centre. This may allow the meta-organization to achieve legitimacy with fewer participating members, but in our context raises questions about the representative legitimacy of these organizations if they claim to act on behalf of the NGOs and civil society as a whole. Meta-organizations may also try to establish monopolies in order to achieve their aims, so that organizations might face intense pressure to join, especially if meta-organizations become a means to achieve social status and legitimacy within the sector (Ahrne and Brunsson 2005). In the NGO sphere, a key resource that national NGO members of meta-associations might hold is reputational legitimacy. While TNGO associations might be able to function with a few highly reputable members, we argue that more inclusive representation is likely necessary for global legitimacy. As a result, TNGO associations may actively lower the barriers to participation for underrepresented groups of civil society organizations (CSOs).

Meta-organizations might be especially well positioned to address social issues that cross national boundaries and are difficult for organizations or legal institutions in specific nations to single-handedly address, such as climate change, sex trafficking and human rights abuses, and global trade (Vifell and Thedvall 2012). This is particularly relevant to TNGO associations, which often champion these types of issues in their advocacy and seek to improve the position of civil society actors within the pantheon of governance institutions. The meta-association literature focuses our attention on how the processes of negotiating governance and structuring activity across a wide range of organizations can result in greater ability to coordinate collective action and greater policy influence.

TNGOs as Collaborative Platforms

The literature on collaborative platforms helps elaborate the multi-scalar nature of TNGO associations. Collaborative platforms are a particular form of collaborative governance defined as ‘an organization or program with dedicated competences, institutions and resources for facilitating the creation, adaptation and success of multiple or ongoing collaborative projects or networks’ (Ansell and Gash 2018, 20). Drawing on the technological sector’s notion of a platform, these collaborative platforms are often associated with innovation in governance. Just as open-source software platforms create a space for contributors from all backgrounds to generate novel content and enhance the technology, open-source governance through collaborative platforms is argued to have the potential to stimulate and strengthen co-production of shared goods.

Under the auspices of a collaborative platform, participants are not managed, but facilitated, and structures are not set, but flexible. Central coordinating entities (backbone organizations) serve as intermediaries creating space for collaboration,

rather than as governors who mete out or exchange resources. This intermediating role cedes control of the collaboration to participants while lowering the barriers participants face to collaborating. Intermediation is accomplished through modular structuring and processes that provide general templates for collaboration, while leaving significant room to adapt to more parochial needs and opportunities. In this context, modular structuring includes the organizing of action through sets of rules or sub-group organization; these can be combined and reconfigured to reflect the needs of many distinct collaborative situations. Modular structuring implies flexibility; while the overall goal orientation of the collaborative platform might remain stable over time, the structures and processes employed to facilitate and sustain collaboration and the content of interactions may change as participants' needs and environmental circumstances change. [Ansell and Gash \(2018\)](#) suggest two critical spectra of variation in the central coordinating activities that have implications for TNGO associations: balancing control among the platform and participants in collaborative design; and the intermediation practices between the platform and participants, which might range from catalysing collective action to essentially serving as a database of participant inputs.

Empirical research on collaborative platforms as they pertain to governance is limited, but existing case studies point to example characteristics and functions. [Berdej and Armitage \(2016\)](#) find that collaborative platforms can serve as information-sharing forums that essentially reduce the costs of interaction. By underwriting the central coordinating functions needed for successful collaboration to occur, TNGO associations might act as platforms that facilitate collaboration without exerting heavy managerial control. This balance aims to preserve the autonomy of member organizations while providing templates which members adapt to their own contexts.

The collaborative platforms literature points to several concrete practices that TNGO associations might leverage to initiate, structure, and sustain collaboration amongst distributed national and regional NGO associations, including informational frameworks for interfacing directly with members, interfacing through sub-groups, and practices that aggregate information on behalf of members. Frameworks can serve as a 'roadmap' for programme implementation ([Borys et al. 2012](#)), but they can also take the form of regulative or certification standards, particularly in cases where comparability of participants' actions or work products is paramount ([Collignon et al. 2021](#)). Depending on the overarching goals of the network of participating NGO associations and the types of collaborative goods to be produced, TNGO associations may utilize distinct constellations of practices which could either enhance or shrink opportunities for collaboration.

Our approach in this chapter seeks to combine elements of structure and process and uses a relational frame to understand how TNGO associations condition NGO member interactions. The literature on meta-associations helps us to understand and characterize the reciprocal relationship between member organizations and the association. The collaborative platforms literature shows how platforms are constituted by a constellation of practices that can reduce the costs of interaction and improve opportunities for innovation. We use both these literatures to explore the NGO interactions mediated by TNGO associations.

Approach and Methods

To address our questions, we use exploratory case studies of two of the major TNGO associations active today, AGNA and Forus International. We draw on data collected from key informant interviews with professional staff of each association, observations of member convenings, and document analysis, including archives from each of the TNGO associations' websites, reports on past events and convenings, annual reports and strategic plans, and research reports.

AGNA is a permanent working group of the global CSO CIVICUS. AGNA's stated goals are to convene and support national and regional NGO associations worldwide in order to increase collaboration across national and regional boundaries and influence global governance institutions and processes. AGNA is governed by its own elected advisory body of member associations and specifies its own strategic goals but relies on CIVICUS for most of its funding ([AGNA 2020](#)). It now represents ninety-two NGO associations in eighty-one countries.

Forus International (formerly the International Forum of NGO Platforms) was founded in 2008 with the goal of influencing global institutions and policy while contributing to building a more united international community. Forus works to enhance member capacities for participation and to influence public policies through participation in global negotiations, convenings, and mobilizations and is more clearly focused on transnational action than is AGNA. Forus has grown into a structured network with sixty-nine national NGO associations and five regional coalitions.

While these TNGOs are broadly similar in scope and aim, they have slightly different histories and contexts that condition their activities. First, the two have somewhat different organizational structures. AGNA is a sub-unit of a larger organization—CIVICUS—that itself engages in global advocacy and transnational action. AGNA members are also CIVICUS members, so that some AGNA member efforts may be simultaneously carried out at two levels: the AGNA group and the larger CIVICUS membership organization. Second, their focus on global advocacy differs. Forus has a more singular function as a platform for its member associations to better engage on the global stage, and as a result there is not a need to negotiate between the TNGO association and a superseding entity. Forus emphasizes its members' capacity to advocate on the international level and has a more explicit goal of participation in global fora, particularly the 2030 Agenda. Since AGNA is subsumed under the larger organization of CIVICUS, many global advocacy issues are often taken up under the umbrella of CIVICUS, rather than AGNA. Third, their funding structures differ: Forus receives much of its support from external funders such as the European Union and the French Development Agency ([Forus n.d.](#)). This enables Forus to administer sub-grants to its members, often to incentivize projects or alleviate gaps, such as some members' lack of technology during the COVID-19 pandemic. In comparison, AGNA members may receive benefits through CIVICUS, but AGNA does not offer them sub-grants. [Table 9.1](#) provides basic organizational data on the two TNGOs.

Table 9.1 AGNA and Forus organizational structures and membership

	AGNA	Forus
Number of national members	78	69
Number of regional members	14	5
Membership dues (in USD)	\$50–\$4,000 depending on association assets.	\$370/annum, on average
Governance structure	Steering committee of members serves as central advisory body. Elected every three years by general membership.	General assembly (GA) composed of 1 voting rep per association; GA decides on strategy and planning.
Primary areas of activity	Convening and networking with peers; improving member legitimacy, accountability, and transparency; capacity-building; improving regulatory environments.	Convening and coalition-building among members; capacity-building for participation in global fora; advocacy on public policies.
Staffing	1 full-time equivalent	9 full-time equivalents

Source: Authors' own compilation.

Findings

TNGO Associations as Sites of Interaction

Sites of interaction are socially bounded spaces where a patterned matrix of social ties and configurations take place (Deloffre and Quack, [Chapter 1](#), this volume). TNGO associations act as sites of interaction within which configurations of processes and practices produce social and political effects. As Deloffre and Quack note, a key feature of sites of interaction is that they are situated across scales. As multi-scalar organizations, TNGO associations must seek to bridge across scales if they are to undertake global action that is relevant to the national level on which member organizations also act.

By creating spaces for members to influence governance, priorities, and programming, TNGO associations help member associations realize their own power of action. Their centrality allows them to serve as a platform where participating members have opportunities to create practices and processes in pursuit of legitimacy both for the association itself and the NGO sector more broadly. These practices shape the field by producing ordering effects. We focus on several of the processes and themes featured in the collaborative platforms and meta-association literatures, including modular structuring processes, balancing control and intermediation, and intermediation processes and frameworks.

Modularity in Governance and Membership Processes

We find both TNGO associations use modularity as a configuring process that helps structure member interaction. Modular processes serve as interfaces that preserve centralized goals while providing opportunities for members to exercise choice over how those goals are applied in their own contexts (Ansell and Gash 2018). AGNA and Forus' pursuit of modular structures stems from their recognition of two important factors. First, they must meet members where they are in terms of their resources and flexibility. This acknowledgement means that TNGO associations must create opportunities for collaboration that range from high to low effort. Second, as with any international organization, members have varying contexts and interests. Therefore, TNGO associations must design structures that are highly adaptable.

Forus and AGNA's distinct governance structures affect the configurations of practices they employ. As an independent, legally chartered NGO, Forus is governed by two key bodies: its general assembly is the main decision-making body, composed of one representative from each national NGO association; and a council of fifteen members, elected by the general assembly with regional distribution of seats. Within the council, there is an executive committee and three thematic committees. Their activities include ensuring the coordination of activities, proper functioning of the executive team, and reporting on the team's activities. As part of the CIVICUS NGO platform, AGNA is led by an elected steering committee of nine members with regional distribution that plays a strong role in advising AGNA. However, CIVICUS is the central governing unit for AGNA and all AGNA members are members of CIVICUS as well as AGNA. As an independent organization, Forus can mobilize members through its governance structure to set strategy and make operational decisions. AGNA's ability to steer the organization is more constrained since some strategic decisions—including which global advocacy campaigns to join—are taken at the parent organization level.

As multi-scalar institutions, sites of interaction face the need to produce legitimate action on multiple levels. Legitimacy is central to TNGO associations and to member NGOs. As Hilhorst (2003) reminds us, what is important about the social category of NGO is that it is a claim-bearing label—a claim that requires legitimation through the act of '*NGOing*' (see also Deloffre and Quack, Chapter 1, this volume). In Deloffre and Quack's formulation, *NGOing* is a process of claim-making (to represent certain interests or to supply goods and services) and subsequent acceptance or rejection by key audiences (Chapter 1, this volume). For TNGO associations, legitimacy claims on the global stage rest on claims of global representation through a membership that represents a wide range of countries. In the same way, national member associations use membership in TNGO associations to support their own claims to legitimacy and to bolster their claim to speak on behalf of the NGO sector in their national context. Membership selection processes are therefore a strategic lever through which NGOs negotiate which organizations have access to interactions (Ahrne and Brunsson 2005).

Formal membership practices are similar for both Forus and AGNA. Core/active membership is reserved for one national NGO association per country, which must have a generalist focus (rather than thematic, such as health, environment, etc.). Only core members are given formal decision-making powers such as the right to vote and the ability to serve in the chief advisory body (the 'council' in Forus and the 'steering committee' in AGNA). NGO associations that are regional or thematic may gain membership under an affiliate/associate class. While these other member types may participate in the general meeting or assembly, they do not have voting authority.

The two TNGO associations differ slightly in how they coordinate diverse member types. These variations in practice may be related to choices they have made about modular structuring. AGNA's position within the CIVICUS network constrains choices around capacity and decision-making, since many strategic decisions rest with CIVICUS rather than AGNA. As an autonomous organization, Forus has greater flexibility and scope in its activities. Forus raises funds independently and can financially support members through sub-grants to undertake a range of endeavours. In the past, AGNA has only been able to offer support for travel to in-person meetings and staff exchanges.

Of the 166 national and regional NGO associations we identified through membership lists, we found twenty-five national-level associations that belong to both TNGO associations, suggesting that in some cases national associations expect distinct benefits from each TNGO association. In nine countries, two different associations belong to each of the transnational associations, suggesting a potential 'division of labour' at the national level in some countries. There is no clear regional or other pattern to joint membership. AGNA membership includes fourteen regional NGO associations. Forus include only five and of these five, four also belong to AGNA.

AGNA and Forus have historically viewed national associations that are open to all NGOs in a country as the most legitimate representatives of a country's civil society. This view is enshrined in their governance policies: only national NGO associations have the right to vote and serve on formal decision-making bodies and only one association is allowed per country. This necessarily excludes some associations and may generate competitive dynamics at the national level. Membership policies can also generate tensions between the TNGO and national-level NGOs if national NGOs disagree with the decision about which national platform gets membership status.¹ AGNA has found one way to address competitive pressure for membership given the one association per country membership rule, by allowing associations from a country to rotate membership status, with associations taking turns having full membership status.

A challenge for both TNGO associations is that membership policies and processes must remain fluid to accommodate new types of organizations that seek to join these global organizations. Yet these member national associations have their own individual identities that are shaped by their own country-of-origin context, as well as by the civil society actors that they represent. As a result, members have

differing preferences over membership strategies. The emergence of new member types is challenging, given that TNGO association identity and legitimacy is enhanced when they can speak with a unified voice. Incorporating new member types may require NGO associations to modify their values, goals, and structures to facilitate coordination, which will need to be negotiated among existing members (Dlamini 2020).

To maintain legitimacy on the global stage, TNGO associations may need to find ways to include emerging voices in the sector while reducing the threat to existing members who may have long-held beliefs regarding association strategy and values (Karlberg and Jacobsson 2015). Forus reports pressure to incorporate emerging civil society actors, such as social movements, Indigenous grassroots groups, and feminist and LGBTQIA+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, asexual) movements that are active in global advocacy efforts.² These actors, however, have distinct identities and tend to operate differently from the more traditional NGO associations, sometimes moving at a faster pace and taking more disruptive or confrontational approaches to advocacy. For Forus members who value their ability to represent the sector in interactions with governments, inclusion of these members can be challenging.

In contrast, AGNA has faced less pressure to incorporate emerging civil society actors (who can be easily accommodated within CIVICUS), but more pressure to incorporate thematic networks with expertise in particular subject areas.³ In AGNA's case, we see how the modular structure of AGNA within the broader CIVICUS organization provides flexibility, because these organizations can pursue membership in CIVICUS directly. The ability to redirect these other organizational types to CIVICUS and to provide selective opportunities for advocacy engagement enables AGNA to preserve their organization as a space for national NGO associations devoted to enhancing the capacity of CSOs. In this way, membership selection is used to maintain the agenda-setting power of national NGO associations and the identity of AGNA as a capacity-building effort.

While TNGO associations' membership policies can create a social hierarchy through inclusion and exclusion, they may avoid the risk mentioned by Deloffre and Quack (Chapter 1, this volume, p. 17) of, reifying categories of desirable behaviour because stratification is based on organizational scope, rather than behaviour or performance. While both associations encourage members to cultivate features such as accountability, transparency, and inclusiveness, membership is not contingent on their performance. In our observations, we find very few instances of informal hierarchy or status differentials within TNGO associations, although differing levels of participation between members affect influence within the association. While both associations make strong attempts to incorporate all members' input, highly active members may naturally play a larger role in shaping the associations' direction and identity. Both TNGO associations acknowledge that not all members can participate or contribute to the same degree, and attribute this inequality largely to differences in members' resources and capacity.

Steering Processes

Steering is the process of governing that involves determining goals, agreeing on feasible activities, and finding ways to drive activity towards goals; steering processes produce ordering effects, or a set of social structures and institutions (Deloffre and Quack, [Chapter 1](#), this volume). While AGNA and Forus both have member-led processes for formal decision-making, the central secretariat also plays a large role in steering informal decision-making and directing ongoing activities. Negotiating the balance of central control versus member-led activity is a key organizational challenge for these associations.

Steering in both associations is indirect, meaning that governance largely depends on practices such as reflexivity and bi-directional communication. AGNA and Forus both strive to develop processes where members engage in collective problem-solving, provide feedback, and propose ideas. Members participate in a process of identifying needs, renegotiating meanings, and envisioning solutions. In both TNGO associations, the central secretariat views itself as a site of coordination, responding to member input on the content and nature of association activities. The difference in central secretariat size, however, conditions the amount of coordination and steering that can take place. AGNA has a single dedicated staff member for all members, while Forus has a larger secretariat with staff dedicated to advocacy coordination, capacity development, networks engagement, communications, and so forth.

Information Collection and Frameworks

In both associations, developing information collection processes and frameworks are important processes for building peer-to-peer interactions that are developed by and for the members themselves. For both organizations, the steering process tends to begin with information collection and intermediation, a significant challenge among a far-flung global membership.

Forus has the most comprehensive effort, collecting substantial information from its members through surveys, open feedback platforms, and other avenues.⁴ Information enables them to identify needs and evaluate their current practices. As one Forus staff member explained, it is relatively easy to gauge members' engagement through day-to-day interactions, but these perceptions are often not tangible or backed by systematic data.⁵ As a result, they seek more concrete data to justify specific changes. Forus is developing their own communication platform which will allow Forus to gather 'touch point' data through micro surveys. This platform is meant to enhance bi-directional communication between Forus and its members. It is planned to be available 24/7 and allow members to submit feedback anonymously.⁶ Information is ultimately used to develop activities that are salient and engaging for members. In other words, these activities bring members to the table and enable TNGO associations to coordinate collective efforts.

AGNA historically had to rely on information collected through CIVICUS' annual constituent survey, which did not always meet its needs. As a result, AGNA has

gradually expanded their own modes of information collection to better meet member needs.⁷ AGNA has also begun to implement a feedback system following each meeting; the agenda for subsequent meetings is then based on this feedback. In recent years, AGNA has increasingly sought member feedback through various means, including the development of a customer relationship management system.⁸

Once information is collected, associations build informational frameworks that act as informational guides and address topics relevant to members' needs in conjunction with the TNGO associations' larger strategic agenda. AGNA and Forus' informational frameworks differ, linked to their different organizational histories. As an interest group nested within a larger NGO network, AGNA historically focused on building organizational capacity, since advocacy was primarily within the purview of its parent organization, CIVICUS. AGNA tends to publish guides intended to help national associations build their own organizational capacity, including topics such as managing a national association and managing institutional relationships.⁹

Forus focuses on both advocacy and building organizational capacity and its frameworks tend to focus on building platforms for global advocacy. Forus receives funding from international governing bodies for the express purposes of coordinating global civil society advocacy, a task which is otherwise costly to catalyse. Guides published by Forus include topics such as how CSOs can play a larger role in their country's voluntary national reporting (VNR) process as part of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Forus also crafts these guidelines to be flexible to countries' varying political environments. For example, their guidelines on the VNR process also include information on how CSOs might take alternative action, such as a parallel VNR process or shadow reports when their governments are less inviting of CSO participation (Forus 2018). In this sense, the guidelines are adaptable to members' context.

Informational frameworks can serve as platforms that help lower the cost of collaboration. For example, the UNmute campaign by Forus responded to a virtual High Level Political Forum (HLPF) in 2020. Forus distributed the UNmute 'social media kit' with visuals and information in four languages. NGO associations were then guided to distribute these materials via their social media and incorporate information from their own contexts. Through this campaign, NGOs increased awareness of the virtual forum to collectively reduce the risk that CSO voices were underrepresented in the HLPF. In this case, Forus incentivized collaboration by reducing the effort required of NGO associations. While the campaign distributed a standardized message, NGO associations were invited to adapt this message and use it as a launching pad to discuss their own challenges and solutions (Forus 2020).

Frameworks for Participation and Peer-to-Peer Action

Once informational frameworks are in place, TNGO association secretariats play a brokering role by facilitating peer-to-peer interactions and intentionally working to alter networks and connect members with shared interests. Historically, annual in-person meetings of the membership were an important venue for peer-to-peer interactions. The global COVID-19 pandemic disrupted these processes.

Both associations recognized that inequities within the TNGO associations were being exacerbated with the move online since members from low- and middle-income countries often suffered from poor internet connectivity and bandwidth. This came on top of existing inequities for members from countries where English, French, or Spanish are not the dominant language. The pandemic also presented an opportunity for TNGO association members to work together to share information that might help national members mitigate the physical, economic, and social effects of the virus.

Forus' first step was to collect information on members' needs, including barriers to participation and challenges that they were facing in their own countries. This effort allowed Forus to redirect their efforts and distribute information which was meaningful to members' new situation. Forus also sought to address inequities and to alleviate the technology gap during the COVID-19 pandemic by offering sub-grants to members to purchase technology that would enable them to participate in meetings. In addition, Forus worked with an external service to provide interpretation in multiple languages during its meetings. Devoting financial resources to the virtual transition may have enabled Forus to sustain participation at higher rates during the COVID-19 pandemic.

AGNA found it needed to make adaptations in moving to an online format. Prior to 2020, AGNA had used in-person events as opportunities to overcome connectivity barriers. This worked well since all members travelled to a central location and met in person, providing equal access (to all who could attend). While the move to a virtual environment could support inclusion if some members could not travel to an annual conference, in practice the transition to a virtual environment caused certain regions to reduce their participation substantially due to time zone and connectivity issues.¹⁰ AGNA began holding regional meetings to address time zone issues and to ensure that simultaneous translation was available in all meetings. Feedback on the regional approach appears positive; one participant noted 'Excellent deep dive into country context—not rushed and without an information overload. Very helpful to have a thinking space to understand and connect issues & context-specific strategies.' Another noted: 'Regional meetings are very good!' (AGNA 2021). The regional meetings also highlighted the challenges of developing a shared strategy across member associations given that even regional members may experience very different local contexts. For example, in the Caribbean regional meeting, members reported vastly different experiences in building productive relationships with national governments, with some members facing interference and repression, and others reporting effective partnerships to address issues such as COVID-19 response.¹¹

A second configuring process is the use of sub-groups to structure opportunities for peer-to-peer learning and information exchange. These sub-groups can be structured by region or by issue area. Sub-groups can take various forms, but often act as a deliberative body or working group to tackle different issues. Forus working groups tend to be organized thematically. One example is Forus' member-led project, Platforms Unite: Partnerships for Advocacy. The project resulted in the creation of the Network of Portuguese Speaking NGO Platforms (known by its Portuguese acronym

RePLONG), an NGO association which connects national NGO associations from Portuguese-speaking countries to share insight on advocacy. Initiated by conversations that took place during the event, the subsequent partnership grew out of a shared understanding that combatting inequality could be overcome by fostering a democratic environment in their countries (Forus 2019b).

Forus members have also had success with a thematic working group on Protection of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse, which began in 2019 as an initiative of Bond, a Forus member from the United Kingdom. The working group was joined by thirty-one Forus members and three external civil society networks. The resulting dialogue led to the development of a toolkit that provides guidelines, tools, and resources for CSO networks to prevent exploitation and abuse in the international development sector.

AGNA's organizational structure features both region-specific and task-specific sub-groups. AGNA is in the process of building a model in which members take ownership over network activities but has occasionally found this shift difficult. Some sub-groups have been particularly innovative, such as their working group on transparency and accountability. This group has introduced new efforts such as a website to showcase members' initiatives and to publish a series of reports on transparency and accountability.¹² AGNA maintains several other issue-specific sub-groups on topics such as communications and resources and sustainability, which tend to emerge based on members' needs and preferences.

For AGNA, the fourteen regional NGO association members have the potential to act as coordinating bodies within the TNGO associations, but to date that potential has not been realized. As noted above, the regional meetings started during the COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the benefit of connecting members within the same region, and found that members which share similar backgrounds tend to exchange information on how they apply broad international goals in their local context. For example, in AGNA's most recent regional meetings, some European members consulted with others about effective strategies to advocate for civil society with national governments.¹³ In another regional meeting, Pacific members exchanged resources that could be used to manage the spread of false information.¹⁴

Staff exchanges are another strategy to promote shared action. These are particularly important to AGNA, given its focus on capacity building. Staff exchanges provide resources to allow one staff member from an NGO association to switch places with another, thereby observing the experience of a peer NGO association. In recounting these examples, AGNA highlighted the importance of opportunities for members to interact in-person. These peer-to-peer interactions have historically been a go-to option to strengthen social ties amongst members; strong social ties tend to encourage members to initiate and direct collective activity that does not rely on the secretariat to be sustained. This is particularly important for AGNA, which currently has only one staff member devoted to member activities. Several members commented on staffing issues at the regional meetings, with one commenting, 'very concerned about the shrinking staff for AGNA. We only have 1 coordinator where we used to have 5. It is not sustainable.' Another commented, 'It is not enough! AGNA matters within CIVICUS' (AGNA 2021).

Discussion and Conclusions

In this chapter we show how transnational NGO associations function as sites of interaction in which practices and processes of configuration act to structure and shape interactions among member NGOs. We use the literature on meta-organizations to suggest that a key feature of TNGO associations is that interactions take place at several levels: between the central TNGO secretariat and independent national NGO association members, as well as among the member NGO associations themselves. A key challenge for meta-organizations is balancing central direction with member control. The collaborative platforms literature complements this by shedding light on organizational structures that help address the challenges of self-sustaining, multi-scalar activity. Modular design is intended to create interfaces that lower the cost of member collaboration, to lower the cost of managing collective action, and to allow considerable room for creativity. This design is also intended to enable members to exercise a high degree of decision-making power over the actions that define TNGO associations.

To inform their modular structures, TNGO associations invest considerable resources into developing information collection processes and information frameworks. Informational frameworks support peer-to-peer interactions in which members are able to take up issues of most interest to them. This configuration of practices employed by TNGO associations produce ordering effects in the field. This ordering is shaped by membership policies that constitute the space where members interact and make decisions, determining which organizations participate, how much authority they hold, and what opportunities exist for collaboration. These ordering effects are not always equitable: some members are able to participate more actively in these activities than others, often based on their organizational capacity. Both associations recognize that members have varying degrees to which they are able to engage. *Forus*, in particular, works to create a range of opportunities—with more or less intense participation—that range from contributing information to more active engagement such as leading a working group. With a smaller central staff, *AGNA* relies more on membership to take up issues of interest to them.

While members recognize that self-governance is important in the long term, member participation has often been limited by resource constraints.¹⁵ *AGNA* notes that financial support may be a key barrier. *AGNA* members typically do not receive compensation for tasks associated with network management, but when compensation or funding are available, members tend to be more responsive. In comparison, *Forus*' working groups are largely member-initiated and often used to collate information (*Forus* 2019a, 2022). In addition, *Forus* members may gain access to funds from entities such as the European Union and the French Development Agency. Issue-specific sub-groups often result in a diverse range of outcomes, dependent on members' contexts and needs. According to the collaborative platforms literature, a high degree of member control may be the source of this drive towards innovation (*Ansell and Miura* 2019).

While member engagement is partially attributed to their material resources, it may also be based on non-material resources such as their expertise and influence.

Given that some members consistently participate, they may develop relationships and knowledge that reinforce their participation and this process has the potential to reify pre-existing power and resource dynamics, particularly between higher income and lower income countries. This unequal access to resources may cause exclusionary effects when members are unable to participate in interactions, affecting their opportunities for collaboration and ability to contribute to collective decisions. Recognizing that inclusivity must extend beyond mere membership to participation in these processes, both TNGO associations make efforts to alleviate constraints on participation through supporting things like regional meetings and online interactions.

TNGO associations play critical roles as coordinating entities for transnational and national action. As many national governments restrict civic space, national NGO associations must not only support the NGO sector in the home country, but also face pressure to evolve and expand their efforts to the regional and transnational scales. TNGO associations like AGNA and Forus create space for members to interact through conferences, working groups, and other fora of debate. In these spaces, members may discover potential allies which result in synergistic coordination. These relationships allow members to leverage comparative advantage and exchange knowledge through peer-to-peer processes.

Importantly, AGNA and Forus, as transnational entities, may serve as a ladder by which NGO associations engage not only with each other, but with other transnational entities such as the United Nations. Forus is a prominent example, whereby it actively encourages members to participate in policy dialogue at the transnational level such as through the VNR process. For NGO associations, this alignment with other civil society actors in the transnational environment is important to their legitimacy and sense of identity. These forms of collaboration, however, are likely contested, and internal power dynamics within coalitions may give rise to conflict both within the transnational associations and in the national civic space.

Our theoretical base in meta-organizations helps identify challenges that TNGO associations face, particularly related to decision-making and sustainability. A clear example includes the regional conferences convened by AGNA, where issues and potential solutions mature before reaching the general assembly. However, AGNA also acknowledges that not all regions show the same level of cohesion. For example, national NGO associations in Latin America have a history of coordinating their actions (Appel 2015). This history eases communication and allows their regional coalition to thrive. In comparison, other regions may not have a history of interaction or hold varying norms of internet use, hindering their ability to engage in transnational interaction.

TNGO associations, as meta-organizations and as producers of public goods, face a sustainability challenge as they strive to constantly meet members' evolving interests. This challenge calls on TNGO associations to be flexible and adaptive in what they ask of members. Modular structures fill this need by being member-driven and relatively independent from the TNGO association itself. Modular structures enable members to take the lead, while the TNGO association acts primarily as a facilitator. In many cases, these structures emerge, change, and disappear organically depending on members' demand for them.

At a time when the potential and opportunity for global action is increasing and the civic space in many countries is narrowing, national NGO associations are likely to face new challenges as they navigate a desire for transnational action with increased repression at home. As a result, TNGO associations are likely to be increasingly important intermediaries that can support NGO associations in navigating this dilemma. As meta-organizations, TNGO associations can include national associations in a global community of similar associations engaged in problem-solving and mutual support. This global platform might also allow national associations the cover to push issues that they could not support at home. Through their modular platform structures, TNGO associations also allow national associations to engage in modes and at times that are aligned with capacity, resources, and local context. The NGO–NGO interactions held by these TNGO associations are critical to this ability to create mutually constituted legitimacy and potential for action.

Notes

1. AGNA, Staff Interview, 5 November 2021.
2. Forus, Staff Interview, 25 June 2021.
3. AGNA, Staff Interview, 5 November 2021.
4. Forus, Staff Interview, 18 August 2021.
5. Forus, Staff Interview, 18 August 2021.
6. Forus, Staff Interview, 25 June 2021.
7. AGNA, Staff Interview, 5 November 2021.
8. AGNA, Staff Interview, 9 December 2020.
9. AGNA, Staff Interview, 9 December 2020.
10. AGNA, Staff Interview, 5 November 2021.
11. AGNA, Caribbean Regional Member Meeting, online, 20 May 2021.
12. AGNA, Staff Interview, 5 November 2021.
13. AGNA, Latin America Regional Member Meeting, 30 April 2021.
14. AGNA, Pacific Regional Meeting, online, 18 May 2021.
15. AGNA, Staff Interview, 9 December 2020.

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NGO–NGO Interactions, Brazil’s Counterterrorism Legislation, and Beyond

Susan Appe and Ana Paula Borges Pinho

Introduction

In March 2016, then-Brazilian president Dilma Rousseff signed the country’s first law ever to be specifically designed to counter terrorism.¹ Purportedly linked to international pressure from the Financial Action Task Force (FATF)—the standards-setting transnational organization which combats threats to the international financial system—the law was the outcome of a contentious legislative process started in June 2015 ([Planalto 2016](#)). From its introduction into parliamentary debates, Brazil’s organized civil society mobilized to contest and curb its potentially negative impact on the Brazilian civic space, as different types of protests and demonstrations could ultimately be considered as terrorist acts by the government. The issue is even more pressing considering the country’s historical tendency to criminalize organized civil society and social movements, and the substantial number of bills criminalizing demonstrations that had been introduced in response to protests in 2013.

Partly due to the role played by the Criminal Justice Network (CJN), a civil society network, the version of the law adopted in March 2016 is considered to be much less harmful to organized civil society. The CJN’s objectives address issues around public security in Brazil. Since its inception, it has provided a space for nongovernmental organizations in Brazil to relate to one another—what Deloffre and Quack’s framework chapter call ‘sites of interaction’ ([Chapter 1](#), this volume); indeed, where social ties and configurations overlap. We pose the following question: how and to what extent did NGO–NGO interactions take shape in the policy field of counterterrorism? We present an evolving network as a site of interaction in Brazil with relational processes as the unit of analysis. As our research demonstrates, the interactions through the CJN had an ordering effect, leading to more institutionalized spaces for NGOs to interact and assume agency in the counterterrorism policy field and beyond. Initial interactions around concerns about public safety and criminal justice reform are shown to be building blocks to NGO–NGO interactions in this field. The case shows transcalar interactions among local and international

NGOs and diffused interactions with other actors and the broader public. In Brazil the relational processes reveal how NGOs created their agency that then produced further collective advocacy and the creation of the new Collaborative Advocacy Network.

NGO–NGO interactions in Brazil are taking place in a context that scholars term the ‘shrinking space’, describing the increasing constraints and threats experienced by organized civil society (e.g., [Carothers and Brechenmacher 2014](#); [Dupuy et al. 2016](#); [Dupuy and Prakash 2018](#); [Brechenmacher and Carothers 2019](#)). Most of the research on civic space has focused on national-level regulations and restrictions, however, some of the most pertinent policy areas and regulations—like counterterrorism—have gone well beyond national borders, affecting national legislation and international relations. In this context, civil society networks at local, national, regional, and transnational levels have emerged as important players ([Keck and Sikkink 1998](#); [Appel 2016](#)). Interactions of Brazilian NGOs have quickly become transcalar, as they worked with local peers with an international focus, international NGOs active in the country, and a global network of NGOs formed to understand and counter the negative effects of FATF recommendations on civil society. As a consequence, the Brazil case contributes to a deeper understanding of interactions and what we consider relational processes among NGOs at local, national, and international levels within a transnational policy field such as counterterrorism.

Background: Organized Civil Society, Counterterrorism, and FATF

Our analysis begins with the acknowledgment that organized civil society is increasingly linked to global security issues. After the Cold War era, NGOs and organized civil society had long been suggested as a necessary determinant of democracy and good governance. However, the 11 September 2001 attacks in the US dramatically changed these assumptions. Civil society started to be perceived as potential contributors to human insecurity ([Sidel 2006](#)). Although the 9/11 attack did not indicate significant changes in the strategies of terrorists ([Enders and Sandler 2005](#)) and there is no firm evidence that terrorist organizations take advantage of NGOs and other civil society organizations ([Bolleyer and Gauja 2017](#)), it was enough to raise states’ concerns about connections between civil society, namely NGOs, and terrorist organizations for money laundering, in particular.

This securitization became normalized ([HSC and ECNL 2018](#)) as the ‘[t]ransnational terrorist attacks ... provided governments with strong impetus to tighten regulations on the operation of non-state actors within and across their borders’ ([Bloodgood and Tremblay-Boire 2011](#), 146). Governments and international organizations combatting terrorism and money laundering have assumed that NGOs with an international scope in particular are ‘like international terrorist networks, [they] are non-state, non-profit, transnational organizations consisting

of interconnected (networked) members and activists organized into branches (or in terrorism terminology, cells) engaging in coordinated, transnational campaigns often to change government practices and policies' ([Bloodgood and Tremblay-Boire 2011](#), 146). In this context, transnational NGOs are likened to terrorist networks across several features: they raise funds and bring people together; they transfer people and money across borders; they build communication networks; and sometimes they purposively try to get around governments. In addition, national and international non-profits have been known to break laws (e.g., environmental campaigns and trespassing) and some terrorist organizations, such as International Islamic Relief Organization in the Philippines and Indonesia, have paired with NGOs for service provision ([Bloodgood and Tremblay-Boire 2011](#)).

Civil society scholars argue that an aim of counterterrorism laws should be to make sure legitimate NGOs are still able to operate while preventing the abuse of NGOs by terrorist organizations ([Carter et al. 2008](#); [Bolleyer and Gauja 2017](#)). However, most agree that counterterrorism legislation is used by governments to restrict space for civil society action. Counterterrorism laws can negatively impact civil society's creativity, effectiveness, and its expressions of diverse voices ([Sidel 2006](#); [Howell et al. 2008](#)), whilst imposing significantly onerous compliance costs for NGOs through the complicated financial reporting that is now required ([Howell 2006](#)). Also, counterterrorism laws can be used by governments to target political opponents ([Howell 2006](#); [Howell et al. 2008](#)).

The larger context of global counterterrorism policy is led by the FATF. The FATF is an international, governmental organization established in 1989 and housed at the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development headquarters in Paris. It is considered the 'global counter-terror finance regime' ([Keatinge 2014](#)). It has only thirty-nine members, comprised mostly by developed countries and a few middle-income ones; yet over 190 jurisdictions are committed to implementing its recommendations ([FATF n.d.](#)). The FATF's objectives are to 'set standards and promote effective implementation of legal, regulatory and operational measures for combating money laundering, terrorist financing and other related threats to the integrity of the international financial system' ([FATF n.d.](#)). The organization works through the issuing of 'Recommendations' (forty in total), supported by 'Interpretive Notes' and 'Best Practices Papers' ([FATF n.d.](#)). FATF has been described as 'the most powerful intergovernmental organization you have never heard of' ([Hayes 2014](#)).

Terrorism became a part of FATF's scope after 9/11. Prior to this, FATF was centred on money laundering and its links to drugs and organized crime. FATF put new rules into place within six weeks after 9/11, and without any consultation with national governments. If countries do not comply with FATF recommendations, they put at risk investments, trade opportunities, and official development assistance. FATF is described as having a 'potent' effect on national law (even if it is not part of international law, nor are the FATF standards binding). That is, FATF recommendations 'incentivize member states to increase state regulation of nonprofits in an effort to ensure a compliant or LC [largely compliant] rating in the regular mutual evaluation rounds' ([Breen et al. 2019](#), 708). Given the restrictions placed on civil society

actors around the world, FATF has been considered an ‘external catalyst’ and part of the international pressures to further regulate the non-profit sector (Breen et al. 2019, 18).

In 2015, an unprecedented counterterrorism bill was introduced by the Brazilian Executive Branch, then led by President Dilma Rousseff. Her popularity among the public and in Congress was plummeting, as corruption scandals and a looming economic recession threatened the country’s stability. At the same time, FATF was exerting considerable pressure on the government to strengthen domestic legislation against terrorism. In April 2015, FATF’s former president, Roger Wilkins, led a delegation visit to Brazil. During this visit, the Brazilian government was warned that unless it approved new counterterrorism legislation by October 2015, the country could be ousted from FATF and, thus, weaken its position in the international financial markets (Assi 2015). The delegation also highlighted the fact that Brazil was the only G20 country lacking legislation against terrorism financing.

By June 2015, a bill had been drafted (PL 2016/2015). While recognizing Brazil had never suffered a terrorist attack, the statement of motivation that accompanied the bill emphasized the international threat posed by terrorism (Brazil’s Executive Branch 2015) and the importance of adapting domestic legislation to international treaties, namely those associated with FATF (Brazil’s Executive Branch 2015). The statement of motivation was signed on 16 June 2015 by the ministers of justice and finance, both of whom had met with FATF’s president during his visit to Brazil just months before in April (Assi 2015). The government had an unenviable mission: to create counterterrorism legislation that could appease FATF, and at the same time avoid alienating social movements that formed the support base of the president’s Workers’ Party. The bill proposed by the Executive, therefore, explicitly included a civil society safeguard, stating that it did not apply to individual or collective action in political protests by social movements or by unions driven by social goals (Brazil’s Executive Branch 2015).

Nevertheless, when the bill went from the Executive to be analysed and voted on by the Congress, thirty-five amendments were proposed by congresspersons, six of which were approved (Oliveira Maia 2015). Some of the most relevant amendments broadened the definition of what constitutes terrorism and increased the length of sentences for punishment. Other amendments were proposed to weaken the civil society safeguard by restricting the situations it would apply to; while other amendments sought to strengthen it by broadening the groups it sought to protect. At the Senate there were attempts to completely exclude the civil society safeguard, but the Lower House rejected the move. In the end, the bill was strengthened by incorporating religious, class, and professional groups to be safeguarded, along with acts by political protesters and social movements (Planalto 2016). The congressperson responsible for overseeing the bill’s legislative process, Arthur Oliveira Maia (2015), praised the multi-party efforts to swiftly pass the bill by Brazilian Congress’ standards—bills take an average of 1,263 days to be approved or not by the Brazilian Congress (Marcelino 2020); it took 273 days for the anti-terrorism bill to be signed into law.

Once the bill was submitted for presidential approval in March 2016, some of the congressional amendments were considered too broad and imprecise by the executive. This led to partial presidential vetoes, but soon the law (Planalto 2016) was signed by President Rousseff on 16 March 2016.² In order to explore how NGO–NGO interactions shape this policy field of counterterrorism, we explore relational processes through Brazil’s CJN. In the next section we outline our research approach.

Our Research Approach

Our analysis seeks to better understand NGO–NGO interactions within the policy field of counterterrorism and implications for both global governance and Brazilian contexts. Our unit of analysis is the relational processes that allowed for NGO–NGO interactions to emerge and to be legitimized in this policy field. Our data collection and analysis entailed a review of over 2,000 pages of organizational archival documents across FATF, government, and NGO documents (see Table 10.1). We corroborated our document analysis through interviews with key NGO leaders in Brazil and copious field notes from participant observation (see Table 10.2).

As we began our data collection and analysis, our initial stage of coding was conducted and informed by the larger global context about counterterrorism and the specifics of the Brazilian case at the country level. We used deductive and inductive coding approaches, drawing on the literature as well as allowing codes to emerge from our interpretation and analysis. In the second stage, we began memoing to explore more of the evidence related to NGO–NGO interactions that were shaped by, and were shaping, concerns about public security and counterterrorism legislation in what was a process of direct steering of the action agenda for organizations in the field. This approach allowed us to uncover the paths through which power of action arises, showing how power results from the interactions across different NGOs, as opposed to resulting from the activities of one single organization (Deloffre and Quack, Chapter 1, this volume).

Table 10.1 Documents compiled for analysis

Type of document	# of pages
FATF annual reports (1992–2018)	976
Other FATF reports (2014–2018)	306
Global nonprofit coalition documents (2014–2018)	204
Webinars transcripts by Global Nonprofit Coalition (2014–2018)	155
Brazil-specific NGO documents and legislation (2014–2018)	381
Total	2,022

Source: Authors’ own compilation.

Table 10.2 Data gathering by method

Method	Total
Documents analysis (pages)	2,022
Interviews	13
Points of observation	7

Source: Authors' own compilation.

Empirical Context: Brazil's Organized Civil Society

Brazil has a thriving organized civil society with over 780,000 organizations (IPEA n.d.), employing around three million people—3 per cent of the country's working population (Garcia Lopez 2018). The sector's foundation was formed by grassroots social movements created in the 1970s, during the military dictatorship that ruled Brazil between 1964–1985. These movements organized themselves as a form of resistance to the regime, but also as a response to social issues resulting from public policies (or lack thereof) and economic recession. Social movements started developing in order to provide the services and support the state would not supply. Some of these movements included groups of slum dwellers demanding land rights (whose numbers swelled due to rapid and uncontrolled urbanization); groups fighting for improvements in services such as health, education, and transportation; an expanding labour movement; and the landless movement (Gohn 2000). This period also saw the creation and growth of movements working on issues related to gender, race, Indigenous populations, and the environment. The development of organized civil society in Brazil culminated in the country's 1988 Constitution, dubbed the citizens' constitution because of the heavy influence civil society had in its drafting. Such participation ensured that civil rights and social demands were constitutionally guaranteed, including the protection of minorities, the state provision of social assistance (e.g., the right to a public health system), and the introduction of participatory mechanisms, such as councils for the formulation and regulation of public policies formed by representatives from the government and civil society.

Public security, however, was one area that did not change much after democratization and the citizen's constitution (Leeds 2013; Lima et al. 2016). Although the police were no longer responsible for national security (protecting the state), but for public security (protecting citizens), the institutional structures created by the dictatorship were maintained in the new constitution (Leeds 2013). This means that the police forces are divided between a civilian police force, overseen by the judiciary and responsible for criminal investigations, and a military police force which is responsible for policing and maintaining order. The authoritarian legacy is perceived in the slow and incomplete transition from a police system that controls citizens to one that protects them; in the militarized approach to public security operations in poor areas that are comparable to wars in enemy territory; and in the prevalence of

human rights violations committed by the police, including excessive use of force, torture, and a high number of killings (Cano 2006). The high levels of violent crimes and the public’s perception that the problem was out of control helped cement public security policies that tended to be militarized, repressive (instead of preventive), and reactive, responding to immediate crises or specific high-profile crimes (Cano 2006). Legislation on public security follows a similar pattern, focusing on fighting crime through increasingly tough and disproportionate penalties, reinforcing the idea that increasing imprisonment rates and sentence lengths is the solution (Lima et al. 2016).

The Criminal Justice Network

The response to the heightened violence in the 1990s and 2000s led to the creation and growth of several NGOs working on public security issues and brought together in 2010 eight of these NGOs to form the CJN. Made up of Brazilian NGOs (see Table 10.3), this network became the relational building block for interactions in the counterterrorism policy field. It was a space where the NGOs could coordinate efforts, exchange practices, and build on their different skill sets. From within this space, CJN (Criminal Justice Network n.d.) assumed a brokerage position. Specifically, CJN monitors bills concerning criminal justice issues in the Brazilian Congress and advocates in both the Legislative and Executive branches. Furthermore, as our research shows here, CJN integrated transcalarity and diffused advocacy in Brazil. With this brief introduction to CJN, we turn to the legislative process of Brazil’s anti-terrorism bill and will narrate further the work of CJN in this context.

NGO–NGO Interactions and Brazil’s Counterterrorism Legislation

Given the pressures by FATF and the legislative debates starting in 2015, one NGO leader reflected:

What happens between 2010/2011 and the most decisive moments in 2014, 2015 and 2016, is that Brazil agrees to host big events and there was a new economic scenario. International organizations began to put further pressure on Brazil. There had always been pressure, but I think that the fact that [1] Brazil had to ensure safety in those big events, the fact that [2] in that economic scenario any change in [country credit] ratings would have different consequences than they would have had in a different moment, and the fact that [3] our investigative bodies, even the Federal Police, were being pressured [to ensure public safety], led to a change of course that generated the executive [anti-terrorism] bill.³

Indeed, it was called ‘the perfect storm’ by NGO leaders in Brazil. The link between concerns for public security, a punitive criminal justice system, and attention to

Table 10.3 The criminal justice network participants

NGO participants	Mission/objective
Centro de Estudos de Segurança e Cidadania (n.d.)	Objective: To carry out innovative research, among other projects, that feed public debate and promote human rights in the criminal justice system.
Conectas (n.d.)	Mission: To enforce and promote human rights, and combat inequalities to build a fair, free and democratic society from a Global South perspective. Vision: To address injustices and propose solutions that have a positive impact on people's lives, particularly the most vulnerable in society.
Instituto de Defensores de Direitos Humanos (n.d.)	Mission: To develop programmes that promote and protect human, economic, social, and cultural rights through free legal help in emblematic cases of institutional violence and deprivation of liberty, as well as to develop capacity building activities on human rights.
Instituto de Defesa do Direito de Defesa (n.d.)	Mission: Work so that citizens, regardless of their social origin, race or class, have the right to a fair hearing against the punitive power of the State ... Contribute to the continuous establishment of parameters and limits to the powers, towards a more fraternal, egalitarian, free, fair and truly democratic society.
Instituto Sou da Paz (n.d.)	Mission: To contribute to putting into practice public policies for security and violence prevention that are efficient and guided by the values of democracy, social justice and human rights.
Instituto Terra, Trabalho e Cidadania (n.d.)	Mission: Promote access to justice, protect the rights of prisoners, and generate knowledge by systematically working directly with inmates, fostering a public dialogue, and promoting citizenship education. Vision: Eradicate gender inequality, protect rights, and fight mass incarceration.
Gabinete de Assessoria Jurídica às Organizações Populares (2019)	Mission: Defend and promote human rights, focusing on access to justice and security, especially the socially vulnerable segments, through human rights education, social control and public policy monitoring, aiming at the construction of a society that is dignified, just and democratic. Objectives: To contribute to the realization of the rights to citizen security and social justice; to act in the promotion and defense of the rights of the child and the adolescent; collaborate for the construction of a culture of human rights that will enable the rootedness in society of the values of the democratic state of law; conduct studies and research on human rights; contribute to the preservation of life, physical and psychological integrity, the achievement of freedom and the egalitarian conditions of people; promote training in human rights.
Justiça Global (n.d.)	Mission: Protect and promote human rights, as well as strengthen civil society and democracy. Objectives: Denounce human rights violations; influence policy-making processes based on the fundamental rights and gender and racial equity; promote the strengthening of democratic institutions; protect the rights of victims of violations and human rights defenders.

Source: Authors' own compilation.

counterterrorism was undeniable according to NGOs. The CJN was a natural place for NGOs to start considering the implications of the pending legislation. The following presents three relational processes among NGOs that anchor the case of Brazil’s counterterrorism legislation and explain how their agency arose from networking dynamics.

The Criminal Justice Network as a Building Block

In the new counterterrorism space in Brazil, CJN was in the position to swiftly respond. CJN activity produced NGO–NGO interactions that focused on (1) providing information which led to (2) coordinated legislative advocacy. This was particularly pressing in the case of the anti-terrorism bill because it was introduced in 2015 with an ‘urgent’ status, meaning that the legislative process would be much faster than usual and would therefore considerably limit NGOs’ ability to act and open the discussion to popular participation. The bill’s introduction demanded CJN to move quickly: the network sent representatives to follow the legislative process, including any proposed amendments that could be particularly harmful to organized civil society and social movements, and to directly engage with legislators. The network sought to expand the number of Congress members they worked with, including centre-right politicians who understood that the anti-terrorism law could be a threat to civic space.

As part of this legislative strategy, the position of CJN was to take a stand against the law, petitioning for its complete dismissal. However, NGOs and other civil society actors also established the most important and non-negotiable issues that could not be included in the law, in case it was approved. Some of those demands were successfully met during the legislative process in 2015, such as the reincorporation of the civil society safeguard to the bill after it was removed by the Senate; the removal of politics and ideology as motivations for terrorism; and the removal of the coercion of authorities defined as a terrorist goal. Other demands were reached through the presidential vetoes before the bill’s signing.

With the CJN’s leadership, NGOs produced a unified message that the anti-terrorism law was a categorical part of a set of instruments criminalizing and restricting organized civil society and social movements, suffocating mobilization, and silencing voices of dissent.⁴ In a 2015 public statement signed by over forty NGOs and social movements, the organizations strategically highlighted specific sections of the bill that would be particularly damaging to civil society ([Article 19 2015](#)). The aim was to signal to (and thereby inform) the president which parts of the bill to veto in case a complete veto was not possible. The efforts were effective, and all the issues highlighted by NGOs were vetoed by the president in the law’s final text that was signed into law in March 2016. This effectiveness and the speed by which it came to fruition were likely in part due to prior social interactions among key NGOs in Brazil through CJN. Additionally, there was a relationship between Article 19, a London-based human rights organization which had opened a regional office in

São Paulo in 2007, and CJN. Furthermore, CJN had a close relationship particularly with the Ministry of Justice because of its public security agenda. While CJN and the Ministry of Justice had a transparent relationship, still several NGOs reported being caught off guard with the release of the 2015 anti-terrorism bill.⁵

As a key building block, CJN's (in partnership with Article 19) analysis of bills in the Brazilian Congress regarding the right to protest helped to frame and legitimize the organization's stance: that there is a deliberate criminalization of civil society by the government ([Article 19 and CJN 2017](#)). The project identified fifty-nine bills between 1991 and 2016, most of which would have a detrimental effect on the right to protest. The bills were categorized into fifteen thematic areas (see [Table 10.4](#)), each area containing between one and twenty-one bills. The thematic areas with the highest number of bills are directly connected to the 2013 protests, when thousands of people took to the streets all over the country. The protests were, at first, a response to the rise of public transportation fares in São Paulo, emerging into a space for people to voice their 'dissatisfaction with institutional politics, corruption and scarcity of public investments in education and health, in contrast to investments in sports events that would take place in Brazil' ([Gondim 2016](#)), namely the World Cup and the Olympic Games. Those bills include provisions against the use of face masks in protests (six bills)⁶, damage to property (five bills) and the right to protest itself (five bills)⁷.

The issue that was most overwhelmingly represented in the bills analysed was terrorism, with twenty-one bills. These proposed bills sought to broaden the definition of terrorism to include, for instance, politically motivated acts or land invasions (a strategy commonly used by the Landless Movement). The anti-terrorism bill introduced by the Executive in 2015 bore striking similarities to some of those previous bills (mostly introduced between 2011 and 2014) that had already been criticized by NGOs for their potential to be used against social movements and to curb the freedom to demonstrate ([Fonseca 2014](#)). In response to these continued threats by the government, CJN and Article 19 created a website in 2017 to monitor bills about the right to protest. This became an institutionalized space for NGO-NGO interactions as organizations identified the need for accurate and accessible information on the bills proposed by the government that could potentially harm civil society, so that they could not only monitor legislative activity, but act upon it quickly if necessary ([Article 19 2017](#)). In their justification for the project, the organizations pointed out that since 2013 there had been numerous attempts by the Congress to criminalize protesters and curb their freedom of speech and association ([Article 19 2017](#)). We argue that this website is not only an outcome of NGO-NGO interactions facilitated through CJN, but that it further laid a foundation of CJN as a broker which allowed it to exchange information. This granted greater agency to NGOs through continued interactions and fomented yet further interactions, as explained below.

Table 10.4 Thematic areas of bills introduced about the right to protest in Brazil (1991–2016)

Thematic area	Number of bills	Description
Amnesty	2	Provision of amnesty against criminal prosecution for people and leaders of social movements that participated in strikes, occupations, and protests.
Criminal organizations’ law	1	Creation of a safeguard to ensure the law against criminal organizations cannot be used against social movements and political protests.
Damage to property	5	Increase of sentence lengths in cases involving damage to public and private property.
Contempt	3	Contempt of public officials is a common accusation leveraged against protesters. Some bills aim at increasing the sentence lengths in cases of contempt of police officers, whereas other bills aim at completely repealing the law that criminalizes the contempt of public officials.
Face masks	6	Criminalization of the use of masks or any kind of facial covering that may prevent identification.
Invasion of public offices	1	Criminalization of the invasion and occupation of public offices.
Protest notification	3	Imposition of additional requirements for the notification of protests to the relevant authorities, including that protests must receive prior authorization (which is unconstitutional).
Public disorder	1	Criminalization of public disorder.
Right to protest	5	Over-regulation and restriction of the right to protest.
Roadblocks	4	Criminalization of roadblocks.
Terrorism	21	Broadening of the definition of terrorism. This could include, for instance, politically motivated acts or land invasions.
Use of fireworks	1	Criminalization of the use of fireworks in protests.
Use of force	4	Regulation of the use of force against protesters, so that it is used as a last resort.
Vandalism	1	Criminalization of vandalism and incitation to vandalism, including long minimum sentences.
Vigilance	1	Vigilance of public meeting spaces, indoors or outdoors, with a capacity of over 1,000 people, which must be equipped with surveillance cameras.

Source: Authors’ own compilation.

Transcalar and Diffused Interactions

As the legislative process proceeded in 2015 and 2016, CJN began to rely on its member organizations with an international focus, like Conectas, and on partners outside of the network, like Article 19. Conectas is an international, Brazilian human rights NGO that was founded in 2001 to address human rights issues from a Global South perspective. Since the issue of counterterrorism was largely driven by international pressure (namely FATF), Conectas along with Article 19 allowed for transcalar interactions.

An NGO leader from CJN explains the transcalar nature of the debates and an emergent consensus among Brazilian and international NGOs:

Our counterargument [to the anti-terrorism legislation] was that existing laws were enough. It is a debate about criminal law, that the belief that the creation of new laws helps. An argument was that, due to the transnationality of terrorism, a new law had to be created to match international ones ... However, you can do that through other crimes, such as murder. [This proposed legislation was] more about politics than crime prevention. The debate is more political than technical or criminal.⁸

They continue by observing the international NGOs that became involved and try to complement each other's strengths:

Article 19 has a large amount of studies and technical competence to bring to the debate; Amnesty has legitimacy from the international view; [and] Human Rights Watch is a really important NGO in this issue as well.⁹

In addition, the international NGO Greenpeace was active through its Brazilian branch, conducting an online advocacy campaign. In efforts to diffuse information, the campaign targeted the Brazilian public and highlighted the fact that any person fighting for their rights could, under the draft bill, be considered a terrorist (Folhapress 2016).

Indeed, NGO-NGO interactions in this space quickly reflected the transcalar nature of counterterrorism as a policy field beyond borders. Brazilian NGOs (both international and domestic) brokered and engaged with their international peers to exchange experiences and materials from different contexts and disseminate them to the public and other actors. One NGO pointed to how the Brazilian Congress can generally be influenced by international pressure, which led to NGOs presenting to congresspersons a sample of clear statements by international organizations which opposed overly burdensome and tough anti-terrorism legislation. Conectas was a key actor in this process. Headquartered in São Paulo, the international NGO is a 'collective effort of professionals, academics and activists ... to monitor and mobilize international human rights agendas' (Conectas n.d.). Being the organization with the strongest international agenda in CJN, Conectas worked in coordination with several

other Brazilian NGOs during the legislative process but also sought out international connections. They started engaging with FATF, trying to learn more about how it worked and thereby understand the forces, at least in part, behind the anti-terrorism bill. There was a debate about the extent of Brazil's obligation to implement FATF's recommendations and Conectas sought to learn how NGOs in other countries were dealing with the issue.

To that end, Conectas joined the Global Nonprofit Coalition on FATF, a group of NGOs which began in 2012 to build awareness about and advocate to FATF regarding the non-profit sector. By 2016, the Global Nonprofit Coalition included seventeen organizations in its core group (eight of which are based in the Global South), and one hundred and twenty-three groups from forty-six countries (Global NPO Coalition on [FATF n.d.](#)). The Coalition produces and disseminates information about FATF and the impact of its recommendations globally. It also provides online spaces on their webpage to engage the sector worldwide and to build local capacity, so that NGOs can understand and take part in FATF's evaluation processes in their home countries.

Through the Coalition, Conectas learned about how FATF's regulations were affecting NGOs all over the world, and how future FATF evaluations in Brazil could be a source of further restrictions. Conectas has been working with the Coalition ever since, having hosted a Coalition workshop in 2017 ([Global NPO Coalition on FATF 2017](#)) and helping other Brazilian organizations identify issues concerning FATF. In fact, as of 2020, a local network of organized civil societies, called the Coalition of Brazil Civil Society Organizations on FATF (Coalizão Brasileira de Organizações da Sociedade Civil para o GAFI in Portuguese), developed to discuss, educate, and perform collective action on issues related to FATF. Such organizing among Brazilian international and domestic NGOs allowed them to focus energies directly on FATF as a transnational organization, bypassing, at that time, their own national government.

Providing and exchanging information rested on networked coordination not only with other organizations working on the same issues in the Congress and in international NGOs, but also with Brazilian social movements that would be affected by the law and which otherwise would have little resources to follow legislative procedures. In order to engage these movements, exchange information, and share strategies, NGOs relied both on digital methods, such as WhatsApp and email groups, and upon in-person participation in events and forums. This also included the organization of meetings in different parts of the country, thereby reaching out to social movements where they were located. For example, one NGO supported social movements by producing communication materials that translated into simple terms the risks brought about by the legislation to popular mobilization.¹⁰

The Creation of Brazil's Collaborative Advocacy Network

CJN was able to mobilize during the anti-terrorism bill's proposal, revision stages, and eventual passing into law. This drew on years of prior interactions among

NGOs in Brazil and created what we identify as the relational building block to activate not only Brazilian NGOs, but also transcalar interactions with international NGOs, and diffused interactions with social movements, the broader public, and other actors. NGOs in Brazil were assuming more agency and these interactions helped to produce new NGO spaces and configurations in Brazil. The process had a major ordering effect in the field through the institutionalization of some of the relational advocacy practices developed: given the focused advocacy among Brazilian NGOs since 2015, the Collaborative Advocacy Network (Rede de Advocacy Colaborativo, RAC) was created in 2018 with the aim to foster further effective advocacy efforts and to strengthen NGO influence in four areas: human rights, socio-environmental development, transparency and integrity, and the new economy. It has supported, for instance, the creation of an advocacy guide by Imaflora, one of Brazil's leading environmental NGOs, that systematized relevant advocacy strategies and contextualized them for Brazilian NGOs ([Pellegrini Morgado and Oliveira Gozetto 2019](#)).

RAC was one of the hosts of the first advocacy conference in the country in September 2019 in partnership with CJN. Other hosts of the conference included the Advocacy Hub, which is now a member of RAC and helped build its knowledge-sharing platform, and Pact for Democracy (Pacto pela Democracia), a network that has become RAC's advocacy partner. Although RAC may promote and participate in meetings as a network, it does not sign documents, public statements, or political stances. In its bylaws, members commit to keeping all data and information related to the strategies developed during general assemblies and thematic group meetings confidential (Rede de Advocacy Colaborativo n.d.).

The first advocacy network in Brazil, RAC consists of two types of members: permanent members and collaborators. Permanent members are individuals or organizations that actively participate in the network's activities, such as workshops, thematic group meetings, and general assemblies. Depending on their own organizational capacity, permanent members may also provide a physical presence in Brasilia (the Brazilian capital where Congress is based), produce analyses and briefs, help finance the network, mobilize partners, and work on capacity building. Collaborators are interested in and support the network's activities but participate on an ad hoc basis. In 2020 RAC had sixty-one members, forty-two of which were permanent members ([Rede de Advocacy Colaborativo 2020](#)).

While created in part as a result of the NGO response to the anti-terrorism legislation, RAC's objectives are much wider in scope. Its thematic groups are permanent bodies and produce relational processes that are divided according to RAC's four priority areas (human rights, socio-environmental development, transparency and integrity, and the new economy), working as umbrellas under which a number of topics may be discussed in the network. The category of human rights includes education (dealing with issues arising from home schooling, for instance), migration, decent work and justice, and topics that include anti-terrorism laws. Socio-environmental development includes climate change, mining in Indigenous lands, water and sanitation, and the use of pesticides, among other issues. Transparency

and integrity includes topics such as the regulation of lobbying activities and open data policies in general, and specifically, legislative data policies. Finally, the new economy looks into tax reform pertaining to taxing donations to NGOs, and promoting bioeconomy and a low-carbon economy (*Rede de Advocacy Colaborativo* 2020).

Like CJN and Article 19’s website to monitor bills about the right to protest, RAC has brokered spaces to share and exchange information. With its member, the Advocacy Hub, RAC runs an online platform to share information on the issues it works on, analyses on specific policies, and also tools and how-to guides to help organizations design their advocacy strategies (*Rede Advocacy Colaborativo* n.d.). In addition to this online tool, RAC’s secretariat is currently based at Pulso Público, a political consultancy organization based in São Paulo and Brasília. One of the responsible leaders of RAC at Pulso Público worked for several years at CJN,¹¹ exemplifying the relational processes among NGOs in Brazil. As secretariat, Pulso Público provides operational support to RAC, such as the organization of meetings and communications. Internal communication, in so far as the precedent was set during the counterterrorism legislation process, is done mostly through email and WhatsApp groups. The secretariat also prepares and sends out a bulletin every two weeks with updates on the network’s main activities and with developments on the priority issues in the network’s agenda; for instance, if a new bill is proposed or a vote is coming up. In addition, the executive secretariat supports the thematic groups by providing analyses, identifying advocacy opportunities, developing advocacy strategies and activities, monitoring the network’s legislative agenda, and providing in-person support to advocacy activities in Brasília (*Rede de Advocacy Colaborativo* n.d.).

The signed March 2016 counterterrorism legislation was a result of NGO–NGO interactions that were based on prior interactions in CJN. By examining the relational processes of these interactions, we are able to narrate the institutionalized spaces—sites of interaction—for NGOs to yet further relate in transcalar and diffused ways and also assume greater agency in the counterterrorism field, thereby activating further and broader advocacy activities through the creation of the RAC.

NGO–NGO Interactions in the Policy Field of Counterterrorism and Beyond

How and to what extent did NGO–NGO interactions take shape in the policy field of counterterrorism? Having identified the threat, NGOs began compiling and sharing information, campaigning against the anti-terrorism law, and brokering advocacy efforts almost immediately in 2015. To do this, they used the established CJN as the relational building block for communication, coordination, and legislative engagement to directly steer advocacy action; it became the site of interaction. Among others, Conectas and Article 19 played an important role in leading the NGO–NGO

interactions (Roque 2016). These transcalar interactions occurred in response to FATF as a catalyst of the legislation, and also because of the broader context of criminalization of organized civil society and social movements in Brazil.

The Brazilian story here is relevant to other studies about counterterrorism and its implications on civil society and highlights the relational processes that occur even in a constrained context. As a building block, CJNI's positionality led to the emergence of new forms of brokerage as well as expanded transcalar and diffused interactions among NGOs in Brazil. The case shows how NGO agency was developed through these interactions, in an example of the power of action that does not result from the activities of one actor. A more robust and legitimized identity of advocacy emerged through the relational processes which were triggered by the introduction of the anti-terrorism bill and how NGOs enacted in response. The ordering effect generated is clear in the creation of the new RAC, which has assumed a joint objective among NGOs in Brazil to be active and heard in policy and legislative debates. Further research should continue to trace the development of this new meta-association (Cheng et al., Chapter 9, this volume) and super-networks (Schapper, Chapter 8, this volume) in Brazil. RAC's scope goes well beyond public security (and counterterrorism). Given the range of topics it seeks to address, if successful it has the potential to shape many policy fields that have direct implications on organized civil society and social movements in Brazil.

Epilogue on Counterterrorism Legislation in Brazil

Even with the strengthening of civil society advocacy efforts through NGO–NGO interactions and their increasing institutionalization through the creation of the RAC which continues to engage in Brazil, threats to Brazil's civic space have remained. In March 2019, the Brazilian government published a law on asset freezing, complementing the anti-terrorism law. The bill for this law was introduced in June 2018 also by the Executive, then represented by Michel Temer, Rousseff's vice-president who took over after her impeachment. The pressure from FATF played an even clearer role than it did for the anti-terrorism law: the draft law on asset freezing mentions FATF ten times, highlighting that failure to comply with FATF's recommendations could lead to retaliations, which grow worse the longer countries take to rectify their deficiencies. The statement also describes the sanctions that non-compliant countries face, ranging from inclusion on lists of countries with strategic deficiencies (high risk or uncooperative countries) to the application of countermeasures by the financial system of other countries, or even exclusion from FATF and eventually from other international organizations such as the G20, the International Monetary Fund, and the World Bank (Brazil's Executive Branch 2018).

Jair Bolsonaro became president in October 2018 and the asset-freezing bill was a top priority (Gazeta do povo 2018; Jovem Pan 2018). His administration claimed it was a time-sensitive issue, declaring that if the bill was not approved by February

2019, Brazil would be suspended from FATF ([Gazeta do povo 2018](#)). The administration held a meeting with the FATF’s president, Marshall Billingslea, in January 2019 in which it reaffirmed the intentions to deepen the collaboration between Brazil and the organization ([Ministry of Justice 2019](#)). The bill was upgraded to urgency status by Congress in November 2018; it quickly went through the Lower House with minor amendments, was approved by the Senate, and signed by the president in March 2019. The asset-freezing law ([Planalto 2019](#)) ‘enforces the immediate freezing of terrorist assets, in compliance of United Nations Security Council’s sanctions related to terrorist offences’ ([Brazilian Central Bank n.d.](#)). The law was further strengthened by a decree (no. 9.825) in June 2019 to ‘address remaining shortcomings for identifying and freezing terrorist assets’ ([FATF 2019b](#)).

Following the passage of all this terrorism legislation, FATF reported that it is ‘satisfied that Brazil has made substantial progress and addressed most of its targeted financial sanctions deficiencies ... The FATF no longer considers this a [Brazilian] membership concern for the FATF’ ([FATF 2019a](#)). While FATF has backed off, under the Bolsonaro presidency the environment for organized civil society was often contentious and uncertain during the four years. On 1 January 2023 former president Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva reassumed the office after a hotly contested election against Bolsonaro and a tight runoff in October 2022. With Lula da Silva’s progressive agenda and Brazil’s economic challenges, concerns about the environment and rising poverty, NGO–NGO interactions—through sites of interaction like the RAC especially—are likely to continue to take shape and influence various policy fields.

Notes

1. Authorship equally shared.
2. This led to partial presidential vetoes of sections that criminalized the following: the destruction of public or private property; interference in, or sabotage of, computer systems and databases; harbouring terrorists; and public praise of terrorism (with a mandatory added sentence if the crime was committed through the internet).
3. NGO 9, Interview, 16 December 2019.
4. NGO 4, Interview, 4 October 2019.
5. NGO 1, Interview, 19 September 2019.
6. Some protesters wore face coverings such as scarves or balaclavas, for reasons including protection from the tear gas used by the police or to conceal their identity (this was before the COVID-19 pandemic).
7. Two of the bills, criminalizing roadblocks and increasing the penalty for damages to property carried out during protests, were proposed by Jair Bolsonaro when he was a congressperson.
8. NGO 3, Interview, 25 September 2019.
9. NGO 3, Interview, 25 September 2019.
10. NGO 1, Interview, 19 September 2019.
11. NGO 1, Interview, 19 September 2019.

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PART IV
CONCLUSION

Conclusion

Main Findings and Future Research Directions

Maryam Zarnegar Deloffre and Sigrid Quack

Introduction

The aim of this collective endeavour was to explore how non-governmental organizations (NGOs) make a difference in global politics through their relations with one another. We offer a conceptual framework for studying NGO–NGO interactions that highlights a variety of relational types and builds understanding of what might otherwise appear as unexpected and counterintuitive effects. We argue that the ability of NGOs to make things happen often evolves from their interactions with each other rather than from pre-existing resources and intentional strategies. We suggest using the concept of relational power to analyse the identity, mobilization, legitimacy, and ordering effects of NGO–NGO interactions. The three analytical perspectives chosen to structure the volume—social ties, configurations, and sites of interactions—further help to elaborate how the power of NGOs is constituted from, and evolves through, their relationships. While the social ties perspective enables insights at the micro-level, the focus on configurations adds complementary knowledge at the meso- and macro-levels, while sites of interactions offer a lens that cuts across these scales.

The empirical chapters in this volume provide a set of rich, empirical studies covering a wide range of different interaction types that are embedded in a multiplicity of relational settings spanning different world regions. The types of interactions covered by the contributions expand beyond well-documented forms such as cooperating, collaborating, competing, and brokering, to less well-studied ones such as divorcing, disregarding, conflicting, co-opting, and merging. All contributions examine NGO interactions as part of broader relational fabrics, which include relationships with businesses, national governments, and international organizations. They study NGO engagement in multiple global issue areas, ranging from climate change, human rights, criminal justice, and migration to development, humanitarian aid, and social services. Each of the contributions provides in-depth research on a case or topic area, zooming in on some, but not necessarily covering all, of the dimensions surveyed in the introductory framework chapter.

Taken together, the chapters cover a broad range of relational types and document an array of identity, mobilization, legitimacy, and ordering effects. They point towards different forms of relational power which shape the relational context to which they belong. Overall, our findings suggest that the multiplicity and flexibility of NGOs' relationships with their peers and other actors should be given more attention when studying their impact in world politics.

In these concluding remarks, we revisit the main findings of the chapters in the light of our conceptual framework, discuss how this volume contributes to literature on NGOs and global politics, and suggest directions for future research.

Main Findings of this Volume

The main findings of this volume contribute to ongoing debates on transnational NGOs, global politics, and global governance. More specifically, they expand our understanding of *NGOing*, promote synthetic knowledge about the power of NGO interactions and their effects, and open up new perspectives on processes of global governing.

Expanding Our Understanding of *NGOing*

What constitutes an NGO has been and still is subject to scholarly debates. As Willetts (2011, 31) famously stated: 'There is no such thing as a typical NGO.' To address diverging understandings of NGOs, we suggested a relational approach that focuses on NGOs' everyday practices of claim-making and their audiences' acceptance or rejection of these claims. Studying *NGOing* requires us to remain open to how actors construct claims to NGO status as contingent on specific social and historical contexts. For example, some authors have emphasized claims to serve a public purpose and to partner with social and political actors in multiple settings as central to *NGOing* (Hilhorst 2003; DeMars and Dijkzeul 2015).

While this volume cannot resolve scholarly controversies over definitions, it can contribute to a better understanding of what constitutes an NGO as a social category. For example, while early scholarship on NGOs asserted they were principled actors that 'do good', subsequent research showed that NGOs often harm rather than help (see e.g., Bob 2005; Murdie 2014). A relational categorization of 'NGO' understands such claims to 'do good' by serving the public or providing a public good, not as a principled attribute of an NGO, but a claim that must be legitimated, recognized, and negotiated through NGO interactions. As such, the claim, and thus the very essence of NGOs' identity and activities, are shaped by political, social, economic, and relational settings as well as interactions with societal actors. Several contributions to this volume analyse practices of claimmaking, and the rejection and recognition of those claims to help consolidate and expand our understanding of *NGOing*. These

chapters provide empirical observations on how, and by which means, actors seek to present and legitimize themselves as NGOs and how these attempts might be contested by partners and audiences. They also show how *NGOing* shapes mutually shared understandings of what defines NGOs as a social category. Particularly revealing are the chapters by Carolei (Chapter 2), Schmitz et al. (Chapter 4), and DeMars and Dijkzeul (Chapter 7) that study contestation around constitutive features, such as claims to serve a public purpose, to be non-profit and to be non-violent, and Schapper (Chapter 8) and K. R. Cheng et al.'s chapters (Chapter 9, all this volume) which apply the concept to Transnational Advocacy Networks (TANs) and meta-associations, respectively.

In his chapter on the conflict between the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) and Survival International (SI), Carolei (Chapter 2, this volume) shows how SI contested WWF's claim to serve a public purpose over its possible complicity in committing human rights abuses against Indigenous people in Cameroon. In order to assert that WWF was acting like a corporation, SI filed a legal complaint with the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's (OECD) Arbitration Body under its Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises. While the attempted adjudication of the conflict between SI and WWF was not successful, it nevertheless reshaped the understanding of what constitutes an NGO and when it is considered to fall under the OECD Guidelines for Multinationals. In adjudicating the complaint, the OECD widened the applicability of its guidelines, which were originally intended as a complaints procedure for multinationals, to include rights-based claims against NGOs with significant commercial activity. Through their interactions, SI, WWF, and the OECD Arbitration Body renegotiated the boundaries of NGOs as a social category and effectively modified legal understandings of NGOs and their responsibilities. Schmitz et al. (Chapter 4, this volume) investigate the process of merging between several NGOs and for-profit organizations in the field of social service provision. Their analysis shows how claims about the benefits of integrating commercial activities for achieving public purpose can be effectively used by NGOs for meeting the objectives of the merger and legitimating it to a wider public.

Another example of public contestation about the legitimate boundaries of NGO activity addressed in this volume centres around non-violent action in contexts of violent conflict and war. DeMars and Dijkzeul (Chapter 7, this volume) show how in the Ethiopian civil war, humanitarian NGOs became part of complex configurations of practices, binding them to one or both sides of the warring parties through a combination of humanitarian, social affinity, and sovereignty practices. While maintaining their claims of doing good for the humanitarian cause, their entanglements with governments, rebels, and warlords engaged in civil wars bring forward critical challenges to the notion of NGOs as entities that remain neutral in violent settings. Similarly, Carolei (Chapter 2, this volume) discusses how WWF was successful in protecting Indigenous lands in part because of its relationships with government actors. To fulfil the protection mandate, however, government authorities employed eco-guards who used violence and committed human rights abuses

against the Indigenous populations. Given WWF's relationship with the Cameroonian government, SI accused it of complicity in the use of force. The insights from these empirical studies extend to many contemporary situations in which humanitarian NGOs are faced with difficult choices when negotiating access in conflict settings, wherein they need to decide the extent to which they will engage with belligerent parties in order to reach populations in need. A relational perspective reveals how the social category of NGO stretches conceptually in such violent contexts.

In all these cases, social categorizations of what constitutes an NGO in a specific context are enacted, contested, and sometimes gradually changed through the everyday practices, internal workings, and discursive repertoires of NGOs. This also holds true for their claim-making and the reception of these claims by peers, partners, opponents, and wider audiences. Schapper (Chapter 8, this volume, pp. 175) suggests that such a relational approach can also be extended to other civil society configurations, such as TANs. Her analysis of a super-network that formed to influence the Paris climate negotiations comes to the conclusion that there were 'TANing' processes at work that "not only comprise[d] the establishment of an internal network, but also include[d] the manifold outside interactions, communications, and politics between different TANs". Likewise, K. R. Cheng et al. (Chapter 9, this volume) show how meta-associations of NGOs engage in similar claim-making on the global stage by accentuating the breadth of their membership to legitimize their claims to be representative of global concerns. At the same time, national member associations use their participation in the meta-association to legitimize their claims to represent concerns of peer NGOs in their country.

Taken together, these contributions indicate that legally attributed features of NGOs, such as their non-profit orientation and non-violent nature, cannot just be taken as a given, but need to be claimed and negotiated in specific social and historical settings through everyday interactions with peers, partners, opponents, and audiences. The findings suggest that the fluidity of the concept of *NGOing* is not only conceptually useful but also stands up empirically. The interactions between NGOs and others, as well as between NGOs and their context, not only help to explain their behaviour and activities but also point towards double-edged social consequences: on the one hand, the adaptability, fluidity, and flexibility of NGOs in their claim-making is what enables them to relate, (re)position, and react to changes in their relational context. On the other hand, by displaying too much of this flexibility NGOs might run the risk of diluting their identity and undermining the legitimacy of their actions.

One promising avenue for future research is to apply the concept of *NGOing* to other domains and explore whether and how other actors make similar legitimization claims in their interactions. For example, in making claims to serve the public purpose, do government-organized NGOs (GONGOs), businesses, state agencies, or even violent non-state actors stretch or change what it means *to NGO*? How does this claim-making play out in their relationships with audiences, and what are the effects in ongoing contests for status and connections in global politics? Similarly, future research might also explore what '*stating*' or '*businessing*' as claim-making may

involve, and whether and when NGOs can be found to slip into these other relational claim-making patterns.

Grigorescu (2020, 2) has recently argued that the distinction between inter-governmental and non-governmental organizations is less clear-cut than often considered. Historically, global governance in different policy fields has shifted back and forth between governmental and non-governmental approaches. He also suggests that international organizations are better conceptualized along an inter-governmental–non-governmental continuum where decision-making, financial, and deliberative features can fall on either end of the spectrum. We can read Grigorescu's analysis as an invitation to think about repertoires of action rather than assuming fixed connections between actor and claim-making type. The findings of our volume offer inspiration to explore the variety of claim-making repertoires that actors in global governance employ. For example, transnational NGOs might engage in *NGOing* in many of their interactions, but they might also raise claims to business performance or sanctioning power that resonate more with our common understanding of what companies or states do. Future research might thus explore innovative forms of claim-making and shifting (Della Porta 2023a) between NGOs, businesses, governments, and international organizations, and how NGOs employ repertoires of different forms of claim-making directed to various audiences.

Promoting Synthetic Knowledge on the Power of Interactions and Their Effects

Another contribution of this volume is to bring into view and synthesize findings about a variety of interactions, multiplicity of effects, and underlying power relations. While not being comprehensive by any means, the range of interactions and effects considered in this volume goes beyond existing scholarship and provide fruitful ground for future research. In what follows, we highlight the findings on interaction types and their underlying relational power, as well as those on temporal scope, multiplexity, and personal ties.

Interactions are varied and produce multiple effects. By opening up the spectrum of interactions beyond the prevailing duality of cooperation versus competition, this volume provides important insights for research on NGOs and their role in global politics. The contributions show the value of studying NGOs within their complex webs of interactions, rather than as organizations with autonomous decision-making practices. The story told in this volume thus goes beyond prevailing notions of processes of change-making (advocacy, norm promotion, naming and shaming, producing information, etc.) as driven by NGOs' resources and intentional strategies. This volume instead suggests that change comes about through open, ongoing, day-to-day processes—interactions among social actors, social objects, and practices and institutional, spatial, and temporal contexts. Examining these interactions in their relational contexts opens up avenues towards a better understanding of how NGOs

Table 11.1 NGO interactions, power relations and effects: overview of chapters

Chapter	Entry point	Prominent types of interaction	Relational power	Effects
(2) Carolei	Social ties	Conflicting	Power to	Identity Ordering
(3) Petropoulos	Social ties	Competing Co-opting Coordinating Cooperating	Power to	Mobilizing Ordering
(4) Schmitz, Mitchell, & Chen	Social ties	Merging	Power with Power to	Identity Legitimacy Ordering
(5) Reiners	Configurations	Divorcing Disregarding Conflicting Co-opting Brokering	Power to	None Legitimacy Ordering
(6) H. Cheng, Wang, Ma, & Murdie	Configurations	Brokering	Power to	Mobilizing Ordering
(7) DeMars & Dijkzeul	Configurations	Conflicting Coordinating Cooperating	Power to Power with	Mobilizing Legitimacy Ordering
(8) Schapper	Sites of interaction	Coordinating Cooperating Brokering	Power with Power to	Identity Mobilizing Legitimacy Ordering
(9) K. R. Cheng, Finchum-Mason, & Gugerty	Sites of interaction	Coordinating Collaborating	Power with Power to	Mobilizing Legitimacy Ordering
(10) Appe & Borges Pinho	Sites of interaction	Coordinating Brokering Collaborating	Power with Power to	Mobilization Legitimacy Ordering

Source: Authors' own compilation.

are originally constituted, as well as how they can achieve results that would not have been expected by only considering their starting conditions. [Table 11.1](#) provides a synthetic overview of the main findings.

Interactions are powerful. The multiplicity of interactions and effects raises questions about underlying mechanisms. In the introductory chapter, we introduced the concept of relational power and how it manifests as *power over*, *power to*, and *power with*. Many of the findings in the chapters point towards power as something generated and exerted, amplified and multiplied by the interactions in ways that outsize the initial resources or inputs of the NGOs involved. In the following discussion, we summarize some of the findings that show how interactions lead to the different

effects—legitimacy, identity, mobilizing, and ordering—laid out in the introductory framework chapter.

NGO interactions are processes through which (individual and collective) identities form and evolve. This can occur through conflictual (Carolei, [Chapter 2](#); DeMars and Dijkzeul, [Chapter 7](#), both this volume) as well as coordinating, brokering, and cooperative relationships (Schapper, [Chapter 8](#); K. R. Cheng et al., [Chapter 9](#); Appe and Borges Pinho, [Chapter 10](#), all this volume). Identity effects can be observed at the level of individual NGOs, associative groups of NGOs, as well as super-networks of TANs. Equally, when NGOs engage in merging, the most collaborative type of interaction in our typology—studied by Schmitz et al. ([Chapter 4](#), this volume)—this shapes their individual and collective identity. But not all relationships of conflict, coordination, brokering, collaboration, and merger develop or reshape actors' identities. As we will argue below, there is an important temporal dimension that impacts the power of interactions to generate identity effects. From the studies in this volume, we might thus propose two possible trajectories. When claims are mutually acknowledged, valued, and recognized, *power with* is likely to facilitate learning processes, reflexivity, and collective identity-building in NGO relationships. Another trajectory towards identity formation seems possible if hostile conflict becomes mediated by a third party that, through its regulatory actions, reshapes the conventions of what is understood to be an NGO without the two conflicting parties changing their self-perceptions. This would suggest that conflict, even if unresolved in the dyad, can carry productive *power to* change identity classifications at a structural level.

The power of interactions to constitute something greater than the sum of its parts is most obvious with regard to mobilization ([Avant 2016](#)). NGO interactions are often directed towards swaying existing power balances by changing the preferences, and/or the practices, of audiences towards the benefit of the overall community or society. By bringing together views, practices, and groups that were previously separate, NGO relationships can generate the *power with* that enables newly formed alliances or loose collectives to potentially achieve goals that might otherwise not have been possible. Typically, it is brokering, collaborating, and cooperating relationships that generate these mobilization effects (see Petropoulos, [Chapter 3](#); H. Cheng et al., [Chapter 6](#); Schapper, [Chapter 8](#); K. R. Cheng et al., [Chapter 9](#); Appe and Borges Pinho, [Chapter 10](#), all this volume), but mobilization can also be fuelled by larger conflictual constellations (DeMars and Dijkzeul, [Chapter 7](#), this volume).

In keeping with a relational approach, we view *legitimacy* as relational or socially constructed, being deeply embedded in relationships between actors, and contingent upon an actor's perceptions of other actors, rules, or institutions (see also [Johnson et al. 2006](#); [Bernstein 2011](#)). Legitimacy is produced through interactions with the institutional environment and/or with other social actors. In the contributions to this volume, legitimacy effects result from the various processes of *NGOing* reviewed above, which are constituted by claim-making and relating to audiences. For example, Carolei ([Chapter 2](#)) shows how institutional rules enable particular forms of contesting, which redefine the public purpose of NGOs. Reiners' analysis

(Chapter 5) reveals how NGOs can strive to enhance the legitimacy of their goals and contributions by ignoring and avoiding others. Schmitz et al. (Chapter 4) and K. R. Cheng et al. (Chapter 9) show, by contrast, how processes of merging and associating produce legitimacy effects that enhance claims to serve the public good. H. Cheng et al. (Chapter 6) show how some Global South NGOs can bolster their legitimacy through gaining access to inter-community brokerage roles while others cannot. Joining forces across previously existing cleavages allowed a super-network of TANs (Schapper, Chapter 8) and a newly formed Criminal Justice Network in Brazil (Appel and Borges Pinho, Chapter 10) to gain legitimacy for their claim vis-à-vis governmental actors in their respective contexts (all in this volume). Identity, mobilizing, and ordering effects are hence deeply intertwined with processes of gaining or losing legitimacy.

NGO interactions are also important for understanding how global *ordering* occurs. From the findings in this volume, we would propose that NGO interactions produce order in at least two ways: first, if repeated over time, they generate stable relational patterns and/or reconfigure existing ones in ways that shape decision and rule-making in global politics. In this volume we have referred to those patterns as configurations. Examining configurations through a relational approach highlights their dual nature as being generated and changed through NGOs' interactions as well as recursively shaping their interactions. Examples are the emergence of top-down and bottom-up configurations of NGO interactions in the Greek migration crisis (Petropoulos, Chapter 3), the shaping of channels of access to key brokering roles for some but not other Global South NGOs through positions and interactions (H. Cheng et al., Chapter 6), the ordering and reordering of NGO configurations through the steering and accommodating of NGO associations (K. R. Chen et al., Chapter 9), and the interactions of NGO practices not only in mobilizing new configurations but also shaping local and foreign government policies in war and conflict zones (DeMars and Dijkzeul, Chapter 7, all in this volume). A relational perspective thus allows us to approach configurations as co-constitutive of interactions of NGOs. In this way, it sheds light on how NGO interactions play a role in the social constitution and perception of opportunity structures (Della Porta 2023b, 3) and are embedded in relational fields (Goldstone 2004).

Second, relational power facilitates and enhances NGOs' ability to influence and shape transnational and global rule-making. We see this when their conflicts lead to a redefinition of the applicability of OECD arbitration frameworks (Carolei, Chapter 2, this volume), when interpersonal ties allow them to shape the interpretation of the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights' right to food (Reiners, Chapter 5, this volume) or when building a super-network of TANs enables them to insert their goals into the preamble of the Paris Climate Agreement (Schapper, Chapter 8, this volume). Relational power also impedes further closure of civil society spaces. In Brazil, for example, the Climate Justice Network has effectively hindered changes in the national law that were designed to implement certain rules of the transnational Financial Action Task Force. NGO interactions through brokerage chains (H. Cheng et al., Chapter 6, this volume), humanitarian response

configurations (Petropoulos, [Chapter 3](#); DeMars and Dijkzeul, [Chapter 7](#), both this volume), and processes of law-making (Reiners, [Chapter 5](#); Carolei, [Chapter 2](#), both this volume) can also produce global public goods.

While the empirical studies in this volume do not exhaust the full range of theoretically and empirically possible connections between types of interactions, relational power, and effects, they show the fruitfulness of our approach. None of the mentioned identity, mobilization, legitimacy, or ordering effects could be explained simply by the starting conditions without taking into account what happened in the course of the interactions. However, the contributions also refer to instances where NGO interactions fail to have such effects (see Reiners, [Chapter 5](#), on rights to health; Petropoulos, [Chapter 3](#), on funding, both this volume). This raises the question about scope conditions that might make interactions more or less powerful. From the contributions in this volume, we propose three features that seem to render NGO interactions particularly powerful in generating such effects: temporal scope, multiplexity, and interpersonal relationships. In the following discussion, we examine how the findings in this volume regarding these features connect to recent and ongoing scholarly work, and we point towards avenues for future research.

Interactions are particularly powerful when they extend over time. Drezner (2021) has recently argued that the temporal scope of international relations studies has implications for what kind of power can be discerned and what types of effects identified. Temporal scope refers to the duration over which interactions occur. His argument is in line with Baldwin's (2016, 72) suggestion that the liquidity of power increases with time because resources become more fungible. For example, power relations that reconstitute identities and world views typically need longer periods of time to become effective. This also applies to our analysis of NGO interactions. While types of interactions presented at the beginning of this volume can occur as one-off events, what is empirically and theoretically relevant is the iterative and sequential nature of NGO–NGO interactions. Effects are rarely generated by one-off interactions but rather evolve over time as part of ongoing and mutually constitutive relationships. Repeated conflict or cooperation is likely to harden into configurational patterns, as shown by Petropoulos ([Chapter 3](#)) and Reiners ([Chapter 5](#), both this volume). Over time, cooperation can also turn into conflict when substantive or normative disagreements arise (Reiners, [Chapter 5](#), this volume). An emergency might call previously competing actors to collaborate on urgent problems (Petropoulos, [Chapter 5](#), this volume). Long-standing disregard and separation between NGOs advocating for related causes can eventually be transformed into cooperation to reframe their causes into a common approach (Schapper, [Chapter 8](#), this volume).

The iteration and sequence of interactions are also important with regard to underlying power relations. While entering new relations can enhance power (Avant and Westerwinter 2016), chapters in this volume show how ongoing relations also produce power. In several cases, *power with* arises from long-term coordinated, collaborative, and cooperative interactions and becomes a source of collective mobilization that enhances the *power to* achieve collective goals (Schmitz et al., [Chapter 4](#); Schapper, [Chapter 8](#); K. R. Cheng et al., [Chapter 9](#); Appe and Borges Pinho, [Chapter](#)

10, all this volume). At the same time, chapters also point towards the productive power of conflict for generating avenues for legitimacy and ordering effects (Carolei, [Chapter 2](#); DeMars and Dijkzeul, [Chapter 7](#), both this volume). Future research on such relational sequences could contribute to a better understanding of the liquidity of power by exploring how specific types of power can be transformed into other types.

Interactions are particularly powerful when multiplex, for example, cutting across different social spaces and scales. In their analysis of the new power politics in transnational security governance, [Avant and Westerwinter \(2016\)](#) find that multiplexity—actors' overlapping membership in several networks—affects the identity and the inclinations of the networks in which they are embedded. In their research, such multiplex nodes can link interpersonal to interorganizational or interstate networks, as well as networks in different issue areas. In our volume, overlapping memberships apply to actors engaged across sites of interaction, but also to practices and processes intersecting across different spaces and scales. DeMars and Dijkzeul ([Chapter 7](#), this volume) find that configurations of sovereignty, societal affinity, and humanitarian practices mobilize different emergency response networks in Ethiopia. Petropoulos ([Chapter 3](#), this volume) likewise finds configurations of practices mobilize more effective humanitarian responses in Greece. Actors positioned at the intersection of multiple temporal-relational contexts can develop greater capacities for creative and critical intervention (K. R. Cheng et al., [Chapter 9](#); Schapper, [Chapter 8](#); Petropoulos, [Chapter 3](#), all this volume), and those not in these intersections are thus at a disadvantage (H. Cheng et al., [Chapter 6](#), this volume). Chapters by Petropoulos ([Chapter 3](#)), Schapper ([Chapter 8](#)), Appe and Borges Pinho ([Chapter 10](#)), and K. R. Cheng et al. ([Chapter 9](#), all this volume) show how overlapping memberships are crucial for NGOs to generate both agency and power. Overlapping memberships bridge multiple policy, organizational, and social contexts and foster creativity by transmitting and transferring information and discourses from one forum to another and can also generate learning. In our volume, multiplexity also shows across ties, configurations, and sites of interactions. Chapters examine such multiplex interactions between NGOs (Carolei, [Chapter 2](#); Reiners, [Chapter 5](#); Petropoulos, [Chapter 3](#); Schmitz et al., [Chapter 4](#)), between TANs (Schapper, [Chapter 8](#)), between brokerage configurations (H. Cheng et al., [Chapter 6](#)), between individuals positioned across different networks and policy domains (Reiners, [Chapter 5](#); Petropoulos, [Chapter 3](#)), and between NGOs scaling different networks (Appe and Borges Pinho, [Chapter 10](#); K. R. Cheng et al., [Chapter 9](#), all this volume).

Interpersonal relations are a constitutive and facilitating feature of NGO interactions. Several authors have observed that interpersonal relations are not sufficiently considered in the NGO literature ([Schneiker 2017](#)), foreign policy analysis, and international relations broadly ([Heimann and Kampf 2022](#)). At the same time, there are emerging streams of research that consider the effects of personal relationships in expert networks and communities of practice for transnational governance and NGO advocacy more specifically ([Djelic and Quack 2010](#); [Schneiker and Joachim 2021](#); [Hearson et al. 2023](#); [Reiners 2024](#)). This literature suggests that positive

interpersonal ties are important conduits for receptiveness and trust building with possible spillover effects on the organizations to which the individuals belong. Heimann and Kampf (2022), for example, found that personal relations between political leaders can help to overcome obstacles, diffuse tension, gather information, and mobilize support in foreign policy and diplomacy. Research on transnational governance highlights how interpersonal relations within expert networks and communities are conducive to informal and formal rule-setting (Cooley and Nexon 2016; Quack 2016). In our volume, interpersonal relations can arise from all members of NGOs, hence leadership, employees, and volunteers. The findings suggest that interpersonal relations are a facilitating feature of NGO interactions. In fact, Petropoulos (Chapter 3), Reiners (Chapter 5), Schapper (Chapter 8), as well as Appe and Borges Pinho (Chapter 10, all this volume) show that interpersonal ties are essential for generating cooperation and coordination in advocacy in situations where competing or conflicting organizational goals and norms of NGOs raise high barriers for interorganizational alliance building. Yet these relationships are not restricted to the cooperative end of the spectrum. As demonstrated by Reiners (Chapter 5) as well as DeMars and Dijkzeul (Chapter 7, both this volume), disregarding, as well as adversarial social ties between individuals can also have hampering effects. Several chapters point towards persons bonding through shared practices, be they practices typically employed in expert committees or anchoring practices used by NGOs and their employees in humanitarian aid crises.

Temporal scope is also key to interpersonal relations. In situations of crisis, individuals often draw on long-existing, sometimes latent interpersonal ties. Transnational NGOs entering Greece during the refugee crisis were only able to mobilize links to local NGOs if they had already been present there before and developed such personal relationships. Similarly, the individuals promoting a super-network between TANs at the Paris climate conference knew each other because of recurrent interactions on previous occasions (Petropoulos, Chapter 3; Schapper, Chapter 8, both this volume). Interpersonal relations gain robustness if rooted in a variety of groups, networks, or communities. They become fragile when standing on their own. Reiners (Chapter 5, this volume) provides an example for this fragility. While interpersonal relations helped to provide expertise in committees, NGO representatives ran the danger of being co-opted or silenced by other committee members as there was no supporting outside mobilization.

Overall, by bringing together evidence on NGO interactions and their effects across a range of important global policy fields and world regions, the volume offers synthetic knowledge about an understudied topic. Based on the findings from the chapters, we have formulated propositions of how and why NGO interactions are powerful in generating identity, mobilizing, legitimacy, and ordering effects. We have hypothesized that temporal scope, multiplexity, and interpersonal relations are facilitating factors to make NGO interaction effective. Yet, it is important to highlight that a relational approach sees interactions as open-ended—even if they are recurrent and iterative over longer periods of time, and unfold in institutionalized relational contexts.

NGOs and Global Governing: Towards a Relational Perspective

This volume set out from the observation that NGOs' role in global policymaking and global governance is increasingly recognized, yet its complexity requires further inquiry. A relational perspective helps shed light on how NGOs deal with major contemporary challenges. The current literature on NGOs often observes that they have become victims of their own success. As their influence in advocacy, service delivery, and standard-setting has grown, so too has the public scrutiny of their claims, activities, and outcomes: who do NGOs represent? How democratic is their internal decision-making? Why are there so few NGOs from the Global South operating at an equal footing with those from the Global North? To whom are NGOs accountable and are they sufficiently transparent to their audiences? [Mitchell et al. \(2020\)](#) place transnational NGOs between 'power and irrelevance' and see a need to reform NGO organizational models in response to the contemporary challenges arising from geopolitics, quests for accountability, and pressures of competition. [Balboa \(2018\)](#) observes a paradox of scale when NGOs expand reach and scope to global levels to gain authority in global politics while at the same time losing support at the local level. While this volume cannot comprehensively address all these challenges, we believe that our relational framework and the findings of the empirical studies can be helpful for thinking about how the role of NGOs in global politics is evolving and changing over time in response to these challenges.

First, this volume shows that NGOs' power in global politics often arises from their interactions. This suggests that we should broaden our research beyond the strategies of large NGOs and consider the full range of interactions between entities that undertake *NGOing*. Shifting the focus towards interactions provides insights into how small to medium-sized NGOs gain agency and power as part of relational webs while individually not having the same material resources, social standing, and visibility as leading NGOs. A central focus of the literature has been on network centrality or leading status, which provides big NGOs with access to more material or ideational resources. This is due to the number of interactions in which they engage and this multiplicity of interactions also makes them less vulnerable to periodic disruptions in relational patterns and more able to threaten rupturing relations with others; they can accumulate resources, information, and prestige because of their central position ([Bob 2005](#); [Carpenter 2007, 2011](#); [Stroup and Wong 2017](#)). Small to medium-sized NGOs may not occupy these central positions (see [Reiners, Chapter 5](#); [K. R. Cheng et al., Chapter 9](#); [Petropoulos, Chapter 3](#), all this volume), but they still act, provide public goods, and solve problems. Focusing on interactions reveals the ways in which actors in this group emerge, negotiate recognition and support, creatively solve governance problems, and define the public good.

Second, this volume also highlights the variety of relational types through which NGOs interact with peers and other actors. The empirical studies in this volume show that relational sequences and patterns leading to specific effects are much more complex than often recognized. This relational complexity becomes even more

evident when combining insights from the three analytical perspectives that organize this volume. Findings show how repeated and sequential interactions between specific actors (social ties) lead to the emergence of aggregate patterns of relational types such as configurations. This relational complexity mediates and moderates NGO activity and outcomes more than organizational endowments or strategies. With the right relational mix, actors can exert outsized influence on shaping state interests, as both Reiners (Chapter 5) and Schapper (Chapter 8) show in this volume. Relational configurations generate complex and countervailing effects that might open pathways to coordination, as DeMars and Dijkzeul (Chapter 7) show, or foreclose future cooperation as discussed by H. Cheng et al. (Chapter 6, both this volume). The main takeaway is that we cannot understand the power of NGOs without attention to their relationships and relational contexts.

Future longitudinal studies of transcalar NGO interactions can contribute to developing a more dynamic theory of political opportunity structures co-created by relationships. Our relational approach suggests that the civic space in which NGOs work is constituted through dynamic, contingent processes that both expand and contract these social spaces. Therefore, through the relational processes and interactions of claim-making, NGOs constitute the spaces in which they act. Chapters by K. R. Cheng et al. (Chapter 9), Appe and Borges Pinho (Chapter 10), and DeMars and Dijkzeul (Chapter 7, all this volume), in particular, examine NGO interactions with, and within, community, national, and international political opportunity structures, and show how these interactions enable and constrain relational configurations, constitute brokerage positions and processes, and produce or deny relational power. A relational approach can make visible how *NGOing* still occurs in situations of government crackdowns and pandemic measures, and yet it can also reveal how organizations claiming NGO status can constitute restrictions for others, such as in the case of GONGOs, right-wing, or evangelistic civil organizations. Future research could examine how humanitarian and civic space is constituted, the processes through which NGOs make claims and establish publics within constrained civic spaces, and whether these processes look different for international and local NGOs.

Third, the open-endedness of a relational analysis of NGO interactions resonates with the recent theorizing of global policymaking as a bricolage of practices and values (Pouliot and Thérien 2023) embedded in a patchwork of polycentric governing processes (Koinova et al. 2021; Gadinger and Scholte 2023). Our volume also relates to recent works that view global governance as complex, dynamic institutional fields where processes, practices, and positions intersect, interact, and produce transformative effects (Krause 2014; Stroup and Wong 2017; Zarakol 2017; Kim 2020). These studies enhance our understanding of how hierarchy (Stroup and Wong 2017; Zarakol 2017) and institutional orders (Krause 2014) emerge in specific areas of activity and how NGOs navigate transcalar contexts (Pallas and Bloodgood 2022). Others use interactions (Eberlein et al. 2014) as a lens through which to understand how global governance actually works (Koinova et al. 2021).

Our volume speaks to this broader academic interest in understanding what drives and shapes processes of global governance. Shifting configurations of social ties can result in the creation of new actors, practices, and processes or generate competing sites of political authority (MacDonald 2018, 131). NGO interactions with other NGOs, states, for-profit firms, and other actors generate social spaces where governance occurs. These spaces may be more transitory or permanent, but what is notable are the processes of interaction that generate relational (collective) agency and power (see for example Carolei, Chapter 2; Appe and Borges Pinho, Chapter 10; Schmitz et al., Chapter 4, all this volume; Andersen 2015). These interactions may result in the expansion or alteration of institutional rules and governance functions (Carolei, Chapter 2, this volume), the resourceful provision of services (Petropoulos, Chapter 3; DeMars and Dijkzeul, Chapter 7, both this volume), the broadening of international law and commitments (Schapper, Chapter 8; Reiners, Chapter 5, both this volume), and mobilizing resources (H. Cheng et al., Chapter 6; K. R. Cheng et al., Chapter 9, both this volume). Thus, these interactions constitute spaces of *global* governance and what it means to govern globally.

Future research could apply a relational approach to examine the dynamic processes of global governing, taking interactions rather than governors as starting points to map how global governance occurs. Adopting a relational approach to global governance would be helpful in revealing the relational mechanisms and dynamics underlying forms of global organization and processes of global governance (see de Oliveria Paes 2023 on region-making). In turn, these analyses could also reveal how new-found agency or sites of political authority might be appropriated or misused in ways that (re)produce hierarchy and exclusion.

This volume is an invitation for more relational NGO research. Rather than providing a generalizable theory of NGOs or global governance, this volume provides a conceptual framework and a rich set of empirical studies that enable a better understanding of the contingent, dynamic, and iterative processes through which NGOs affect global politics. The strength of an approach that foregrounds open-endedness and contingency is that it provides an understanding of how NGOs adapt and change in a changing world. Future research may examine our propositions in other policy fields and regions. We hope that other scholars may feel inspired to follow up and expand further on the research agenda and case studies presented in this volume.

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