

MENARA Working Papers

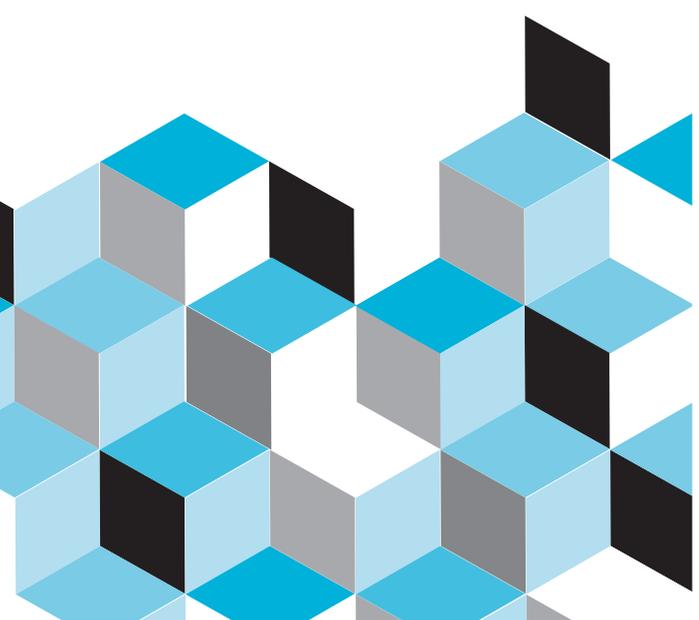
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THE INTERNATIONAL NGO TRIANGLE IN THE MENA REGION

Máté Szalai



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ABSTRACT

The Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region is increasingly embedded into the global order in the transnational field, namely through the intra- and interregional interactions of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) with state actors. The phenomenon is investigated in the framework of the “international NGO triangle”, namely the system of relations between the non-governmental organization, the host state and the external partner. Case studies include the activities of the Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect in Iraq, regional NGOs cooperating with the ECOSOC, and the Qatari “multiple track approach” after the Gulf rift of 2017. However, the extent to which NGOs operating in the region have actual agency (and, in parallel, the extent of their dependency on state actors) can be debated. Consequently, the strengthening of the transnational sector does not necessarily limit the leverage of states as previously predicted.

INTRODUCTION

The growing role of non-state actors (NSAs) has been an important feature of the globalized international order (Csicsmann et al. 2017: 10–1), especially in the post-bipolar era. Due to systemic changes taking place in recent decades, such entities have achieved indisputable relevance in decision-making and the management of economic and social affairs on the local, national and international level. The Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region has been no exception, especially in the light of the regional instability caused by the Arab uprisings in 2011. Since the beginning of the decade, a wide range of NSAs have appeared or emerged as central players in different conflicts.

The process of transnationalization and the emergence of non-state actors represents a field in which the embeddedness of the Middle Eastern regional system in the global system should be analysed (Morillas et al. 2016: 72–5). This paper focuses on the role of two types of entities through which such dynamics will be investigated. Firstly, “global” non-governmental organizations (NGOs) will be researched, namely those INGOs (international non-governmental organizations) that are not founded by individuals or organizations from the MENA region, but do operate in the MENA region. Secondly, to investigate the process from the other direction (namely how Middle Eastern NSAs affect the global order), Middle Eastern NGOs with considerable activity outside the region will be analysed. While the transnational arena is dominated by non-state actors, the role of states is considerable and should also be included in the investigation.

¹ Máté Szalai is the coordinator of the Middle East research programme at the Institute for Foreign Affairs and Trade (IFAT) and an assistant lecturer at the Corvinus University of Budapest. The author would also like to thank the assistance of Adrienn Bátor and Hajnalka Tóth as well as all his colleagues who helped him in his work.

The paper consists of three main parts: the first describes the role of transnationalization in world politics and in the MENA region as a framework for the investigation, while the second sets up the model of the “INGO triangle” in order to interpret the complex relationship between the stakeholders of transnationalization. Lastly, the third part incorporates three case studies.

The main argument of the paper is that beyond the state-level dimension, the transnational field has witnessed a process of integration of the Middle Eastern domestic and regional orders in the global order. More importantly, this process not only exposes the MENA to global developments but also strengthens the agency of Middle Eastern actors to influence the global agenda. The major question in this regard is the extent to which this agency belongs to independent organizations or, on the contrary, whether they are just another tool for Middle Eastern states to pursue their interests on the global level.

1. TRANSNATIONALIZATION IN WORLD POLITICS AND IN THE MENA REGION

One of the core features of the post-bipolar global order has been the shrinking leverage of the modern state. Primarily due to the technological, economic and social changes that took place in the second half of the 20th century, the Westphalian state lost its perceived monopoly not just in international affairs, but in domestic affairs as well. This process was accompanied by the necessary rise of different types of non-state actors which can play, among others, supportive, complementary, competitive or disruptive roles vis-à-vis the state in which they operate.

This process led to a phenomenon often described as transnationalization, which “refers to overlapping ties and linkages of non-state actors between various national states” (Faist 2004: 339). This essentially reflects the “movement of people, information, and goods in the global arena [...], a movement of culture, a globalization of meaning” (Friedman 1998: 242). In this framework, transnational relations equal “contacts, coalitions, and interactions across state boundaries that are not controlled by the central foreign policy organs of governments” (Nye and Keohane 1971: 331). The phenomenon does not erase the role of nation-states (Faist 2004: 339), but it does reshape the environment in which they operate and form their domestic and foreign policies.

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are one of the primary players in this new transnationalized global world order. NGOs can be defined as “autonomous organisations that are non-governmental, that is, they are not instrumentalities of government; and non-profit, that is not distributing revenue as income to owners; and formal, legal entities” (Anheier et al. 2001: 4). Based on this very broad definition, a wide range of different entities can be labelled as NGOs, “irrespective of their forms, formal status or aims” (Rucht 1999: 206–7).

Naturally, an NGO whose activities transcend national borders, or that operates in a country different from that in which it is based, can be called an international NGO, or INGO. The first such entity was created in 1840, and by 1915 their number reached 1,080. Developments in the 20th century paved the way for the creation and growing importance of INGOs – by 1990, there were more than 30,000 such entities (Christensen 2006: 286). The main reasons behind this huge rise include the decline of state power, the articulation of global and international problems (which cannot be dealt with by a single nation-state), the denationalization of multinational corporations and, last but not

least, developments in communications and information technologies (Christensen 2006: 286–7).

Despite the limited attention paid to them in public discourse and in the literature, “INGOs have a profound impact on international law, international regime formation, national politics and the quality of life within individual countries” (Bloodgood 2011: 95), and thus they have become an integral part of the global order and global governance in almost all fields of politics. In 2000, approximately half of the world’s INGOs pursued activities in either economic development and infrastructure or research, but many also worked to provide social services, policy advocacy, cultural and recreational goods, religious, educational, environmental or health issues, or general politics and defence (Christensen 2006: 287).

Perceptions of INGOs differ in the literature and have been harshly criticized by certain actors. Generally, “in an era of privatization and democratization, international policy makers hypothesize that NGOs can articulate political liberalism, complement private sector initiatives and extend a social safety net to supplement or replace government services” (Carapico 2000: 14). On the other hand, they can be seen as inseparable from the European and American cultural and political context in international politics, being a “small and elite collection of [...] organizations which are based in the most powerful political and cultural capitals of the West” (Mutua 1999: 210). Consequently, a very common and recurring critique of the work of INGOs is that despite their advertised independence, they actually promote a partisan political agenda. “They present themselves as apolitical, as not interested in the political character of a state, although they clearly seek to vindicate liberal values in non-Western societies” (Mutua 1999: 211). From this perspective, they are very similar to interest groups, as they “rely on the same range of tactics, including inside lobbying, public education, protest and demonstration, and judicial action, in roughly the same proportion as traditional interest groups” (Bloodgood 2011: 103). Even if one agrees with the general activities and aims of INGOs, several reservations can be expressed regarding their practical operation, including the “lack of regulation, amateurism, lack of co-ordination with the public sector, duplication, competition for resources, sub-standard work, and lack of sustainability” (Cavill and Sohail 2007: 231).

Another problem associated with the rise of NGOs is the spread of GONGOs, namely government-sponsored non-governmental organizations. Perceiving the process of transnationalization and the growing role of the non-state sector, several governments have overseen and initiated the creation of NGOs which, either directly or through funding, work as a foreign policy tool and lack real agency. Nevertheless, one should not overgeneralize the phenomenon of GONGOs – some can be benign, some are irrelevant, but many can be dangerous by serving as a disguised tool controlled by states (Naím 2007: 96).² The differentiation of NGOs from GONGOs can be problematic not just for society, but also for other states and international organizations.

Transnationalization and the growing role of NGOs and INGOs has affected the MENA region as well. In the 1990s, their number grew exponentially due to the “confluence of wide-ranging [...] domestic and international trends” (Carapico 2000: 13), including:

- education and urbanization, and the transnational movement of information and knowledge;

² Another term used in the literature is “quango”, which stands for quasi-autonomous non-governmental organization (Kleinschmit and Edwards 2017: 530).

- national state policies aimed at suppressing or co-opting non-state actors and opposition parties, both of which can lead to the strengthening of NGOs;
- the changing policies of traditional international development aid actors (including international organizations and Western INGOs) which shows the trend to provide material and non-material resources not just to state actors but more and more to non-state actors; and, in parallel,
- the shifting strategy of global state actors to rely more and more on non-state actors in achieving their foreign policy goals, not just in the MENA region but all over the world, a shift we can call the “neo-democratization approach” or the “extension of the neoliberal world order”.

Naturally, in a region where state structures are inherently weak in many respects,³ the presence of NGOs is not surprising. The constant and often violent rivalry between elite groups (Anderson 1987: 12–4, Izquierdo Brichs and Lampidri-Kemou 2013) in MENA countries vying for control over the state and state institutions does not incentivize politicians to provide for the needs of society in terms of representation and material and non-material welfare to a greater extent than is necessary to secure some form of legitimacy. This creates a constant demand from the side of society for non-state actors and also creates the possibility for INGOs and donor actors to play a role in domestic politics and the civil sphere of a given country.

In response, the states – perceiving their weakness all over the world, including in the MENA region – tried to prevent NGOs from gaining strength. As Rouven Symank (2017: 5) observes,

Today, however, this momentum [of NGOs] – or at least the perception of its dynamics – has fundamentally changed. In a climate of re-emerging nationalism and protectionism, several NGOs and Member States of the UN have complained about an increasingly restrictive stance towards civil society and argue that the principles of the UN are being undermined by such trends. Numerous articles write about “crack-downs” on civil society not only in Russia and China, but also in Egypt, Azerbaijan, and, more recently, Turkey.

The backlash against NGOs in the MENA region actually started years before the Arab uprisings. In 1996, the Ministries of Interior Committee of the League of Arab Nations identified NGOs (and human rights NGOs in particular) as a threat to their national security. Subsequently MENA governments implemented an increasingly aggressive and diverse toolkit to harass civil activists (Pitner 2000). As a result, according to Pitner (2000), local NGOs had three options: to obtain funding from government bodies and draw closer to the state itself; to collect money from foreign actors and circumvent the state; or to set a specific, independent agenda and accept subsidies only from partners that totally respected their autonomy. Forcing NGOs to find international partners had a very interesting and unintentional effect, namely that it accelerated the integration of the MENA region into the global order and created a dynamic and asymmetric net of relations between various actors which we describe as the “INGO triangle”.

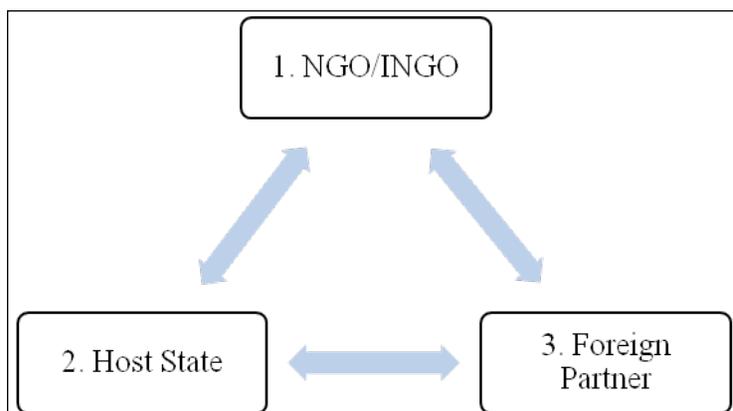
3 Avoiding generalization, Middle Eastern states tend to be strong in terms of their security apparatus and law enforcement, while failing in other areas of governance. Rolf Schwarz and Miguel de Corral (2011) made a classification based on the three main functions of the state, namely security, welfare and representation. Based on the ability of state institutions to provide these public goods, the authors classified states in five categories: “strong” (if they can check all three), “reformed” (security and representation), “rentier” (security and welfare), “weak/fragile” (security) and “failed” (none). They argue that most of the Middle Eastern states fit one of the middle three categories, which means that they cannot provide for all three functions, which creates a social need as well as a possibility for NGOs.

2. THE “INGO TRIANGLE”

In order to interpret the role, activities and dilemmas of INGOs operating in the MENA region through case studies and thus to shed light on the effects of the transnationalization of global politics on the regional and domestic orders, a simplified model labelled the “INGO triangle” will be used in the investigation.

This model (see Figure 1) is essentially a network of three vertices, with each vertex representing an actor. The first is the non-state actor we will examine here – an NGO receiving support or funds from abroad, or an INGO operating in different countries. The second is the host state (HS), namely the MENA country or the extra-regional country in which the examined NGO is operating. The third vortex is the foreign partner (FP) of the first actor – a state or intergovernmental institution that subsidizes the NGO/INGO, for example, or an INGO that cooperates with the NGO in question. Naturally, oftentimes an NGO/INGO has several foreign partners at the same time, so we can include multiple actors in this vortex.

Figure 1 | The INGO triangle



In this network, we can identify three edges which represent the interactions between the different actors. The three types of connections are characterized by different dynamics:

(i) *The NGO/INGO and the host state (1-2)*: several factors affect the relationship between the HS and the NGO/INGO. The attitude of the HS towards the NGO/INGO is essentially based on a political decision about whether the activities of the specific NGO/INGO can be regarded as posing a political challenge to the government. If not, several other possibilities remain: they can complement the activities of the state or even support and strengthen its position in the country (by helping to conduct its functions or providing legitimacy). Although the role of non-state actors has increased significantly in the MENA region since 2011, the state institutions, sensing their loss of power, can easily fight back. Therefore, paradoxically, the weakness of states does not necessarily translate into peaceful coexistence, but often results in harsh crackdowns on the civil sphere. The political decision made by the HS is hugely dependent on the sector in which the NGO/INGO operates – in politically sensitive fields (e.g., human rights, gender equality, sexual and reproductive rights, legislation, security, etc.) the chance of the NGO/INGO being securitized is much higher than in other areas, for example education (e.g., providing free English language lessons), culture or the economy.

(ii) *The NGO/INGO and the foreign partner (1-3)*: in this case, we can expect a cooperative relationship between the NGO/INGO and the FP (although not exclusively). The interaction between these actors can be modelled as an interaction based on the perception of common interests – the FP provides material or non-material resources to the NGO/INGO, while the latter usually accepts a specific framework of aims, modus operandi or other kinds of donor requirements. The exact flexibility of this framework of aims and the remaining leverage of the recipient NGO/INGO vary significantly – if the aims and operational philosophy of the actors overlap perfectly, there is no additional political burden put on the NGO/INGO (which is the perfect scenario for them), but in practice, the recipient often has to fulfil some donor expectations. In addition, the FP might require information sharing, administrative work or other forms of output from the NGO/INGO. In some cases, especially if the foreign partner is a non-MENA state and the examined INGO is seated in this non-MENA state, the relationship can be strained as well, especially if there is a change of government in the non-MENA state or if political disagreements exist between the two actors.

(iii) *The host state and the foreign partner (2-3)*: from the perspective of the present study, the most interesting question regarding the relationship between the HS and FP is how the dynamics between these two actors affect the position and the circumstances of the NGO/INGO in the host state or vis-à-vis the foreign partner. Naturally, if the HS and the FP maintain hostile relations (for example, Syria and the United States), the NGO/INGO which operates in the former but receives funds from the latter faces difficult dilemmas in its activity, for example whether it should disclose the existence of its relationship with the FP. This is especially difficult if the FP requires all of its partners to publish the origins of the subsidies it provides. Naturally, the question is more sensitive if the foreign partner is a state and not an international organization in which the host state is also a member. That is why the United Nations and other global international governmental organizations (IGOs) can serve as a less sensitive foreign partner for NGOs. From another perspective, both the FP and the HS can use the NGO/INGO to their advantage, thus corrupting the work of the NGO/INGO to become a foreign policy tool.

The three interactions (NGO/INGO–HS; NGO/INGO–FP; HS–FP) do not exist independently from each other, but continuously affect one another. Neither the host state nor the foreign partner has complete oversight over the relationship between the NGO/INGO and the third member of the triangle. Thus, if the HS and the FP have a bad relationship, both might be suspicious of the NGO/INGO and perceive it in the context of their bilateral relationship (even as a GONGO). In examining specific cases, one has to take these dynamics into account.

3. CASE STUDIES

In the following pages, the INGO triangle will be used to interpret three case studies. The first is the work of the New York- and Geneva-based Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect (GCR2P) and its work in effecting the framework of post-conflict reconciliation in Iraq. The second focuses on Middle Eastern NGOs cooperating with the Economic and Social Committee (ECOSOC) of the United Nations which will show how the regional civil sphere can affect the global order as well, and not just the other way round. The third focuses on how a state actor, Qatar, used NGOs/INGOs to influence the international perception of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) crisis of 2017.

3.1 THE GLOBAL CENTRE FOR THE RESPONSIBILITY TO PROTECT

The Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect was established in February 2008 with the primary aim to contribute to the general acceptance among societies globally of the responsibility to protect (R2P) norm.

The R2P is one of the most discussed norms to have emerged in the 21st century, although its exact meaning, scope and applicability are widely debated (Bellamy 2014). The basis of the content of the norm is twofold (see UN General Assembly Resolution 60/1). Firstly, it proclaims that “each individual State has the responsibility to protect its populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity” (UN General Assembly 2005: §138). Secondly, it also suggests that

the international community, through the United Nations, also has the responsibility to use appropriate diplomatic, humanitarian and other peaceful means, in accordance with Chapters VI and VIII of the Charter, to help to protect populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity. (UN General Assembly 2005: §139)

Contrary to popular belief, the R2P doctrine does not create a new legal foundation for intervention, as the UN General Assembly resolution cited above clearly states that the responsibility of the international community should be exercised in accordance with the UN Charter.⁴ While the first practical application of the norm took place in 2011 in the form of UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1973 (which provided legal grounds for the intervention of Western powers in the Libyan civil war by the creation of a no-fly zone),⁵ the exact position of R2P is not fixed in the international legal system.

While the creators of the norm hoped for universal acceptance, many debate the moral and practical logic behind the R2P doctrine. David Bosco (2011) argues that the idea is structurally flawed as its success will always be “ambiguous and debatable”.⁶ Nonetheless, the R2P attracted the attention of many scholars, policy-makers and activists who thought that if the norm became a generally accepted one, it could have a positive effect on international politics. Many state and

4 There are constant debates, moreover, concerning the scope of the R2P doctrine – whether it should apply only to the four major crimes identified by the General Assembly resolution (namely genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity) or to a much broader set of humanitarian and human security problems (Bellamy 2014).

5 Prior to that, the norm had modest “real-world impact” (Hehir 2013: 6). In the resolution, the Security Council reiterated “the responsibility of the Libyan authorities to protect the Libyan population” and stated that it is the “parties to armed conflicts” which “bear the primary responsibility to take all feasible steps to ensure the protection of civilians”. While the resolution, obviously, was accepted by all permanent members of the Security Council, the lawfulness of the practical application and interpretation of the resolution was highly debated by the Russian and Chinese governments, which limited the further diffusion of the norm.

6 Roland Paris (2014) claims that there are five fundamental problems with R2P: the mixed motivation problem (in practice, the humanitarian nature of the motive of the interventionist force is never verifiable); the counterfactual problem (the intention to prevent mass atrocities before they happen); the conspicuous harm problem (preventing mass atrocities with actions causing collateral damage); the end-state problem (how to reach a sustainable situation which enables the interventionist forces to leave); and the inconsistency problem (the international community cannot intervene in all cases of mass atrocities). These structural questions can easily discredit any interventions, even if they are driven by humanitarian motives.

non-state actors championed the R2P doctrine and started to actively promote it on the global level (Hehir 2014: 6). As Peter Hilpold rightly observes, the scope of the transnational “alliance” that has formed to promote the R2P doctrine, which includes different actors from different spheres and regions, is quite unique in the international system (Hilpold 2014: 4).

One such entity is the Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect (GCR2P). According to its mission statement, the goal of the organization is “to promote universal acceptance and effective operational implementation of the norm of the ‘Responsibility to Protect’” and it “seeks to transform the principle [...] into a practical guide for action in the face of mass atrocities”.⁷ The GCR2P’s activities include providing advocacy and recommendations, conducting research and reports while also cooperating with other state and non-state actors to operationalize the R2P doctrine. In this way, the GCR2P is among the actors contributing to international politics, mostly through “pressing for action, research, policy analysis and idea-mongering” (Ercan 2016: 118).

GCR2P represents the NGO/INGO in the INGO triangle, but it has many connections in terms of both host states and foreign partners. The INGO monitors fifteen countries,⁸ but its work has been most visible in the case of Iraq since July 2013.⁹ In terms of foreign partners, GCR2P operates from New York and Geneva, but according to its website it receives financial support from nineteen states,¹⁰ as well as from several foundations and individuals.¹¹ Most of its reports and public recommendations are made specifically to the United Kingdom, so it could be a fair choice for its primary foreign partner. Moreover, the list of patrons of the institution includes, among others, former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, winner of the 1984 Nobel Peace Prize Desmond Tutu and former Jordanian Crown Prince El Hassan bin Talal. In this case the relationship between the FPs and the HS (Iraq) is officially cordial, therefore we can expect limited tension regarding the work of the GCR2P in the country, even if the work of the INGO relates to a politically sensitive topic.

Since the beginning of 2013, the GCR2P has published twenty-seven “Atrocity Alerts” to monitor the humanitarian crisis in Iraq. These reports are sent to all permanent representatives to the UN, so they have the potential to shape the understanding of states about the situation in Iraq. During the summer of 2014, the GCR2P contributed to the ongoing debate about a possible intervention in Iraq, eventually proclaiming that the activities of the international coalition against the Islamic State (IS) were in accordance with the R2P norm. Later, the GCR2P played a watchdog role and

7 See GCR2P official website: About Us, http://www.globalr2p.org/about_us.

8 Afghanistan, Burundi, Central African Republic, Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, Democratic Republic of Congo, Eritrea, Iraq, Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories, Myanmar (Burma), the Philippines, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, Syria and Yemen.

9 Besides the case of Iraq (and the KRG), other MENA states cooperated with the Global Centre in the framework of the “Global Network of R2P Focal Points”. The initiative urges all governments to appoint a national Focal Point who, as a senior-level official, can promote the norm of R2P on the national level. According to the official website, sixty countries in the world have appointed such an official, including three from the MENA region: Qatar, Jordan and Morocco. See GCR2P website: Global Network of R2P Focal Points, http://www.globalr2p.org/our_work/global_network_of_r2p_focal_points.

10 Australia, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, France, Germany, Ireland, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Mexico, Monaco, the Netherlands, Norway, Republic of Korea, Rwanda, Slovenia, Sweden, Switzerland and the United Kingdom.

11 Including the Carnegie Corporation, the Open Society Foundation and the Keller Foundation.

monitored the atrocities committed not just by the Islamic State but also those of the American-led intervention and the Iraqi government. In February 2017, they raised the issue of collective punishment in the fight against the Islamic State. In many cases, both the Iraqi central government and the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) were open to engaging with the GCR2P regarding cases related to the atrocities committed by the IS.¹²

The most visible achievement of the GCR2P's work regarding Iraq is its contribution to UN Security Council Resolution 2379, which requests "the Secretary-General to establish an Investigative Team, headed by a Special Adviser, to support domestic efforts to hold" the Islamic State "accountable by collecting, preserving, and storing evidence in Iraq of acts that may amount to war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide [...] to the highest possible standards" (UN Security Council 2017). The Investigative Team respects the sovereignty of Iraq; therefore, this act was not securitized by the Iraqi government. The role of GCR2P in the process is, naturally, not completely visible; nonetheless, according to their account they "worked closely [...] with the Iraqi and UK governments and with other UN Security Council members, for the establishment of the investigative mechanism" (GCR2P 2018). The creation of an Investigative Team was in line with the previous work of the GCR2P in raising the topic of bringing jihadists to justice in Iraq. For example, in September 2016 (one year before the adoption of UNSCR 2379), the GCR2P issued a joint statement with Amnesty International and Yazda¹³ in which they called on the UN Security Council to assist "in providing justice for the victims of Da'esh's mass atrocity crimes by working with Iraq and other states to establish a relevant mechanism of international justice" (Amnesty International et al. 2016).

After the adaptation of UNSCR 2379, the Centre criticized the "limited focus" of the resolution, arguing that the investigative body should not concentrate only on the atrocities committed by the Islamic State, but on those of other actors as well, especially if they were the result of sectarian violence. In this regard, the statement is clearly meant to criticize the Iraqi Defence Forces and to urge the government (and the international community) to investigate these crimes as well. In addition, they recommended "the government of Iraq [to] adopt enabling legislation to incorporate genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity into domestic law" (GCR2P 2017).

All in all, the GCR2P demonstrates a clear case of an NGO working on issues related to security and humanitarian intervention at the international level. Its primary aim is to shape the international agenda and to help the Iraqi state through legislation. Its relationship with both the HS and the FP seems cordial, as no critical public statements have been found. Nonetheless, the GCR2P has been criticized in the Middle Eastern media, especially in relation to its endorsement of the US-led intervention in Iraq in 2014 (Shupak 2015). According to the argument, "This is the most recent of many examples of justifications for the bombing that have been made in terms of the Responsibility to Protect." In this regard, the GCR2P is credited with discursive power when it comes to framing a specific intervention. From a broader perspective, this watchdog role helps the

12 Based on an interview with Anna Samulski, a research analyst from GCR2P, conducted in person in April 2018 and in writing afterwards.

13 Yazda is a "multi-national Yazidi global organization established in the aftermath of the Yazidi Genocide in 2014, to support the Yazidi ethno-religious minority and other vulnerable groups". See the official website: *About Us*, <https://www.yazda.org/about-us>.

actual operationalization of the R2P doctrine and provides the theoretical concept with substance (especially with regard to its practical requirements).

The role and activities of GCR2P represent an example of two interesting developments regarding the embeddedness of the MENA regional system in the global order. Firstly, it shows how global NGOs can contribute to the diffusion of a norm appearing on the global agenda in both the regional (MENA) and the domestic (Iraq) sphere. Secondly, such global NGOs can use their successes and activities in the region to strengthen the role of the norm on the global level. Both processes strengthen what we can call the “normative integration” of the MENA system into the global order, which means the acceptance, introduction, formation and alteration of global norms by regional actors.

3.2 NGOS COOPERATING WITH ECOSOC

As the case of GCR2P shows, the most obvious area in which NGOs and INGOs can achieve significant success is influencing international legislation through cooperation with different United Nations bodies. The next case study focuses on NGOs in the Middle East that cooperate with the UN.

For non-governmental organizations working in economic and social affairs, one way to exert influence is to contribute to the work of the Economic and Social Council of the UN, which created the first official format to include NGOs in the decision-making processes of the global organization. The United Nations Charter itself proclaims in Article 71 that

The Economic and Social Council may make suitable arrangements for consultation with non-governmental organizations which are concerned with matters within its competence. Such arrangements may be made with international organizations and, where appropriate, with national organizations after consultation with the Member of the United Nations concerned.

To participate in the work of ECOSOC, NGOs should achieve “consultative status” which can be considered as the doorstep to such activities. According to the website of the NGO Branch of ECOSOC, the eligibility criteria include, among others, official recognition by a government for at least two years before application and an established headquarters.¹⁴ Moreover, ECOSOC forbids the inclusion of organizations established by governmental institutions or intergovernmental agreements.

Consultative status is granted by ECOSOC itself upon the recommendation of the Committee on NGOs. This circumstance highlights the most important feature of the ECOSOC mechanism, namely that the approval of consultative status depends entirely on the governments of member states. If an NGO is considered a threat by its own government, that government can block its cooperation with the UN at different steps of the process (e.g., not recognizing the NGO officially in its domestic law, or vetoing it in the vote in ECOSOC itself). This enables states to exclude NGOs

¹⁴ Criteria also include a democratically adopted constitution, the authority to speak for its members, a representative structure and appropriate mechanisms of accountability and transparent decision-making processes; the basic resources of the given NGO should be derived from contributions of national affiliates or from individual members.

that are critical of them. On the other hand, if an NGO is accepted, there is a higher chance that the host state will not hamper its cooperation with its foreign partner, which in this case is ECOSOC (and other bodies of the UN).

Altogether, ECOSOC differentiates between three forms of consultative status: general (which applies to NGOs conducting broad activities), special (which applies to NGOs conducting activities in only a few fields) and roster (NGOs with which the UN cooperates but which does not fulfil the requirements of the former two categories).

In 2009, two years before the Arab uprisings, there were 162 Middle Eastern or North African NGOs with consultative status in ECOSOC, representing 5 per cent of the 3,194 such entities globally (Housseini 2009: 9). By July 2018, according to the online database,¹⁵ their number rose to 260, although their share remained at 4.9 per cent (of 5,209 consultative NGOs worldwide). These data – especially considering the anecdotal evidence regarding the rising number of non-state actors since 2011 – suggest that despite the turmoil, no radical changes have occurred.

Statistics show (see Table 1) that more than half of the MENA NGOs with consultative status are from the Mashreq region (126), with Turkey (39), Egypt (30) and Israel (27) taking the lead. The Gulf lags behind with only 96 registered NGOs, more than half of which are from Iran, the country which hosts the most consultative entities in the whole region (52). Besides the Islamic Republic, only Iraq has a significant number (15) in the Gulf. The Maghreb comes third, with only 38 NGOs with consultative status, most of which are Moroccan (25).

Table 1 | The number of NGOs with ECOSOC consultative status by origin (sub-region and country)

The Gulf		Mashreq		Maghreb	
Bahrain	3	Egypt	30	Algeria	3
Iran	52	Israel	27	Libya	1
Iraq	15	Jordan	4	Morocco	25
Kuwait	4	Lebanon	18	Tunisia	9
Oman	0	Palestine	7		
Qatar	7	Syria	1		
Saudi Arabia	8	Turkey	39		
UAE	4	Occupied Syrian Golan	0		
Yemen	3				

Interesting conclusions can be drawn from the data on the countries of activity of all NGOs with ECOSOC consultative status (see Table 2). Altogether, there are 798 NGOs which operate in the MENA region.¹⁶ This means that officially, more than 15 per cent of NGOs with ECOSOC consultative

¹⁵ All the following data were retrieved on 22 July 2018 from the iCSO database of the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs NGO Branch: *Consultative Status with ECOSOC and other accreditations*, <https://esango.un.org/civilsociety/displayConsultativeStatusSearch.do?method=search>.

¹⁶ This number is not equal to the sum of the numbers listed in Table 2, due to the fact that many NGOs operate in more than one MENA country.

status conduct activities in at least one MENA country (798 out of 5,209). These data mean that despite the low level of integration of the region in the global international order, the region is well integrated in the transnational global order;¹⁷ nonetheless, the reason behind this is probably the unfortunate fact that a large number of armed conflicts and civil wars take place in the MENA region. Moreover, the difference between the number of NGOs founded in a MENA country (260) and those working in at least one MENA country (798) again shows the exposure of the region to outside actors, even in the non-state sphere.

Table 2 | The number of NGOs with ECOSOC consultative status by country of activity (sub-region and country)

The Gulf		Mashreq		Maghreb	
Bahrain	139	Egypt	289	Algeria	172
Iran	204	Israel	259	Libya	132
Iraq	227	Jordan	230	Morocco	260
Kuwait	139	Lebanon	275	Tunisia	196
Oman	108	Palestine	209		
Qatar	129	Syria	166		
Saudi Arabia	149	Turkey	263		
UAE	159	Occupied Syrian Golan	0		
Yemen	152				

Many of the MENA NGOs working with ECOSOC conduct essential activities both in their respective countries and on the international level. For example, the only accepted Bahraini organization, the Bahrain Women Society, empowers women to exercise their role in society, raise parents' awareness to protect children from abuse and neglect, and contribute to preserving the environment.¹⁸ They have contributed to the work of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women, the United Nations Environment Programme, the Conference on Sustainable Development in Brazil, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women and the Internet Governance Forum. Between 2012 and 2014, they organized a total of twenty-five workshops in Bahrain for mothers and kindergarten teachers on gender equality (UN Committee on NGOs 2015: 13-4). One of the prominent leaders of the organization is Dr Wajeeha Sadiq Al Bahrna, who participated in the Bahraini National Dialogue forum following the uprising that took place in the country in 2011.¹⁹

It is interesting to investigate the NGOs from war-torn Iraq as well. Eleven of the twelve organizations accepted from the country have been given consultative status since 2011 (the one exception being the Kurdistan Reconstruction and Development Society). Most of these NGOs are active in social care, charity, human development, aid or emergency assistance, but there are two youth

17 Considering random dispersion, twenty countries out of the 192 UN member states should have a ratio of approximately 10 per cent.

18 See the official website: *About Us*, <http://en.bahrainws.org/about-us>.

19 "300 Organisations Register", in *Gulf Daily News*, 3 July 2011, p. 6, https://wikileaks.org/gifiles/attach/10/10604_Societies%20in%20National%20Dialogue.pdf.

organizations (the Global Youth Organization and the Jssor Youth Organization) and one cultural organization (Cultural Meeting Foundation). One interesting case among them is the Assyrian Aid Society, which promotes Assyrian culture and provides assistance to Assyrians in need in Iraq. This group only received consultative status in 2011, but it has been working actively in helping to care for internally displaced persons (IDPs) since 1991 (UN Committee on NGOs 2015: 10–1). Its members have also participated in the post-IS reconstruction of Iraq, for example gathering volunteers to rebuild the Assyrian church in the town of Teleskof (al-Shibeeb 2016). On the global level, they have participated several times in the work of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues organized by the UN.

Naturally, due to the national recognition requirement, suspicions are easily raised that such NGOs/INGOs are actually GONGOs (Kleinschmit and Edwards 2017:535). Even in these cases, however, such organizations represent a connection between the state and an international organization through which a bi-directional process can take place – MENA states can affect the global forums of international norm creation, while international organizations can put pressure on states through them to adhere to such norms. Therefore, while it is worth analysing whether an NGO is a GONGO or not, their existence still represents a form of integration of the MENA system into the global order. As Kim Reimann (2006: 63) puts it,

the emergence of these new opportunities for NGOs is probably not best understood as a process solely driven either by the state from above or by society from below, but rather as part of the ongoing process of political globalization which has involved a *symbiotic* relationship of mutual growth and interdependence among states, IGOs and NGOs. The simultaneous growth of IGOs and NGOs over time has been an interactive and mutually reinforcing process: the creation of new international institutions (in some cases in response to NGO actions) has led to the creation of new international opportunities for NGO formation and growth, which in turn has led to new and more complex systems of international governance. One of the reasons that states and IGOs have increasingly promoted NGOs is that they themselves have benefited from the advocacy and services of NGOs as the world has moved toward greater international regulation of global problems.

As we can see from this case study, NGOs from the MENA region that have received consultative status from ECOSOC conduct their activities on two separate levels: firstly, they undertake local activities in their own national communities, and secondly, they participate in global discussions and multilateral diplomacy forums. In this way, the civil sphere of the MENA region affects the global order as well. In these cases, the host state has a neutral or even positive relationship with the given organization, since otherwise it can block its acceptance. When it comes to the NGO–foreign partner relationship, the FP provides recognition and prestige to the given entity in exchange for the requirement to participate in UN politics. Therefore, the connection between local NGOs and IGOs represents a process of embeddedness of the MENA region, even if identifying GONGOs can be a challenge.

Naturally, ECOSOC is not the only international body with which NGOs from the MENA region can interact. For example, since 2011 the “transnational arena” has been “opened up” for Bahraini human rights organizations due to the repressive actions of the government and the growing

number of exiles (Bhatia 2017: 296). A network of such NGOs is represented in Brussels (e.g., the Bahrain Institute for Rights and Democracy, the Bahraini Human Rights Observatory) to influence the decision-making of the European Union. They welcomed the adoption of the resolution of the European Parliament in June 2018 on the deterioration of the human rights situation in Bahrain (BIRDBH 2018), though their participation in lobbying is not clear.

3.3 QATAR'S USE OF INGOs AND NON-STATE ACTORS IN THE GCC CRISIS

The growing role of INGOs in international politics represents an opportunity for Middle Eastern and North African states to pursue their interests on the regional and global level. To illustrate this point, the case of Qatar during the GCC crisis will be analysed.

On 5 June 2017, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) (the "Quartet") announced that they would break off diplomatic ties with Qatar, close their airspace and seas to the country and basically put it under an effective embargo. Subsequently, the coalition proclaimed thirteen demands that Qatar must meet (Wintour 2017),²⁰ which were later replaced by six principles (Khan 2017). The rift has remained unresolved since June 2017. Although several regional and global actors have proclaimed that they support the peaceful resolution of the dispute, nobody has been able to persuade the two sides to work out their differences. Tensions rose even higher during the annual summit of the GCC in December 2017, which collapsed after a few hours, and on the first anniversary of the blockade, when both sides strongly emphasized their own narratives in the international public discourse.

Influencing the international community's perceptions about Qatar was extremely important for the Quartet. Firstly, according to Ulrichsen (2017), the crisis "may well be remembered as the first international crisis of the 'alternative facts' era". Before the proclamation of the embargo, several pieces of fake news surfaced in the Emirati and Saudi media about a non-existent speech by Emir Tamim as well as the presence of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard in Qatar. The whole dispute between the two sides was basically about two versions of the truth (Qatar being a constructive player or a supporter of international terrorism) and not about the interpretation of an agreed fact. Secondly, as a small state squeezed between two regional powers (Saudi Arabia and Iran), the independence of Qatar has always been dependent on its relations with external actors. Since the Quartet aimed to make Qatar give up its foreign policy and economic independence, the outcome of the dispute would be determined by the reaction of the international community.

Realizing this, the Qatari strategy to deal with the crisis was also aimed at convincing the international community of their narrative. In doing so, the government initiated what we can call a "multiple-track approach".²¹ This strategy was aimed at influencing the outside world's perception of the crisis (and Qatar) using different forums on different levels with different types of actors.

20 Three of these concerned alleged support of terrorism, two concerned interference in domestic affairs, two referred to the media network of Qatar and three others were connected with Qatari foreign policy. The remaining three points were general remarks about compensation for the aforementioned allegations, the desire to put Qatar under financial control and the deadline for the demands.

21 A term which was used by Lolwah Al-Khater, the spokesperson of the Qatar Ministry of Foreign Affairs, during an interview I conducted with her in Doha on 8 July.

This included, among others, the following types of interactions:

- *State-level negotiations through diplomatic channels with governments.* Usually, this form of communication is aimed at either informing other members of the inter-state community about Qatar's narrative or deepening existing cooperation with them in order to increase the value of the bilateral relationship. Such attempts were made with Russia regarding military equipment deals (Ramani 2018) and with the United States concerning setting up a formal strategic dialogue format (US Department of State 2018).
- *Negotiating with supra-national organizations.* Besides state-level diplomatic ties, Qatar also aimed at strengthening cooperation with international organizations with essentially the same goals. This has included negotiating with the secretary general of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization about "enhancing cooperation" (Qatar's Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2017) and signing a military cooperation agreement with NATO (NATO 2018). The latter was important also due to the fact that the secretary-general of the organization publicly "thanked the Emir for Qatar's role and its efforts in the fight against terrorism",²² a clear stand against the Quartet's narrative about Qatar's affiliation with terrorist states.
- *Turning to supra-national judicial bodies to resolve the dispute.* In the last year, Qatar voluntarily submitted legal applications against the members of the Quartet at supra-national judicial bodies. The country filed complaints individually against Bahrain, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates at the World Trade Organization (WTO 2017a, 2017b, 2017c), stating that the measures undertaken by the Quartet are unlawful coercive attempts at economic isolation in terms of the flow of goods and services and trade-related aspects of intellectual property rights. On the other hand, Qatar also submitted an application against the United Arab Emirates at the International Court of Justice (ICJ), claiming that the UAE violated the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination (ICJ 2018). The purpose of these applications is not self-evident – a ruling by either the WTO or the ICJ will not end the dispute by itself (although they could find in favour of Qatar and ease the embargo to some extent). Nonetheless, the institutional proceedings could serve at least two political purposes. Firstly, they put pressure on the Quartet by keeping the issue on the table from a legal perspective. Secondly, involving international legal bodies in the dispute represents Qatar's integration into the liberal world order and aims at creating a vivid contrast with the coercive measures of the Quartet.
- *Using international non-state actors to form the discourse in the international community.* Qatar has used non-governmental organizations and other types of non-state actors in its foreign policy for two decades. For example, the relationship between Qatar and the Muslim Brotherhood has been one of the most important alliances between a state and an NSA and has affected the regional balance of power (Kausch 2017: 41–2). Moreover, the country has subsidized several armed groups and Islamist communities throughout the region that the Quartet has deemed terrorist or radical (Zohar 2015: 439–40).²³

22 "Qatar, NATO Sign Agreement on Military Co-operation", in *Gulf Times*, 7 March 2018, <http://www.gulf-times.com/story/584286>.

23 Since some of the sponsorships came not from state institutions but from private organizations and/or individuals, it is hard to decide whether these manifestations of support can be seen as state funding.

In this case, Qatar has used many non-state actors to influence the perception of the members of the international community about the crisis. Though many of them were not strictly speaking NGOs, their role can be interpreted within the INGO triangle: Qatar played the foreign partner role, while different (mostly Western) countries were the host states. In the United States, Qatar works with about two dozen public relations (PR) and lobbying firms (including Blueprint Advisors, Ogilvy Government Relations, Lexington Strategies and Debevoise & Plimpton).²⁴ The particularity of these efforts was that Doha understood the importance of personal relations, which is why they hired companies that have personal relations with the US government. This included, among others, the aforementioned Blueprint Advisors, which was connected to Rudy Giuliani; Nicolas D. Muzin, a former close ally of Ted Cruz (G. Harris 2018); and the lobbying firm Ballard Partners, which supported the Trump campaign in 2016 (B. Harris 2018).

The Thani regime also invested in research: it invested heavily in the prestigious Brookings Institution before the embargo (Tibon 2017), which, according to some, might have caused a research bias at the think tank (Hamburger and Becker 2014). Moreover, in early 2018, it created a new DC-based institution called the Gulf International Forum, which receives money not from the Qatari government itself, but from organizations that are funded by the Qatari government (Allen-Ebrahimian and Dubin 2018).

The aim of the Qatari PR strategy in DC was to put the Department of State (DoS), the Department of Defence (DoD) and the White House on the same page regarding the Gulf crisis. Whereas the first two – especially due to the presence of the Al-Udeid US military base in the country and to the diplomatic mediation activities of Doha – supported the Qatari side in the dispute, President Trump seemed to lean towards the Saudi–Emirati side. For this reason, Doha wanted to move the White House closer to the position of the DoD and the DoS. The effort was successful, or at least the aim was reached – on 10 April 2018, President Trump welcomed Emir Tamim Al Thani in Washington, and called Qatar an “advocate” in the fight against terrorism (Brookings 2018).

The Qatari government also used non-state actors to increase the visibility of those state-controlled INGOs that work in international humanitarian affairs. Qatar Charity formalized its cooperation with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in October 2017 (UNHCR 2017). This endeavour was also aimed at least partly at convincing state actors of the importance of Qatar in the international system. The effort bore fruit when the British Minister of State for International Development proclaimed his admiration for the humanitarian efforts of the Qatar Charity (Qatar Charity 2018).

- *Using foreign NGOs and INGOs to support the case of Qatar.* Qatar’s multiple-track approach involved using a different kind of non-state actor as well. Besides using INGOs under its own control and funding foreign NGOs, Doha also changed the relationship it had with foreign INGOs. The structural difference between these cases and those already mentioned is the different constellation of actors in the INGO triangle – in these cases, Qatar was able to use the INGO as the host state, and not as the foreign partner (as in the previous point).

²⁴ “Bottom Line”, in *The Hill*, 25 June 2018, <https://thehill.com/node/394062>.

Before the crisis of 2017, Qatar had a poor relationship with international human rights (HR) organizations, mostly due to the poor living conditions and the limited rights of migrant workers employed in the tiny emirate. Such institutions frequently criticized the Qatari government for its inhumane treatment of guest workers (mostly coming from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and other South Asian countries) who are hired in construction, tourism and so forth. The most emblematic episode of the troubled relationship between such organizations and Qatar was probably the 2013 report by Amnesty International entitled “The Dark Side of Migration”, which focused on those migrants who were hired to work on projects in preparation for the 2022 FIFA World Cup (Amnesty International 2013).

Nonetheless, Qatar realized that in the debate with the Saudi–Emirati-led Quartet, such human rights INGOs could be its natural allies. During the first weeks of the rift, Qatari citizens working, studying or living in the blockading countries were expelled, resulting in severe human rights abuses according to many observers. For this reason Qatar wanted the activities of these HR INGOs to support its narrative, even if unintentionally.

Doha influenced the work of these organizations in two identifiable ways. Firstly, state institutions cooperated with them to uncover the abuses caused by the measures taken by the Quartet. In the first six months of the embargo, an Amnesty International team visited Qatar two times and was received by the National Human Rights Committee.²⁵ Secondly, in order to ease the pressure on the country over the mistreatment of migrant workers, Qatar joined a few international agreements and made moderate reforms to improve the living standards of foreign labourers, many of which were hailed by HR organizations (Amnesty International 2017b, HRW 2018a, 2018b, 2018c). At the end of the day, both Amnesty International (Amnesty International 2017a, NHRCQ 2017a) and Human Rights Watch (HRW) issued several reports and proclamations about the Qatari crisis that heavily criticized the measures taken by the Quartet (HRW 2017, NHRCQ 2017b).

As we can see, in this case Qatar was able to use NGOs and INGOs effectively to formulate the public discourse about the GCC crisis. With its multiple-track approach, Qatar has used state and non-state actors alike to pursue its interests and to create a discursive environment in which it can withstand the effects of the embargo. It remains to be seen how the rift will be resolved and how the different stakeholders will be affected; nonetheless, we can say that if Qatar succeeds, using transnational connections will play a huge part in the process.

CONCLUSION

This paper has illustrated the effects of transnationalization and the rise of non-state actors and transnational relations on the MENA region. The main interpretative framework consisted of a triangle of three actors involved in the process – the host state, the NGO/INGO and the foreign partner. The dynamics between these three players and the development of their bilateral and trilateral system of interactions determine the political, economic and social outcomes as well as the leverage of the actors.

²⁵ “Amnesty Team Arrives in Doha to Assess Impact of Illegal Blockade on Qatar”, in *Qatar Living*, 29 November 2017, <https://www.qatarliving.com/node/40225721>.

The three case studies highlighted three different types of dynamics in the INGO triangle. In the first case, the investigated INGO (GCR2P) promoted norms which were in line with the interests of its foreign partners. In the second case, NGOs with stable relationships with their host countries and support from supra-national entities managed to promote values in their respected societies and to influence the international agenda as well. In the third case, a MENA state (Qatar) as a conscious actor in the transnationalized international society sought to use NGOs and INGOs to reframe the international discourse on a specific international question.

In each of these cases, the exact relationship between the NGOs and INGOs and state actors – either the host state or the foreign partner – varied significantly, as did the leverage of such NGOs and INGOs. For this reason, overgeneralizations about the level of agency and the nature of state–non-state actor relations should be avoided in investigating international affairs. What is clear is that the process of transnationalization affected the MENA region to a significant extent, transforming the room to manoeuvre of state actors and paving the way for unseen and unpredictable political processes.

The case studies also reveal important findings regarding the embeddedness of the MENA region in the global order. The case of GCR2P shows the process of normative integration taking place in the transnational dimension. The case of ECOSOC represents the ability of MENA NGOs and states to influence the global agenda. Lastly, the case of Qatar shows how transnationalization serves as a toolkit for MENA states to use non-state actors in reaching their foreign policy goals.

Naturally, other case studies could have been chosen to investigate the level of embeddedness of the MENA region in the global order. Further analysis is needed in the case of Islamic charity organizations (Atalay 2013, Ahmed 2009) and other entities operating in different fields. Overall these examples suggest two important conclusions. Firstly, the non-state sector represents an area in which the MENA region is moving towards embeddedness, not peripherization. Secondly, this embeddedness is active rather than passive – MENA actors can gain agency in the global order and are not merely exposed to global developments. It is another question that the agency is many times attained by state actors, and not necessarily by independent NGOs.

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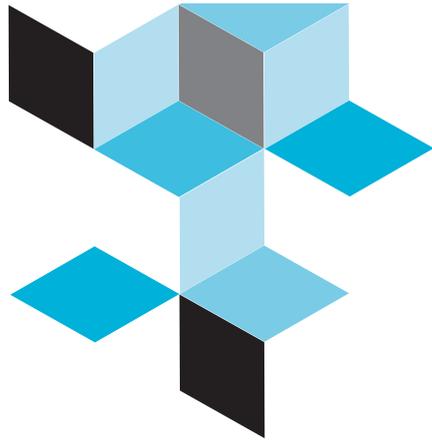
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