

The role of transnational NGOs in promoting global citizenship and globalizing communication practices

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This paper engages with the concept of Global Citizenship and the role of transnational non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in teaching awareness about global issues like health, education, and poverty. Specifically, the paper traces the logics of one transnational NGO, *Save the Children*, as it teaches communication practices and values related to children's rights in developing countries. The paper illustrates how the NGO promotes Global Citizenship values and communication practices, which are taken to be universally applicable. For example, the NGO promotes self-expression and participatory decision-making to its client populations, practices which are grounded in individualistic notions of relating. These ways of communicating are not only different from but also sometimes conflict with sociocultural and political ways of acting and relating in particular locales. The paper argues that Global Citizenship is a vision choreographed by donor countries with moral and ideological implications. It calls on scholars, political decision-makers, and NGOs to reflect on who defines the concept, drives its implementation, and understand the impact of imported interaction values on local populations.

Der Artikel diskutiert das Konzept des 'Globalen Bürgers' und die Rolle von transnationalen Nicht-Regierungsorganisationen in der Arbeit an globalen Problemen wie Gesundheit, Bildung und Armut. Der Artikel analysiert am Beispiel der NGO *Save the Children*, wie bestimmte Kommunikationspraktiken und Werte in Entwicklungsländern gefördert werden. Die Analyse zeigt, daß Kommunikationspraktiken und Werte transferiert werden, als seien sie universell. Die NGO fördert zum Beispiel Teilnahme an Entscheidungsprozessen und Meinungsäußerung, welche individualistische Werte widerspiegeln und konstruieren, die nicht nur unterschiedlich sind von lokalen Kommunikationspraktiken und dem Verständnis von sozialen Beziehungen sondern auch mit diesen in Konflikt treten können. Der Artikel argumentiert, daß die Vision vom globalen Bürger letztendlich von Geberländern gezeichnet ist und moralische und ideologische Implikationen hat. Die Diskussion wendet sich an Akademiker, politische Entscheidungsträger, und NGOs und appelliert, über die Konzeption und Implementierung des Globalen Bürgers zu reflektieren sowie die Konsequenzen von vermittelten Interaktionswerten.

Keywords: communicative practice; global citizenship; values; narrative; transnational NGO

It is commonplace by now that we live in a globalized world with intertwining economies, cultures, flows of people, and information. Connectivity, mobility, stretched social relations, and the intersection of economic, cultural, and social practices have become entries in the globalization dictionary (Cochrane & Pain,

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2000; Sparks, 2007; Thussu, 2000). Especially the right to information and communication has been identified as one characteristic of Global Citizenship (Featherstone, 2000). People should be able to share information freely and engage with each other across national borders to create awareness for issues of concern that transcend the immediate family, community, and nation-state (Dower, 2003; Falk, 1994). Global Citizenship is a vision with a moral and ethical logic; a 'normative claim about how humans should act' (Dower, 2003, p. 7). Activism is not only a choice but an ethical calling as states are unable to protect 'the common good' (Dower, 2003, p. 13).

The vision of the global common good cannot only be accomplished by individuals but needs institutional support (Dower, 2003). Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are a particular kind of those institutions assisting people in need and advocating for issues concerning the well-being of humankind such as the environment or children's development around the globe. NGOs and Transnational Advocacy Networks (TANs) promote the moral good implicitly and explicitly through development projects, political support for diaspora and exile groups, and political and economic support of national governments (Dower, 2003). Global Citizenship and communication are tightly related in that 'doing' Global Citizenship requires communicative practices.¹ If transnational networks and NGOs are regarded as major players in constructing notions of Global Citizenship, one question becomes which specific communicative practices those organizations use to engage in this task.

Through the example of one transnational NGO, *Save the Children*, the paper illustrates how the NGO fosters universally applicable communication practices and values and eventually concepts of Global Citizenship that promote and enact a liberal and humanistic worldview driven by developed donor countries. The paper illustrates further how the practices and values taught by the NGO can be different from and even conflict with ways of acting and relating in particular locales. The paper argues that NGO clients become the vehicles for the practice of Global Citizenship and a global ethics targeted at social change toward freedom of expression, breaking up of received social hierarchies, and expression of multiple opinions.

The organization

Save the Children is an independent relief, advocacy, and development organization related to protecting and saving the lives of children around the world. Originally founded in 1919 in the UK, the *Save the Children* alliance works in more than 70 countries, including the USA and Europe (Save the Children, 2009a). The goals of the organization are ensuring the physical and mental well-being of children, alleviating children's poverty and disease, reducing violence against children through education, empowering families economically, engaging in HIV/AIDS education, and helping communities to identify and solve problems that endanger the well-being of their children (Save the Children, 2009b). The work ethics of the organization are based on the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (OHCHR, 2007; UNICEF, 2010), standards which have been signed by 192 countries as of 2005 and include respecting a child's view, freedom of expression, thought, and association, the right to privacy, and access to information, among others. *Save the Children's* education programs include early childhood education, keeping children in schools, and teacher

trainings; its health programs focus on disease prevention and the creation of hospitals and health centers, especially in remote rural locations. The organization also concentrates on food programs and helping children and parents to fight malnutrition. The organization has assisted children after environmental catastrophes like the earthquake in Haiti in 2010, the typhoon in Myanmar in 2008, or Hurricane Katrina in the USA in 2005.

Methodology

I have collected data through personal interviews with staff in one of the *Save the Children* offices in Urumqi, China, analysis of the NGO's website, and observation of life in a semi-nomadic Kyrgyz herder family in the mountains of northwestern China. China is one example for a developing country in which the NGO is active. There are several regional offices in Beijing, Shanghai, Kunming, Urumqi, Lhasa, and Chengdu. I conducted interviews with staff members in Urumqi in northwestern China in the summer of 2006. Urumqi is the capital of Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR). The region is multiethnic, with Uyghurs² (9.83 million, 47% of population) and Han (8.36 million, 40% of population) being in the majority (Amnesty International, 2009; National Bureau of Statistics of China, 2009). In addition, there are Kazakhs, Kyrgyz, Mongolians, Xibo, Russians, Tajiks, Uzbeks, Tatars, Manchus, and Daur (National Bureau of Statistics of China, 2009). The Urumqi *Save the Children* office was setup in 2003 and works on issues such as training health educators and teachers, especially in relation to HIV/AIDS awareness. The program manager at the time was US American, while the staff were composed of local Uyghurs and Han Chinese. The interviews were conducted in the office of the NGO in the capital of XUAR, Urumqi, and lasted from half an hour to two hours. The interviews were held in English as the staff were fluent in this language. Staff members mentioned repeatedly the importance of *open* and *transparent communication* and *participation* like working in teams and consulting with other staff on problems and their solutions.

Based on those insights, I studied the website of the organization to find more instances of terms related to open and transparent communication as well as participatory style approaches in the organization's work in different countries. Websites were chosen as they provide insights into how the organization portrays its work for a global audience and promotes universally applicable communication practices and values.

I have used a Cultural Discourse Analysis approach in this study (Carbaugh, 2007). Based on an Ethnography of Communication approach (Hymes, 1962, 1972) and relating cultural communication and Speech Codes Theory (Philipsen, 1987, 1992; Philipsen & Coutu, 2005), Carbaugh formulated premises that capture social interaction processes through which sociocultural life is created and enacted. The method helps understanding the significance and meanings that particular communicative practices have for interlocutors engaging with them. At the same time, Carbaugh acknowledges that a full understanding of those practices from the perspective of the interlocutors is only an approximation due to the interpretive processes by the researcher.

When people communicate, verbally, nonverbally, face to face, or through mediated communication, people orient to particular ways of being, identifying, acting, emoting, and place-making. Those ways are 'radiants of cultural meaning'

(Carbaugh, 2007, p. 174) which people engage in. For example, terms for personal identity description or social identification can be ways of gaining insight into how people engage in grouping processes (Witteborn & Sprain, 2009). Particular genres (e.g. narratives) or styles of communicating (e.g. participatory decision-making) point to social interaction values and norms that people either find meaningful or are persuaded to find meaningful in their daily lives. Therefore, an analysis of ways of identifying, relating, and place-making can illustrate communication values in a particular community as well as premises for social life. The analysis in this paper focuses on genres like narratives and stories,³ witness accounts, and communicative practices like 'participation' and 'self-expression.' Narratives and witness accounts were chosen as they appeared repeatedly on the website run by the organization and provide insights into how the organization illustrates its impact and displays ways of relating with locals. Moreover, the communicative practices were addressed verbatim in the personal interviews with NGO staff and also on the website, which is why they have become the focus of analysis.

Celebrating global citizenship through virtual accounts

Humans are languaged beings who create their social realities through communicative means, one being narrative accounts (Gergen, 2005; Witteborn, 2005, 2007, 2008). Humans tell stories that can motivate listeners to strive for change and positive outlook. Progressive stories can help narrators gain sympathy and support for particular conditions (Gergen, 2005). Forced migrants, for example, can tell stories of displacement and detention to motivate listeners to help change immigration and asylum laws (Witteborn, 2008). Through narrating, individuals relate to others by positioning themselves into particular ways of being and constructing social, cultural, political, and geographical identity locations.

Through personal video stories and witness accounts displayed virtually, *Save the Children* represents children's and parents' voices for an international audience. Personal stories and witness accounts are ways of relating through which the organization represents its success and improvement of the lives of children and makes its actions transparent in virtual space. Personal stories were often told in the present tense and included detailed descriptions of a child's or a parent's daily life experiences. Witness accounts are discursive excerpts, such as quotes from parents about how the organization has improved the health of their children, communicative practice, or education.

The displayed narratives and narrative excerpts tell mostly progressive stories of success, hope, and development. The narratives provide insights into the ways in which people situate themselves as a person and in their social relations and enact and reflect on particular ways of being (Carbaugh, 2007). On *Kroo Bay* (<http://www.savethechildren.org.uk/kroobay/>), for example, the viewer can take part in the lives of slum-dwellers in Freetown, Sierra Leone and listen to personalized stories of what it means living in the place called Kroo Bay and how donor money helps locals to improve their lives. On the website, there are links to engage in political action to lobby for aid to children on the African continent ('Make your mark') or make a donation. There are webisodes, slow-motion video narratives about places such as a newly renovated hospital, through which the reader gains first-hand evidence of the impact of donor money. Individual inhabitants are introduced through passport-style color pictures, which are pinned on the website like on a board, from nurses to

mothers and children. By clicking on those photos, the viewer is linked to a site on which the individual person provides information about him or herself and reflects on ways of acting and relating in the community. One example is the boy Bilal (Kroo Bay, n.d.):

1 My team is FC Bundy Bush. It is an under 11 team in Kroo Bay. I'm a midfielder
 2 so I kick the ball on. We have a coach and train at the weekends.
 3 I support Barcelona but in England I support Manchester. Eto'o is my favourite
 4 player, he is an attacker from Cameroon. I also like to run and I like to make kites.
 5 I like to sing, I sing traditional songs and we sing carol music in school.
 6 My school is up on the hill from Kroo Bay. I like studying – especially reading
 7 and maths. My least favourite subject is drawing. I can draw, but I don't like to
 8 draw. I love maths because when my mother brings things home from the market I
 9 can do the sums and make sure nothing is stolen or goes missing.

The boy narrates a personal profile, which provides the listener with insights into his daily life and daily practices such as sports, art, and school. The latter part of the narrative focuses explicitly on the functions and benefits of education for the family (lines 8–9). Education and knowledge, specifically math, enable the boy to protect the family and its goods ('nothing is stolen or goes missing,' line 9).

Through a link 'Post a message,' a viewer can respond to and relate to the narrator:

1 Hi! Just wanted to say that both your pic and the fact that you support Barcelona
 2 FC team, made me smile. I am from Barcelona! Hope maybe some day you will
 3 be able to go there :) I am biologist (I love animals!) and now I'm working for a
 4 few months in the USA. I was searching information about your country, because
 5 I am preparing activities for a summer youth program, and I want the kids from
 6 here to know a bit more about your country. You're very lucky of being able to
 7 sing carol music in your school! I like it a lot, but now here I'm too busy and I
 8 can't do it! Have a nice day! A huge smile for you :D Anna. (Anna, 2009)

Anna relates to Bilal by evoking local–global connections through her own spatial positioning ('I am from Barcelona!', line 2), 'the kids from here' (lines 5–6), and 'your country' (line 6). The local voice of Bilal transcends the image of the slum-dweller through universal experiences like going to school and playing soccer while Anna's transnational voice affirms Bilal in his persona as a child with universal everyday experiences like singing in school (line 7). Bilal is not only a slum-dweller but also a young boy with interests that people around the world can share, such as soccer. Moreover, Bilal can relate transnationally in his fandom of celebrity soccer clubs and is able to map places like Manchester and Barcelona, which evidences his curiosity not only for sports but also the global geosphere. The latter can be reassuring evidence for donors and the general viewer that *Save the Children* fosters an environment which embraces the local and the global and helps children portray themselves in their common humanity rather than as victims.

The narratives, like many others on the website, construct personhood as individualistic and self-expressive. The viewer can see images of real people with sorrows, fears, happiness, and interests that negate a victim image and encourage virtual conversations among people, especially children and teenagers as many examples demonstrate on the website. A unique self is implicated in the presentation of individual narratives of daily experiences, needs, and dreams, success and

overcoming difficulties with the help of the organization and donor money. The self with its right to health, education, and food is central to the work of the NGO and is celebrated as such through the narrative display for an international audience.

In addition to personal stories, there are witness accounts. Witness accounts are brief discursive excerpts, often represented in the form of a quote by a child or parent. Several of those can be found on the *Save the Children* main website.⁴ For example, a father from Mali spoke about how zinc had cured his son's illness:

'My advice to all parents is to follow up with all children [when they are sick]. This is a good treatment for diarrhea and it saved my son's life.' Numan, the health worker, adds: 'Mory is very intelligent. He is already helping his mother and handicapped father with small chores.' Baby Mory – now a toddler – is a healthy, happy child. His mother says he likes to play with his older brother and sister; he likes soccer and he likes engines.⁵

This witness account is represented in the form of a health advertisement. The family comes alive for an international audience through the voice of the father and the description by the health worker. The voice of the father, displayed through direct speech, relates to the reader through the idea that the work of *Save the Children* has not only saved his son but has also had a positive impact on the family through health education. The father's and health worker's direct speech as well as the indirect voice of the commentator follow the narrative logic of a health advertisement, which talks about an ailment (diarrhea), the product for treatment (zinc), treatment procedures (take zinc), and the social benefits (happy, healthy baby and parents). As the father has understood the benefits of taking zinc for treating a threatening illness, he becomes a credible role model for other parents as well as a witness to the impact of the work of *Save the Children*. The health worker's direct speech as the expert voice serves in turn as a witness to the truth of the father's statement.

Those narratives and witness accounts are virtually staged evidence for the successful implementation of a global ethics by the NGO. The father's and health worker's accounts of the importance of the NGO work and its benefits can only be 'heard' as the organization provides the virtual stage for their representation of experience. The father and health worker come to life through a mouse click whenever a reader chooses to engage, and donors and potential donors can reassure themselves that their money is well spent. Accountability and transparency are values that the organization communicates through those witness accounts and stories online.

The majority of the virtually displayed projects, video testimonies, and narrative evidence come from developing countries like the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Guatemala, Nepal, China, and Afghanistan. Audiences are enabled to get hyperlinked to the problems in those countries and affirm themselves in their role as relational selves who are engaging in a global ethics and help people to lead a better life. Moreover, international donor audiences can see how the organization's beneficiaries perform themselves narratively through a unique self, a way of life that values individual happiness, international cooperative relationships, success, and the continuous improvement of the self (Carbaugh, 1987). *Save the Children* therefore not only assists locals in improving their lives through health and education but it also choreographs communication practices and genres such as

personalized narratives and witness accounts in virtual space to represent and promote the common good.

Participation and self-expression as global communication practices

The cultural logics of self, self-expression, and participation can also be found in communicative practices within the NGO and the ways in which the NGO fulfills its educational and humanitarian mandate. One staff member told me, ‘the idea of participation is the key strategy.’ Participation was related by another staff member to learning ways of communicating based on transparency, equality, and expression of opinions:

There is something special about the management style. Management is very *transparent* and *open*. We encourage *team-work*. You can do things working in teams and also independently. Manager X was there coaching us, he was always there *chatting, talking, asking questions, exploring*. The most things I learnt from X is *talking with people*. (Italics added for emphasis)

This particular experience was expressed by a local Uyghur staff member in the Urumqi office and referred mostly to the communication practices by her manager from the USA. ‘Talk’ implies a focus on substantive topics while the relationship between people is explored (Dirven, Goossens, Putseys, & Vorlat, 1982). The employee describes a way of relating that is characterized by dialogic interactions (‘talking with’ not ‘talking to’ people) and optimizing solutions through diverse viewpoints, teamwork, and accountability. The emphasis is on task orientation through relationship development, providing unique personal viewpoints, and exploring, building, and maintaining intersections between self and other in a transparent fashion.

In addition to describing their relational engagement, employees talked about how management practice had changed their sense of social location. One young Uyghur woman told me:

I feel empowered. I can participate in decision-making and be part of a transparent management style in which no information is hidden by superiors but is circulated amongst the staff, so that everybody can make constructive contributions to solve problems.

Feeling ‘empowered’ is an enactment of a relational sense of being, which performs the individual self as having transcended a muted stage, presenting itself on equal terms with others. This perceived change in social and emotional location is driven by a change in communicative practice, introduced for example by the US American program manager ‘X’ in the Urumqi office. Participatory decision-making, problem-solving, and transparency in management are ways of acting that transform ways of being through relational development and vice versa.

The NGO promotes participation and self-expression in its work with locals in several countries. For example, *Save the Children* promotes participation of children on teacher boards in the DRC. In a video clip on children’s health in the DRC, *Save the Children* staff and local teachers emphasize the importance of ‘active and participatory learning methods.’ The rationale is that ‘Child participation is

a fundamental part of all the work that Save the Children does' and that developing 'child participation in school decision-making processes' is fundamental to promoting education in the communities through the children themselves (Save the Children, 2008a).

In addition to countries like the DRC, participation and self-expression are promoted in countries like Yemen. On the regional program web page for the Middle East and North Africa, for example, the *Save the Children* work is described by a newspaper article. The article discusses how self-expression is a right for children under the headline: 'The right to participate and the right to education':

The idea most emphasized by the group was that children should be given the right to have a say in general and especially regarding their own issues. 'People don't consider us as complete human beings with thoughts and ideas and opinions. They just say, oh, they are kids what do they know (...) we do know, we know a lot, and *we want our right to have a say*, passionately insisted 12 year-old Wiam Naser Al-Duba'e as she jumped excitedly. Wiam was the youngest participant in the training.' One of the trainers, Diaa Malab added: 'We are helping the children find a way to express themselves as well as create an advocacy tool to form public opinion and laws promoting children's rights.' (Al-Sakkaf, 2009, italics added for emphasis)

Teaching of children's rights is not only a moral and ethical way of creating chances for young generations to become educated and live without violence but also an ideological tool to democratize society, breakup received social hierarchies, and create social change on a societal level. Self-expression and an emancipated, goal-oriented self also become manifest through witness accounts by local staff in countries like China:

In Yining No 22 Primary School, I met a group of students who told me about the changes in their class since their teachers attended the learner-centered teaching methodology training provided by *Save the Children*. Now the students have time to study in groups where each child has *the chance to speak out and give his or her thoughts*. *One parent told us, I know the teachers are now using a new way to teach. My son has become more and more open and dares to communicate with others.* (Save the Children, 2008b, italics added for emphasis)

Through the work of the organization, children are enabled to voice opinions and think independently. The staff attests to the progress of children in terms of an involved sense of being, progress which is confirmed and appreciated by local parents. Not surprisingly, communicative practices, such as *participatory style*, *decision-making*, *making one's voice heard*, and *expressing ideas* correspond to the overall mission of *Save the Children*:

Save the Children provides opportunities for children to develop practical skills which enhance their self-confidence and self-esteem, enable them to communicate, to cooperate, to negotiate, to make decisions which encourage their independence. We support children to express their views and encourage children's participation through children's forums, children's research projects, children managing activity centres and directly presenting recommendations to policy makers. (Save the Children China, 2006)

The focus on decision-making, participation, and self-expression is based on the international human rights discourse manifested in such documents as the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (Save the Children, n.d.). In 'Practice

standards in child participation,' the organization describes guiding principles for the organization's staff in their work with children, based on the UN Convention:

Children have rights to be listened to, to freely express their views on all matters that affect them, and to freedom of expression, thought, association and access to information. Measures should be put in place to encourage and facilitate their participation in accordance with their age and maturity. (Save the Children, n.d.)

The standards in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child – one of them participation rights – were developed over a decade through collaboration between governments, NGOs, educators, social workers, advocates, and lawyers. One of the standards, the right to participate, emphasizes respect for the opinions of children, ensuring freedom of expression and thought, freedom of association, privacy, as well as access to information (UNICEF, 2010), the latter being one characteristic of the *Global Citizenship* concept (Featherstone, 2000). Cultural values and tradition are acknowledged in relation to these rights (UNICEF, 2010). What those cultural values could be and how they align or potentially contrast with the right to participate is not made clear in the UNICEF document, however; a problematic which will be discussed next.

Local ways of communicating

Participation, decision-making, and expressiveness are different ways of describing similar logics about processes of communicating, the nature of human beings, relating to other people, and meanings of social identities. Human beings in general and children in particular are defined as equal and able to engage through their unique and independent selves, which need to be developed and nurtured. What it means to be a person is defined through difference; that is, difference in portraying a particular type of persona to the world through voicing one's ideas, which are unique. At the same time, the unique self is not an isolated self. The unique self, which strives towards independence in terms of ethical and moral decision-making and viewing the world is bound into a web of social relationships that the self needs to honor. In order to reconcile the seeming tension between a unique self, which has to relate to other unique selves, particular communication processes and ways of acting are encouraged that balance the tension (see Carbaugh, 2007; Philipsen, 1987).

The fundamental principle of relating to others is based on the notion that all people, regardless of their ethnicity, origin, class, gender, and specifically age are entitled to information, decision-making, and their view of the world and have the universal moral right to be taken seriously. The individualized self also has the moral obligation to engage in processes of acknowledging self and other through mutual interaction work, which has to be open and transparent.⁶ In order to engage mutually, one needs equal positions with regard to the right to asking questions, making comments, disagreeing, and making decisions.

Practices like participatory decision-making and related values like individualism, transparency, and critique of self and other do not always correspond to local practices and interaction norms, however. During my research in northwestern China, I have encountered a socioculturally diverse population, including Uyghurs, Han Chinese, Kazakhs, Kyrgyz, Uzbeks, and Tajiks, among others (Amnesty

International, 2009). The following brief examples are derived from observations of life in a semi-nomadic Kyrgyz herder family and interviews with staff of *Save the Children* in the Urumqi office. With the help of a local Uyghur guide who also translated for me, my travels brought me to an altitude of 3500 meters in the Kunlun Mountains in Xinjiang province and in touch with the Kyrgyz herder family. In many rural regions in China, especially the mountains, life is dictated by the seasons and manual labor. My observations of child–parent interactions in the semi-nomadic family attest to this claim. In summers, the family like many others moves to the summer grazing pastures at about 3000–4000 meters where people live in yurts, sometimes made out of stone. In winters, people move to lower altitudes. Families spend much time together and live in condensed spaces in the yurts. Special items for daily usage like cooking oil arrive with truck drivers or tourist guides as tourism has become important in this still rather isolated region. Children learn early to help adults with herding and participate in the daily chores of people who live off the land.

The access to information, mass media, and children’s books is limited in such an environment, especially in the area that I visited, according to the family and the guide. Although much loved, I was told that children are not involved in many decision-making processes that affect their lives, such as when to move to the winter quarters or when to do their daily household duties. They are also not supposed to ask too many questions, disagree with their parents, or critique them or other adults. For the people, the extended family and its needs were more important than individual wishes in order to survive. This does not mean that access to information, the ability to be involved and contribute one’s opinion, and the right to say ‘no’ is not fundamental for children, no matter where they live. However, the question for reflection is how ‘imported’ and universally perceived rights and communication practices (e.g. sharing of information, expression of opinions, participatory decision-making) are in tune with, change, or even overwrite existing ways of being and relating and whether and how the people whose lives are potentially changed through new communication norms and values have a say in those changes. The narratives and witness accounts from the NGO website discussed earlier report the positive changes that practices like participatory decision-making or self-expression had on children around the world. At the same time, the impact of those practices on social interaction norms and values in various family or community settings can still be explored more.

In addition to the previous example, quotes from the NGO staff illustrate that participation and self-expression promoted by the NGO are different from some local ways of communicating. The US American program manager in the Urumqi office said, for example:

The participatory style is new. You ask children their opinion and people ask why-questions. This approach is in the very beginning and has not been talked and thought about too much (. . .). I come from a low-context culture where we say what we mean and mean what we say. Here, when people ask, there is the fear that it might be destabilizing.

The participatory practice emphasizes the importance of an independent, inquisitive, and expressive self, associated with a ‘low-context culture’ by the manager. Asking questions and participating in decision-making, which are practices that can potentially upset received social hierarchies, are in contrast to

some practices like orienting to and ‘reading’ the other to estimate what can be said, how, and when to preserve social stability and sociopolitical hierarchies. The latter was especially true for educational settings in the region. NGO staff emphasized that teachers, parents, and children are used to a monologic teaching style, with the students listening and ‘absorbing’ the knowledge without much questioning, making analytical connections, or answering in ways not prescribed by preset teachers’ answers or textbooks.

Participatory decision-making not only contrasts with some local ways of relating in some settings but also political practice in China. Participation can destabilize as multiple opinions compete for recognition. The Chinese government was identified by NGO staff as a partner in their work but also as an enforcer of ways of communicating characterized by non-participatory decision-making and monitoring the programs of the NGO. Participation runs counter to many government-regulated ways of being and acting as well as traditional hierarchies between those in positions to talk and those in positions to listen. Moreover, freedom of expression is fundamental to the fulfillment of the standards set by the UN Convention as well as best practice standards used by the NGO. Freedom of expression sets the legal, ideological, and sociopolitical frameworks for realizing participatory styles, self-expression, transparency, and sharing of information. Although freedom of speech, the press, and assembly for Chinese citizens are endorsed in Article 35 of the Constitution of the People’s Republic of China (1982), censorship of free speech and the press is still common (Amnesty International, n.d.). Therefore, practices like self-expression and participatory decision-making promoted by the Convention and the NGO can only be applied partially in China and in ways that do not undermine the current political order in the country.

Despite these challenges, the NGO staff in Urumqi reported a positive impact of their work on local populations:

Our workshops on HIV AIDS are different from the traditional ones. In the traditional model, people line up, somebody lectures, people listen, then leave. Our workshops emphasize participatory styles. A lot of partners have benefited because they’re learning through their own experience, see how practical it is.

The impact of participatory styles is evidenced in the work in another province in China: ‘With our support, Save the Children has trained over 10,000 teachers in Yunnan, South West China. This has given over 300,000 school children the chance to learn in more exciting and interactive ways (. . .)’ (Save the Children, 2009c). These examples illustrate how the NGO slowly changes some social interaction practices in settings like education from monologic to interactive. At the same time, it is not clear yet how these changes might influence social interactions in other contexts like family and work or impact political participation.

Discussion

Based on the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and best practice, *Save the Children* fosters a universally applicable concept of Global Citizenship. The organization promotes a universal right to communication and information through practices such as participatory styles, self-expression, and transparent ways of acting on a global scale. It encourages a universal discourse of emancipation and equality

that helps children voice their rights and grievances. The organization also publicizes its success through client voices who affirm donors in their ethical and moral commitment as global citizens.

Local ways of communicating and imported practices of ‘doing good’ can differ, as the analysis has illustrated.⁷ Communication practices like participatory decision-making and self-expression are manifestations of liberal and humanistic values like individualism, independence, and equality. The values promote the notion of an agentic and interrelated self, which improves itself morally through self-reflection and critique of self and other. These notions are sometimes in contrast with ways of communicating, which emphasize webs of social relations that are characterized by knowing one’s place in the social and political hierarchy (Kim et al., 1996) as well as ideological frames that limit sociopolitical participation.

‘Doing good’ is a moral and ideological project as this study has shown. Participatory styles, self-expression, and creating the conditions for egalitarian discourses are practices commonly related to a democracy (Habermas, 1987). They are also related to the individual and society as they target public opinion and the law. Examples are the Middle East program of *Save the Children* discussed earlier (Al-Sakkaf, 2009) or changing social interaction norms and values related to education in China. Therefore, working for transnational NGOs like *Save the Children* or being a donor implies being a global citizen by supporting and implementing particular citizenship ideologies.

Donor audiences live mostly in developed countries (Kegley, 2009) from where they can learn about Global Citizenship values by engaging in transnational donations. They can also affirm those values by monitoring the progress of the people in developing countries through virtual space. Many locals in the places I have visited do not have similar privileges. Although their ways of life and communicative practices are changed by the humanitarian efforts orchestrated in developed countries, they neither define Global Citizenship nor the communicative practices and values related to it. The paper argued that transnationally operating NGOs as well as donors need to keep reflecting on the communication values they teach and support and the implications of their efforts for the individual and society. As NGOs promote the common good and values based on a shared humanity like solidarity and compassion, they carry a particular responsibility.

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Notes

1. Communicative practice is defined as linguistic and extralinguistic recurrent symbols and forms of communication (Carbaugh, 1996).
2. Uyghurs are one of the ethnic groups or ‘nationalities’ in China (‘minzu’). They live mostly in XUAR, speak a Turkic language, and are predominantly Muslim.
3. *Narrative* and *story* are used synonymously here. For the purposes of this study, a story is defined broadly as a piece of discourse through which persons come to life through their actions and social relations (see Witteborn, 2007).
4. Link <http://www.savethechildren.org/>, *Programs, Health, Survive to 5, Success Stories*.

5. The full quote was accessed from *Save the Children*, <http://www.savethechildren.org/programs/health/child-survival/survive-to-5/zinc-saving-lives-mali.html> (accessed 15 September 2009) but the website had changed several months later. Since 2010, a quote by the parents is available on *Survive to 5. The campaign to save the life of children under 5. Meet 4-year old Mory*: 'Our advice to all parents is that this is a good treatment for diarrhea and it saved our son's life.' <http://www.savethechildren.org/programs/health/child-survival/survive-to-5/survive-zinc.html> (accessed 8 March 2010).
6. For a related discussion on the meaning of 'communication' in US society, see Katriel and Philipsen (2007).
7. For a methodological discussion of how to take the *local* into consideration in relation to security programming, see Miller and Rudnick (2008).

Notes on contributor

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