Chapter 4
Global Media and Information Ethics:
Challenges Re-Examined

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ABSTRACT

Any meaningful debate on global media and information ethics is burdened with the complexity of dissecting various disjunctive dynamics that characterize the complexity of emerging global relationships. The authors argue that the emerging global phenomenon problematizes the Cartesian plane of oppositions – center vs. periphery, North vs. South, global vs. local, which has been the forte of globalization studies until recently. It is against this background that the authors seek to examine challenges of having a global information and media ethics. The authors will pay attention to the antagonistic mechanics informing the domination and rejection of intangible ethical principles. In this discussion, they will be guided, partly, by Alleyne's (2009, p. 384) postulation on the need to pay attention to "changes in state power, the relationship between the market and the state, and modifications in the ideological assumptions about the optimum form of world order."

INTRODUCTION

In his article "*Disjuncture and difference in the global cultural economy*," Arjun Appadurai (1990), argues against the Cartesian plane of oppositions – center vs. periphery, North vs. South, global vs. local, which has been the forte of globalization studies until recently. He suggests the need to focus on global politics from a viewpoint that acknowledges the ceaseless interaction of global relations, which mutate constantly. If this mutation has led to a global culture, it is one that is "marked by an organization of diversity rather than a replication of uniformity" and "no total homogenization of systems of meaning and expression has occurred, nor does it appear likely that there will be one any time soon" (Hannerz, 1990, p. 237).

Any meaningful debate on global media and information ethics is burdened with the complex-

ity of dissecting the aforementioned dynamics of global relationships. There are scholars (See Alleyne, 2009 for example) who point at the futility of pursuing universal ethics, arguing that it is unachievable. Pursuing Alleyne's line of thoughts are primordialists who support cultural relativism, but unlike Alleyne, they fail to address both the susceptibility and potential degeneration of relativism to ethnocentrism. Thomas Cooper's (1996) ethnographic studies among the Shuswap, Polynesians and the Navajo have demonstrated not only a dedicated endeavor to understanding universal humanity, but also, from a socio-anthropological standpoint, the problematic and indefensibility of cultural relativism.

Other scholars (See Christians, 2007, 2008, Etzioni, 1996) have suggested communitarianism as a universal model of ethics. Universality in Christians and Etzioni's sense presuppose the existence of universal standards, especially because universalism has its anchorage on a broad postulation of commonalities of human experience. This presupposed common human experience does not obstruct espoused universal standards.

At the core of this search for universal media and information ethics, is the seemingly less pivotal role of non-Western ethical guidelines in challenging the Western models, especially when the canonicity of Western guidelines is presented as worth of emulation at the expense of unique traits of post-colonial societies. (Although we do not pose the question "*is there a political-theoretical horizon beyond the existing discourse of postcoloniality*?" with Gayatri Spivak (2009), we share her concern on the limitations of post-colonial discourse)

Attempts by scholars such as Rao & Wassermann (2007), Land (2006), and Christians (2004), to incorporate ethical concepts from non-Western contexts in the global media and information ethics debate have altered neither the debate nor the fundamentals informing Western theoretical paradigms. There is, however, noticeable scholarly effort in challenging not only the dominance of

Western-based paradigms, but also a rising rejection of "abstract ethical principles conceived in the Western mind but presumed true for all cultures" (Christians 2005, p. 3).

It is against this background that we seek to examine challenges of having a global information and media ethics. We will pay attention to the antagonistic dynamics characterizing the domination and rejection of the said "abstract ethical principles." In this discussion, we will be guided, partly, by Alleyne's (2009, p. 384) postulation on the need to pay attention to "changes in state power, the relationship between the market and the state, and modifications in the ideological assumptions about the optimum form of world order."

MEDIA ETHICS AND GLOBALIZATION

The foundation of abstract principles, at least in media and information ethics, emphasizes the centrality of individual autonomy. It is laced with freedom as its dominant motif, a prevailance of "the cult of human personality in all its freedom" (Christians, Ferrè, & Fackler, 1993, p. 21). It is a foundation whose building blocks are mostly borrowed from the Enlightenment vocabulary, part of it emanating from the Renaissance, consisting of terms such as human and individual rights, freedom, justice, democracy, sovereignty, unrestrained speech, unbridled "marketplace of ideas." Upon this lexicon is a predicate for a Euro-American grand narrative, which was globally assumed to exhibit internal coherence in the way it tied representation and the public sphere.

However, this perspicuity was altered, if not entirely disrupted, by global changes that visited the nineteenth century, producing a loosely structured landscape whose nation-states were systematized around a redefined lexicon and consequent varying political narratives. At once, there emerged tension in global relations as nation-states sought to adjust to influences from without while main-

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