Journalism and Ethics in a Globalized Society

Luís Miguel Cardoso

Abstract— **It is undeniable that the events that have recently marked the history of mankind have already been felt and transmitted globally. This experience is further reinforced by the recent multiplication of television channels dedicated solely to information. In fact, with the dissemination and strengthening of information and communication technologies, human society seems to unequivocally reveal its dimension as an Information Society, thus appearing designed in a paradigm marked by the globalized circulation of words and images. The challenge we face is to maintain high standards of quality in information and journalism, avoiding falling into sensationalism. For this work, it is important to debate the place of ethics and deontology in this globalized world.**

Keywords— **Journalism, Information, Media, Ethics**

I. INTRODUCTION

Today's society is a huge challenge for teachers and educators, since the vertigo of information and technologies, social and cultural transformations, as well as the constant evolution of the student's profile, make the teaching-learning experience unequivocally a place and time of permanent change. On the one hand, the education system must keep up with these changes, so that the study plans remain relevant, appropriate and updated, the methodologies used reflect modernity and the teachers are trained and master the latest literacies and pedagogical practices. In the era of immediacy and media coverage, at the time of standardization and disfigurement of the singular, at the time of massification and voracious consumerism, is there still a true and dignified moment for global Information, governed by Ethics and Deontology?

It is easier to ask questions than to find the answers. So let's try to invert the labyrinth. Let us change the face of the prism in order to perceive doubts as a method and not as a closed circle. What if it were possible to create global principles of Ethics and Deontology? What if the new world order of information could create links beyond physical and virtual borders? Here is the project. Is it utopian to use Globalization to create a space of unity and diversity between different exercises in journalism?

Feeling Globalization implies a serious awareness of its different limits. It is not a question of analyzing this phenomenon as a mere transnational network, with economic

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and social motivations. It is a question of questioning whether this characteristic can be transformed, metamorphosed from threat to opportunity. At first glance, the economic strength of large groups in the media appears as a tentacle crystallization of power. From the power of the groups, we move on to the power of the word of these groups and, multiplied by Information and Communication Technologies, their strength is affirmed in fullness and omnipresence.

Let us consider, however, that the massification of Information could be accompanied by the mass dissemination of deontological principles. In other words, instead of concentrating the groups of Social Communication and the globalized dissemination of Information, we were moving to Information supported by a globalized deontology. Thus, it is a matter of moving from evidence to transcendence.

In this perspective, the economy and trade streamline these global networks for the exchange of information and today, the world is truly and literally in our hands because it is with them that we instantly access different information supports, which take us to our destination in a matter of seconds.

In this vertigo, humanity can no longer dispense with the big international news agencies or the big stations on a global scale. In this context of global oracles, mass information becomes a product of maelstrom and speed, but also a producer of behaviours and perspectives. It is that in the antipodes pole of globalized massification there is a marked individualization, a circumscription of the subject in a spiral that is typified in the paradox of isolation and absolute contact with the world. Likewise, technology has enabled the creation of new community ties of a virtual nature that can be seen as a field of exploration and application of ideas. So, will it not be possible to reverse this negative isolationism and to spread a message centred on ethical and deontological values through global networks and virtual communities? Can we use the potential of these communities to disseminate global lines of thought on ethics and deontology?

In this context, we cannot ignore or conceal that the key to these issues is, in essence, the understanding we have about the phenomenon of Globalization. Let us remember three paths that we can follow.

David Held (1999) and his collaborators tried to systematize the different visions and schools of thought about Globalization, ending up defining three categories: the "sceptics", the "hyperglobalizers" and the "transformationalists".

For the "sceptics", Globalization, in comparison with the 19th century, for example, is not a novelty, but a change in the

scale, namely when we analyze economic interactions. However, even the scale does not convince this group that first argues that there is still no true global trade, but rather trade in three regional groups - Europe, Asia-Pacific and North America. Another idea of the "sceptics" is that national governments maintain their status and value, mainly in the regulation of economic activity.

In this perspective, if we adopt this vision concerning Globalization, nations still have an important role in choosing and determining paths, which necessarily includes the debate on the Deontological Codes. Thus, we can and must think that each state can conceive ethical and deontological coordinates and, from these, establish a dialogue with other nations, in order to find common points, creating synergies of action and inspiring course lines, beyond the physical borders. The doubt lies in the real feasibility of this optimistic vision because on a planetary scale, governments and nations reflect cultural and political, social and even civilizational idiosyncrasies. Is it possible to reconcile the ethical and deontological ideals forged in a democratic territory with others that originate in dictatorial states? Is it possible to combine values between countries as different as those belonging to democratic Europe and those belonging to countries in Africa or Asia and which have antagonistic power exercises? If we believe that national voices can be found in international forums, such as the UN, for example, then there will be scope for dialogue. Nevertheless, this dialogue maybe, as it often happens at the UN, a compromise, a compromise, a minimum common denominator. And will there be room for compromises when we talk about Ethics and Deontology?

Second, as opposed to the "sceptics", David Held and his collaborators analyze the second school of thought whose members are called "hyperglobalizers". They consider Globalization as an absolutely real phenomenon, responsible for the creation of a new world order, dominated by trade flows and the belief in the devaluation of the power of national governments, while broader organizations are replacing them in the international spheres of influence. Now, in this line of thought, if we are living in a "global era", then there is also room for a worldwide construction related to Ethics and Deontology. We can use existing international organizations or create specific ones to design a guiding model for good informational practices. It is therefore a question of taking advantage of global mechanisms, organisms and forces for a concerted understanding on this topic. However, is it possible to use global forces, often dominated by economic or political interests, to create a document free of pressures, more or less explicit, more or less camouflaged, of those same interests?

Third, the "transformationalists" reveal themselves as thinkers who recognize Globalization as a driving force in modern societies, but who continue to defend the value of national governments and more traditional aspects. Globalization includes contradictory forces and trends, where information and communication technologies are established as a central element in the dissemination of cultural influences,

in a decentralized and multidirectional dialogue. In this sense, perhaps we can theorize about the ability to use information and communication technologies as the main ally in the dissemination of a global Code of Ethics, but is it possible to conceive it in this contradictory universe of positions and influences?

In short, what point of view can we choose? Let us turn to Anthony Giddens, who, commenting on these three aspects, writes:

> Which position is closer to the truth? That of the transformationists, almost certainly. Sceptics are mistaken, in that they do not take into account the extent to which the world is changing - world financial markets, for example, are now much more organized globally than in the past. Hyperglobalizers, for their part, see the phenomenon too much in economic terms and as an excessively unilateral process, when, in fact, globalization is a much more complex issue. (2004: 61)

In fact, as Giddens notes, Globalization is much more than an economic issue. It is not just big systems like telecommunications, production and marketing or financial markets that are at the heart of Globalization, as Peter Dicken notes. Today, this phenomenon is present in our daily lives, in our personal, organizational, local or national spheres, changing our thinking and our ways of seeing the world. The challenge is now a matter of point of view: is Globalization an adjunct or an opponent to the realization and dissemination of a global Code of Ethics and Deontology?

If we travel through the diachrony of ethical and deontological codes, the examples seem to guarantee an optimistic view on attempts to create transnational texts. Let us recall the Declaration of the Duties of Journalists of the International Federation of Journalists, an organization founded in 1952, or the declaration by Bordeaux that triggered later texts. The International Federation of Journalists has often considered deontological issues, as happened in Denmark in 1986, and highlighted, for example, the fundamental principle of objective description, information according to the truth, comment according to conscience, or values such as social progress, democracy, freedom and peace. In addition to the European universe, the foundational texts, such as the code of journalistic ethics, adopted by the first Pan American Press Conference, held in Washington in 1926, analyzed in 1950, at the Inter-American Press Conference, held in New York, and that the Inter-American Press Association would adopt. It is also worth recalling the statement by the Latin American Federation of Journalists, an organization that intended to fight against the system of media ownership.

In these primordial times, it would be a serious sin not to mention the United Nations project that wanted to define an international code of honour for the press and information. The first version, prepared in 1950, received several positive opinions and, in 1952, a second version appeared that was

never applied.

Subsequently, within UNESCO, a process was launched to create a convergence document for the professional practice of journalists. Following the publication, in 1980, of the report prepared by the commission led by Sean Mac Bride, former Minister of Foreign Affairs of Ireland, which deepened the concept of a "new world order of information", some obstacles are being drawn. the economic and technical gap between developed and developing countries reveals that only the former has the real capacity to create globalized information since only they have the means to collect and disseminate information on a global scale. Although this information is prepared according to principles of plurality, these countries end up becoming dominant. However, a predominant position undeniably causes an imbalance.

UNESCO has not given up on debating this issue and since 1978 it has promoted numerous consultative meetings, namely those held in Prague and Paris, in which participants highlighted the durability and relevance of the UNESCO Declaration, following the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and the principles of freedom of opinion, freedom of expression and information. Besides, they highlighted the relevance of the media and journalists, who, due to their missions in the field of information and communication, place increasing social responsibility on them.

The UNESCO Declaration certainly has a structural mission: to guarantee the substance and the foundations for national or international ethical and deontological codes. On the other hand, it does not forget fundamental concerns such as respect for universal values and different cultures, the rejection of war and other world problems, together with the aspiration for a new world order of information and communication. Despite its importance, this statement does not hide a clear limitation and that Daniel Cornu summarizes as follows:

> The UNESCO Declaration on the media, due to its universal ambition, has the undeniable advantage of focusing on a reflection on ethics. But it is not for this reason that it can also avoid criticism based on the fundamental rights of the human being. It aims to guide deontology, on which it admits different formulations in principle. In this sense, it is not "applied", in contrast to the rules adopted by the communities of journalists, which remain in force and are for the most part before it. It is more normative than prescriptive. (1999, 51).

Despite the serious limitations that have limited the project, the idea of a supranational Code of Ethics and Deontology has not been forgotten. In fact, since the last great debate on Deontology that took place with the contribution of UNESCO, the Council of Europe, or the FIJ, a new interest was noticed more recently after the 1991 Gulf War, which raised many and varied problems. For ethical and deontological guidelines to be global, it is necessary, first of all, to create them and, secondly, to disseminate them. As Claude-Jean Bertrand (2002, 133) notes:

Admitting that ethics must be consensual and voluntary, all interested parties must discuss the contents and their application among themselves. Accession appeals must be addressed to both commanders and troops. Along with the interest in deontology, there was also a concern to find ways to encourage respect for the rules, and consequently, all over the world it was reflected, it was written, experiments were made: it is necessary, therefore, that exchange information between regions of the globe.

It thus seems very clear that a supranational Code of Ethics and Deontology would fill a gap felt by journalists and the public. If it were possible to achieve it, a document capable of harmonizing and defining international journalistic activity would be won, under the aegis of universal principles that would be equally useful in countries where these precepts have not yet been configured and written. This code would be able to highlight the values common to all journalists, taking advantage of the most recent experiences. Returning to diachrony, it is worth mentioning the effort made by UNESCO, in 1973, to compare the deontological documents of the 48 member countries of the organization, giving rise to the "Collective Consultations on Codes of Ethics for the Mass Media", where universal values such as "Truth, objectivity and accuracy" (71.7% of references), "professional secrecy" (54.3%) or rejection of "slander, accusation without proof, defamation and plagiarism" (47.8%), or the "International Principles of Professional Ethics for Journalists", approved on 21 November 1983, and which would be discussed at UNESCO with the contribution of around 400,000 journalists from around the world, including the International Federation of Journalists, the International Organization of Journalists, the International Catholic Journalists Union, the Arab Federation of Journalists, the Union of African Journalists, the ASEAN Conference of Journalists, the Latin American Federation of Journalists and the Latin American Federation of Journalists press workers (PINA: 1997, 33).

Given these efforts, it becomes clear that we can identify common points in different groups or nationalities, oscillating between a general nature and an evident unanimity, which shows the existence of a core of concerns that go beyond borders and cultures. Values such as truth, objectivity and accuracy are enshrined in the vast majority of national codes, soon followed by the duty of professional secrecy, the rejection of slander, accusation without proof and defamation, for example. Thus, there are undeniable convergences, as Sara Pina writes (PINA: 1997, 36,37):

> The body of generally accepted deontological values in journalism, which would therefore constitute a kind of "central core" of journalistic deontology, can be grouped into four main areas: general principles of professional ethics (truth and objectivity; service of the "common good" "Or"

public interest "; professional secrecy); principles related to citizens' rights (respect for the reserve of private life; respect for racial, religious or ideological differences; respect for intellectual property rights; defence of freedom of information; rejection of slander, accusation without proof and defamation); principles related to the dignity and integrity of the profession (duty to use only honest means in obtaining information; duty to be responsible for the information conveyed; duty of loyalty to colleagues; the refusal of publicity and advertising; rejection of bribes or personal interests; conscience clause); and principles whose application also involves newspaper companies

So, in conclusion, despite this perspective of convergence, we must not forget that from country to country, social and cultural specificities necessarily impose unambiguous limitations and very different constraints on an international code.

In this context, the challenge is to build a paradigm or common denominator in an era of global information. The multiple forms of communication that we can use today have reformulated our traditional conceptions of looking at information and can also help to create a universal document within the scope of Ethics and Deontology, at a time when local, national or association codes are no longer being used. are consistent with global networks which, in turn, also bear responsibility at the global level. In the days of this new order of information, news of a regional nature, with partial connotations, with a circumscribed cultural or ethnic background are capable of triggering misinterpretations if disseminated on a large scale and without adequate contexts. On the other hand, if we are experiencing problems on a global scale such as global warming, the greenhouse effect, political instability, and economic and social asymmetries, then the response of the media can only be effective if it is global and, given the In this scenario, their responsibility on this scale requires universal codes of conduct.

With this planetary imperative, journalists can also be global, responsible and active agents, in favour of inalienable causes such as Human Rights, in an increasingly clear confluence for universal citizenship (far beyond borders and local, regional or national idiosyncrasies. nationals) and provide a more comprehensive dialogue between peoples and cultures, bringing to the media agenda issues that could be overlooked due to local or national constituencies.

Is it possible to find a core of ethical concerns that unifies and regulates diversity? Recently, several researchers have tried to find this synthesis by using journalistic codes of ethics, international documents on Human Rights and even anthropological studies (BLACK and BARNEY: 2002). But the real challenge is not to find, to discover these universal values. It would be more relevant for this process to perceive the urgency of building a code, even if it is not based on universal ideas and accepted in full. In other words, instead of trying to find common subjects, it would be more useful to try to build (WARD: 2005) a document through dialogue with journalists and their associations.

However, the scenery is still cloudy and windy. How can these new journalists of a universal ethical and deontological code include their intrinsic characteristics, the facets of nationality, culture or language in an exercise that aims to be the opposite, that is, the abandonment of differences and the conquest of similarities? Is there a place for impartial communication in globalized communication? Or, could a journalist forget the specifics that define him and defend universal values that can even decontextualize, empty and alienate him?

These and other issues disturb a profile of consonances between the disparity of values and options that a process of building a global ethical and deontological code is capable of triggering. Will we, at this moment, be forced to postpone this project inexorably, leaving it on the frontiers of utopia?

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