

Redefining Journalism Ethics amid Toxic Global media



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FOR

THE WORLD BETWEEN THE LINES

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What we will do

Introduction: How I think about J-Ethics. History and Current Situation of J-Ethics (according to me)

Part 1: **Concept reform**: Global media ethics and “objectively engaged journalism.”

Part 2: **Application**: Discussion of difficult areas

- ▶ Local/global problems; engaged or neutral; patriotism, etc.

Part 3: **Practical Reform**: How build an engaged GME. Utopian?

My starting point

1. Big Picture ethics: Philosopher and historian of ideas;
Three questions occupy me.

2. Worldview: APPREHENSIVE for species, democracy, humane ethics

- ▶ *Future:* Can humans shift From parochial, tribal, war-like towards a global ethic and society?
- ▶ *Evolutionary origins:* Hard & soft traits. Ecology as trigger.

Which will prevail?

- ▶ *Design societies and media spaces for democratic, humane interactions?*

My topic today: J-Ethics -Building an engaged global ethics

Basic Terms

No difference between “ethics” and “morals” in this talk

Ethics is primarily social: norms for group life amid conflicting interests. Makes group life possible. But what sort of life?

Historically: Morality immoral. Abuse of morality.

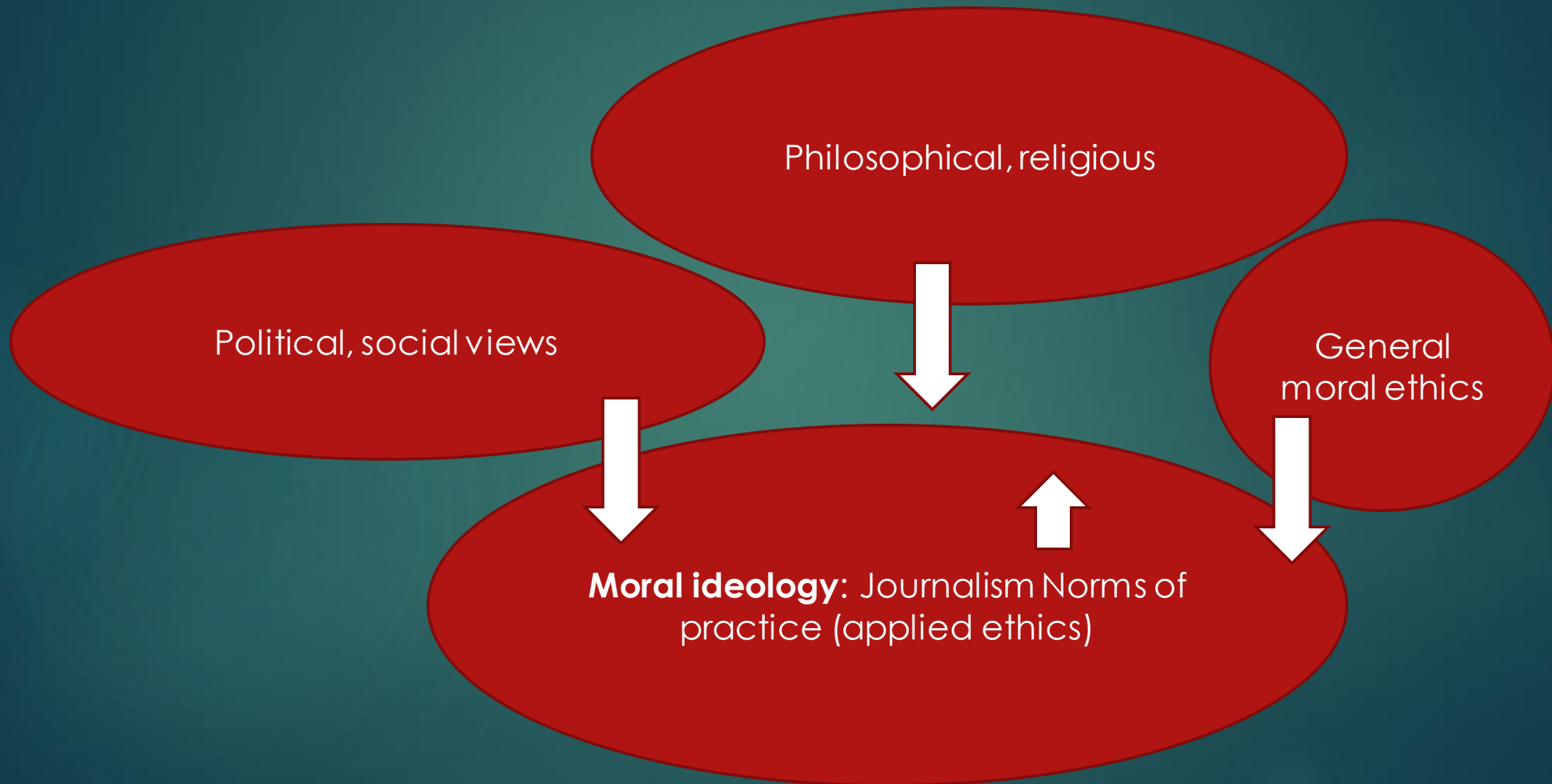
Journalism is news, analysis or commentary on issues of interest and importance to the public. Focus of definition is on the act of journalism not who does it.

Journalism ethics: *Responsible* use of the freedom to publish for the public or “study and application of norms of responsible journalism.”

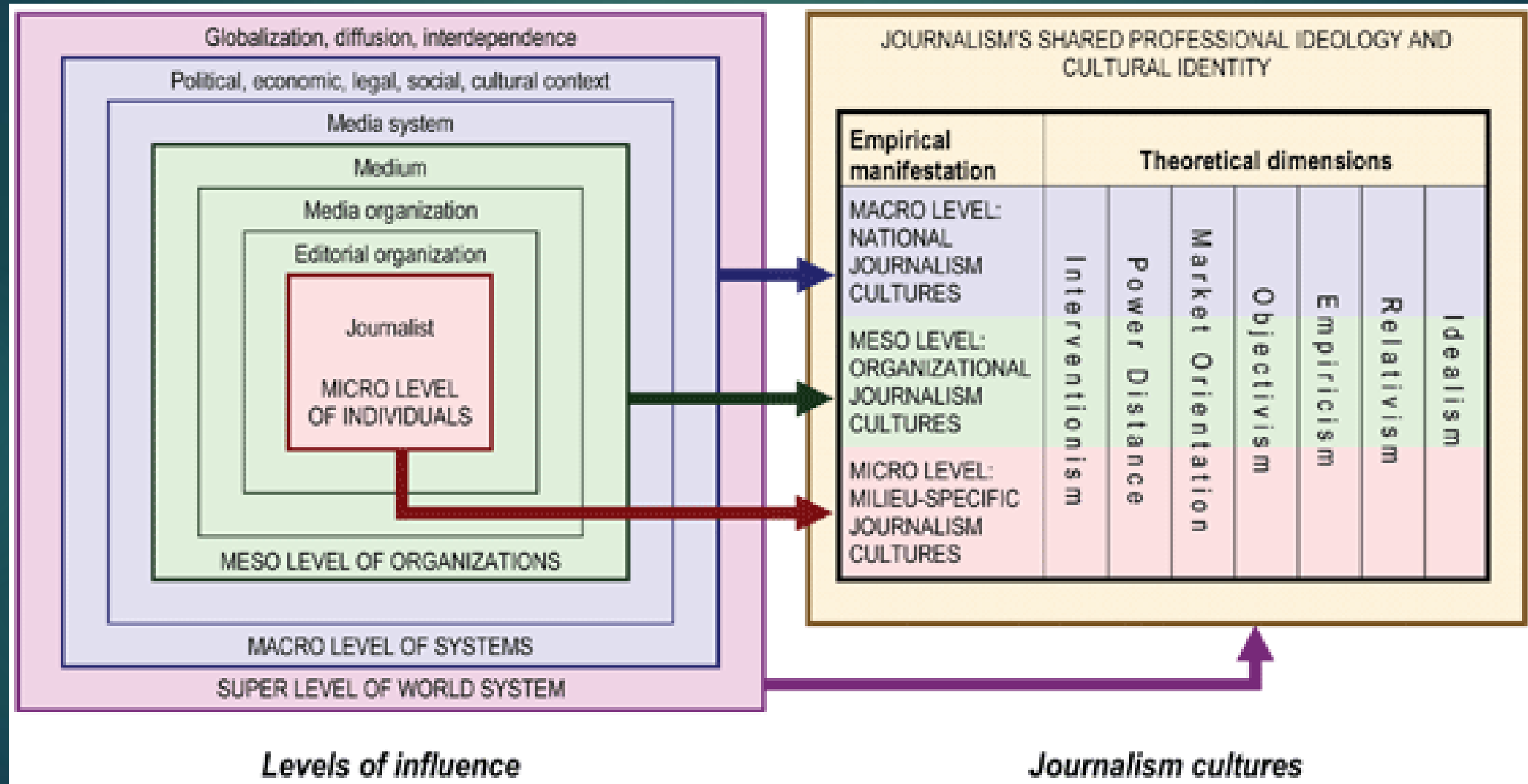
Media Ethics: Responsible freedom to publish in **any** media.

Journalism ethics is part of media ethics

J-Ethics is a specific moral Ideology, within other ideologies.
No 'stand-alone' j-ethics



J-ethics as part of a social practice



The Precarious Life of Democratic J-Ethics

Political Conditions

1. Freedom of Media.
2. No serious threats to Journalists
3. Access to information

Economic Conditions

1. Economic stability of outlets
2. Economic independence
3. Diverse media committed to standards, codes, accountability
4. Fulfill key Informational functions

Conditions of individual Journalists

1. Character
2. Ethical skills & Knowledge
3. Sufficient wages and decent working conditions.
4. Support from Editors/owners

Social conditions

1. Citizen interest in news; Engaged.
2. Supports good Journalism & democratic dialogue
4. Uses media Responsibly
5. Not factional, extremist

Guatemala and its media: Freedom and Independence?



You are DOING j-ethics when fighting for right of journalists and good journalism-economically, politically. ETHICS IS PRAXIS, not simply abstract discussions.

How did we get **here**...from *there*?

To talk about future, I need a story about the past:

The turbulent history of Journalism Ethics

J-Ethics **follows** media and social change:

Five press revolutions followed by five changes in ethics

History of (Western) Journalism Ethics 1700-present

17th Century:
600 years ago

**Origin of News
Press**

Claims to be
accurate and
unbiased to
please censors

18th Century

**Public
newspaper
Press**

Press as public
informer and
watchdog
(opinion,
advocacy)

19th century

**Elite liberal
press**

1st half of
19th century

Free press,
free market
(opinion,
advocacy)

**Mass media
press**

2nd half of
19th century

Business of
news,
Independent

20th century

**Mainstream
Professional
media**

1st
**professional
ethics:**
Objectivity:
Facts &
neutrality

Critics

21st century

**Fragmented
plural ethics
'for
everyone'**

Decline of
news
objectivity

Opinion,
partisan,
extremism

News Objectivity (1920-1990) Neutrality & 'just the facts'

Against engagement, advocacy

Principle #1: Neutrality in Stance

- ▶ Reporter is not engaged. Purging of views and interpretations from copy.
- ▶ Neutral amid the contending groups/stenographer; no perspective.
- ▶ Serve public through provision of 'facts'

Principle #2: 'Just the facts'

- ▶ Positivism: Sharp division of fact and opinion/interpretation
- ▶ Techniques: Balance; attribution of opinion;

WHY OBJECTIVITY? Why restrain 19th century freedom of press?

1. Growing public and government criticism (press power; sensationalism)
2. It fit the news press: short, factual.
3. Ethics: societies adopted professionalism and positivism. 'Truth through ethics.'

Legacy of News Objectivity

1. **News focused. Little on other stances**
2. **Ethic for professionals.** Accountability by professionals
3. **Parochialism: non-global; nationalistic**
4. **Simplistic political rationale: facts for citizens**
5. **Narrow practicality, despite criticism**

Model for Mass Media 1900-1990? *Monopoly on news and advertising*



Digital Model: Mass self-communication; networks



The Decline of News Objectivity

1. Other stances: Investigative; opinion; civil-rights

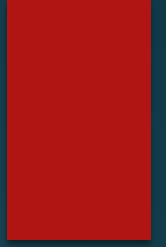
2. Academic/social criticism of the stance; *culture wars*

- ▶ Doubts whether objectivity is possible or desirable
- ▶ Alternate epistemologies: Historicism, constructionism, political criticism, “conceptual relativity”

3. Growth of online media and journalism

- ▶ perspective, opinion, partisanship and advocacy;
- ▶ multiple users unconnected to tradition of j-ethics.

A Sea-Change in Issues, Ideas, Norms



Before online journalism: Typical problem areas for teaching/debate

- ▶ Editorializing (opinion, advocacy, emotion)
- ▶ Accuracy and pre-publication verification (do your **own** verifying)
- ▶ Independence: Distance from sources; conflicts of interest
- ▶ Deception and fabrication (before 'fake news'!)
- ▶ Graphic images and alterations (before easy manipulation!)
- ▶ Use only verified and valid; rumors (before citizen content!)
- ▶ Special sensitive situations (suicide, hostage taking)

All of this presumed a dominant professional journalism

New issues

- ▶ Identity & Scope
 - ▶ Aim, Stance and principle
 - ▶ New practices/technology (VR, AI)
 - ▶ Participation of citizens
 - ▶ Disinformation, extremism, 'amplification'
 - ▶ Culture, pluralism, global issues
- New vocabulary**

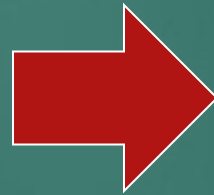


Ethics: Fragmentation, Disruption,
(yet also) Re-Invention

Difficult Transition for Media Ethics

Created a century ago for a pre-digital, non-global, mainstream, professional, “closed”

Pre-digital,
parochial
ethics
for
professionals



Digital, global
ethics for
'everyone'

So... What's next?

What can j-ethics look like in future?

What will replace aging ideas? What new moral ideology?

Is there a *third way* between neutrality and partisanship?

Is there a *third way* between strong patriotism and a 'warm and fuzzy' humanitarianism?

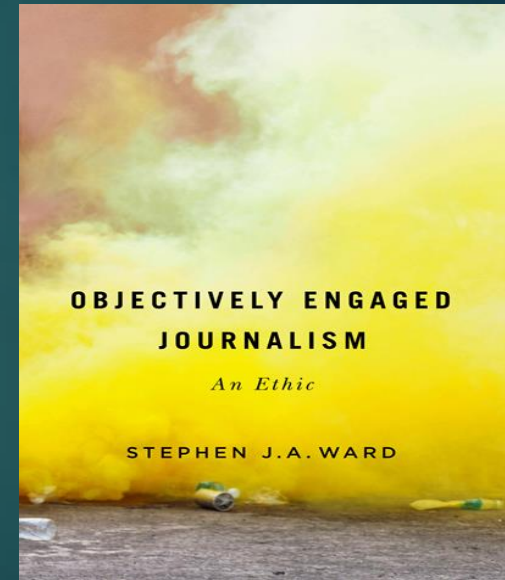
My Proposal for Redefining Journalism Ethics

Conceptual Reform:

- (1) objectively engaged ethic for democratic humanity,
- (2) grounded in global moral principles (global media ethics)

Practical Reform:

- (3) a partner in macro-resistance to toxicity, and
- (4) a public-participatory media accountability.



Set aside much of past j-ethics as outdated moral ideology.

What is Global Ethics?

Two senses:

1. Principles: A moral ideology based on global principles
2. Problems: Engaged with global issues

J-Ethics has never been global. It has been parochial or local.

“Moral globalism” vs “Moral Parochialism”: A choice of values.

Priority: global values trump the parochial.

Practical focus

- Ways to protect human rights, promote global justice and economic equality, combat racism and tribalism, to reduce conflict and to assist the making of peace

What is Global Media Ethics?



It is moral globalism applied to journalism.

The study and application of global moral values for responsible use of media now global in content, reach and impact.

- ▶ Redefinition: global aims and principles
- ▶ Approaches to coverage of global issues
- ▶ Replace non-global ethics: challenging patriotism, nationalism, r

A “project”: work in progress. Not “one” thing. Plural approaches.

What would change for journalism?

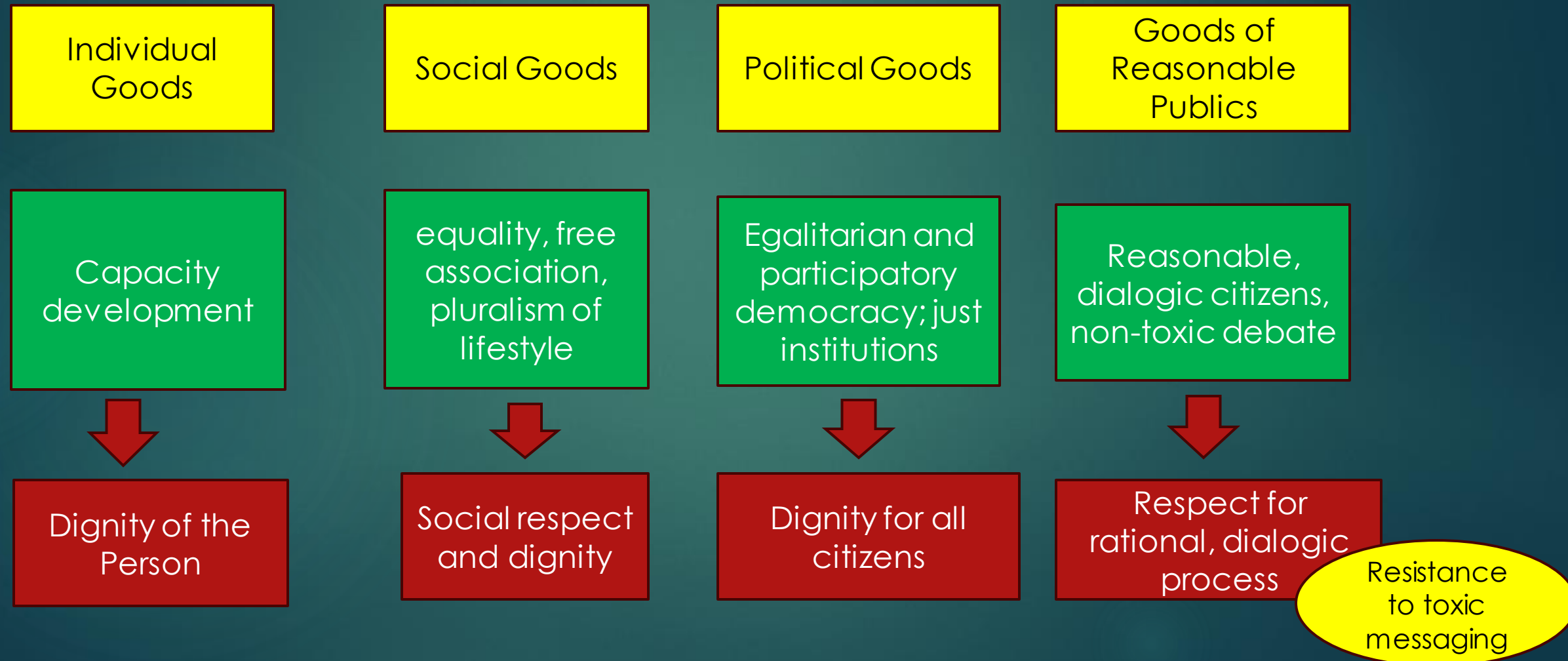
Self-consciousness: Roles and Aims : Act as global agents for a better world:Engagement for humanity

Two primary values:

1. Human flourishing beyond borders(a) decent (b) fuller flourishing.
2. Dialogic, plural democracy as part of flourishing

Approaches to stories

My Theory of Human Good



Applying the Human Good to Journalism

Report on:

1. Equality of levels of society: decent levels of basic goods
 - ▶ Who is being denied basic physical, social, or political dignity?
 - ▶ Degree of elite hierarchy: Who in society is benefiting the most; has the most power
2. Reporting on global issues from a global view
3. Representation of minorities, immigrants etc
4. Demagogues, groups seeking to undermine democracy; hate speech
5. Create diverse media spaces for informed, respectful analysis; assist media literacy; nurture reasonable citizens.
6. Critique uncritical claims for patriotism and need for war; maintain critical stance.
7. Promote global equality and justice; undermine stereotypes and racist portraits

Themes of GME: Handbook (2021)

Table of contents

<https://link.springer.com/book/10.1007/978-3-319-32103-5>



In addition to section of method/philosophy, topics include:

1. Human rights
2. Global justice, factual reporting and advocacy
3. Perspectives from the Global South
4. Emotion and Objectivity in Global Reporting
6. Reporting Disasters and Trauma
7. Global immigration crisis
8. Science communication in age of pandemics
9. Reporting poverty
10. Reconciliation and journalism
11. Whistleblower sites
12. Peace journalism
13. Free speech and taking offence
19. War reporting
20. Journalism Collaborations
21. Reporting Queer communities; VR and representing;
22. Social media and media accountability; digital verifying
23. Regions of world, e.g., Al Jazeera; South Korea etc.

Doing GME: Ethical Journalism Network

<https://ethicaljournalismnetwork.org/>

- ▶ The EJV is a coalition of more than 70 groups of journalists, editors, press owners and media support groups from across the globe and we are growing. We are a registered UK charity and supervised by a Board and an international network of advisors.

You're already thinking globally!

The World Between the Lines

My View of Media Ethics

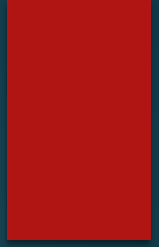
Global Humane Ethics

Communication/Media
Ethics for All Uses

Journalism Ethics:
Professional/Non-
professional



Questions?



Part 2: Practice--Difficult Areas

Can the local and global co-exist?

Is it a choice between engagement or neutrality?

Can you be a patriotic journalism yet global, truthful, objective?

Can the local and global combine?

Are there universal norms in journalism?

How apply them to differing local cultures and media?

Different cultures & media values

Different ideas on principles and on role of journalism (e. g. South Africa)

Canada (reconciliation & maintain vitality)

Hawaii (native, American, global) **Separate slices

- ▶ What happens to SPJ code: truth, independence, minimize harm, be transparent (objectivity removed in late 1990s)

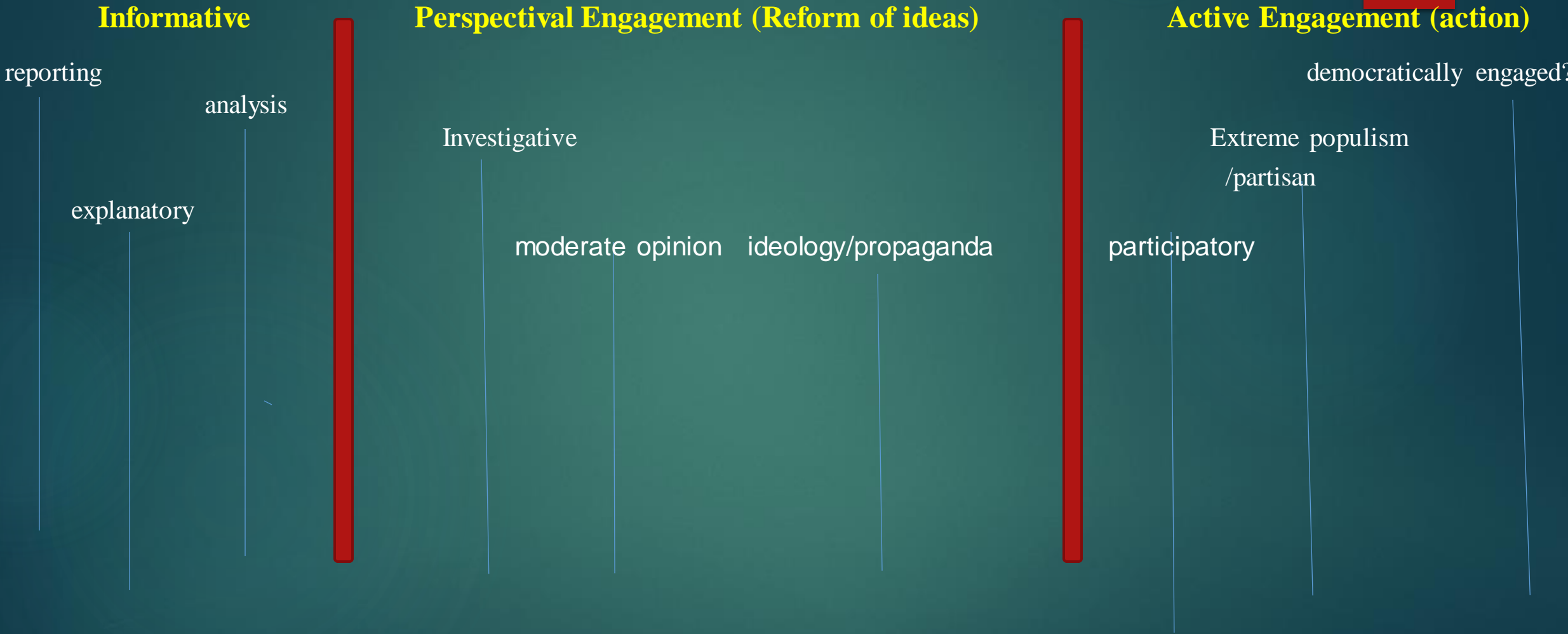
Question of **stance**

What is your stance?

A choice of partisan and neutral reporting?

Is there a third option?

A Continuum of Journalism Stances

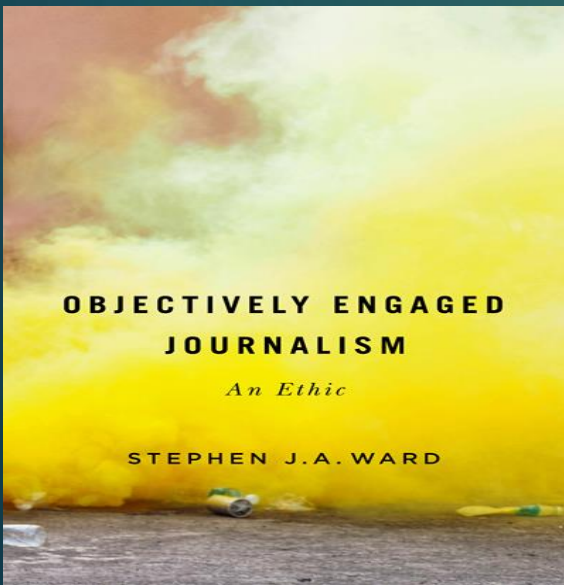


Objectively Engaged Journalism



Between neutrality and Partisanship

- ▶ **Engaged in aims** and value: global ethics & democracy
- ▶ **Objective in method** but not old objectivity:
- ▶ **Pragmatic objectivity**: Objectivity as holistic testing of interpretations in situated knowledge
- ▶ Two elements: **A willingness to test; a holism of criteria (not one)**



Premise 4: Pragmatic Objectivity

<i>Standards of empirical validity</i>	Accuracy, verification, completeness of fact
<i>Standards of clarity, logic, and coherence</i>	Coherence among beliefs, well-defined terms
<i>Standards of diverse and trusted sources</i>	Appropriate range of sources, less-powerful voices, ‘real’ experts
<i>Standards of self-consciousness</i>	Question approach to story, alternate frames, assumptions, language used
<i>Standards of open scrutiny</i>	Rational arguments, respectful disagreement, informed positions, avoidance of ranting and extreme emotion

Positive features of this stance

- ▶ Better epistemology of how test and know things: no dualisms
- ▶ Passion (or emotion) **and** method; yet restrains bias
- ▶ Applicable to almost any kind of journalism
- ▶ **Willingness to critique** and take 'sides' against toxic forces.

Journalism Ethics Beyond Facts

Democracy and Plural Media Needs

Dialogic needs

Participatory needs

Advocational & reform needs

'Perspectival enrichment' needs

Explanatory needs

Need for Reporting and Investigations

Problem of patriotism

What is patriotism?

What's the problem?

Problem of Patriotism for GME

If journalist is “World Citizen”—what about patriotism?

Leo Tolstoy, a pacifist: patriotism was stupid and immoral:

“Seas of blood have been shed over this passion, and will yet be shed for it,” wrote Tolstoy, “unless the people free themselves of this obsolete relic of antiquity.”

But others recognize its hold on us:

Plato: *“We are not born for ourselves alone, but our country claims for itself one part of our birth, and our friends another.”*

Stoics: Developed Plato to take of three circles of concern

Forced choice?: strong negative emotion or essential for unity?

Why I am interested in patriotism

- ▶ My war reporting: Truth-teller or patriot?
- ▶ Called unpatriotic; narrow and undemocratic.

How my war reporting changed me....globalism through experience.

Test of good journalism is in times of tension, war

Extreme and moderate patriotism

If patriotism is a special affection for one's country what sort of affection?

Political or communal?

Extreme:

- ▶ *superior to others; exclusive concern; uncritical support*

Moderate:

- ▶ Not superior, not exclusive, critical

Political patriotism: : Love of egalitarian democracy:

- ▶ Object: democratic well-being of citizens.
- ▶ Constitutional safeguards; just structure; citizens' meaningful participation; deliberative: free speech, critical press.

Test of patriotism claims: Moderate?

Consequences of following claim? moral character.

Who benefits?

- ▶ Inclusive of all citizens
- ▶ Restrained morally
- ▶ Open to public scrutiny

Is there such a thing as a “global patriot”?

Summary

Ethical journalists can be patriotic only under strict conditions -- *if patriotism is defined along moderate, democratic lines.*

There is an overlap between moderate patriotic journalism and democratic community: free speech, rights, limits on power, opposition to censorship

Not necessary to deny affection for country but **constantly subject affection to scrutiny.**

Part 3: Building Engaged Global Media ethics

Macro-resistance

Journalism as partner in de-toxing of media

Public-Participatory Ethics

Macro-resistance: 3 Areas of Activity

Area 1: Evaluate

Detox the
public sphere

Area 2: Educate

Critical media
literacy

Area 3: Reform

Guidelines,
new ethics



Public Participatory Ethics

Canadian Coalition for
Media Excellence

Public Participatory Ethics

- ▶ Citizens' right and responsibility
- ▶ Collective advocacy
- ▶ Reasoned analysis

New Content Needed

Ethics of new media ecologies & new media

Ethics of interpretation and opinion

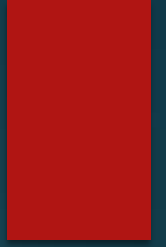
Ethics of global democratic journalism

Ethics of covering intolerant groups



The Journalist's Resource
Informing the news

Positive signs

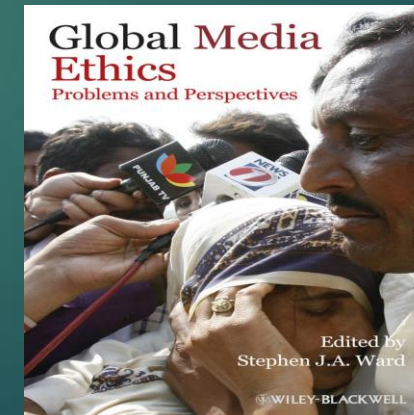
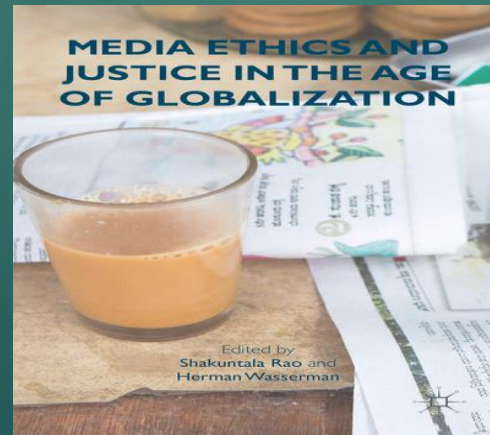


New work at theory level

1. Books; journals & special editions
2. Conferences, roundtables

Courses on international media ethics: Ethics 4 Justice- UN

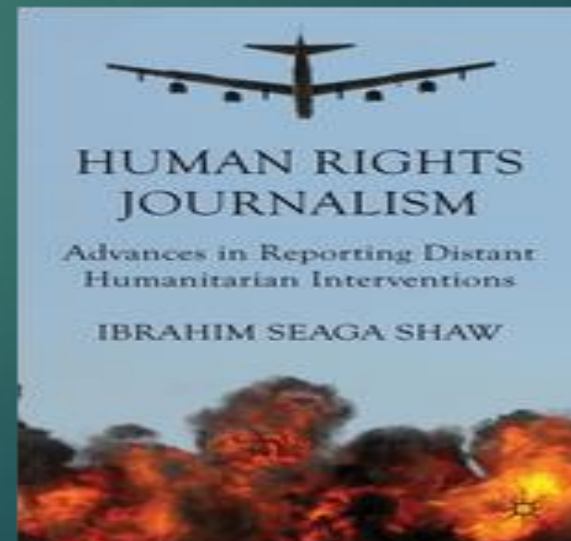
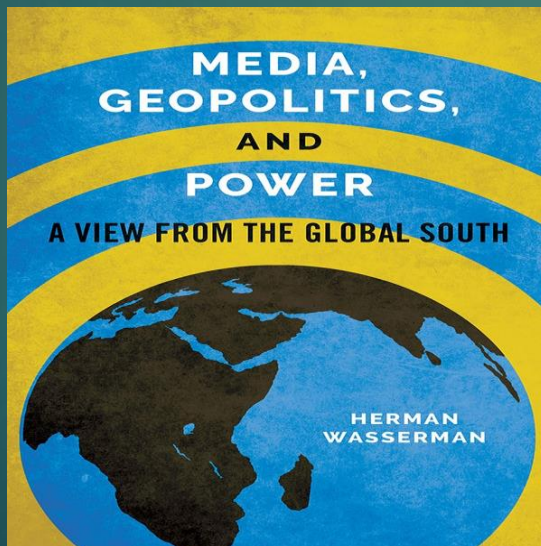
► https://www.unodc.org/documents/e4j/E4J-Ethics_Fact_Sheet_20190702.pdf



Ward Code for Global Journalism

[Ward Code for Global Integrated Ethics.pdf](#)

<http://mediamorals.org/introducing-the-ward-code-for-global-integrated-ethics>



In J-Schools: Global Reporting Center

<http://globalreportingcentre.org/>

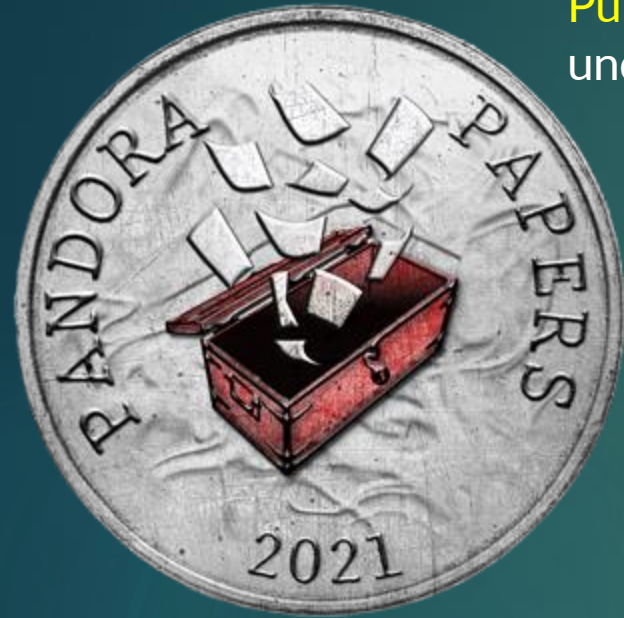


Civic Society Coalitions against Prejudice



Collaboration worldwide

Pulitzer Center for Crisis Reporting
underreported global issues

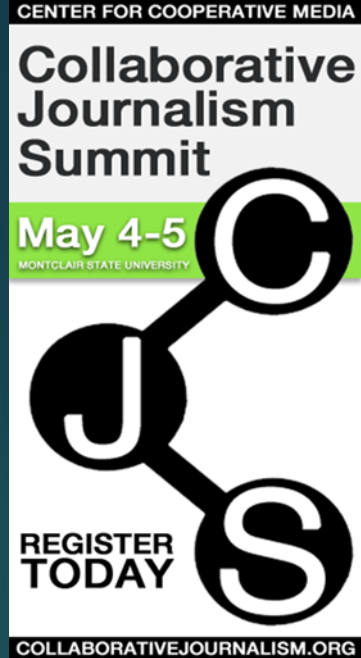


Institute for Non-Profit News

<https://inn.org/members/>



**GLOBAL
ANTI-CORRUPTION
CONSORTIUM**



How far can GME go?



Is it utopian?

Degrees of “realization”

Endorsement by journalists: Three stages.

Stage 1: Inject ideas into public discourse

Stage 2: Codifying principles

Stage 3: One of the dominate moral ideologies of media

How develop the project?

**Dialogue across borders; no absolutes; de-centered webs*

SUMMARY: What to Do? (Summary)

Conceptual Reform: Ethics for

- ▶ Principles and goals of Global, digital media (including journalism)
- ▶ Idea of democratically engaged journalism (not neutral, not disengaged)

Reform of Practice

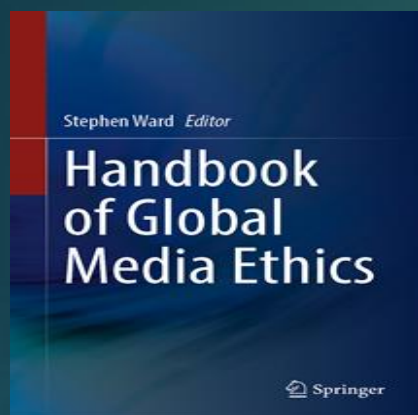
- ▶ Norm revision within journalism: new norms and protocols for new problems and media
- ▶ Media ethics as social activism: “Macro-Resistance” to Toxic Media

Social reform:

- ▶ Media Accountability reform: Critique, educate, rewrite
“Public participatory” ethics

Democratic, Digital Citizens

▶ **We are not helpless!**



Thank You!

