

ALSÍUS, S. (ed.) *The Ethical Values of Journalists. Field Research among Media Professionals in Catalonia*. Barcelona: Government of Catalonia, 2010. ISBN: 978-84-393-8346-8

BY ANASTASIIA GRYNKO

Assistant Professor, Mohyla School of Journalism,
The National University of Kyiv-Mohyla Academy (Kyiv, Ukraine).



Bridging the ethical norms and real-life practice in media

Media ethics usually focuses on claims concerning which values ought to drive good journalism (Plaisance & Deppa 2008). That is why ongoing discussions about journalism ethics often deal with moral principles, normative rules and codified obligations aimed at *improving* professional performance rather than *understanding* the values shared by practitioners. Writing about the existing literature on media ethics, Plaisance (2009) notes that ethical discussions are too often centred on normative standards and best practices. Meanwhile, the expanding volume of media ethics research is criticized for an apparent gap between theory and practice in the field (Starck 2001). Therefore, little attention is paid to the “*ethics of journalists*” - the ways in which deontological norms are perceived and exercised in everyday media practice; and even fewer works analyze ethics through systematic data-based research providing “the voices” of those who work in media. In fact, this “practical” component of journalism ethics constitutes an important point for both academic and professional discussions. It sheds light on the reasons behind the professional behaviour of journalists and provides in-depth understanding of *how* and *why* the world of media operates, as well as on how it *ought to work*.

The book *The Ethical Values of Journalists. Field Research among Media Professionals in Catalonia* manages to bring together the theory and practice of media ethics. Referring to the real-life experience of journalists, the authors seek to understand the “ethics of journalists” or how universal moral values are reflected in real-life experience. Based on a complex empirical study conducted in Catalonia, Salvador Alsíus (ed.) and a team of researchers study the shared values that shape and govern journalists’ behaviour. Particularly, the authors analyze how journalists link normative principles with professional decisions and explore “the attitudes and values that affect their professional activity” (p. 16).

The contributors to the book (Salvador Alsíus, Christopher Tulloch, Carles Singla, Mònica Figueras, Ruth Rodríguez, Francesc Salgado, Fabiola Alcalá and Marcel Mauri) have a strong academic background and solid research and practical experience in journalism. They were all involved in the research team. The volume is edited by Salvador Alsíus, PhD in Journalism, Head of Journalism at the University of Pompeu Fabra in Barcelona, also working as a television journalist.

An original research methodology and advanced fieldwork make the findings, presented in the text, especially valuable. Starting from the content analysis of ethical codes and documents that regulate media ethics in Spain, the researchers complete an inventory of formalized norms that guide contemporary journalism. Generally, the book covers four fundamental principles (truth, justice, freedom and responsibility) that constitute the “backbone” of the profession and provide a well-organized deontological basis for further analysis of journalists’ attitudes. Then, the combination of qualitative (in-depth interviews) and quantitative (survey) research methods helps to obtain a complementary picture of the value system employed by journalists in practice. The study’s findings also provide rich demographic characteristics of the journalist community in Catalonia, providing a “snapshot” of people working in the field today. Taken as a whole, the text by Salvador Alsíus and his team of Catalan scholars contributes to the global work on media and media ethics that, according to Zelizer (2004), usually lodges in philosophy and sociology.

Connecting conceptual issues with the experience of Catalan practitioners, the book reveals a wide range of specific dilemmas that journalists face in their daily work, such as the trustworthiness of sources, manipulation of images, use of hidden cameras, stereotyping and discrimination of socially disadvantaged groups, independence from political forces and commercial pressures, dealing with press officers, accepting gifts and other rewards for coverage and many others. Looking at the ethics of media through the lenses of media practitioners, this work introduces provocative issues in journalism prac-

tice and obligations. In fact, it involves journalists within the global and interdisciplinary discussion on ethical issues and media regulation, bridging the normative and real-life dimensions of professional conduct.

The book by Salvador Alsius (ed.) and his team of scholars remains in line with a growing number of empirical and practice-oriented works that underline individual ethics, perceptions and interpretations of normative concepts together with the conceptualization of moral values widely covered by philosophers. These works become especially important within the changing professional conditions, new technologies and market developments that pose new ethical dilemmas for professionals and demand a constant rethinking of the ethical framework. Although media ethics has to do with standards, the media are made up of individuals and the ethical concerns of the mass media are the ethics of individuals (Merrill, Lee & Friedlander 1990). Donsbach (2004) concluded that most work by journalists is about perceptions, conclusions and judgments. Quinn (2007) also emphasized the importance of professionals' view of media ethics, which employs an internalized moral psychology of journalists. Finally, Coleman and Wilkins (2010) offer to link research with practitioners' experience, stressing the need for an in-depth understanding of journalists' ethical judgement and moral development.

Although the study presented in the book follows a specific time period and geographic coordinates, it contributes to the global discussion on journalistic professionalism and effective regulation. The authors note that "the media face similar problems all over the world", and Catalanian journalists who participated in the study experience similar difficulties and ask themselves the same questions as their colleagues from other countries. As Clifford Christians and Michael Traber (1997) once mentioned, there are so-called "universal values" that work across nations and in different regions of the world, and ethical values are mainly shaped irrespective of nationality. Therefore, referring to the experience and attitudes of journalists in Catalonia, this work provides rich details for an overall portrait of contemporary journalism. For scholars, students, researchers and professionals in journalism and related areas, *The Ethical Values of Journalists. Field Research among Media Professionals in Catalonia* contributes to an in-depth understanding of media practice in Spain and worldwide.

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