

## Islamic and Western perspectives on applied media ethics

Saadia Izzeldin Malik\*

**Abstract:** This study discusses the compatibility of Islamic theories of ethics with Western theories of ethics regarding the ethics of global journalism. The study examines Western and Islamic approaches and perspectives on ethics and applied ethics in the field of journalism. Central to the discussion are global journalism values of freedom of expression, individual right for privacy, public right to know, and the global clashing values of media ownership vs. freedom, and consumerism values vs. media values of social responsibility. These clashing media values are part of the broader practices of newsgathering and news reporting that encompass many ethical dilemmas in the field of media and journalism. The study concludes by discussing Western perspectives on character education. It also provides an Islamic moral perspective based on character education as an approach compatible with the Western perspective on moral education. This perspective will help reconcile global clashing media values.

**Keywords:** Applied ethics; global journalism; Islamic ethics; values; Western liberal ethics.

**Abstrak:** Kajian ini membicarakan keserasian teori-teori etika Islam dengan teori-teori etika Barat serta etika-etika kewartawanan global. Kertas kerja ini menilai pendekatan-pendekatan Barat dan Islam ke atas perspektif etika serta penggunaan etika dalam bidang kewartawanan. Perbincangan kertas kerja ini berpusat kepada nilai-nilai kewartawanan global, kebebasan bersuara, hak untuk privasi, hak awam untuk mengetahui; dan nilai pertembungan media terhadap 'pemilikan media lawan kebebasan, serta nilai kepenggunaan lawan nilai tanggungjawab sosial media.

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\* Saadia Izzeldin Malik is an Assistant Professor of Mass Communication in the Department of Mass Communication, Qatar University, Doha, Qatar.  
Email: [saadiaizzeldin@gmail.com](mailto:saadiaizzeldin@gmail.com).

Pertembungan-pertembungan nilai media merupakan sebahagian daripada ruanglingkup yang luas dalam pengumpulan berita dan laporan pemberita yang merangkumi pelbagai kes dilemma serta kesilapan etika dalam bidang media dan kewartawanan. Akhir sekali, kajian ini membincangkan perpektif Barat ke atas pendidikan sifat serta memberikan perspektif moral Islam berdasarkan pendidikan karakter sebagai pendekatan yang serasi dengan perspektif Barat. Hal ini penting untuk mengabungkan pendidikan moral sebagai satu pendekatan demi untuk menyatukan nilai media global yang bercanggah.

**Kata Kunci:** Etika gunaan, kewartawanan global; etika Islam; nilai-nilai; etika liberal Barat

This article examines Western and Islamic approaches and perspectives on ethics and applied ethics in the field of journalism. Rather than discussing Islam and its perspective on ethics as a separate and distinct field of study, the discussion centres on the compatibility of both Islamic and Western ethics with regard to the ethics of global journalism. The author's standpoint is that Islamic theories of ethics are part of human literature on ethics; thus, Islamic theories of ethics should not be discussed separately from human heritage. For that reason, this article's discussion will weave together liberal Western theories of journalism and its Islamic counterpart.

Applied ethics is the application of moral theories to practical moral problems. Kidder (1995) defines applied ethics as learning to make rational choices between what is good and bad, and what is morally justifiable action and what is not. Journalism ethics is a type of applied ethics that investigates the "micro" problems of what individual journalists should do in particular situations, and the "macro" problems of what news media should do, given their role in society (Ward, 2008). It is within the context of journalism ethics as applied ethics that the paper discusses issues of freedom of expression, individual right for privacy, public right to know, and the global clashing values of freedom of the press vs. media ownership, and media values of social responsibility vs. consumerist values. These sets of clashing media values are part of the broad areas of newsgathering and news reporting that encompass many ethical dilemmas in the field of media and journalism.

### Conceptualising ethics: Western and Islamic perspectives

The word ethics originates from the Greek word *ethos*, which means character, spirit and attitude of a group of people or culture. Ethics is also defined as a system of moral principles by which human actions may be judged as good or bad, right or wrong. Western ethics defined the three main categories of ethics as common ethics, personal ethics, and, professional ethics (Kidder, 1995). Common ethics often comprise the intuitive beliefs held by all members of a society – an inner voice – a conscience emanating from cultural, spiritual, and religious beliefs. For instance, all societies share similar common ethics in terms of the error of killing, stealing, and lying. Personal ethics (core values) are often based on cultural or sometimes religious standards. They often include ethical values such as opposition to war. Personal ethics are the basis of character. Finally, professional ethics are usually codified principles best expressed in codes of ethics of media organisations. “Seek the truth and report it” is part of the codes of ethics of the Society of Professional Journalists (SPJ).

Writers and philosophers on Islamic ethics such as al-Ghazālī (d. 1111), Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 1209), al-Tusī (d. 1274), al-Dawanī (d. 1502), define ethics or *‘ilm al-akhlāq* as the science of the human soul which covers the characteristics and qualities of the soul as well as the methods of how to control and moderate them (Abdul Rahim, 2013). Moreover, al-Ghazālī defined Islamic ethics or *‘ilm al-akhlāq* as the way to attain the wellbeing of the soul and to guard it against vice (al-Ghazālī, 2001). The sources of ethics in Islam are the Qur’ān and Sunnah. The Qur’ān is the most significant source given by God for human beings to refer to on issues pertaining to human conduct besides the Sunnah of Prophet Mohammad (S.A.W.). The model of this ethics is Prophet Mohammad, his actions and behaviours. Indeed, Prophet Mohammad (S.A.W.) explained the purpose of his mission by saying, “I was sent only to perfect the moral excellence of human beings” (al-Bayhaqī, vol. 10, p. 191). Hence, to know how ethics should be applied, Muslims need to look no further than Prophet Mohammad as a role model to be imitated.

Moreover, *akhlāq* from an Islamic perspective, according to Taha (1967), can be defined as the fine and thin end of law. According to Taha, there is a dialectical relationship between law and ethics. Law is

the base and ethics is the apex. The Qur'ān reads, "Penalty for a wrong is an equal wrong but he who forgives and reforms shall be rewarded by Allah; He does not love the unfair ones" (Qur'ān, 42:40). This verse explains the relationship between law and ethics. It asserts how Islam gradually develops the human self, by first asserting the rule of justice. Islam then educates the self through worship and daily practice, until it is able to act in accordance with moral principles. Furthermore, laws are used to fill the ethical vacuum. Laws will be less necessary when we regulate ourselves by acting ethically. As Kidder (1992) argues, there is no need to debate whether or not regulation is needed; we either regulate ourselves by acting ethically or we create some external mechanism that will impose regulation.

### **Theories of ethics and applied ethics from Western and Islamic perspectives**

According to Zaroug (1999), ethical theories are generally divided into three major sub-disciplines: (1) meta-ethics, (2) normative ethics, and (3) applied ethics. Meta-ethics focuses on questions relating to the nature and origin of moral concepts and judgments. Philosophers in meta-ethics have taken different positions on this matter. They disagree over whether moral judgments are objective, subjective, absolute, or relative.

Normative ethics is primarily concerned with establishing standards or norms for conduct. It is commonly associated with general theories about how one ought to live. In normative ethics, for any act, there are three things that might be thought to be morally stimulating. First, there is the agent (the person performing the act), second, there is the act itself, and third, there are the consequences of the act (Zaroug, 1999). One of the central questions of modern normative ethics has to do with whether human actions are to be judged right or wrong in themselves or based on their consequences. Traditionally, Western ethical theories that judge actions by their consequences have been known as teleological or consequentialist. One of the prominent theorists of teleological ethics is John Stuart Mill (1863), the most famous advocate of the Utilitarianism. According to Mill (1863), Utility or the Greatest Happiness Principle holds that actions are right if they tend to promote happiness, and are wrong if they tend to produce the reverse of happiness. For Mill, happiness is intended pleasure and the absence of pain. Unhappiness

is pain, and the privation of pleasure. Thus, according to Mill (1863) rather than looking at the intention behind the act, one must explore the best outcome for the greatest number of people. In the field of applied journalism ethics, reporters who use deception to uncover social ills often appeal to the principle of utility on the ground that in the long run, they are accomplishing some moral good for the public they serve. In other words, the positive consequences for the society they serve justify the means used in gathering the information (Day, 2006). Another class of theories in normative ethics is designated as deontological, which judges actions by their conformance to some formal rules or principles. The deontological theory of Kant (1964) or the Categorical Imperative theory stipulates that moral agents should check the principles underlying their actions (the intention) and decide whether they want them applied universally. Kant believes that moral behaviour should be measured by living up to standards of conduct because they are good, not because of the consequences that might result.

Muslim theologians discuss many metaphysical issues such as free will and determinism and meta-ethical questions such as the meaning of words, the nature of morality, and the justification of moral judgments. They also discuss the determinants of human actions and motivations. For instance, the Mu'tazilites believe that man can act freely of his own accord, without his actions being predetermined. They advocate rationality and objectivity of morality. A moral obligation can only be justified when it agrees with reason. On the other hand, for the Ash'arites, "the whole issue of free will and predestination was encapsulated within the argument of God's omnipotence, namely, the notion that God is the Creator of both good and evil acts" (De Cillis, 2014, p. 15). The Sufis focus on controlling of the evil traits of the lower self inherent in an individual: ignorance, arrogance, envy, anger, and hate and replacing these with virtues such as knowledge, humility, contentment, patience, and love. In Sufism, having good character is attained through *mujāhadah* (struggle) against one's desires and through *riyāḍah* (training) of the soul. The Sufi way begins with vigilance and then *muraqabah* (watching one's deeds) and *muḥāsabah* (accounting for one's deeds); repentance, patient, *tazkiyah* (purifying one's soul), worship, abiding with moral principles, being sincere, and acting for the sake of God (Abdul Rahim, 2013).

Aristotle's moral philosophy, referred to as virtue ethics, is based on the theory of the Golden Mean. Aristotle argued that the ultimate

goal of human effort is “the good”, and the ultimate good is happiness. Achieving happiness involves striking a balance, a “just-right point” between the extremes of excess and deficiency, or “overdoing” and “underdoing” (Richard, 2014). Aristotle’s mean or virtue ethics emphasise character with the goal to develop a virtuous individual. Through practice and repetition, moral virtue (good) becomes a way of thinking and acting. Another important Western philosopher of ethics is Aquinas (d. 1274) whose influence on Western thought is considerable, particularly in the areas of ethics. Aquinas, though indebted to Aristotle, took his ethics further than Aristotle did. Aristotle believed that having right moral character is necessary for the flourishing human. He also believed that the right use of reason will show what counts as the right sort of moral character. Aquinas accepted this, but went further. He saw the deeper purpose of moral education and character formation as preparing humans for union with God. Aquinas also believed that humans are created in God’s image and that humans flourish most when their likeness is closest to that image (De Young, McCluskey & Van Dyke, 2009).

Muslim ethical theorists and philosophers who approached applied ethics from a virtue-ethics perspective such as al-Fārābī and Ibn Miskawayh, have a similar understanding of Aristotle’s virtue ethics. Ibn-Miskawayh’s ethics is based on four virtues: *al-‘adl* (justice) *al-ḥikmah* (wisdom), *al-shajā‘ah* (courage), and *al-‘iffah* (temperance or chastity). Ibn Miskawayh exalts justice to the position of the highest or ultimate virtue; it is ‘the whole virtue’ of which the other three virtues are manifestations (Shaida, 1978). For al-Fārābī and Ibn Miskawayh, virtue is gained through training and habit. A person acts virtuously when his rational power controls his desires and consequently the person acts moderately. At first, character formation requires deliberation, thought, struggle, and repetition of the moral acts until they become within the disposition and character (Abdul Rahim, 2013).

### **Contextualising ethics in the changing nature of journalism ethics**

To contextualise the changing nature of journalism and journalism ethics, Ward (2009) classified the history of journalism ethics in liberal Western societies into five stages based on the dominant press theories and goals of journalism in each stage. The first stage is characterised by the invention of journalism ethics in the periodic news press of the

17<sup>th</sup> century, especially in London. Traditions of factual news reporting and independent opinion making began during that era. Editors claim to adhere to such norms as impartiality, truth-telling, unbiased observation, credible informants, etc. The second stage is characterised by the development of the 18<sup>th</sup> century public sphere that stimulated the growth of a more free and diverse press, including the first daily newspapers. By the end of the century, the press is a “fourth estate,” a social force to be feared or praised. The third stage is the era of the liberal theory of the press. Liberalism stressed a free marketplace in the world of ideas and in the economy. Social progress would come through education, social reform and a press that supported liberal ideas. From the 1800s to the present, people have modified this liberal view, while others have critiqued this view. It remains at the heart of most discussions on news media today.

During the fourth stage, journalism witnessed the development of social responsibility theory. The social responsibility theory of the media represents the response of media industry to media ethics. In 1947, widespread concern about the ethical behaviour of the press led Henry Luce, the founder of Time magazine, to form a commission to study the responsibility of the press in the United States. It was the Hutchins Commission into the Freedom of the Press in the late 1940s that gave the Social Responsibility Theory a clear and popular formulation. In its report, the commission stressed that the main functions of the press was to provide a truthful, comprehensive, and intelligent account on the news and events and a forum for the exchange of comments and criticisms. “The press should provide a ‘representative picture of the constituent groups in society’, and assist in the ‘presentation and clarification of the goals and values of society’, and ‘provide full access to the day’s intelligence’” (Commission on Freedom of the Press, 1947, pp. 21–28). During this stage, journalists constructed professional codes of ethics focusing on objective journalism, enhanced by social responsibility theory. Objectivism sought to use adherence to fact and impartiality towards political parties to restrain a free press that was increasingly sensational (or ‘yellow’) and dominated by business interests (Ward, 2008).

Journalism ethics in its fifth stage, as Ward (2008) argues, is influenced by mixed media, where the public obtains information from a mixture of traditional and new media. Online journalism re-defined

the role of a journalist from a professional gatekeeper to a facilitator of conversation. The fifth stage of the development of journalism ethics is the stage that shapes the ongoing heated debate on global media ethics.

### **The global media ethics debate**

The debate on global media ethics is characterised by diverse point of views and voices. In this respect, Ward (2008) mentions that the field of media studies during this stage has been widened by theories outside the field of media studies that can be categorised under the umbrella of critical studies such as post-colonial studies. These theories critique the project of journalism ethics by examining the relationship between ethical discourse and the exercise of power, Western economic and cultural dominance, and post-modern scepticism about truth and objectivity. One of the implications of this trend is that media scholars, textbooks, and teachers should “de-westernize” journalism ethics. De-westernization of journalism ethics means using cross-cultural comparisons when discussing the principles of media ethics, to engage in cross-cultural dialogue about journalism ethics, and to explore both common ground and differences (Curran & Park, 2000; Hafez, 2007; Thussu, 2009). The debate on global journalism ethics is important at this juncture of the development of media/journalism ethics as it provides a critical perspective on Western liberal media theories that dominate the field of media ethics. However, there are disagreements among global media ethicists. For instance, there is disagreement over whether global media ethicists need to identify universal values/principles among all journalists or humans. Do such universal values exist? What might they be? And in what way does the application of these universal values differ from the application of the principles of dominant Western liberal journalism?

Christians and Nordenstreng (2004) propose a theoretical formulation that re-examines the search for global media ethics. They proposed social responsibility theory as a possibility for the press to adopt internationally. Accordingly, there is a call for journalism to shift its focus from serving the public of a specific nation to the public as the citizens of the world, and to interpret the ethical principles of objectivity, balance, and independence in an international manner (Wilkins, 2011).

It could be argued here that there is a risk that the quest for finding global principles to govern media/journalism ethics will open



avenues through which global media ethicists will return to the same point they were trying to avoid, namely identifying moral guidelines represented by codes. Thus, global media ethicists will find themselves in the same theoretical ground with other academics and scholars who reduce media ethics to codes of ethics. These codes, though informative and constructive, have little influence on the professional practice of journalists. Moreover, the call for journalism to cater for global/international audiences stressed by many theorists of global media ethics brings another ethical issue with regard to the moral responsibility of journalists towards the public and their accountability by the very public they serve. I would argue that journalism has a primary responsibility towards the citizen of its own nation. However, by the very virtue of globalisation the scope and meaning of nation and what it means to be a citizen of a nation has changed. At this global moment, everyone of us lives at a cultural intersection. Hybrid communities constructed by the movement of people crossing geographical boundaries of countries and/or by the movement and exchange of cultural values and products through the media and communication technologies have changed the public or citizens within a nation-state or a country to local/global public. As such, when practicing its ethical responsibility towards its public, the media need not think outside its own geographical borders. This change in the nature of the media public within the country brings social responsibility as a local and global media value to the forefront of any debate on media ethics. Diversity, impartiality, social justice, and equal access to news information are ethical values central to media social responsibility. The practices of global media has brought the ethical values back to priority; thus, these ethical values should shape the debate on global media ethics. However, unless values of social responsibility of the media are practiced locally, they cannot be practiced globally. And unless journalists internalise the ethical values of their profession, journalism will cease to be an ethics-based profession.

### **Global conflicting media values within an Islamic perspective on ethics**

This section substantiates the theoretical discussion on ethics and applied journalism ethics by highlighting clashing media values. It discusses the conflicting value of individual right to privacy vs. public right to know, media ownership vs. freedom of the press, and consumerist values vs. the social responsibility of the media. These conflicting media values

should be read within the broad framework of the current global economy of media characterised by the domination of corporate media and its commercial values.

*Individual right to privacy vs. public right to know*

Ethical dilemmas in media (especially in journalism), among other issues, involve newsgathering and news reporting. Most ethical lapses by media professionals fall within these two areas of newsgathering and news reporting. In these two areas, journalists face ethical dilemmas of balancing privacy issues related to individuals, which also have legal implications and public interest/public right to information (the right of the public to know). According to Day (2006), the right to privacy means the right to be left alone or to control unwanted publicity about one's personal affairs. The ability to maintain the confidentiality of personal information is the basis of an autonomous individual. Others are not entitled to know everything about an individual.

At this global moment, the issue of individual right to privacy becomes one of the most challenging issues as globalisation, through advances in technology, takes surveillance to new levels. We now have the freedom to communicate with almost anyone around the world. This freedom has been associated with a loss of privacy, in the sense that each individual leaves a digital footprint. An individual's telephone calls are monitored and his conversations are recorded. People have gained a freedom, but also lost a freedom (Brewster & Hine, 2013). Clearly, these advances in technology have a profound impact on the ethics of placing the individual under surveillance either by the media or by governments or by commercial companies or by all together. When we speak about privacy, particularly as a right, we focus on the individual. In Islam, the individual is an end in himself/herself and not a means to be used by other human beings or institutions to serve their interests (Taha, 1967). In this respect, individual freedom, dignity, and reputation are central values in Islam that require protection and wise handling when balanced with the community's right to receive information (public right to know). The Qur'ān contains verses emphasising the importance of respecting personal autonomy. The Qur'ān rebukes those who wish to pry into matters, which do not concern them, or harbour suspicions in respect of others, conceding that some suspicions can even be considered crimes. The Qur'ān (49:12) states, "O you who have

believed, avoid much [negative] assumption. Indeed, some assumption is sin. And do not spy or backbite each other. Would one of you like to eat the flesh of his brother when dead? You would detest it. And fear Allah; indeed, Allah is Accepting of repentance and Merciful.” Moreover, Islam supports people in the expression of their opinions publicly while at the same time mandating that respect must be shown to other opinions. Journalists and the public are expected not to misuse this freedom to inflict damage to others (Berenger & Taha, 2013). The Qur’ān condemns rumourmongering and spreading of false news and it encourages verification of information (Qur’ān, 24:19, 49:6). It also warns against defaming and tarnishing the reputation and honour of others (Berenger & Taha, 2013).

The tension between individual privacy and public right to know is clearly seen in the area of newsgathering: What type of information are journalists allowed to gather? Who benefits from the gathered information? These questions are central to the ethics debate. There are two types of information we can talk about here: The “need to know information” that serves the purpose of keeping the public well informed on issues that affect and influence their livelihood, and the “want to know information” (Elliott & Ozar, 2010). From a Western liberal democratic perspective, a well-informed public, through a media that acts as a watchdog to check and balance governments, is the backbone of democracy. Sensational news is part of the ‘want to know’ information. Stories about scandals of politicians, public figures, and celebrity news are the type of information that sells. The short-term profiteering mindset of transnational corporations that own most global media is the force behind the proliferation of sensational or commercialised news. This is a cycle where companies sell sensationalism which leads to public craving for more sensationalism. The “need to know information” is left out of the cycle.

This is a cycle where companies sell sensationalism which leads to public craving for more sensationalism. The “need to know information” is left out of the cycle. The media cannot demand the freedom to report if their practice violates the right of the individual to obtain accurate information that provides the opportunity for citizens to play an active role in building a proper and enlightened civil society. Islamic teachings emphasise the limits of freedom of expression and the responsibility that should restrain its use. In particular, attention is directed towards

the moral guidelines that extend beyond what is articulated in laws and codes, with an emphasis on human dignity and the common good (Mohamed, 2010).

*Media ownership: Economic and political pressure vs. freedom of the press*

Profit motive and competition are the economic pillars of Western democracies. When economic considerations become the motivating agent for why one does something, ethical questions arise, especially when the commercial interests are allowed to dominate the social obligations of the media (Day, 2006). The issue then is how to balance economic pressures against individuals or institutional duties to others (i.e. ethics). Economic pressure on the media is usually discussed at the levels of concentration of media ownership in the hands of a few transnational corporations, and the role of those corporations and advertisers in controlling media content; thus, influencing the role of the media in making their own independent editorial decisions and pursuing fair and objective journalism. Based on rationalisation and standardisation of production processes, free markets, economies of scale, and market forces lead to fierce competition, which weakens the independence of journalists as well as their working conditions. Economic pressures from advertisers particularly affect those working in private media. As for controversial issues that journalists now have to cope with, the range of sensitive topics now includes self-censorship due to conflicts of interest with economic actors such as private media owners who have other industrial activities, advertisers, or shareholders.

While this dilemma of media ownership by corporations vs. freedom of the press is true for Western/global media and private media, we find that media institutions in less democratic countries face another media ownership dilemma. This dilemma is characterised by the ownership of media by governments and the political influence exercised over media institutions and journalists. In most non-democratic countries, governments exercise control over media institutions either through censorship of media content, through appointments of editor-in chief of newspapers, through licensing of media institutes, or licensing of journalists. Furthermore, due to government ownership of media, we find that 'truth' is reported from the side of the government that owns the media and is valued by its limitedness and not by the abundance of

its facts. In other words, media ownership by governments and political parties in many countries impede the freedom of journalists to access information. Additionally, journalism as a profession is among the most low-paid professions in many countries, making many journalists subject to all sorts of manipulation by news sources and media owners. As a result of media ownership by corporate media or government in Western and non-Western countries, the public is often misinformed. However, the changing nature of the political economy and culture of journalism should not make the profession lose sight of the individual. The prime ethical responsibility of journalism is towards individuals. “Like medicine for instance the culture and political economy of medicine (large pharmaceutical companies and their influence on the medical practice) did not make doctors abandon the right of the patient to get the right treatment for the disease. Doctors like journalists have ethical responsibilities toward individuals” (Gordon, Kittross, Babcock, Merrill, & Dorsher, 2011, p. 111).

*Consumerism values vs. social responsibility of the media*

The consolidation of global media institutions by few multinational corporations, which is funded by the pursuit of profit, has led to a conflict between the values of consumerism and values of media. Capitalist consumerist values are presently rampant. The proliferation of consumerism values through the media has been sustained through the unequal flow of information from the West to the rest of the world. Global flow of information from the West to the rest has long made non-Western media systems at the receiving end of information. This has generated more dependence on Western media content. This imbalance of flow of information between the West and non-Western countries engendered debates on cultural hegemony by the West and the subsequent impact of this cultural hegemony on cultural, moral, and religious values of other countries and societies. It is important to note here that Western culture that is globally exported by the media is a culture of branding (mainly through advertising) and packaging of Western values (through Western entertainment and news industry). Through this culture of branding and packaging of Western values, media institutions have turned the audiences around the globe into consumers. In the myth of consumerism, the individual is gratified and integrated into society by consuming. The consumer redirects cultural fulfilment to the rewards of buying and owning products.

From the perspective of Social Responsibility Theory of the Press, the media is driven to benefit the public. It expects journalists to address society's need for truth, requires an open and diverse debate on public issues, and honest updates of current events. In this model, media ethics is automatic because the press is free to serve its purpose for the public, as opposed to special interest groups or advertisers (Ward, 2008).

From an Islamic perspective, personal/social responsibility in the field of journalism could be discussed within the two principles of freedom of expression and accountability. In Islam, freedom of expression as a concomitant part of individual and social responsibility necessitates that people have the right to obtain the information and the knowledge they need for deliberation and discussion to formulate their opinions. On the other hand, accountability as a central Islamic moral principle indicates that as "human beings were created responsible, so they be held accountable, each person for himself and no soul answerable for the actions and beliefs of any other" (Solihu, 2011, p. 132). Therefore, veracity is the cornerstone of the Islamic model of communication, emphasising personal responsibility and accountability in news production and dissemination (Mohamed, 2010). The sender of the message has a social responsibility: an obligation to tell the truth and verify its accuracy before broadcasting it to the public. The receiver has an individual responsibility to seek the truth by obtaining information from more than one source to be sure of its veracity.

To sum up the discussion on clashing media values, I argue that Islam as a system of morals can contribute to the debate on reconciling global conflicting media values. As Taha (1967) asserts, Islam provides a perspective that reconciles individual freedom and social justice. Individual freedom and morality are indivisible in Islam with morality constituting the proper exercise of individual freedom (Taha, 1967). On the other hand, social justice in Islam refers to social equality across gender, class, religion, and racial differences. Islam states that all humans are equal before God and that humanity and dignity of all regardless of class, gender, and colour should be respected. In the Qur'ān, the standard of excellence it sets is moral and religious – what the Qur'ān calls piety is the content of one's character. The Qur'ān says, "O people! We have created you from a male and a female, and have made you nations and tribes so that you may know one another. The noblest among you is the most pious. Allah is all-knowing." (Qur'ān, 49:13). For the media to

be socially just, it needs to talk of social injustice, their socio-historical content and to include perspectives of non-dominant groups.

Arab Spring did not only signify the power of people to change failing and corrupt governments, but it also indicates the importance of rethinking the role of the press in the Middle East. People turned to social media to voice their concerns after they lost trust on the mainstream media outlets that functioned as mouthpieces of their governments. The media has to be critical and has to perform its ethical social responsibility of representing diverse issues of concerns to its own citizens. Journalism ethics should place more emphasis on the representation of others, since misrepresentation can spark wars, demean other cultures, and support unjust social structures (Ward, 2008).

### **Reconciling conflicting media values through moral character education**

Moral Development as a theory has a long history beginning with the work of the Swiss psychologist Piaget (1932), author of the book *The Moral Judgment of the Child*. Piaget believes that individuals define morality individually through their struggles to arrive at fair solutions. Given this view, Piaget suggested that classroom teachers should provide students with opportunities for personal discovery through problem solving, rather than indoctrinating students with norms.

Expanding on Piaget's work, Kohlberg (1969) determines that the process of moral development was principally concerned with justice, and that it continued throughout the individual's life. Kohlberg specifies that moral reasoning as the basis of ethical behaviour has six developmental stages with each stage more adequate at responding to moral dilemmas than the previous stages. Each stage in the Moral Development theory stresses specific reasoning of responding to moral dilemma. For instance, in the first stage of moral development – depending on the age of a person – obeying the rules is important because it is a means to avoid punishment. In the second stage, there is an emphasis on conformity, being nice, and consideration of how choices influence relationships. Moral Development theory has been criticised on the basis that the theory could measure moral reasoning and not moral behaviour. It is possible that someone could think some way and act in another (Gibbs, 2014). Moral education, for Muslim philosophers, is not only concerned with teaching the mind (reason), but also concerned

with teaching and regulating the self. In this respect, moral education is a path that includes the process of interaction between the inner and outer practices, between the self and the society (Taha, 1967).

Due to the obvious gap between formal and informal moral ethics education, there is a separation between moral reasoning and moral behaviour. Moral behaviour is not learned as part of our daily practices. We all receive our moral education from informal institutions. Parents usually teach moral values to their kids. The community also plays a role in teaching its members moral values. In formal school education, ethics is not fully geared towards teaching students moral values and behaviour across curricula. Formal education in most countries is largely secular. There has been a heated debate among advocates of religious ethics and moral education and advocates of liberal education about what values should be taught to children at schools. A starting point, as Kidder (1995) argues, would be schools, departments, and colleges to define some simple human values that are shared by all religions and all cultures such as no cheating, which could also be translated into no plagiarism. Islam as a religion reflected in the Qur'ān and *ḥadīth* is full of human values such as respect, honesty, fairness, promise keeping, truth-telling, responsibility, refusal to achieve your ends by fraud, and work ethics that could be incorporated into all curricula to instil moral education in children from an early age and help narrow the gap between formal and informal ethics education. In addition, ethics must be a counterpart of other sciences, such as, law, politics, science, economics, for such sciences would become soulless or insignificant if detached from ethics. As such, basic ethical principles like justice, freedom, equality, and rights should be included and applied in all disciplines. Ethics should exist in each and every field of discipline (Abdul Rahim, 2013, p. 511).

There is a need for moral education as a tool to help enhance the moral behaviour of the individual. Ethics/moral education and training aim at developing a sense of responsibility embedded in processes such as thinking, rationality, and intention. Media ethics training is geared towards helping media professionals enhance their ethical fitness abilities through thinking of their actions and the consequences of those actions on news sources and audiences, and the consequence of their actions on their own organisations and on themselves. External mechanisms that govern journalism as a profession, such as codes of ethics and laws, are



also important as they embolden the responsible use of the freedom to publish; they encourage a more professional media that is aware of its social role and its capacity to help or harm. These external mechanisms should go in tandem with individual moral education. As Dajani (2012, p. 1) stated, “the disease in the present world communication order was moral before it became structural. No matter how good the structure is, it is doomed if the morals are bad. In the final analysis, the driver is more important than the car and the one who uses the technology determines its output.”

### **Conclusion**

This study provided Islamic and Western theoretical insights into ethical principles such as individual freedom, freedom of speech, impartiality, accountability, and other principles. These principles are central to the practice practice of media in a non-ethnocentric fashion. They also allow for both Western and Islamic perspectives to be seen as compatible.

The study discussed current global pressure on the media with regard to issues of media ownership, political pressure, the values of corporate media consumerism and their subsequent collision on media values of press freedom, individual right to privacy and social responsibility of the press. It has also provided the Western liberal and Islamic ethics with insight on the clashing values in the media. In this regard, the study reviewed the current liberal Western debate on global media ethics and the debate on social responsibility as a global principle to guide journalists globally. In the same vein, the study dwelled on Islamic principles that the author believes contribute to the ongoing debate on global journalism ethics. I argued that any perspective to conceptualise media ethics and reconcile clashing values of journalism ethics in this technologically advanced global world should perceive the moral education and moral development of the journalist as important as the ethical responsibility of the profession. Thus, ethics education has become central to our lives now more than ever before. It has become essential to the benefit of both the individual and society. Ethics education can be integrated in all curricula to produce morally responsible individuals who can exemplify lively ethics through moral behaviour. Unless ethics is internalised at the individual level through moral education and examples, we will not see ethics in media institutions. This may provide an answer to the questions of why there are codes without conduct, technology without

humanity, theory without practice, and global change without personal change (Abd Ghani & Hasim, 2004).

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