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Determining and explaining the components of the justice-oriented Islamic community based on the teachings of Nahj al-Balaghah

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As emphasised in Islamic sources, justice is one of the most important issues covered in the religion of Islam. In fact, justice is a central theme in Islam and has a special value in this regard. Conversation about justice and its nature, as well as its realisation in human communities, has been thus far a necessity in human life. Actually, the establishment and implementation of justice in all areas are crucial for the utopia. Given the importance of this subject, the present study aims to determine and explain the components of the justice-oriented Islamic community based on the teachings of Nahj al-Balaghah. Therefore, the components that introduce justice orientation in the Islamic community are extracted from the sermons, letters and wise sayings (viz. narrations) of Nahj al-Balaghah. Afterward, the extracted components are classified based on the similarity of the themes and concepts. In the end, five classifications are introduced, including distributive justice, procedural justice, interactional justice, social justice and fairness.

Contribution: Based on the determined indices, the model of justice-oriented Islamic community is developed. It is thus recommended to pay more attention to the realisation of a justice-oriented Islamic community by researchers and leaders. This is mainly because of the fact that the opposite of a justice-oriented community is one with injustice, where oppression and disrespect for the rights of others occur, divine blessings change, divine wrath and anger are provoked and destruction approaches.

Keywords: Islam; Islamic community; justice; distributive justice; procedural justice; interactional justice; social justice; fairness; Nahj al-Balaghah.

Introduction

Justice has been distinguished as one of the most eminent human ideals as well as the main concerns of divine religions and political thinkers for a long time. It is a popular belief that the relationships between individuals and groups, laws and regulations in the society, along with social institutions, should be fair. Moreover, social rules and obligations need to meet public legitimacy once they are established and implemented on the basis of justice and even conform to it (Askari & Mirakhor 2020). Conversation on justice, its nature and systems, together with the way it is realised and fulfilled in human societies in the form of social, political and economic justice, and in the human population in the form of moral and individual justice, has continuously been one of the basic human needs, such that justice can be still traced back to the subjects raised by ancient Greek philosophers and thinkers as well as the holy books, despite being distorted (Ayish 2015). Therefore, it is one of the foremost concerns of political thought in general and political philosophy in particular. The founder of Islam, the Prophet Mohammad (PBUH), was one of the central figures chosen in the world, propagating this divine religion, and the executor whose words, deeds and gestures were in accordance with revelation, with no disobedience to divine commands. Hence, he endorsed justice in his political activities. Of note, Islam is the religion established based on justice and the Islamic community (viz. ummah) of the middle nation, which is founded on a fair system. This religion also attaches much importance to justice and considers its existence to be the requirement in the real fabric of the society (Issazadeh & Issazadeh 2017). As stated by Jordac (2016:155), the main reason behind the acceptance of the caliphate by Imam Ali (AS) was the threats made against social justice. Reiterated by the Prophet

Mohammad (PBUH): 'An hour with justice is better than seventy years of worship whose nights are spent with praying and days with fasting' (Jame Al-Sadat, vol. 2, p. 223). Justice is thus one of the doctrines of divine immutability that governs the heavens and the earth. In this sense, Imam Ali (AS) said: 'Justice is the foundation and pillar on which the universe stands' (Baharalanvar, vol. 78, p. 83). Fundamentally, justice is the factor shaping the survival of states and guaranteeing the continuity of nations. If the society is adapted to this principle, it will be in congruence with the whole of existence. The Almighty God is the first to establish justice, as evidenced by the angels and the people of knowledge (Surah Al Imran, Ayat 18). In Qur'anic culture, great importance is also given to just behaviour or treatment, particularly in social and economic issues. In addition, in more detailed cases regarding speech, conduct, family relationships and helping orphans, much more emphasis is laid on justice. If justice is implemented in the society, countless problems will be resolved, and the society will approach utopia (Issazadeh & Issazadeh 2017). As rulers and managers are the role models of the culture that governs society, the authorities in the Islamic community need to put justice orientation on the agenda. Justice orientation is accordingly of importance in the distribution of benefits among different sections of society, the decisions made, the interactions and in general.

Justice is one of the main concepts in the humanities, especially in political science. This is not an overemphasis, because the role of justice as a determinant in the society is unquestionable. In other words, justice is at the centre of the intellectual system of political thinkers. It is even an attribute appreciated by both the Creator and the creature, in the way that God praises himself that there is no god worthy of worship except him (Surah Al Imran, Ayat 18). Reflecting on all divine religions, it can be observed that they have paid much attention to the significant element of justice and have even named it either as the main goal or one of the important goals. In Islam, this has not gone unnoticed, and 29 ayats (i.e. verses) of the holy Qur'an have been revealed directly about justice, and other 290 ayats have been on the subject of oppression, which is against justice.

In general, several ayats in the holy Qur'an refer to this issue, either directly or indirectly, implying its weight in Islam. Obviously, justice is something whose truth would be untouched if Islam had not commented on it (Motahari 2016). This has always been considered as one of the main elements of political debates and political power and even the distinguishing chapter of force, legitimacy of power and obedience by people. From a historical perspective, there has been a struggle between justice seekers and oppressors throughout the ages, and people have not been far from the desire for a world alive with justice in historical periods. Undoubtedly, the oppressed have been seeking for this rare gem at all times throughout history, and they have defended it with all their might whenever they have reached it. Motahari (2014), devoting his whole life to this goal, says that:

> The stomach affects one's thoughts. It is not possible for an affluent person to defend justice, just as it is unbearable for a deprived person with many sufferings to deny it. (p. 43)

Once people are confronted with oppression, crime, infidelity and corruption and are even influenced by them, their desire for justice and truth awakens (Motahari 2012).

In addition, relying on the orders by Imam Ali (AS) and being inspired by the noble book of Nahj al-Balaghah, as a collection of concepts issued by a perfect human being, can pave the grounds for settling conflicts and promoting the society, organisations and institutions in the path of growth and divine perfection, and consequently it can strengthen the society in the field of human management. Consequently, the models developed from Nahj al-Balaghah can be more compatible and stable with the atmosphere of governmental and nongovernmental institutions in Iran. Considering Imam Ali's (AS) governmental and managerial approach and historical experience in ruling the Islamic world, as well as the existence of reliable documents about his managerial career and interactions with people (Fazeli Kebria & Delshad Tehrani 2012), along with the improper applications of Western models in the Islamic community, the extraction of domestic models from Nahj al-Balaghah can be effective for growth, sustainability and perfection. Therefore, the present study aimed to determine and explain the components of the justice-oriented Islamic community based on the teachings of Nahj al-Balaghah.

Justice

The word justice does not need any definitions to understand its meaning, as its manifestations can be grasped instinctively, and such definitions are very close in different societies. However, numerous definitions of justice have been offered by many thinkers and scholars, all with very familiar concepts in different cultures, rooted in the nearness of its examples in different civilisations. Considering the different definitions of justice, they are generally one in terms of their manifestations, and the only reason for the variation is that certain aspects of such examples have been simply addressed in each definition, and the discrepancy can be found in them (Khadduri 1984). To find a collective feature for all definitions, there is a need to consider it as the position of the object in its place, which is different in relation to the validity of the objects; in other words, justice, like science, has no more than one meaning, but it has different manifestations according to various examples (Javadi Amoli 1996). Plato, somewhere in his work, defines justice as the coordination of duties both in social and individual frameworks (Lotfi 2001). This definition goes back to the previous two definitions, because the place of everything is not in excess, but in the middle of the best place. Elsewhere, he states that justice occurs once one achieves what one is entitled to and does what one deserves. In another place in Plato's works, justice is equated with beauty, and it is maintained that society can be beautiful if there is justice; otherwise, it cannot be beautiful. Besides, Aristotle defines justice in the literal sense of the word, equal

to having persons and objects. It is thus important to make balance between profits and losses as well as the duties and rights of individuals. Thus, by definition, justice refers to the virtue by which everyone should be given what they are entitled to (Motahari 2019).

Justice is also one of the concepts mentioned many times in Islamic manuscripts. There are some examples in the Holy Qur'an. 'This is the reward for what your hands have done. And Allah is never unjust to His creation' (Surah Al Imran, Ayat 182); 'Allah Himself is a Witness that there is no god worthy of worship except Him – and so are the angels and the people of knowledge' (Surah Al Imran, Ayat 18). Other ayats state:

> Indeed, Allah never wrongs anyone – even by an atom's weight. And if it is a good deed, He will multiply it many times over and will give a great reward out of His grace. (Surah An-Nisa, Ayat 40)

> Indeed, Allah commands you to return trusts to their rightful owners; and when you judge between people, judge with fairness. What a noble commandment from Allah to you! Surely Allah is All-Hearing, All-Seeing. (Surah An-Nisa, Ayat 58)

> O believers! Stand firm for Allah and bear true testimony. Do not let the hatred of a people lead you to injustice. Be just! That is closer to righteousness. And be mindful of Allah. Surely Allah is All-Aware of what you do. (Surah Al-Ma'idah, Ayat 8)

Justice is thus an important social and political issue in Nahj al-Balaghah, and as this element is vital in public administration, so it has been in the eyes of Shiite leaders and Imams. In Nahj al-Balaghah (2000), justice is also interpreted as putting everything in its place or observing the rights in the bestowal of life and not declining to grant mercy to what is possible.

It is obvious that the concept of justice is of utmost importance in all human societies, and it is not limited to the Islamic community, as confirmed in research in Western societies. Studies demonstrate that justice can significantly affect beliefs, feelings, attitudes and behaviours in employees. According to Rawls (1971), justice is assumed as an advantage and a virtue in the society. The basic argument in the theories of justice holds that the perception of justice mainly determines how people react to the decisions made by managers (Camgoz & Karapinar 2011). Of note, many recent studies in the West have further examined justice, especially in organisations and business environments, which has led to the emergence of different views in this regard. Initially, the prevailing literature on justice shed light on distributive justice, viz. the perception of justice of how benefits are shared. Over time, Western scholars started to consider procedural justice or the perception of justice in how allocations are determined (Folger & Cropanzano 1998) and interactional justice as the third type of justice. Distributive justice, according to the equity theory by Adams (1965), is the perception of individuals about the fairness of being paid in proportion to their roles. Adams' main focus was on people's perceptions of fair results and their performance evaluations

(Deutsch 1985). Adams (1965) also emphasises that individuals are not so much concerned with what they receive but with the fairness of what they receive. To determine justice, he suggests that the ratio of people's inputs such as literacy, intelligence and experience to their perceptions should be compared to the same ratio in others. When raising the equity theory, Adams stated that the comparative process performed by individuals was more mental rather than objective; in other words, individuals' assessment of distributive justice is based on their perceptions (Folger & Cropanzano 1998). In addition to Adams' equity theory, Leventhal (1976) introduced other allocation principles, such as equality and need. In the past, it was thought that individuals should receive equal rewards. Research also shows that different environments demand distinctive allocation laws (Deutsch 1975). However, the main goal in all allocation principles is to achieve distributive justice. This means that, in a job position, those who work harder earn more, and those who work less earn less. The law of equality should be thus taken into account as a fair method of allocating benefits. Individuals will accordingly feel satisfied when they find that benefits are being distributed in a fair manner, even if they do not receive a sufficient amount, because they are aware of the fairness of their low pay (Farid, Iqbal & Jawahar 2019).

Furthermore, procedural justice refers to the perception of fairness in the processes and procedures used to allocate benefits (Strom, Sears & Kelly 2014). In this sense, two theories highlight the importance of procedural justice; the first one is the theory of control proposed by Thibaut and Walker (1975), wherein people tend to control what happens to them, and fair practices are assumed to be valuable because they allow individuals to control allocations and other outputs. The second one is the group-value model, developed by Lind and Tyler (1988), arguing that individuals like to be the valuable members of a group or community, so fair practices are important because they indicate that individuals are valuable. In fact, the fairness of decision-making procedures shows the importance of individuals to the community leaders. In addition, Western scholars have attempted to introduce interactional justice. In this line, Bies and Moag (1986) presented the concept of interpersonal justice, referring to the quality of interpersonal relationships expected by people along with the importance of honesty, respect and equal opportunity of individuals in such interactions. This type of justice denotes how the leadership treats its subordinates. In this regard, Greenberg (1993) suggests that justice can interact in two ways: the first is informational justice, providing knowledge about the procedures shaping individuals, and the second is interpersonal justice, suggesting how individuals interact. Interactional justice is thus vital because it affects feelings, perceptions and behaviours in individuals. In addition, research advocates that interactional justice, especially interpersonal justice, can have a positive impact on the level of trust in individuals and their attention to groups or communities (Colquitt et al. 2001).

Extracting justice-oriented components from Nahj al-Balaghah

Following an in-depth theoretical review along with the careful study of Nahj al-Balaghah, the components associated with justice orientation were extracted from the sermons, letters and wise sayings (viz. narrations) of this noble book and then categorised (Table 1). In order to extract the key codes in Nahj al-Balaghah, a thematic analysis method was used. For this purpose, first the words that expressed justice in Islamic society were extracted from Nahj al-Balaghah. Then these key codes were divided into basic themes and structured themes. These divisions can be seen in Tables 1 and 2.

While examining the key points, the basic and organising themes of justice were presented following logical classifications and rational limitations (Table 2).

With reference to the obtained basic and organising themes, the model for the justice-oriented Islamic community based on the teachings of Nahj al-Balaghah was illustrated in Figure 1.

Discussion and conclusion

It is said that one of the most fundamental concepts in the humanities and especially in political science is the concept of justice. This is not an exaggeration, because the importance of justice and its determining role in society is undeniable. The purpose can be expressed by saying that the issue of justice is at the centre of the intellectual system of political thinkers. Justice is an attribute that is beloved both by the Creator and the creature, and God has praised himself with this attribute. Looking at all religions, both heavenly and nonheavenly, we see that they have all paid attention to the important element of justice and named it either as the main goal or one of the important goals. In Islam, too, this debate has not gone unnoticed, and 29 verses of the Qur'an have been revealed directly about justice, and another 290 verses have been revealed about oppression, which is anti-justice. In total, it can be claimed that about one-tenth of the verses of the Qur'an refer to this discussion either directly or indirectly, and this shows its importance in Islam. Of course, if the religion of Islam had not mentioned justice, its truth would not have been harmed. This fact has always been considered as one of the main and inseparable elements of political debates and political power, and it can be considered the distinguishing chapter of force and legitimacy of power and obedience of the people. If we look at this word from a historical point of view, we will see that throughout history, there has always been a struggle between justice seekers and oppressors, and in no historical period have people been far from the desire for a world full of justice. Of course, throughout history, there have always been oppressed people who have searched for this rare gem, and whenever they have reached it, they have defended it with all their might. Motahari (2014), who had dedicated his whole being to this goal, says in this regard: 'Thought is subject to the abdomen'.

TABLE 1: Extraction of key points and basic themes related to justice and fairness from Nahj al-Balaghah.

No.	Sources	Key points	Basic themes
1	Letter no. 53	… the good and the bad should never be as before in your opinion, as the good-doers become discouraged to practice goodness and the wrong-doers feel encouraged to perform evil acts …	Justice in encouragement
2	Letter no. 59	… so the work of people in what is right is the same with you, because there is no price for justice in badness …	Justice in pay
3	Letter no. 53	… indeed, the light of the rulers' eyes depends on the establishment of justice in the cities …	Principle of justice implementation in cities
4	Wise saying no. 476	… spread justice and desist from oppression …	Spread of justice
5	Letter no. 46	… be the same in the looks and gestures of the eyes, in gazing and pointing at everyone, so that the powerful do not hanker after your oppression and the powerless do not despair of your justice …	Justice in behaviours
6	Letter no. 27	… be equal in your gaze and in your stare at the people, so that the elders do not yearn for your injustice and the helpless do not despair of your justice …	Justice in behaviours
7	Letter no. 53	… the good and the bad should never be as before in your opinion, as the good-doers become discouraged to practice goodness and the wrong-doers feel encouraged to perform evil acts …	Justice in encouragement
8	Letter no. 53	… the most adorable things in your sight are the most ubiquitous in justice …	Institutionalisation of justice
9	Wise saying no. 437	… justice puts everything in its place …	Justice in appointments
10	Letter no. 53	… the most popular things with you should be the ones that are more in line with moderation and justice …	Justice orientation
11	Letter no. 25	… do justice between the camel on which you ride or milk and the other camels …	Justice for creatures
12	Wise saying no. 147	… by justice, the enemy will be thrashed …	Justice for enemies
13	Sermon no. 34	… it is your right on me to distribute the treasury justly …	Justice in distribution
14	Sermon no. 216	… do not repudiate to consult in justice …	Justice
15	Letter no. 53	… the best source of happiness for the governors should be the establishment of justice in the land and the rise of friendship among the subjects …	Justice for people
16	Letter no. 46	… so, give justice to the people and do not abandon justice in socialising with them …	Fairness in socialising
17	Wise saying no. 132	… fairness will multiply your friends and acquaintances …	Fairness with friends
18	Letter no. 51	… be fair in your dealings with people …	Fairness with subordinates
19	Letter no. 53	… concerning the properties of your relatives and subjects, treat everyone you adore with fairness, otherwise you will have oppressed them …	Fairness with relatives, elites and managers
20	Wise saying no. 224	… to be fair compounds the number of friends, and a just method quells the opposition …	Emphasis on justice and fairness with foes and friends

It is impossible for a wealthy person to defend the principle of justice, just as it is impossible for a suffering deprived person to deny the principle of justice'. Whenever a person is

TABLE 2: Classification of basic and organising themes related to justice and fairness based on Nahj al-Balaghah.

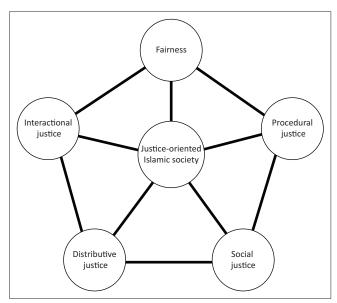| No.	Sources	Basic themes	Organising themes
1	Letter no. 53	Justice in encouragement	Distributive and interactional justice
2	Letter no. 59	Justice in pay	Distributive and procedural justice
3	Letter no. 53	Principle of justice implementation in cities	Social justice
4	Wise saying no. 476	Spread of justice	Procedural justice
5	Letter no. 46	Justice in behaviours	Interactional justice
6	Letter no. 27	Justice in behaviours	Procedural justice
7	Letter no. 53	Justice in encouragement	Procedural justice
8	Letter no. 53	Institutionalisation of justice	Distributive and procedural justice
9	Wise saying no. 437	Justice in appointments	Procedural justice
10	Letter no. 53	Justice orientation	Interactional justice
11	Letter no. 25	Justice for creatures	Social justice
12	Wise saying no. 147	Justice for enemies	Social justice
13	Sermon no. 34	Justice in distribution	Distributive justice
14	Sermon no. 216	Justice	Interactional justice
15	Letter no. 53	Justice for people	Social justice
16	Letter no. 46	Fairness in socialising	Fairness
17	Wise saying no. 132	Fairness with friends	Fairness
18	Letter no. 51	Fairness with subordinates	Fairness
19	Letter no. 53	Fairness with relatives, elites and managers	Fairness
20	Wise narration 224	Emphasis on justice and fairness with friends and foes	Procedural and interactional justice, fairness

FIGURE 1: Research model based on the teachings of Nahj al-Balaghah.

confronted with oppression, crime, infidelity and corruption and suffers from them, the desire for justice and truth awakens in him. This study aimed to determine and explain the components of the justice-oriented Islamic community based on the teachings of Nahj al-Balaghah. For this purpose, after an in-depth review of this noble book, the components representing justice in the Islamic community were extracted and then categorised. Ultimately, the research model was developed based on the given components, including distributive justice, interactional justice, procedural justice, social justice and fairness. According to the study results, exploiting distributive justice, procedural justice, interactional justice, social justice and fairness could help create the justice-oriented Islamic community in line with the teachings of Nahj al-Balaghah.

The way individuals are treated in the society may be thus influenced by their beliefs, feelings, attitudes and behaviours. Fair treatment by the community leaders can generally lead to their higher commitment and citizenship behaviours beyond their defined roles. On the other hand, people who feel unfairly treated are more likely to abandon constructive activities in the society or show low levels of commitment. They may even engage in abnormal behaviours, such as revenge. Therefore, understanding how individuals judge the perception of justice in their society and respond to justice or injustice is one of the important issues that should be considered by community leaders.

Discussing the existence of a just atmosphere in the society necessitates the assumption that individuals wish to be fairly treated, which is also called the equity theory in social sciences. It is one of several theories arising from the social comparison process. According to this theory, the importance of individuals' sense of justice in relation to the fair treatment of the community leaders is emphasised, and it is claimed that individuals are motivated to establish justice if they feel they have been treated unfairly. They also compare their perceptions with those of others. If, by comparison, individuals realise that dealing with them is relatively unfair, they will feel deeply offended and will try to mitigate it. According to the related literature, people who feel unfairly treated may adopt some strategies to reduce injustice; for example, they may change the amount of their contributions, that is, spend less energy on work or reduce their efforts; they may try to adjust the results or what they receive from their affiliated organisations, viz. request salary increase or promotion or eventually quit their jobs; they may further influence other people and compare them or ask them to give up. It is worth noting that individuals usually choose the most severe reactions if their wishes are not met.

The main value of the equity theory for managers lies in the fact that the social comparison processes are highlighted, and individuals always evaluate themselves in society and in comparison with others. Hence, leaders making use of temporary solutions to tackle injustice face serious problems. Another effectiveness of the equity theory is that it makes the community leaders realise that they can have more accurate assessments of the current situation if the information about individuals' perceptions are clear-cut. As well, the application of this theory to the community leaders in the reward and punishment system in the workplace is more evident because formal rewards (such as payroll and work assignments) are more easily seen than informal ones (e.g. inner satisfaction and a sense of accomplishment), which are often at the centre of one's perception of equity, and social comparisons are a powerful factor in the workplace. As explained, the importance of creating a fair atmosphere in society is more understood. In this way, justice and fairness should be the top priorities in society in terms of the distribution of benefits, the quality of relationships between the community leaders and individuals, the decision-making procedures, etc., so

that society can gain benefits (such as higher levels of satisfaction, commitment and citizenship behaviour) and prevent destructive behaviours (absenteeism in productive activities, underemployment and social loafing, etc.).

Of note, the model presented here is fundamentally different from the existing ones, because it is based on the teachings of Nahj al-Balaghah. According to the conditions prevailing in Islamic organisations, the presentation and application of domestic models inferred from religious sciences can guarantee their progress and success, while other models are often extracted and introduced by Western researchers in cultures and contexts different from those in the Islamic community. In addition, the model proposed in the present study was divided into five general indices, viz. distributive justice, procedural justice, interactional justice, social justice and fairness, wherein all aspects, including personal dignity, ethics, behavioural standards, religious and Islamic beliefs and so on are noted, which can foster human resources and guide them to true happiness and perfection for the benefit of the society.

Acknowledgements

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