



Ethics of Journalism from the Viewpoint of Nahjul Balagha

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Received: 2023/05/28 ; **Revised:** 2023/06/23 ; **Accepted:** 2023/12/19 ; **Published online:** 2024/05/21

Abstract

News media refers to those elements of mass media that gather, assess, create and communicate news and information to a target or general public. These include print media, broadcast news, and the internet. In this age of information explosion, ethical journalism is fueled by necessity to ensure that journalists stay true and maintain a sense of truth and justice to benefit the society as a whole. Based on qualitative methods including library research, content analysis and comparative analysis and through mapping the current system of journalism ethics presented by the West, this research seeks to explore journalism ethics from the viewpoint of Nahjul Balagha. The study does not support to offer a final code of ethics for Islamic journalism, however, relying on Islamic ethics, this research seeks to fill a void in the reform of a journalistic code of ethics based on the high-quality and rich moral and spiritual teachings of Nahjul Balagha.

Keywords: News, media, ethics, journalism ethics, Islamic journalism ethics.

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Publisher: Urwat al - Wuthqa International Academic Research Institute
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.22034/jspt.2025.458267.1043>



Introduction

In the contemporary era of 'information explosion', 'information avalanche' and rampant disinformation and uncertainty for both journalists and their audiences, ethical journalism plays a critical role in creating the needed space to nurture healthy and high-quality journalism. With regard to the western dominance over the manufacture and dissemination of information - through a sophisticated network of global communication system that controls all information and news - there exists a growing need for an epistemological framework under the Islamic value-based system for journalism in Muslim communities. In this study, media is conceived of as a conduit or a neutral instrument that can be used for good and evil, dependent on the manner in which they are used. Mass communication, according to Harold Lasswell, Charles Wright and Walter Lippmann, key figures in the field of mass communication, serves five major functions: information dissemination, correlation, cultural transmission, entertainment, public opinion. Journalism primarily falls under the function of surveillance of the environment and serves to inform the public. Islamic news media and journalism, then, with a major educative role in the broadcast sense, do not focus on the individual or group materialistic interests of the community. Instead, they move with a holistic approach and an eye to personal and public spiritual interests for the perfection and salvation of the community. The review of literature reveals few studies into a comprehensive assessment and view of an Islamic code of ethics for journalism. Prof. Mohammad A. Siddiqi in his book "Islam, Muslims and Media: Myths and Realities" stresses the role of ethical journalism in combating misinformation and promoting a more nuanced understanding of Islam and Muslims. Papers like "Islamic Structure of Media Ethics: Problems and Challenges" by Dr. Mughith ud-Din Shaykh and "Journalism Ethics: Harms and Challenges" by Mohammad Fuladi have mainly based their moral standards on Quran and Sunnah whereas "A Religious Introduction to Media Ethics" by Dr. Mohammad Mansur Nejad gives ethical guidelines for media people based on the precious teachings of 'Sahifa Sajjadiyya.' There is little research in this area bringing Nahjul Balagha as a rich source of ethical teachings into focus. Drawing on Islamic ethics, with the use of qualitative methods including library research, content analysis and comparative analysis, this study is underpinned by one central research objective exploring journalism ethics from the viewpoint of Nahjul Balagha.

Ethics

'Akhlaq', an Arabic term, translates to 'ethics' or 'morals' and refers to the practice of virtue, morality and manners in Islamic theology and philosophy. It

is the plural of the word 'khuḷq' or 'khuḷuq' and means disposition. "The word al-khuḷuq denotes the internal constitution of a person i.e. his soul and its certain qualities, and the word al-khalq denotes external figure of a person, its qualities and meanings" (Ibn Manzur, 1990, p.86). The word 'akhlaq' "covers both good and noble dispositions such as courage and chivalry and bad and ignoble dispositions such as iniquity and cowardice" (Misbah Yazdi, 2003, p. 13). Miskawayh defines it in 'Tahdhib al-Akhlaq wa Tathir al-'A'raq' as "a condition in the soul of a person that calls him to action without thinking or planning." Furthermore, "some of these conditions are natural and stamped in the constitution of a person, while some of them are attainable through training and habituating", he adds. Akhlaq, therefore, is that faculty of the soul which is the source of all those activities that man performs spontaneously without thinking about them. Faculty is a property of the soul that comes into existence through exercise and repetitive practice and is not easily destroyed.

News

News is information about events, however, not every event is newsworthy. It is something that may or may not be true about which Lippmann also believes "News and truth are not the same thing, and must be clearly distinguished. The function of news is to signalize an event; the function of truth is to bring to light the hidden facts, to set them into relation with each other, and make a picture of reality on which men can act" (Lippmann, 1922, as cited in Schultze, 2005). News is not necessarily new; it might be some previously unknown information. It may also be that which has not happened yet, but which will happen (Shokrkah, 2009, p.14). Unlike some views that see news as a commodity or as a public good, Dr. Shokrkah (2009) sees it as a social right. For news, as unbiased, accurate reporting of events, there are some criteria called news values that are widely conceived of as factors for the selection of news to be published (p. 21). Journalism refers to the collection of information and production and distribution of reports on events and news values go hand in hand with a code of ethics for a healthy journalism in a community to keep away from fraud, fabrication and falsehood.

Importance of the ethics of journalism

The more we realize the pervasiveness of modern media and its potential power to influence people's lives over time, the more we understand we need constant vigilance over the media products and content daily consumed by millions. Of equal importance is the need to know that ethical decisions in the media largely determine people's consciousness, beliefs, perspective and their assessment of right and wrong. Belsey and Chadwick (2006) argue that: "Cynics

will say that ethics and journalism are incompatible, but this misses the real point. It might be that journalists, or indeed members of any professional group, do not always meet the expected standard in their conduct, but this fact demonstrates it is the relevance, not the irrelevance, of ethics to the profession. This is certainly true of journalism. Much of the practice of journalism must be described and analyzed in terms of a set of concepts which are essentially ethical, terms like freedom, objectivity, truth, honesty, privacy.” (p. ix) According to Charles Veenstra (1994) “whether or not it is accepted, media people have an ethical responsibility. Communication is a mutually influencing process, and ethics and communication are therefore inescapably related” (as cited in De Beer & Froneman, 2010). Veenstra (2010) argues that “all communications have an ethical aspect because they draw man either close to God or away from Him.” When it comes to Islam as a religion whose prophet has been sent to fulfill the virtues which go with nobility of character and covers both individual qualities as well as social characteristics, it is irresponsible for us to be negligent in respect of the ethical aspects of such powerful and influential means of expression in societies.

Theoretical and Philosophical Frameworks

Within the context of the International Encyclopedia of Communication, journalism ethics is a subset of media ethics and media ethics is considered a subset of professional ethics; all of which fall under the broader scope of applied ethics. Applied ethics applies ethical theories and principles to practical situations and professional practices such as business, medicine and media. Professional ethics focuses on the ethical standards and principles governing the conduct of individuals in various professions, not limited to media-related fields. Media ethics is a broader category that include journalism ethics but also encompasses ethical considerations for all forms of media. Journalism ethics deals with the specific ethical issues faced by media ethics and journalists such as truthfulness, fairness, accuracy and integrity in reporting. It provides a framework for journalists to follow in their professional conduct to maintain public trust and uphold the standards of their profession. Classical ethical theories provide a foundation for analyzing and resolving ethical dilemmas in journalism. Deontology, teleology and virtue ethics are the predominant frameworks in which much work in journalism ethics is rooted and ‘Islamic ethics’ is the framework this research draws on. According to deontological ethics, associated with Kant, actions are morally right based on whether they adhere to rules or duties, regardless of the consequences. A journalist following deontological ethics would adhere strictly to professional codes of conduct and principles. The absolutist journalist is solely focused on whether an event is newsworthy or not.

The duty of a journalist is to report the news, period. “The public must decide how that information will be utilized. These ethicists insist that journalists should resist paternalistic impulses and pressure to “sanitize” the news” (Plaisance, 2016). Teleological ethics, also known as consequentialist ethics, holds that what makes an act ethical is not the act itself but the consequences of the act. Utilitarianism as a prominent teleological theory asserts that actions are right if they promote the greatest good for the greatest number. Journalists using this approach would weigh the potential benefits and harms of publishing a story. They aim to maximize overall well-being and minimize harm, even if that means compromising some individual interest. The end can and often does justify the means, so the rules can, sometimes, be bent. Virtue ethics emphasizes the role of character and virtue in moral philosophy rather than either doing one’s duty or acting to bring about good consequences. Journalists are encouraged to cultivate virtues such as honesty, courage, integrity and fairness. Their decisions are guided by their ethical character and practical wisdom to choose the right thing to do in complex situations. For Aristotle, all virtues are to be understood as the moderation (mean) between vicious extremes. Virtue lies in moderation and the right response to each situation is neither too much nor too little. So, the advice is “avoid extremes in action.” Islamic ethics, derived from the Quran, Hadith and other Islamic texts, provide a comprehensive framework that can be applied to journalism. Islam asserts that as a cornerstone, an action is moral when it is, according to Mutahhari (2016) “based upon religious belief or belief in God.” He says, moral action, is, in the first place, a “Godly action or action which is indeed radiance of the Divine Light” (p. 116). Drawing on the criteria Ayatullah Misbah Yazdi (2015) uses for an ethical action, media people’s actions are moral when they are Godly and possess the goodness of the action and the sincerity of the doer both. Above all, as man’s greatest perfection is proximity to God, media people’s actions are moral when they have the most effect, in this day and age of media technology penetration, upon the public’s proximity to God (pp. 339-340).

Journalism Ethics from the Viewpoint of Nahjul Balagha

The matchless teachings of Nahjul Balagha from a perfect man, a man of truth, justice and freedom, show that they are all in accord with a divine worldview from which a good set of moral codes can be elicited and used by the media and news outlets, to accomplish their mission. This perspective offers additional insights into the moral responsibilities of journalists and the potential societal impacts of their work.

1. Frameworks of Rights and Responsibilities

The social responsibility theory in Western journalism emerged in the mid-

20th century as a response to the excesses and potential harm of unchecked press freedom. This theory emphasizes that the press has an obligation to serve the public good, prioritize an informed public and facilitate democratic processes (utilitarian principle). This theory, despite its significant contributions to professional standards and ethical practices, has certain weaknesses when compared to the responsibility and accountability frameworks in Islamic ethics, particularly as articulated in *Nahjul Balagha*. In Islam, the responsibility to inform and consult comes from a right from God's rights over the creation. "From His rights, He, the Glorified, created certain rights for certain people against others... It is an obligatory right of Allah over the people that they should advise each other to the best of their ability and cooperate with each other for the establishment of truth among them" (Sermon 216). Imam Ali (as) asserts that every right always involves two parties. "A right does not accrue in favor of any person except that it accrues against him also and it does not accrue against him unless it also accrues in his favor" (Sermon 216). Also, in the sermon 34, Imam Ali (as) illustrates that there are reciprocal rights and responsibilities for the ruler (the press/news media) and the ruled (the public) which presents the criteria the press and journalists need to meet. Reminding us of another right God has over man that compels him to declare the truth and stand for justice, Imam Ali (as) tells us who the press proprietors should be. He says, "I advise you, O creatures of Allah, that you should have fear of Allah because it is a right of Allah over you ..." (Sermon 191). Furthermore, to inform the public about the truth, news media practitioners need to know that "on us it is obligatory ... to abide by the Book of Allah, the Sublime, and the conduct of the Prophet of Allah" (Sermon 169).

In social responsibility theory, the ethical mandate is derived from societal needs and professional standards, which can be subject to change and interpretation based on cultural, political and economic influences. This can lead to variability and potential dilution of ethical standards over time. In Islamic ethics, the ethical mandate is rooted in divine commandments, providing a consistent and unwavering foundation for ethical behavior and it will be less prone to fluctuations based on human interests. In social responsibility theory, accountability is to society and professional bodies. This can sometimes be inadequate due to limited enforcement power, potential conflicts of interest and varying levels of public engagement. In Islamic ethics, accountability is to God and the community. It extends beyond social and professional consequences to include spiritual and religious accountability. The belief in divine judgment and the afterlife can serve as a powerful deterrent against unethical behavior, as individuals are accountable to a higher power beyond temporal authorities. In Western journalism, ethical breaches are often addressed through corrective

actions such as retractions, apologies, and in severe cases, legal or professional penalties. Ethical breaches, in Islamic ethics, are not only addressed through social and professional consequences but also through personal repentance, seeking forgiveness from God and making amends with those harmed. This dual approach of external and internal correction can offer a more rigorous and enduring approach to ethical conduct in journalism and can foster a more comprehensive ethical recovery process.

2. A Code of Ethics for Journalism

2-1. Seek Truth

Islamic ethics emphasizes that truth is not just a journalistic principle but a moral imperative as the saying goes, “salvation is with the truth” (Al-Tamimi, 1990, p. 47). The best favor of this world for us “should be the putting off the (flame of) wrong and the revival of right” (Nahjul Balagha, Letter 66) encouraging journalists to extinguish falsehood (“put off the wrong”) and promote truths that contribute to the betterment of society (“the revival of right”). This can lead to a different approach to reporting on topics like governance, social welfare, or international relations compared to Western journalism which tends to maintain a more detached stance. The Imam (as) says “the biggest loser is one who is able to speak the truth but still does not speak it” (Al-Tamimi, 1990, p. 204). This places a significant burden on journalists to prioritize truth-telling over other considerations such as personal gain or societal pressures contributing to more responsible and trustworthy journalism worldwide. “Today we stand on the cross-roads of truth and untruth” (Nahjul Balagha, Sermon 4). There is a fine line between truth and falsehood; “There is nothing between truth and falsehood except four fingers ... (The Imam (as)) joins his fingers together and puts them between his ear and eye and says, it is falsehood when you say, ‘I have heard so’ while it is truth when you say ‘I have seen it’” (Sermon 141). While social media can offer real-time updates and raw footage that might be inaccessible through other channels, it also presents a ground for propaganda and false narratives. Journalists have to navigate these platforms carefully to ensure they report accurately without deliberately or inadvertently spreading misinformation. In Islamic ethics of journalism, principles draw from sources that offer unique perspectives and serve as standards and examples to guide journalists in their pursuit of truth and ethical conduct. God is the absolute truth. “Allah, He is the True, and that whereon they call instead of Him, it is the false” (Quran, 22:62).

– Islam is the religion that has the criteria for truth and falsehood. Imam Ali states: “(Islam) consists of columns whose bases Allah has fixed in truthfulness and whose foundation He has strengthened” (Nahjul Balagha, Sermon 198).

– The Holy Quran “speaks and its tongue does not falter ... (It) is that through which you see, you speak and you hear. Its one part speaks for the other part, and one part testifies to the other” (Sermon 133).

– Sagacity “that differentiates between truth and untruth,” (Sermon 1) about which the Imam (as) says “it is enough if your wisdom distinguishes for you the path of your going astray from the path of your guidance” (Hadith 421).

– Ahlul Bayt are “the reins of right, ensigns of faith and tongues of truth” (Sermon 87) and the news media need to align themselves with them and their teachings.

Look at the people of the Prophet's family. Adhere to their direction. Follow their footsteps because they would never let you out of guidance, and never throw you into destruction. If they sit down, you sit down, and if they rise up you rise up. Do not go ahead of them, as you would thereby go astray and go not lag behind of them as you would thereby be ruined. (Sermon 97)

2-2. Seek Justice

A believing Muslim journalist is he who “has enjoined upon himself (to follow) justice” (Sermon 87). In other words, he urges justice upon himself. Then “the first step of his justice is the rejection of desires from his heart.” Moreover, Justice requires effort and striving. “The ignoble cannot ward off oppression. Right cannot be achieved without effort” (Sermon 29). This mandates a proactive role in advocating for justice and rectifying wrongs. It instills a sense of duty for journalists to fight against oppression and to ensure that their reporting contributes to the greater good, even when it is challenging or risky. To uphold justice, both the press (the ruler) and the public (the ruled) need to fulfill the rights of each other. “If the ruled fulfil the rights of the ruler and the ruler fulfils their rights, then right attains the position of honor among them, the ways of religion become established, signs of justice become fixed and the sunnah gains currency” (Sermon 216). Justice requires the press and the public's support. The Imam (as) says, “May Allah have mercy on the person who, when he sees the truth, supports it, when he sees the wrong, rejects it, and who helps the truth against him who is on the wrong” (Sermon 205). Compared to the more individualistic approach in western ethics, in Islamic journalism, the communal responsibility toward justice and ethical reporting is more pronounced, creating a collaborative atmosphere where journalists are reinforced by collective societal support. Running away from the truth blocks the way to reach the secrets of justice. The Imam (as) complains to such people saying that: “I am leading you (amicably) toward truthfulness, but you run away from it like goats and sheep running away from the howling of a lion. How hard it is for me to uncover for you the secrets of justice, or to straighten the curve of

truthfulness” (Sermon 131). Justice grants and secures rights. As Imam Ali (as) states: “The low person is in my view worthy of honor till I secure (his) right for him while the strong one is in my view weak till I take (others’) right from him” (Sermon 37). This teaching encourages journalists to actively seek to protect the rights of the vulnerable and challenge the privileges of the powerful. It differs from Western journalism ethics which often focuses on impartiality but may not explicitly prioritize rectifying power imbalances or addressing systematic injustices. Justice brings about safety and prosperity, and establishes the divine commands. It is not about power or vanities of the world that the Imam (as) accepts the caliphate. He says, “We rather wanted to restore the signs of Thy religion and to usher prosperity into Thy cities so that the oppressed among Thy creatures might be safe and Thy forsaken commands might be established” (Sermon 131). Consider a scenario where a journalist is covering an election. If the journalist seeks power or personal gain, they might be tempted to skew their reporting to favor a particular candidate or party, receiving rewards or recognition in return. In contrast, a journalist adhering to Islamic ethics would strive to report impartially and accurately, regardless of any potential personal benefit. This example underscores the critical role of ethical journalism in maintaining justice and the potential consequences when journalists deviate from the principles for personal gain.

2-3. Obtain and Enhance Discernment

When the world is awash with information and news is available anywhere, the need to think with insight and discernment is of paramount importance to society. To take an active role in order to arm the public with the power of discernment, the media need to seek to uncover the truth based on Divinity and wisdom. News media have a duty and an unusual capacity to serve society best to empower discernment. “And this banner will be borne only by him who is a man of sight, of endurance and of knowledge of the position of rightfulness” (Sermon 173). This guideline encourages journalists to seek deeper understanding beyond surface-level reporting, fostering insightful analysis and contextually rich narratives. The Islamic framework’s emphasis on insight and serving the public interest through thorough and considered reporting offers a different perspective on the ethical responsibilities of journalists compared to Western norms.

Sources of discernment are:

- Remembrance of God; “Certainly, Allah, the Glorified, the Sublime, has made His remembrance the light for hearts which hear with its help despite deafness...” (Sermon 221)
- The Holy Quran; “It (Quran) contains the blossoming of the heart and

springs of knowledge. For the heart there is no other gloss than the Quran...” (Sermon 176)

– The Prophet is “the foremost of all who practice piety and the power of perception of all those who achieve guidance” (Sermon 116). He “lighted flames for the seeker and put bright signs for the impeded” (Sermon 106).

– Past events; “He to whom experiences have clearly shown the past exemplary punishments (given by Allah to peoples) is prevented by piety from falling into doubts” (Sermon 16).

– Piety and refinement; A discerning journalist “sees and perceives; he remembers (Allah) and enhances (the tempo of his) actions . . . He has put off the clothes of desires and got rid of worries . . . He is safe from misguidance and the company of people who follow their passions . . . He has seen his way and is walking on it...” (Sermon 87).

Therefore, “the beginning of the action of one who sees with heart and acts with eyes is to assess whether the action will go against him or for him. If it is for him, he indulges in it, but if it is against him, he keeps away from it” (Sermon 154). This proves that “whoever takes instruction (from things around) perceives; and whoever perceives gains understanding, and whoever gains understanding secures knowledge” (Hadith 208).

2-4. Ensure Accuracy and Integrity

It is insight and discernment that helps distinguish accuracy from inaccuracy as the saying goes: “When you hear a tradition, test it according to the criterion of intelligence not that of mere hearing, because relaters of knowledge are numerous but those who guard it are few” (Hadith 98). It is crucial not to “relate to the people all that you hear, for that would amount to falsehood. Do not contest all that the people relate to you for that would mean ignorance” (Letter 69). It emphasizes caution and integrity in reporting, advising journalists not to report everything they hear helps prevent the spread of falsehoods and unverified information, thus promoting accuracy and responsibility in journalism. Inaccurate information may lead to a risk that may damage credibility and reputation. “Do not say that which you do not know, thereby making others suspicious of your statements about what you do know” (Al-Tamimi, 1990, p. 748). A Muslim journalist thus avoids speculation and, like a filter, removes all the inaccuracies and untruths to prevent spreading doubt. Integrity is another pillar of credibility and authenticity. In Sermon 210 of Nahjul Balgha, Amir al-Mumineen (as) presents an image of an ethical reporter who acts with integrity whereby we can divide journalists into four groups. Those who breach the law, cross the line and commit fraudulent and corrupt acts. Those whose information and ideas are based on scanty evidence or on the mere hearing of it. Those who

spread invalid and repealed news due to ignorance or negligence. And those whose information is worthy of being trusted, possess intelligence and expertise, avoid falsehood, fabrication, counterfeit and alteration, and conveys it with exactness and objectivity. Truthful journalists make sure that the things they say and the things they do are in alignment. “He whose hidden position is not different from his open position, and whose action is not different from his words, has discharged his obligation and his worship is pure” (Letter 26).

2-5. Avoid Deception and Lying

Although deception in journalism is unprofessional and ethically wrong, those who are free from the shackles of religion, ethics and divine chastisement achieve their goals through a web of cunning ways and deceitful means. “Deception in journalism can take many forms, from outright lying, to misleading, or misrepresenting, or merely being less than forthright. All of these actions are intended to cause someone to believe what is not true” (Brown, 2011, p. 78). A coward hides behind loud claims and deceit. He who brags and blusters is insecure and lacking. “They thundered like clouds and shone like lightning but despite both these things they exhibited cowardice” (Nahjul Balagha, Sermon 9). Truth can turn into half-truth and even lies when exaggerations are put into eye-catching headlines to sell more news, please the dominant systems of power and profit from the situation. For instance, during the COVID-19 pandemic, there were numerous instances where false information about the virus and vaccines was disseminated through various media channels. Some outlets and individuals deliberately spread misinformation, either for political gain or to drive traffic to their websites. In order to build trust, you have to first extend trust. When deception is involved, it strikes at the heart of the very faith, integrity and character of the deceiver and destroys the very trust. Amir al-Mumineen (as) condemns it, saying “One who realizes the reality of return (to the next world) never betrays. We are in a period when most of the people regard betrayal as wisdom. In these days, the ignorant call it excellence of cunning. What is the matter with them? Allah may destroy them” (Sermon 41). “The deceiver has no religion” (Al-Tamimi, 1990, p. 780). In other words, “one who has no restraints of religion seizes the opportunity (and accepts the excuses for not following the commands of Allah)” (Sermon 41). Journalists need to “guard against doubts and its ill-effects of confusion” in a world where “mischief has spread its veils and its gloom has blinded the eyes” (Letter 65). An example is the issue of falsified news reports during times of conflict or political unrest. In many instances journalists or media outlets may succumb to the temptation of fabricating stories or distorting facts to serve particular agendas or to incite public sentiment. Imam Ali (as) asserts that “when mischiefs come,

they confuse (right with wrong) and when they clear away, they leave a warning. They cannot be known at the time of approach but are recognized at the time of return. They blow like the blowing of winds, striking some cities and missing others” (Sermon 93).

2-6. Respect Privacy

Muslim journalist is in no way allowed to suspect and spy on people, intrude into private lives, make false and defamatory statements or make known a confidence or secret that are likely to harm someone’s reputation. Allah (swt) says, “O you who believe! Shun much suspicion. Indeed, some suspicion is sin. And spy not, neither backbite one another” (Quran, 49:12). In Islam, “the believer is more sanctified than the Kaaba” and the news media are obliged to have deep respect for everyone’s dignity and reputation. The press is not allowed to invade people’s privacy and hidden aspects of their lives in the name of ‘the public interest’ or ‘the public’s right to know.’ Paparazzi and tabloid journalism is one example. It involves the coverage of celebrities’ personal lives. These stories can delve into sensitive information but are deemed newsworthy due to public interest. News media should not only be careful not to intrude into people’s privacy, but should also keep sensitive information and secrets that are accidentally disclosed to them, strictly confidential. Here is a note of caution for the believing journalists from the Amir (as), “Do not disclose whatever of it is hidden from you because your obligation is to correct what is manifest to you, while Allah will deal with whatever is hidden from you” (Nahjul Balagha, Letter 53) because “The worst form of betrayal is the disclosure of confidential information” (Nuri, 1987, p. 305). Journalists are hence obliged to avoid any form of deception, corruption and whatever makes them “spread calumnies, divulge secrets or slander” (Nahjul Balagha, Sermon 103). They “should be most ready to stop (to ponder) on doubtful points” and “feign ignorance about what is not clear” to them (Letter 53).

2-7. Stand Accountable

Accountability breeds responsibility. In Imam Ali’s (as) view, man is accountable for his own future and the future of his society. “Fear Allah in the matter of His creatures and His cities because you will be questioned even about lands and beasts” (Sermon 67). Imam Ali (as) talks about the responsibility prophets had. Just like prophets were sent down to bring man in contact with God through his nature and guiding faculty, the press, as a leading means in today’s world, need to follow the same path. “Allah sent His Messengers and series of His prophets toward them to get them to fulfil the pledges of His creation, to recall to them His bounties, to exhort them by preaching, to unveil before them the hidden virtues of wisdom and show them the signs of

His Omnipotence...” (Sermon 1). Amir al-Mumineen (as) feels “worried that foolish and wicked people will control the affairs of the entire community, with the result that they will grab the funds of Allah as their own property and make His people slaves, to fight with the virtuous, and ally with the sinful” (Letter 62). This is why the press has a responsibility to stand against ignorance and misguidance to save the community and act within the law of God to move toward Him. “Many an expression is more effective than an attack” (Hadith 394). Words are potent of good and evil. They impact the public, but they also impact the one who utters them. “Words are under your control until you speak them, but you come under their control once you have spoken them. Therefore, guard your tongue as you guard your gold and silver, for often one expression snatches away a blessing and invites punishment” (Hadith 381). Above all, it is a matter of divine obligation to be accountable, with all your limbs, for your words, and the account will be taken on the Day of Judgement. “Do not say what you do not know; rather do not say all that you know, because Allah has laid down some obligations for all your limbs by means of which He will put forth arguments against you on the Day of Judgment” (Hadith 382). For example, during breaking news situations, journalists often face pressure to report quickly, sometimes at the cost of accuracy. They need to resist the temptation to speculate or report hearsay. Journalists are accountable for what they report and this accountability extends beyond legal repercussions and moral and ethical considerations. This cautious approach not only upholds the integrity of journalism but also protects reputation and rights of individuals involved.

2-8. Apply Wise Expediency

In some cases, legal access to information does not mean there are ethical reasons and justification to publish it. Western ethical frameworks typically rely on legal rights and public interest tests to justify publication, sometimes with less emphasis on the broader societal consequences or the potential harm to individuals. Imam Ali (as) weighs the consequences of disclosing confidential information and believes it is justified to withhold truth for the benefit of the public when he says, “I have hidden knowledge, if I disclose it, you will start trembling like ropes in deep wells” (Sermon 5). So, “never speak when you cannot find an appropriate situation to speak” (Al-Tamimi, 1990, p. 750).

Doing what is expedient is wise, efficient and truly the right course to take. Apply wise expediency to situations involving potential harm, corruption and all kinds of moral and ethical improprieties. Expedient is what is correct and right. It is strong. It abides consistently with what is good. It is incorruptible and undeviating. It is divine order. It takes discernment to do what is expedient. To apply wise expediency is to discern the interests of the Muslim community.

Imam Ali (as) says, “Know that the loss of anything of this world will not harm you, if you have guarded the principles of your religion. Know also that after the loss of your religion, nothing of this world for which you have cared will benefit you” (Nahjul Balagha, Sermon 173). Journalists as media warriors are expected to act in a way that “the affairs of Muslims remain intact and there is no oppression in it” (Sermon 74). News media and journalists, therefore, need to:

- Act with piety. “Control your passions and check your heart from doing what is not lawful for you...” (Letter 53) and “struggle for Allah as is His due” (Letter 31).

- Avoid haste: “Avoid haste in matters before their time ... Assign every matter its proper place and do every job at the appropriate time” (Letter 53).

- Be self-controlled: “Have control over (your) sense of arrogance, any outburst of anger, the might of your arm and the sharpness of your tongue” (Letter 53).

Conclusion

In this paper, it is attempted to map ethics of journalism based on Islamic ethics build on Nahjul Balagha as a treasure trove of moral instructions and ethical standards. A reason for this is that there are inherent flaws in the current institutionalized system of journalism that have guided contemporary understanding of journalism and journalism ethics even in Muslim communities. Mainstream news media, following the Utilitarian Principle, see members of the public as customers, are profit-oriented and hence ensure responsibility to the public’s right to know and public interest journalism. They turn a blind eye to Godly actions, virtues, spirituality and man’s salvation and perfection in the direction of God. Islamic news media, on the other hand, are expected to serve the whole community by means of divine, spiritual and intellectual guidance and teachings of Islam and pave the way for man’s perfection toward God. Journalism ethics in Islam are based on Islamic worldview, epistemology and ontology. It is through this divine viewpoint that all materialistic utilitarian, pluralistic, exclusivist, capitalistic, and libertarian views and practices melt away. News media have a responsibility to remain committed first and foremost to pleasing God. A Muslim journalist believes “the best of deeds is that whose objective is Allah’s pleasure” (Al-Tamimi, 1990, p. 191). He, then, does not “enrage Allah for pleasing others because (Allah) is such that He may take the place of others, but others cannot take the place of Allah” (Nahjul Balagha, Letter 27). In Islam, the duty to inform comes from a right from God's rights over the creation. In this view, therefore, a Muslim journalist has a responsibility before God and will be rewarded for it in the hereafter. Furthermore, there is the conception of mutual rights in the sense that each right which benefits an

individual or a group, holds the individual or group responsible to fulfil some duty toward others. Being accountable, in the western code of journalism ethics, is concerned with materialistic values of society and professional bodies. A Muslim journalist sees accountability as a matter of divine obligation and he believes he will be held accountable with all his limbs for his words and decisions on the Day of Judgement. In light of such divine worldview, principle of independence which is, in reality, confused with neutrality in the Western context, is not included in the Islamic code of journalism ethics. The journalist who holds himself responsible before God and considers integrity of his actions to be a crucial requirement to ensure honesty, trustworthiness and credibility, will surely regard independence and impartiality and will never compromise his integrity. Privacy in Islam is beyond personal, physical and informational privacy; it is 'ignore faults of another,' as well as 'hide faults and protect secrets.' A Muslim journalist weighs up the good and bad of their words and actions in order not to spread corruption or cause depravity. From an Islamic perspective, 'not all information is beneficial,' 'not everyone is discerning and trustworthy to provide information,' and 'information should be adjusted to the target group's ability to discern.' As a result, newsmakers are obliged to feed the public with useful information to increase the power of discernment and insight to help them tell the truth from falsehood. Throughout this study, I have stressed the integral role journalism plays in disseminating information which is used by the members of the public to reach salvation and proximity to God. To ensure the practice of Islamic journalism is preserved, efforts should be directed at redefining and reconceptualizing the current mainstream journalism. This study does not support to offer a final code of ethics. It does, however, aim to present a foundation for further studies in order to make a comprehensive code of ethics for journalism. Further work needs to be done in developing Islamic ethics of journalism to enable us to keep moving in the direction of God and Islam.

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