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Reflecting Upon Etic and Emic Perspectives on Distributive Justice

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Abstract The study of distributive justice may be examined using two research perspectives. The first, etic perspective seeks to unveil the common characteristics that characterize the spectrum of distributive justice phenomena across different cultures and circumstances. This perspective focuses on the universal aspects of justice behavior, namely, general laws and causal explanations. The second, emic perspective focuses on the ways in which justice behavior is expressed in specific socio-cultural contexts. This paper proposes a three-part reflection on these two perspectives on distributive justice. First, we review the ways in which the emic, culturally specific perspective has hitherto been incorporated into research on distributive justice; second, we examine the ways which the etic and emic perspectives are employed in two empirical studies on justice perception in Israel; and, finally, we suggest possible ways in which an extended emic perspective can be further incorporated in the study of distributive justice.

Keywords Distributive justice · Etic and emic research · Israel · Cross-cultural · Attitudes

Introduction

The universalist approach to justice suggests that the concept of distributive justice is based on principles of social action that are universally valid (e.g., Ackerman,

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1980; Barry, 1995; Rawls, 1971). From this perspective, justice denotes general principles that are usually justified in rational and formally defined terms (Schmidt, 1994). This approach assumes that it is possible to adopt an objective, external position towards distributive justice, formed beyond specific cultural, social, and institutional traditions. However, recent scholarship suggests that iconographic image of justice as blindfolded does not properly capture the subtle and complex ways in which culture influences and colors justice judgments (Jasso, 2005; Leung & Morris, 2000). In this view, the pervasive influence of culture does not only imply that the administration of justice is influenced by cultural and ethnic factors and is thus not impartial, but also pertains to the very perception of justice judgments (see also Fischer & Smith, 2003; Morris & Leung, 2000; Morris, Leung, Ames, & Lickel, 1999).

These two general conceptualizations of justice—the universalistic, on the one hand, and the contextual, on the other—are articulated in two distinct research perspectives, namely, the etic and emic (Berry, 1990; Cooper & Denner, 1998; Headland, Pike, & Harris, 1990; Lonner, 1999; Miller-Loessi, 1995). These terms, coined by Pike (1967), denote a distinction widely employed in a variety of social science disciplines between an outsider and insider perspective on knowledge (Merton, 1972). Notwithstanding the lively debate surrounding the terms etic and emic (see Headland et al., 1990), the etic perspective (nomothetic, universalist, culture-comparative) focuses on the universal aspects of human behavior, namely general laws and causal explanations, by imposing on it a general knowledge-structure created by the researcher. The emphasis here is on the common, comparable elements that are defined in advance, rather than on unique discovered categories (Helfrich, 1999; Miller-Loessi, 1995). The most salient value of the etic perspective lies in its capacity to provide a broad framework for the cross-cultural study of similarities and differences in justice perceptions and behavior (Berry, 1999). The limitation of this perspective, however, is that by focusing too exclusively on cross-cultural commonalities, we are likely to distort or miss the specific meaning which a given behavior might have in the context of a particular culture (Helfrich, 1999).

This limitation gives rise to the second basic perspective, which concentrates on cultural variations of distributive justice. This is the emic perspective (hermeneutic, indigenous, relativist, contextual, cultural) which, assuming that human acts are shaped within socio-cultural contexts, adopts the viewpoint of a cultural insider and attempts to understand the culture in its own frame of reference (Helfrich, 1999). This perspective focuses on the ways in which a given social behavior is manifest in specific cultural settings and, in this regard, aims at revealing rather than imposing a knowledge-structure. It emphasizes the uniqueness of human phenomena and the way these derive their meanings from specific contexts (Berry, 1999). This emic perspective therefore provides a more precise and detailed description of the unique characteristics of justice behavior within each culture, but its capacity to make cross-cultural comparisons is limited (Helfrich, 1999).

This paper proposes a three-part reflection, each in a different mode, on these two perspectives on distributive justice. In the first part, we review the ways in which the emic, culturally specific perspective has been incorporated into research on

distributive justice; second, we examine the ways which the etic and emic perspectives are employed in two empirical studies on justice perception in Israel; finally, we suggest possible ways in which an extended emic perspective can be further incorporated in the study of distributive justice.

The Emic (Culture-Specific) Perspective in the Study of Distributive Justice

The theoretical and empirical study of distributive justice was initially dominated by the etic approach. This is particularly evident in equity theory (Adams, 1963; Homans, 1974; Walster, Walster, & Berscheid, 1978) which examines how self-interested individuals define and evaluate distribution justice involving exchange in different kinds of rewards. It suggests that an individual's sense of justice is determined by a general principle of justice, namely, the so-called equity principle. This principle determines that rewards should be distributed in relation to the individual's relative contribution. It specifies a universal psychological law that describes how individuals judge distribution fairness and how they respond to and seek to redress perceived injustice. Equity theory has been highly influential in the research of distributive justice and has served as the basis for further theoretical formulations including status-value theory (Berger, Fisek, Norman, & Wagner, 1983; Berger, Zeldtich, Anderson, & Cohen, 1972), and justice evaluation theory (Jasso, 1980, 1989).

During the 1970s and 1980s, equity theory was criticized as ethnocentric in that it was seen to reflect Western-derived capitalistic values (Deutsch, 1985; Leung, 1988; Sampson, 1975). It was claimed that the equity notion did not adequately capture other potentially important value dimensions that may shape justice judgments (see also Leventhal, 1980). This critique gave rise to the multi-principle approach which assumed that people's behavior is not necessarily solely motivated by self-interest (as equity theory assumes), but also by normative considerations (Berger et al., 1983), and a sense of justice which seeks the welfare and happiness of others even to the point of self-sacrifice (Lerner, 1981; Schwinger, 1980). In this understanding distributive justice judgments are multi-dimensional and culture-specific. There are several justice principles, namely, equity, equality and need (which can be translated into more specific rules), according to which people value the fairness of resource distribution. People apply these principles separately or in combination in different cultures (e.g., Jasso, 2005; Leung, 1997; Murphy-Berman & Berman, 2002; Murphy-Berman, Berman, Singh, Pachauri, & Kumar, 1984), as well as when they distribute different classes of resources (e.g., Törnblom & Foa, 1983; Törnblom, Jonsson, & Foa, 1985) in different social contexts (e.g., Deutsch, 1985; Lerner, 1981; Leventhal, 1980) and social relationships (Fiske, 1991). Hence, the main line of empirical research focused on interrelations between these socio-psychological factors and the application of different principles (for extensive reviews, see Hegtvedt & Cook, 2000; Hegtvedt & Markovsky, 1995; Törnblom, 1992).

In the spirit of the multi-principle approach, culture was decomposed into a set of dimensions that were used to explain cross-cultural variations in distributive justice

perceptions (for extensive reviews see Fischer & Smith, 2003; James, 1993; Leung, 1997; Leung & Morris, 2000; Morris & Leung, 2000; Morris et al., 1999; Tyler, Boeckmann, Smith, & Huo, 1997). Specifically, justice perceptions were explained by means of Hofstede's (1980) cultural dimensions, particularly the individualistic-collectivistic dimension (see also Schwartz, 1994; Triandis, 1995). For instance, it was claimed that people in collectivistic cultures (e.g., Chinese), which stress preservation of harmony and group protection in exchange for loyalty and devotion, tend to apply equality as a distribution principle, whereas people in individualistic cultures (e.g., American), which place high value on autonomy and individual achievement, tend to apply the equity principle (see Leung, 1988). Two other dimensions that were found to be salient in explaining cross-cultural differences in justice judgments were the power distance dimension, which reflects the extent to which people accept status differences between individuals or groups, and the masculinity/femininity dimension, which describes whether the culture ascribes high value to the acquisition of value and power rather than quality of life and good relationships with others. Thus, for instance, people in low power distance and high femininity cultures (such as Sweden) tend to apply the equality principle, whereas people in high power distance (e.g., India) and high masculinity cultures (e.g., Japan) tend to apply the principle of equity (e.g., Chang, 1999; Törnblom & Foa, 1983).

The broad categories used in the depiction of culture in this body of research gave rise to further refinement (Morris & Leung, 2000): First, the cultural dimensions underwent further specification and became more complex and multi-faceted (e.g., Murphy-Berman & Berman, 2002; Schwartz, 1994; Triandis, 1995). For example, studies differentiated between different aspects of individualism and collectivism, as these pertain to different spheres and resources (economic versus affective) and type of hierarchy (horizontal/vertical) (Triandis & Gelfand, 1998; Triandis & Suh, 2002). Moreover, the general notion of equity, which assumes that rewards should be distributed in relation to contribution, was now seen to include other inputs, particularly productivity and seniority (Fischer & Smith, 2004; Morris et al., 1999). The assumption here was that emphasis on productivity and seniority would vary across cultures (Leung & Morris, 2000; Morris & Leung, 2000). Findings revealed that whereas resource distribution according to seniority is more salient in collectivistic cultures, distribution according to productivity are more salient in individualistic cultures (see also Mueller, Iverson, & Dongi-Gi, 1999).

Second, research models included different types of moderator variables (e.g., values, role of allocator, situational factors and so on) (Fischer & Smith, 2003, 2004; Leung, 1997). Most salient is the in-group/out-group variable, namely, whether distribution takes place among family, close friends, own ethnic group or among strangers (Leung, 1988). For instance, the study by Leung and Bond (1984) revealed that whereas people in collectivistic cultures tend to distribute according to equality when an in-group is at stake and equity when an out-group is at stake, people in individualistic cultures follow equity regardless of type of group membership (for a review of related studies see Leung & Morris, 2000; Morris & Leung, 2000; Smith & Bond, 1993). Another line of research suggested that the functional goals proposed by Deustch (1975) are not necessarily universal but

interact with culture (Morris et al., 1999). In his original study the author suggested that endorsement of a distribution rule fosters desirable conditions of social life. Specifically, equity enhances productivity, equality strengthens social solidarity and harmony amongst group members, and need nurtures their welfare. However, Hsu (1971) showed that in Confucian cultures, which emphasize equality, the goals of productivity and harmony do not necessarily compete but are, rather, complementary.

On the strength of these studies, the most comprehensive endeavor, to date, to provide a theoretical and methodological framework for the intersection of justice and culture as this pertains to the study of distributive justice, is that by Guillermina Jasso (2005). This study sets out the four basic questions that lie at the heart of the empirical study of the way in which justice evaluations are constituted: "What do individuals and collectivities think is just, and why? How do ideas of justice shape determination of actual situations? What is the magnitude of the perceived injustice associated with given departures from perfect justice? What are the behavioral and social consequences of perceived injustice?" (p. 15). The framework sets out the fundamental "building blocks" (p. 16) of justice analysis: actors (observer or rewardee), quantities (goods and bads as manifest in actual reward, just reward, justice evaluation), functions (formal representation of the ways in which people think about, and behave in regard to, the four basic questions), matrices (assignation of actual and just rewards by a specific observer to a specific rewardee, giving rise to specific justice evaluations), distributions (assignation of actual or just rewards by a specific observer *across* rewardees and by a specific rewardee *across* observers, including the case in which observer is also rewardee, giving rise to justice evaluation distribution), and contexts (ways in which quantities and functions may differ in relation to what is being distributed, by whom, to whom, where and when). These contexts, in turn:

> light the way in our search for the operation of culture, for ... cultural elements may require or prohibit the appearance of certain benefits or burdens, rewardees, or observers in justice sequences and may become attached to particular combinations of societies and time periods (p. 20).

On the basis of the proposed analytical framework, Jasso (2005) then proceeds to distinguish between universal constituents and culturally-based constituents that shape justice evaluations and concludes that, apart from the structure of justice evaluation (the constituents of this function and the relation between them), culture operates in all the fundamental ingredients in justice evaluations.

The above review shows the ways in which research into distributive justice has sought to incorporate emic, or culture-specific, dimensions of justice judgments. Berry's (1990) model of etic-emic integration is a useful device by means of which we may evaluate these studies. Berry proposed that research begins with an etic construct that is assumed to be valid for cross-cultural comparison. This etic construct is then "imposed" on a specific socio-cultural reality (termed "imposed etic"). Subsequently, the emic perspective reveals the culture-specific conditions pertaining to the specific socio-cultural reality. Once this is accomplished, these two systems of knowledge are integrated and, on the basis of their shared meaning, a

(new) etic construct is derived ("derived etic") which, in turn, enables further cross-cultural comparison. Using Berry's terms to summarize the research reviewed above, it may be argued that even those studies that assumed cross-cultural variation in justice behavior, continued to be based upon an "imposed etic" perspective, insofar as these studies imposed externally derived categories (e.g., individualism-collectivism, gender, power distance) on the culture under study. Thus, notwithstanding the fact that the multi-principle approach gave rise to more contextualized research on distributive justice perceptions and behavior, the approach adopted did not adequately allow for the discovery of indigenous notions of distributive justice in the cultures under study.

In the following section we seek to further examine the etic and emic perspectives on distributive justice by looking at the way this is manifest in two empirical studies on justice perception in Israel. These two studies address a similar substantive issue within a similar socio-cultural context. This similarity enables a detailed analysis, using the frameworks proposed by Berry (1990) and Jasso (2005), of the ways in which etic (universal) and emic (culture-specific) categories of justice operate in a specific case.

Two Empirical Studies of Distributive Justice

Study 1: Structural Logic—Mapping Out a Complex Socio-Cultural Context

The first study to be discussed illustrates the way in which an etic construct may be used as a tool to map out and integrate a complex local reality (Sabbagh, 2003). Using a generalized structural logic for observing common patterns of justice perception across diverse cultural contexts (etic level) and accumulated socio-historical knowledge of Israeli society (emic level), the study examined distribution preferences of Israeli adolescents across different social spheres and status groups.

The analysis first mapped, at an etic level, the domain of distribution preferences (or justice judgments) by identifying two major facets that specified (a) six distribution rules (arithmetic equality, equality of opportunities, need, effort, contribution, and talent) that can be applied to the distribution of (b) four main classes of social resources (prestige, power, educational opportunities, and money) in the wider society (see also Sabbagh, Dar, & Resh, 1994). The combination of these facets resulted in a complex system of 24 possible distribution preferences (one for each of the six rules and four resources) that respondents rated according to their relative importance. In order to simplify this system, the study used an etic structural logic for arranging the different rules and resources along two more general dimensions: The first dimension arranged the six *distributive rules* according to the level of differentiation they create (e.g., equality < need < equity in terms of differentiation). The second dimension arranged the set of four *social resources* according to a dimension of universalism/particularism (e.g., prestige < power < educational opportunities < money in terms of universalism). These structural arrangements, confirmed in the regional partitions of a space that was elicited by a non-metric multidimensional scaling analysis on Israeli and

German samples (Sabbagh, 2005b; Sabbagh et al., 1994), had two implications for hypothesis derivation. First, preference for different distribution rules can be conceived in a unified manner through a general construct of preference for differentiation (defined as preference for equity minus equality/need rules). Second, preferences for the different resources can be ordered in a monotonic fashion, so that they increase (or decrease) as one moves from the least to the most universalistic resource (for a similar approach see Schwartz, 1992).

The distribution rules and resources specified above and their respective structural arrangements (etic level) were then employed as a conceptual device for interpreting and integrating the specific circumstances (emic level) of Israeli society. Accordingly, the study described each social sphere in terms of specific socio-historical conditions that determined the relative salience of different distribution rules when distributing a specific resource. Subsequently, hypotheses were formulated in an integrative (unified) form, in terms of expected resource-specific preference for differentiation, as well as variation along status groups and the dimension of the resource's degree of universalism/particularism (for a similar approach see Sagiv & Schwartz, 1995).

The main finding revealed that preference for differentiation tended to vary with the degree of particularism of the resource; that is, preference for differentiation was ordered along the dimension of particularism versus universalism of resource. This finding was explained as a function of an all-inclusive hegemonic (emic) ethos of Jewish pioneering (*halutziut*) that regulated resource distribution in Israeli society, and particularly in the predominant sphere of prestige. This ethos, which can be traced back to the national revolutionary movement of Zionism (Eisenstadt, 1967), was based on the notion of "*ingathering of the exiles*" that stressed the common values unifying all Israeli Jews. Thus, it accorded recognition and membership to any (Jewish) person living in Israel (i.e., in principle, distribution was regulated by equality). But becoming a Jewish pioneer meant devotion to national goals, choosing personal sacrifice over comfort, and playing down personal achievement and material gratification (Eisenstadt, 1967; Roniger & Feige, 1992), thus granting primacy to self-sacrifice and contribution (equity rules). This hegemonic ethos laid the foundation for a cultural hierarchy that distinguished between different societal groupings on the basis of their presumed contribution to the Zionist enterprise (Cohen, 1989; Peled & Shafir, 1996).

Employing Jasso's (2005) framework to analyze the way in which culture operates in shaping justice judgments, we may say that the above study focused on the first basic question of justice research, namely, "What do individuals and collectivities think is just, and why?" With respect to this question, the study considered, albeit implicitly, five main "building blocks" of justice analysis: Israeli adolescent respondents may be defined as "observers"; the four different kinds of resources (or goods) may be defined as "quantities" in relation to which justice judgments are made; the correspondence between different degrees of societal contribution and different degrees of reward (resource or good) may be defined as the "just reward function"; the general just reward value assignated by each respondent (observer) across rewardees may be defined as the "distribution," that is, the rank of relative importance that each respondent assigned to different kinds of

distribution rules; and, finally, this study specified the “context” in which Israeli culture operates with respect to how, where, and when, the justice reward function varies in relation to the type of resource or good that is being distributed. From this analysis we may learn that a systematic study of justice judgments should be based, on the one hand, on the specification of basic “building blocks,” that is, conceptual categories defined at an etic level, and, on the other hand, on the specification of the ways in which these building blocks are shaped, at an emic level, by a specific culture.

Berry’s (1990) model, outlined above, provides another way of looking at Sabbagh’s empirical study in terms of the interplay between the etic and emic perspectives. As demonstrated, the study began with an etic construct, or structural logic, which was imposed on a local socio-cultural reality (“imposed etic”). The study also employed an emic perspective in that it identified a culturally specific ethos (*halutziut*) that regulated resource distribution. Hence, in this study both an etic construct and emic knowledge were used to understand the socio-cultural reality under study. Moreover, the juxtaposition of both perspectives enabled the derivation of integrated hypotheses. However, this study did not complete the research sequence outlined in Berry’s model, according to which the juxtaposition of etic and emic knowledge engenders a new etic construct (“derived etic”). Rather, a complex socio-cultural reality was integrated within the frame of reference of an imposed etic which, even given the emic knowledge necessary for the account, was neither revised nor challenged. In sum, in this study, the juxtaposition of emic and etic systems of knowledge provided an accurate and all-encompassing portrayal of the different distributive spheres, and also enabled the description of a complex social reality in a comprehensive though parsimonious form. This combined strategy made possible an integrative description of a rich social reality.

Study 2: An Etic Construct in Socio-cultural Context: Pioneering Virtue (*halutziut*)

As we saw, Study 1 presented above investigated preferences of distribution rules in relation to four different societal resources, and explained these by means of the pioneering ideology. In the above study, the social hierarchy shaped by the pioneering ethos served as an explanatory device but was not itself held up to examination. In Study 2 (Sabbagh, 2005a) the hierarchy itself was investigated, that is, the way in which university students (defined as “observers” in Jasso’s terms) evaluated different social groupings in Israel according to their perceived contribution to the Zionist cause and according to amount of reward (defined as “quantities” in Jasso’s terms) received by them. Thus, in Jasso’s (2005) terms, this study addressed the third basic question regarding research into justice evaluations, namely, “What is the magnitude of the perceived injustice associated with given departures from perfect justice?” Moreover, in examining this question, the study made explicit use of Jasso’s concept of justice evaluation. That is, observers were asked to assess the perceived contributions and rewards of different societal groupings by means of an inventory, adapted to Israeli circumstances, which

identified culturally unique group categories (e.g., new immigrants, *ashkenazim*), as well as cross-cultural universals (sex or age). Observers assigned different levels of just and actual reward across societal groupings ("distributions" in Jasso's terms) and, in this regard, the study departed from the common examination of justice evaluations at the individual level.

Findings revealed, by means of analysis of variance, that higher status-value was attributed to men and *ashkenazi* Jews and lower status-value to women and *mizrahi* Jews. These findings were explained with reference to the pioneering ethos, according to which the image of the *halutz* accorded a higher value to men and 'masculine' attributes such as social activism and power, required for highly valued national tasks (e.g., combat roles) (Almog, 2000; Livnat, 2000). In the case of ethnic groups, both *ashkenazi* and *mizrahi* Jews were considered equal members of the pioneering society by virtue of their Jewishness. Hence, the Israeli-Jewish collectivity at the general level may be defined as an in-group and, as shown in previous research (James, 1993), we would have expected to find an endorsement of equality within this in-group. Yet, the dominant *ashkenazim*, who historically led the Zionist revolution and who identified with the pioneering ethos, were assigned a pivotal position in the pioneering hierarchy (Cohen, 1989; Peled & Shafir, 1996). In contrast, *mizrahi* Jews, who held a more traditional-religious approach to Jewish redemption and were perceived as failing to acculturate to the pioneering virtue, were relegated to a more peripheral societal position (Cohen, 1989; Peled & Shafir, 1996). Thus, against the expectation emerging out of an etic perspective regarding a preference for equality in the case of distribution among an in-group, the emic analysis provided in this study corroborates the findings of Study 1 by revealing the legitimation of differentiation *within* this in-group.

As can be seen, this study preserved the etic dimension of equity while situating the notion within a specific cultural context (see Singelis, 2000). In other words, based on the assumption that the notion of equity may serve as a basis for cultural comparison, this study utilized Berry's notion of an "imposed etic." However, analysis of the culturally-specific context revealed that the ordering of social groups, and indeed the very definition of these groups (along gender or ethnic lines) was affected by a local ideology that shaped the notion of equity. Hence, it cannot be assumed that the equity notion, or the evaluations of, say, ethnic or gender categories, have similar meanings in different cultures (Miller-Loessi, 1995). Even when parallel societal grouping in different cultures are judged similarly, an emic perspective may reveal that the meaning associated with this judgment in each culture may still be different. This also holds in regard to referential, hierarchical structures in which the correspondence between signifiers of contribution and social groupings may differ in different socio-cultural contexts. Indeed, just as Western individualism underpins the notion of equity, as we see in this study, the *halutziut* ethos too dictated that individual rewards should be determined by individuals' contributions. However, in the specific Israeli context, with the emphasis upon the values of social activism and collective tasks, this ethos acquired a collectivistic meaning.

In sum, in accordance with Berry's (1990) model, this study went further than the previous one by suggesting that the Western notion of equity (etic-level) should be

expanded on the basis of specific socio-historical conditions and explored in relation to the meaning of societal equity in Israeli society. The study thus illustrates what Berry terms “derived etic,” namely, an etic construct that is expanded and refined so that it more adequately captures the complexity of a particular social reality, thereby serving as the basis of more accurate and refined cultural comparisons (Leung & Morris, 2000; Morris & Leung, 2000).

Towards an Extension of an Emic (Cultural) Perspective in the Study of Distributive Justice

As both the review of the literature and the discussion of the two empirical studies demonstrate, the more recent trend in studies of distributive justice rests on the assumption that justice judgments can only be adequately understood within the specific socio-cultural context in which they are embedded. Accordingly, culture plays an increasingly integral part in studies of distributive justice. Notwithstanding this acknowledgment of the importance of culture, however, we suggest that the theoretical and methodological implications of an emic approach to distributive justice may be taken further. In the following, we seek to take some first steps in this direction by bringing together, in their own words, the few theoretical and empirical studies that would appear to encourage such an extended approach.

The cultural anthropologist, Clifford Geertz (1973), gives succinct expression to the understanding of culture as the bedrock of human existence: “not just an ornament of human existence but … an essential condition for it” (p. 46):

> Becoming human is becoming individual, and we become individual under the guidance of cultural patterns, historically created systems of meaning in terms of which we give form, order, point, and direction to our lives. And the cultural patterns involved are not general but specific. (p. 52)

In this understanding, culture is viewed, “not as a series of miscellaneous parts, but as a working whole” (Pike, quoted in Berry, 1999, p. 167) (although to what extent this whole hangs together coherently is a matter of some controversy—see Ortner, 1997). Culture, in this view, cannot be defined as a variable which can be separated out from other constituents of social life; rather, culture is a system of meaning that inheres in the modes of thinking and practices through which people engage with the world around them.

The holistic idea of culture is manifest in Mary Douglas’s (1982, 1986) understanding of justice which, in her view, is a primary system of meaning—no less than a cosmology, equivalent to Durkheim’s notion of the sacred. Leaning on Hume’s understanding of justice, she suggests that it is an “intellectual system, it has a kind of second-order naturalness because it is a necessary condition for human society ... no single element of justice has innate rightness: for being right it depends upon its generality, its schematic coherence, and its fit with other accepted general principles” (Douglas, 1986, p. 114). In her view, culture, viewed in terms of a cosmology or system of meaning, cannot be understood in isolation from social structure. Thus, in an earlier work, Douglas (1982) sets out a classificatory system

according to which societies may be classified according to their degree of social solidarity ("group" dimension) and degree of shared classifications and knowledge ("grid" dimension). In light of this model, she proposes a research agenda which would seek to unveil the implications of the classificatory system for what she terms cosmologies, including distributive justice (for the implementation of this model in a quantitative analysis of distributive justice in Germany, see Wegener & Liebig, 1995).

Walzer (1983), adopting a culturally holistic approach in his philosophical treatment of distributive justice, examines the ways in which each particular culture, conceptualized as a dynamic system of social meanings, informs, and indeed ought to inform, perceptions of distributive justice:

> It's not only a matter of implementing some singular principles or set of principles in different historical settings... I want to argue for more than this: that the principles of justice are themselves pluralistic in form; that different social goods ought to be distributed for different reasons, in accordance with different procedures, by different agents; and that all these differences derive from different understandings of the social goods themselves—the inevitable product of historical and cultural particularism. (pp. 5–6)

Applying Walzer's cultural approach to the empirical study of distributive justice, Elster (1992, 1995) suggests that distributive justice is "local"; that is, their work examines how perceptions of distributive justice vary between different nations, between arenas of distribution (work, health, education), and within arenas (for example, layoffs versus recruitment in the work arena). In their examination of the different forms of local justice, the authors rely on the analysis of actual institutional behavior (by relatively autonomous allocators) rather than on attitudinal surveys in order to characterize distribution values in the USA. In his work Elster (1992) does not propose a general theory of local justice that specifies a set of "conditions—necessary, sufficient, or both—for the application of a particular allocative principle" (p. 14). Instead, he proposes a grounded approach according to which the analysis of everyday decisions in relation to distributive justice reveals the values and principles at work, rather than the other way around. In this regard, Elster et al.'s approach also exemplifies the importance attached to studying systems of meaning as inhering in everyday practices.

As we have seen, an emic approach to the study of distributive justice has been mainly based on quantitative methodology. However, an extended emic approach suggests that a qualitative methodology may be particularly useful for unveiling the systems of cultural meaning underlying distributive justice. Hochschild's (1981) study of justice perceptions exemplifies the way in which an extended emic approach operates in a concrete case. In her study, based on in-depth interviews with a sample of twenty-eight working American adults, she concluded that people employ different distribution principles when distributing different types of resources ("domains"). Specifically, she demonstrated that both the wealthy and the poor, tend to employ equality in the socialization and political spheres while differentiation in the economic sphere. However, she argues that this focus on overall tendencies ignores the possibility that what individuals do is weigh several

rules at the same time and combine them together in various manners in order to arrive at their justice judgments, and that they do so differently in different situations (rather than switching from one single rule to another single rule).

In Hochschild's view, this complex and refined look at the emic justice perception profiles articulated by respondents can only be elicited through the use of qualitative research methods:

> Topics as complex and slippery as beliefs about income, property, justice, equality, and the role of government in the economy and vice versa require a research method that permits textured idiosyncratic responses. The researcher must permit—even induce—people to speak for themselves and must be wary of channeling their thoughts through his or her own preconceptions about what questions to ask, how answers should be shaped, and what coding categories best subdivide the responses ... This research method permitted respondents to reveal their convictions and uncertainties, their reasoning processes and emotional reactions, their foci for passion and indifference, their expertise and ignorance. From the interviews, I was able to evaluate the content, complexity, and strength of individual beliefs about justice, as well as the circumstances in which they occurred and their effects on respondents' political and economic views. (pp. 22–23)

In a more recent study, Reeher (1996), sharing with Hochshild and other scholars (Lane, 1986; Verba & Orren, 1985) the assumption according to which the American system of distributive justice can be characterized by endorsement of political equality and economic inequality, expands this tenet by examining the perceptions of distributive justice held by American senators. Reeher, too, in similar fashion to Hochschild, adopts the qualitative methodological implications of the emic perspective and, in so doing, adds to the few empirical studies that exemplify the unique contribution of this extended perspective to the study of distributive justice. He views in-depth, qualitative interviews as the "best vehicle through which the researcher can truly understand the respondents' points of view, gain genuine insight into the sociopolitical and personal context of their beliefs, and understand how this context fits in with and shapes their positions" (p. 9). Second, this methodological approach is essentially inductive insofar as it brings the researcher to the method of "first listening carefully and then seeing what patterns we can pull out, rather than starting with a definition of the ways in which or the dimensions upon which people think and then trying to find out where the respondents fit in" (p. 9). Third, this approach facilitates the description of the processes by which justice perceptions are consolidated:

> Rather than positing that beliefs and their structures are simply social products, this approach better allows us to see the subjectively determined influences that are simultaneously at work. Furthermore, it also gives us a better handle by which to grasp *how* the environmental or social influences operate (p. 18).

These studies demonstrate the way in which the use of qualitative in-depth interviews may reveal unpredictable dimensions of justice perceptions—such as

ambivalences and critical voices vis-à-vis the dominant views on distributive justice—dimensions that might otherwise remain undetected. Finally, a further extension of the emic perspective can be found in the use of ethnography (participant observation based on long-term fieldwork), which is a methodological device uniquely able to reveal local understandings and application of justice-related concepts as they are articulated in everyday practices in natural settings. A preliminary step in this direction was taken in a study that examined ways in which notions of membership and of just distribution were expressed in the everyday practices of a voluntary organization set up in the early 1990s to distribute clothing and household goods to newcomers from the (former) Soviet Union in Israel (the 'Depot') (Golden & Sabbagh, 2005).

In conclusion, the etic perspective on research into distributive justice has acknowledged culture as an important dimension in shaping justice judgments. In other words, it has recognized the importance of the examination of emic aspects in the operation of justice judgments. This research, which defines culture as a variable, has mostly used quantitative methods. We have attempted to suggest, however, that an extended view of the emic perspective, which views culture in a more holistic form, together with its qualitative methodological implications, may add to existent accumulated justice research by unveiling complex forms of justice perceptions that may otherwise remain undetected. At present, given the dearth of qualitative studies on distributive justice, it is difficult to evaluate the contribution of this perspective to our knowledge of justice judgments. Only on the basis of future research will we be able to evaluate this contribution, as well as to ascertain the precise nature of the interplay between the two, etic and emic, perspectives on distributive justice.

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