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Dignity Line vs. Priority Lists

A study of Martha Nussbaum's List of Central Human Capabilities in Relation to the PRSPs from Madagascar and Yemen

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Abstract

As an equality producing mechanism Martha Nussbaum presents a list of ten central human capabilities which, if realised, will lead to a dignified life. The purpose of this thesis is to discover if it is reasonable to suggest that Nussbaum's list of central human capacities equates to a unified definition of dignity. By examining the parallels between the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (hereafter written as PRSPs) from Madagascar and Yemen and the capabilities on the list, similarities and differences will be analyzed. In conclusion, all the capabilities on Nussbaum's list are represented in the PRSPs but not all Nussbaum's requirements of what the capability should include. However, it can be deduced from this that Nussbaum overly simplifies the concept of human dignity. Thus, due to the lack of a clear and unified definition of dignity Nussbaum's list cannot be considered a universal definition of dignity.

Keywords: Martha Nussbaum, Capability Approach, Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper, Dignity, Poverty

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1 Introduction

The concept of dignity can be understood in many different ways and gives the illusion of agreement where there is a deep philosophical divide. The preamble of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states, that “(...) recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world”.¹ This text roughly interpreted says that dignity is something that needs to be recognized. However, the preamble bases this recognition on faith, as evidenced by its reference to the section of the Charter of the United Nations which states that “the people in the United Nation have in the Charter reaffirmed their faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person”.² The wording ‘reaffirmed their faith’ indicates not only a pre-existing recognition of dignity but also a faith in human dignity.³ Additionally, the term inherent dignity, which is said to reside within ‘all members of the human family’, is used, leading one to draw the conclusion that dignity is an expression of the unity of all mankind.⁴ In this sense, the Declaration declares that dignity is universally agreed upon as a concept.

The Declaration also provides additional references to the concept of dignity in article 22 and 23 with references to social rights. Article 22 states that everyone is entitled to the realization of economic, social and cultural rights “indispensable for his dignity, and the free development of his personality”. Likewise, article 23 paragraph 3, aims to ensure “an existence worthy of human dignity” based on the right to just and favorable remunerations. Both use dignity as an instrument for measuring quality of life. Supporting these qualities should be the focus of state action).⁵

Even though the Declaration seems to assume that a universal definition of dignity exists, no clear definition is provided. The concept of dignity is, therefore, problematic as it is referred to as universal without an accompanying definition. The present thesis will illustrate the conceptual difficulties associated with dignity by comparing Martha Nussbaum’s list of central human capabilities, which is built on a normative universal standpoint of what a dignified life should

¹ Preamble to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights

² Ibid

³ Dicke, Klaus, “The Founding Function of Human Dignity”, in Dicke & Ritschle, *The Concept of Human Dignity in Human Rights Discourse*, p. 115

⁴ Ibid p. 114

⁵ Ritschle, Dietrich, “Can ethical Marxism be derived from theological concepts of human dignity?” in Dicke & Ritschle, *The Concept of Human Dignity in Human Rights Discourse*, p. 118 & Universal Declaration of Human Rights

include, with reference to the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers from Madagascar and the Republic of Yemen. This should provide a wider understanding of the complexity of the concept of human dignity.

1.1 Research Question

This thesis asks whether it is reasonable to say that Nussbaum's list of central human capacities equates to a unified definition of dignity. This will be done by answering the following questions: Is Martha Nussbaum's list of central human capabilities for a dignified life confirmed by the PRSP priority list from Madagascar and Yemen? Does Nussbaum's list of central human capabilities make assumptions about human dignity?

1.2 Theory

Martha Nussbaum's capability approach will be the main theory used in this thesis. The capability approach, with its origins in Amartya Sen's work, has affected the political sphere dramatically as it has, among other things, changed the very definition of poverty. The capability approach describes life as built upon the realization of capabilities, and that every human being is able to develop these through freedom to exercise their capabilities. Flourish when they are allowed to develop their capabilities through dynamic activity, which is the key to the good life. Martha Nussbaum presents, what she believes to be, the most important ingredients for a good and dignified life through her list of central human capabilities. The ten capabilities on her list present the minimum criterion for the realization of dignity. Martha Nussbaum's capability approach and her list of central human capabilities will be further discussed and described in chapter 3 and 4.

1.3 Methodology and Material

Questioning Martha Nussbaum's list of central human capabilities as a minimum standard for dignity has revealed dignity's conceptual complexity. The definitions of dignity and poverty, and an explanation of the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSP) will be presented first, as these are the central concepts of the present thesis. The description of the PRSP focuses on its Participatory Assessment Process to get a wider understanding of what the papers are and should include. This is followed by a presentation of Martha Nussbaum's capability approach with a focus on the concept of dignity and her list of central human capabilities in order to gain a basic understanding of her theory. The PRSPs from Madagascar and Yemen have been analyzed in relation to the ten central capabilities to provide an understanding of the similarities and

differences between the two by trying to find the ten central capabilities represented in the PRSPs to test Nussbaum's theory of a minimum criteria for a dignified life. It has been important to keep in mind previous critical research on the PRSP. Despite acknowledging such research, the present thesis maintains a focus on the capability approach rather than the PRSP. However, the comparison between the capabilities and the papers is followed by a summary and analysis of the results with a focus on the concept of dignity and Martha Nussbaum's claim of overlapping consensus (universalism). A final discussion brings a focus to the complexity inherent in the definition and concept of human dignity.

1.4 Delimitations

This thesis will focus on Martha Nussbaum's version of the capability approach rather than Amartya Sen's. The reason for this is that Sen's Capability approach makes assumptions about quality of life, which intends to advance the idea by asking what people are able to do or be. Martha Nussbaum's approach brings the capability approach to a new level by involving people's level of satisfaction and the amount of resources they are able to command which she believes to be the ultimate gauge of quality of life.⁶ Nussbaum presents a list of Central Human Capabilities which she believes goes "(...) beyond the merely comparative use of the capability space to articulate an account of how capabilities, together with the idea of a threshold level, can provide a basis for constitutional principles that citizens have a right to demand from their governments".⁷ Nussbaum's list, her theory of threshold, and the idea of a social minimum of capabilities strives for a realistic framework. This framework was created to construct basic principles that can serve as the foundation for constitutional guarantees to which nations should be held responsible by their citizens.⁸ Nussbaum's realistic framework and her argument that the list should be the minimum criteria for human dignity has made her the focus of this thesis, rather than Sen or other scholars' capability approaches. However, there are limitations that come with Nussbaum's approach as she usually focuses her capability approach on women and their life situation. This thesis has, however, limited the space for sole women as this thesis focuses on human dignity as it relates to all human beings.

Because the definition of human dignity is individualistic it was not possible to mention all of the definitions. Within the scope of dignity religion is usually a contributing factor. This thesis

⁶ Nussbaum, Martha C, *Women and Human Development: The capability approach*, p. 12

⁷ Ibid

⁸ Nussbaum, Martha C, *Frontiers of Justice: Disability, Nationality, Species Membership*, p. 298

will not delve deeply into the religious implications of dignity, but instead will simply mention religion's existence. The aim of this thesis is to analyze Nussbaum's idea of human dignity and if a dignity line can or does exist. Therefore, the different theories surrounding dignity will be limited to that which can define Nussbaum's approach.

The aim of this thesis is not to investigate the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers' effectiveness or implementation. Rather, it is the aim of this thesis to view the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper as a tool by which the concept of human dignity, the capability approach and human rights can be analyzed. Consequently, this thesis does not aim to discuss whether the PRSPs are an effective method for poverty reduction. This thesis has chosen to focus on the PRSP because it is supposed to be built upon the participatory assessment which makes citizens' voices heard. This thesis takes into account the PRSPs' complications and assures that the PRSP is not seen as a directly linked to the will of the citizens of Madagascar and Yemen. However, this thesis limits criticism of the PRSPs because the focus of the thesis rests on Martha Nussbaum's list of central human capabilities. It is, therefore, very important to note that this thesis will not investigate the legitimacy and effectiveness of the PRSP from Madagascar and Yemen. The PRSPs are solely used as practical examples even though their utility is limited.

2 Central Definitions and Concepts

Dignity surrounds our society as a concept and as a necessity for life and worthiness. According to Martha Nussbaum and her list of central human capabilities a certain amount of capabilities have to be fulfilled for a life to be dignified. Poverty, on the other hand, is, from the perspective of the capability approach, seen as capability deprivation and, consequently, as undignified. This section will provide a definition of dignity and poverty. Additionally, the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers will be introduced.

2.1 Dignity

Human dignity plays a large role in every-day-language statements as an ethical concept. Additionally, dignity surrounds socio-political and constitutional law concerning human value.⁹ Even though different scholars agree upon human dignity being part of the human condition there is no unified definition of the concept. According to Stoic philosophy, the whole world is surrounded by reason and the rationality of God. Human beings are interconnected with nature, social communities and even God. The Stoic notion of human dignity has exercised a significant influence on later Western thinkers.¹⁰ The Stoic concept of human dignity is that it is given by nature and is axiomatic in nature. In contrast to the Stoic idea, human beings are placed in a dominant position over nature from a traditional biblical standpoint. This dominant position mirrors the distinction between God and the world. However, the biblical text has been reinterpreted in recent years to indicate that human beings are responsible for the non-human creations rather than dominating them. Meanwhile, human dignity is not something inherent within humans but rather imparted to the human being by God; ergo, the claim that humans were made “in the image of God”.¹¹

Immanuel Kant criticizes the classical theological foundation of human dignity. However, he believed, as did the bible, that human beings are above nature. His focus lies, on the other hand, on freedom as the indicator and guarantee of the prominent status of the human being over nature. Kant’s famous wording: “act so as to treat humanity never only as a mean but always as

⁹ Ritschle, Dietrich, “Can ethical Marxism be derived from theological concepts of human dignity?” in Kretzmer & Klein *The Concept of Human Dignity in Human Rights Discourse*, p. 87

¹⁰ Ibid, p. 95

¹¹ Ibid

an end”, indicates that human beings only live one life and, therefore, that dignity needs to exist in order to make human life morally worthy. Just as with the Stoic philosophical definition of human dignity, Kant believed human beings to be surrounded by reason. Human dignity exists due to the human being’s power to reason which enables humans to exercise freedom and to follow moral imperatives.¹² Similar reasoning can be found in Martha Nussbaum’s capability approach.

Human dignity can also be placed by the means of treaty. Thomas Hobbes and John Locke’s understanding of human dignity is built upon the understanding of human dignity as vulnerable and dependant upon the State. Hobbes believes humans to be cruel and, therefore, that a strong absolute state is needed to create control over their aggressiveness. Locke, on the other hand, believed that the natural state of human life existed in the state and laws. Both of them viewed individual dignity and rights as prior to any social structure, or set of rules which needed to either be protected by state or by a contract. Human dignity is, consequently, given to those who behave in accordance with laws. Hobbes and Locke’s idea of human dignity has certain similarities with the biblical conception as rights are not given by nature but depend on certain steps by society. John Rawls, as an example of a modern thinker, presents a reconstruction of the need of state to protect human dignity, through his *A Theory of Justice*. He emphasizes the human need for principles, rules, and structure in order to achieve and safeguard equality and a relative stability of justice.¹³

2.2 Poverty

The capability approach contributed shifted the conceptualization of poverty from a traditional utilitarian view, seen in terms of income-deprivation and development in terms of economic growth by the GNP per capita approach, to include aspects such as health, education, political and religious liberty, gender and racial justice.¹⁴ The debate surrounding poverty focuses on ways to approach the underlying standard of living, as the common definition of poverty rests upon whether or not a given person’s living standard is below some minimal level.¹⁵ This minimal level is usually determined by a poverty line, which reflects on the calculations about the money

¹² Ibid, p. 96-97

¹³ Ibid, p. 96

¹⁴ Nussbaum, Martha C, *Frontiers of Justice: Disability, Nationality, Species Membership*, p. 282

¹⁵ Calvo, César & Dercon, Stefan, “Chronic Poverty and All That”, in Addison et al., *Poverty Dynamics: Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, p. 29

required for a subsistence living including housing, food and other necessities. The poverty line does not usually reflect regional or local differences in the cost of living. However, there are several varieties of poverty lines, with each having its own information basis and method. At the UN World Summit on Social Development, in 1995, 117 governments agreed upon two definitions of poverty – those being absolute and overall poverty. The UN defines absolute poverty as “... a condition characterized by severe deprivation of basic human needs, including food, safe drinking water, sanitation facilities, health, shelter, education and information. It depends not only in income but also on access to services”.¹⁶ Moreover, overall poverty was considered to take various forms, including:

” ...lack of income and productive resources to ensure sustainable livelihood; hunger and malnutrition; ill health; limited or lack of access to education and other basic services; increased morbidity and mortality from illness; homelessness and inadequate housing; unsafe environments and social discrimination and exclusion. It is also characterized by lack of participation in decision-making and in civil, social and cultural life. It occurs in all countries: as mass poverty in many developing countries, pockets of poverty amid wealth in developed countries, loss of livelihood as a result of disaster or conflict, the poverty of low-wage workers, and the utter distribution of people who fall outside family support systems, social institutions and safety nets.”¹⁷

The World Bank’s definition of poverty is based on income or consumption levels. A person is considered poor if his or her consumption or income level falls below the set poverty line. Their poverty lines vary in time and place, and each country uses lines which are appropriate to its level of development, societal norms and values. However, the World Bank, in an effort to estimate poverty worldwide, used a single poverty line for the purpose of global aggregation and comparison. The World Bank then used reference lines set at 1.25 and 2 dollars per day.¹⁸ According to Gordon, this line is meaningless. He states that: “It is impossible to tell from the World Bank poverty line whether or not a household with an income below their threshold has sufficient money to live decently or not.”¹⁹ This thesis will see poverty from the capability approach definition, as a capability-deprivation which is a constitutive part of development.²⁰

¹⁶ Gordon, David, “The international measurement of poverty and anti-poverty policies” in Townsend & Gordon (eds), *World Poverty: New policies to defeat an old enemy*, p. 59

¹⁷ Ibid

¹⁸ World Bank, <http://www.worldbank.org>

¹⁹ Gordon, David, “The international measurement of poverty and anti-poverty policies” in Townsend & Gordon (eds), *World Poverty: New policies to defeat an old enemy*, p. 67

²⁰ Nussbaum, Martha C, *Frontiers of Justice: Disability, Nationality, Species Membership*, p. 283 & Nankani, Gobind, Page, John, & Judge, Lindsay, “Human Rights and Poverty Reduction Strategies” in *Human Rights and Development: Towards Mutual Reinforcement*, p. 477-478

2.3 Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper

The capability approach shifted poverty's conceptualization from solely economic dimensions to a multidisciplinary concept. Consequently, the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) took the opportunity to strengthen the links between debt relief, poverty reduction, and governance. The result was that the PRSP came into use by the World Bank and the IMF. The use of poverty reduction strategy papers covers most very poor countries and involves considerable resources. It also contributes to the realization of human rights, and whether changes in the process might enhance this contribution.²¹ Countries have to produce such papers in order to qualify for debt relief under the Heavily Indebted Poor Country debt reduction process (HIPC), which is under the auspices of the IMF and the World Bank.²² The World Bank and the IMF are not allowed to interfere in their member states national politics but rather the must engage in particular reconstruction- and development projects. The idea is that the PRSP will focus on the national poverty of the country that presents the PRSP and is built upon national ownership. Aid through the PRSP is based upon policies which the PRSP constitutes.

The PRSP is used as one of the major instruments to achieve the Millennium Development Goals as it is expected to be “the superior and most promising device for fighting poverty”.²³ The reason for this optimism is the broad based participation of the civil-society which fosters national ownership. In turn, the belief is that this will promote strategies that enhance poverty reduction. The PRSP should, according to the World Bank, present priorities for macroeconomic, structural, and social policies which will together comprise a comprehensive strategy for achieving poverty reduction with targets and indicators for monitoring the process.²⁴ This should be done through a participatory process which is supposed to reflect the multidimensional nature of poverty by identifying economic, social, political and cultural constraints upon reducing poverty. This is supposed to be developed through wide ranging stakeholder engagement with the process, from civil society organizations, private sector bodies, woman's groups, church bodies, and trade unions. The participatory poverty assessments are designed to ensure that the voices of poor people themselves find expression in the PRSP, which

²¹ Nankani, Gobind, Page, John, & Judge, Lindsay, *Human Rights and Poverty Reduction Strategies*, p. 475-476, in *Human Rights and Development: Towards Mutual Reinforcement*

²² Nankani, Gobind, Page, John, & Judge, Lindsay, *Human Rights and Poverty Reduction Strategies*, p. 475-476, in *Human Rights and Development: Towards Mutual Reinforcement*

²³ Ibid

²⁴ Ibid

is a central principle of the PRSP.²⁵ The World Bank thinks that if this principle is upheld all stakeholders will gain collective benefits and all actors will be more committed to implement poverty reduction “initiatives as well as ensure the sustainability of such initiatives”.²⁶ The program is intended to promote a large social movement in which all levels of society participate.

The PRSP initiative should originate within the countries themselves which means that the each country has national ownership. According to the World Bank, a PRSP is a part of the national ownership if civil society is engaged in the process of establishing the document and if their concerns are taken into account in the PRSP document.²⁷ In other words, the citizens are, according to the World Bank and the IMF, the key actors to sustained poverty reduction.²⁸ The donors’ position, according to country ownership, are not to distort national priorities or undermine their capacities.²⁹ In conclusion, the PRSPs’ initiative is based on five core principles: first, national ownership, second, result orientation, third, comprehensive partnership orientation, fourth, coordination of participation of development partners, and, fifth, the adoption of a long-term perspective.³⁰

²⁵ Nankani, Gobind, Page, John, & Judge, Lindsay, Human Rights and Poverty Reduction Strategies, p. 486, in Human Rights and Development: Towards Mutual Reinforcement

²⁶ The World Bank, www.worldbank.org

²⁷ Ibid

²⁸ Ibid

²⁹ Nankani, Gobind, Page, John, & Judge, Lindsay, Human Rights and Poverty Reduction Strategies, p. 484, in Human Rights and Development: Towards Mutual Reinforcement

³⁰ The World Bank, www.worldbank.org

3 Martha Nussbaum's Capability Approach

The capability approach presents the ingredients required for living a good and dignified life. Martha Nussbaum's capability approach brings the approach to a new level by taking into account people's level of satisfaction and the amount of resources they are able to command which she believes to be where the quality of human life is situated.³¹ By presenting a list of central human capacities and developing an idea of a threshold of capabilities which the state needs to implement she believes she has delivered a benchmark for how rights should be provided and secured.³² Martha Nussbaum argues that her capability approach presents the minimum criteria for a human being to live a dignified life. This section will take a closer look at Martha Nussbaum's capability approach with particular focus on her concept of human dignity and her list of Central Human Capabilities.

3.1 The Capability Approach

The capability approach begins from a political conception of the human being and of a life that is dignified.³³ Nussbaum's focus lies on a philosophical level as she uses the idea of human dignity and human development as an important foundational principle.³⁴ This idea is derived from Aristotle's notion of the human being as a political animal and from Marx's idea that the human being is a creature "in need of a plurality of life-activities".³⁵ Her definition of dignity is not separated from capabilities but defined by the way they "intertwined with them and their definition."³⁶ Nussbaum believes the right and the good to be intertwined, whereas, a life worthy of human dignity is constituted by having the capabilities in her list.³⁷ Nussbaum bases this argument on Aristotle's belief that "in general, people seek not the way of their ancestors, but the good".³⁸

³¹ Nussbaum, Martha C, *Women and Human Development: The capability approach*, p. 12

³² Nussbaum, Martha C, *Frontiers of Justice: Disability, Nationality, Species Membership*, p. 287

³³ Ibid, p. 180

³⁴ Nussbaum, Martha C, *Women and Human Development: The capability approach*, p. 13

³⁵ Nussbaum, Martha C, *Frontiers of Justice: Disability, Nationality, Species Membership*, p. 162

³⁶ Ibid

³⁷ Ibid

³⁸ Nussbaum, Martha C, *Women and Human Development: The capability approach*, p. 49

The good life, according to Nussbaum, from Aristotle's view is that the good means to allow a human to flourish. Nussbaum adapts this view by saying that the capability approach is an idea of respecting each person's struggle to flourish.³⁹ She believes that dignity can be secured if justice is accurately conceptualized and achieved. For example, Nussbaum believes that her list of ten capabilities provides a minimum account of social justice giving respect for persons by treating them in ways they can see to be justified.⁴⁰ In other words, if the capability approach and Nussbaum's threshold for states is upheld, social justice will be secured. This in turn will establish security for human dignity.⁴¹

Nussbaum argues that there must be a prior evaluation which chooses capabilities that are good and places the most central capabilities in a priority list defining the minimal conditions for a dignified life. Additionally, Nussbaum argues that it is the task of political and social institutions to secure these basic capabilities.⁴² Thus, human dignity needs to be fulfilled and not undermined by hunger, violent assault, or unequal political treatment. With these facts Nussbaum concludes that society agrees that we all want to live in decent and respectful terms with one another. The world needs to be morally decent so all human beings have what they need to live a life of human dignity.⁴³ Overlapping consensus on a social minimum of capabilities is supposed to make Nussbaum's capability approach politically realistic and applicable by providing a starting point for discussing important development policy issues.

Much of Nussbaum's work is seen from an Aristotelian perspective and presented as universalistic, just like the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which she calls an overlapping consensus. She views her theory, in other words, as "fully available internationally across lines of tradition and religion".⁴⁴ However, she is clear that she does not want to be thought of as drawing all the material in her arguments from the tradition of Western democracies. Nussbaum argues that overlapping consensus is a justified standpoint as it can, over time, be justified to people who hold different conceptions of a good and dignified life. Justification involves the idea of acceptability to all, or at least to the majority. The conception can, therefore, be stable over time if it is accepted on the basis of respect.⁴⁵

³⁹ Nussbaum, Martha C, *Women and Human Development: The capability approach*, p. 68

⁴⁰ Rawls, John, *A theory of Justice*, p. 586

⁴¹ Nussbaum, Martha C, *Frontiers of Justice: Disability, Nationality, Species Membership*, p. 75

⁴² Ibid, p. 166 & Nussbaum, Martha C, *Women and Human Development: The capability approach*, p. 71

⁴³ Nussbaum, Martha C, *Frontiers of Justice: Disability, Nationality, Species Membership*, p. 274

⁴⁴ Ibid, p. 163

⁴⁵ Ibid

3.2 List of Central Human Capabilities

Nussbaum's list, her theory of threshold and the idea of a social minimum of capabilities is an attempt to create a realistic framework. This framework was created to construct basic principles that can serve as the foundation for constitutional guarantees to which nations should be held responsible by their citizens.⁴⁶ According to Nussbaum, the basic idea is that a life deprived of even one of these capacities is not a life worthy of human dignity. For these capacities to be realized from a political level it is necessary to say that "to treat everyone as an end we will have to take a stand on some values that will be made central for political purposes".⁴⁷ The list is as follows:

1. **Life** (Being able to live for the span normal for the species)
2. **Bodily health** (Being able to have good health, adequate nourishment and shelter)
3. **Bodily integrity** (Being able to be physically secure, and with rights over one's own body)
4. **Senses, imagination, and thought** (Being able to use the senses, imagine, think and reason, and have adequately educated, informed and free from repression)
5. **Emotions** (Being able to have attachments to other people and things)
6. **Practical reason** (Being able to 'form a conception of the good and to engage in critical reflection for the planning of one's life)
7. **Affiliation** (Being able to interact well with other people, and to imagine and empathize with their situation; having the social basis for self-respect; not being subject to discrimination on the grounds of race, sex, etc.)
8. **Other species** (Being able to live with concern for the natural world)
9. **Play** (Being able to play and laugh)
10. **Control over one's environment** (A. Being able to participate in political processes; B. Being able to have possessions and seek employment).⁴⁸

Nussbaum believes that all human beings are fully capable of her ten human capabilities and that in order to achieve them all they need is the right education and material support. However, Nussbaum does not believe that capabilities should be thought of as an instrument to create human dignity but rather as ways of realizing life with human dignity.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ Nussbaum, Martha C, *Women and Human Development: The capability approach*, p. 12 + 298

⁴⁷ Ibid, p. 58

⁴⁸ Ibid, p. 78-80

⁴⁹ Ibid, p. 83 & Nussbaum, Martha C, *Frontiers of Justice: Disability, Nationality, Species Membership*, p. 161

4 Analysis: Dignity Line vs. Priority Lists

“I am a great believer in theory,[...] But pure theory cannot ‘freeze’ a list of capabilities for all societies[...] That would be not only a denial of the reach of democracy, but also a misunderstanding of what pure theory can do, completely divorced from the particular social reality that any particular society faces”⁵⁰

Amartya Sen

Martha Nussbaum’s list of central human capabilities was conceived with the intention of bringing a realistic approach to policy making and the quest for human dignity. This is important to note since the list of central human capabilities can be said to be a general guide to ethical practice. Therefore, there is a need to determine how individuals can attain capabilities in a specific social context. This thesis aims to see if Madagascar and Yemen acknowledge that they have to change their social institutions and practices in order to ensure that every individual attains Nussbaum’s functional capabilities in line with her ethical beliefs. This section will analyze the ten central capabilities by searching for their presence in the poverty reduction strategy papers developed by Madagascar and Yemen. This will be done whilst keeping in mind that the PRSPs have been produced with the goal of securing dignified lives for their citizens. Finally, the results of the analysis will be considered with conceptions of human dignity in mind and criticisms of Martha Nussbaum’s dignity line.

4.1 Yemen, Madagascar and the Capability Approach

From the capability approach poverty is seen as a capability-deprivation which is a constitutive part of development. Nussbaum states that human dignity needs to be fulfilled and not be undermined by hunger, violent assault, or unequal treatment in the political realm.⁵¹ From this we can conclude that a certain amount of resources need to be maintained in order to ensure that every human being becomes able to develop the capabilities to secure a dignified life. It is not simply the quantities of resources that provide human beings with their ability to flourish. Resources are an inadequate index of well-being because human beings have varying needs for

⁵⁰ Sen, Amartya, *Capabilities, lists, and public reason: continuing the conversation*, p. 78

⁵¹ Nussbaum, Martha C, *Frontiers of Justice: Disability, Nationality, Species Membership*, p. 274

resources, and also varying abilities to convert resources into productive results. Two people with the same resources might differ greatly in the ways that matter most for social justice.⁵²

Yemen and Madagascar were chosen as subject states of this thesis because of their similarities and differences. Yemen represents an Arabic country located on the Arabian Peninsula in Southwest Asia while Madagascar is located in the Indian Ocean off the southeastern coast of Africa. With similar sizes and population (Yemen 23 million and a land area around 530,000km² and Madagascar, 587,041 km² with a population of 19,625,000 people.) Even though Arab immigrants have influenced the Malagasy culture, Madagascar is a multicultural country in contrast to Yemen, where Islam is the central religion. Yemen clearly calls for development of human resources, in other words, the development of human capabilities. This should be done through the development of knowledge and skills, improvement of health services and creation of job opportunities, in addition to the adoption of positive social programs. Their general goal is to develop human capacities, “considering that human beings are the object and means of development, and creation of a right environment for human beings to produce and participate towards the realization of the aims and objectives of the whole population and the local communities.” Madagascar does not mention human capabilities in the same manner as Yemen. However, as this section will show, they mention most of the list of the ten central human capabilities as a part of their priorities in their PRSP.

4.2 Life & Bodily Health

Nussbaum:

Nussbaum believes that life is a central human capability and that all humans should have the right to live a natural lifespan, one that is not cut short by anything other than natural causes.⁵³ For this to occur one must have good health, including reproductive health and for good health one must have adequate nourishment and shelter.

Madagascar and Yemen:

The Madagascan PRSP highlights their priority of providing access to safe drinking water as, in 2006, only 35% of the Malagasy population had access to safe drinking water.⁵⁴ The strategy to improve this is to ensure adequate access to safe drinking water for all people and educate all

⁵² Nussbaum, Martha C, *Frontiers of Justice: Disability, Nationality, Species Membership*, p. 74-75

⁵³ Ibid, p. 76

⁵⁴ Madagascar: *Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper*, p. 48

people, particularly parents and children, in safe, sanitary and hygienic practices.⁵⁵ Likewise, Yemen, in their PRSP, calls for an enactment of laws and regulations related to water rights. Additionally, Yemen places focus on increasing water production and raising coverage in urban and rural areas as well as expanding sanitation services.⁵⁶

Both Madagascar and Yemen have priorities concerning provision of health service. Madagascar and Yemen's basic health care centres remain underfunded and ill equipped. Therefore, Madagascar's PRSP's main goal appears to be improving the quality of health services, to ensure easy access, affordability and reliability. This will create "an educated population which understands and uses quality health services and treatment options."⁵⁷ Additionally, Madagascar will to control mortal epidemic diseases, such as malaria, tuberculosis, and sexually transmitted diseases.⁵⁸ Likewise, Yemen aims to upgrade and improve the health services by equipping and rehabilitation of health institutions with modern health equipment; reinforced support services; and support community participation in the management and monitoring of the performance of health institutions. Additionally, they aim to improve basic health services and provide basic drugs at prices affordable to low-income groups.⁵⁹

Madagascar focuses more on food and basic rights than Yemen does in their PRSP. A majority of the Malagasy households have a high malnutrition ratio. The goal for Madagascar is to "significant [...] reduce [...] both the ratio of malnutrition among children under 5 years and ratio of food insecurity among households and vulnerable groups."⁶⁰ The government will, according to their PRSP, focus on the most vulnerable groups through a national community nutrition program. Additionally, a minimum level of vital food, shelter and basic needs will be provided for the people by "improving Social Protection management and the provision of basic social services to the vulnerable, improving the targeting and the control of the expenditures in social protection to maximize impact, ensure the prevention, fast reaction and the lessening of the impact of catastrophes, and guarantee an equitable and adequate legal framework for vulnerable groups."⁶¹ Yemen, on the other hand, solely states that they wish to "improve economic and social conditions of women through a set of initiatives including better access to

⁵⁵ Madagascar: *Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper*, p. 81

⁵⁶ Republic of Yemen: *Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper*, p. 107

⁵⁷ Madagascar: *Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper*, p. 72

⁵⁸ *Ibid*, p. 73

⁵⁹ Republic of Yemen: *Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper*, p. 107

⁶⁰ Madagascar: *Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper*, p. 80

⁶¹ *Ibid*, p. 111

land, credit and social services like health and education, food and water”.⁶² Thus, Yemen does not place more focus on food and nutrition as such in their PRSP.

Analysis:

Nussbaum places adequate nourishment and shelter as top priorities for good health and the capability to live a normal lifespan. Madagascar and Yemen both emphasise healthcare, which is an important aspect for good health to be ensured. Additionally, both PRSPs mention the need for safe water access and connects such access to education as citizens need to be educated in safe water use. The need for adequate nourishment is mentioned, as a priority, in the Madagascar PRSP. Yemen, surprisingly, does not have any food priorities even though 40% of their citizens are considered poor.⁶³ Even more surprisingly, shelter is not specifically mentioned in the PRSP, as the living conditions for “most of the 22 million Yemenis remains difficult”.⁶⁴ However, Madagascar mentions the shelter but does not highlight it has a priority.

Even though neither Yemen nor Madagascar mentions all of the things that Nussbaum believes should include these two capabilities it does not mean that they do not mean to secure the living status and the capability as such. Yemen’s PRSP focuses more on creating work possibilities and creating a better working economy. It might be that they believe this will in turn create better living conditions and adequate nutrition. Both of the countries have taken the two capabilities into account in their PRSP, even if Nussbaum’s description of it is not followed to the letter.

4.3 Bodily Integrity & Practical Reason

Nussbaum:

Bodily integrity for Nussbaum means being physically secure, with rights over one’s own body, and not to be forced to lose capacity for sexual satisfaction or be forced to conceive or bear children. Additionally, she believes that being able to move freely from place to place, to be secured against violent assault, and for choice in matters of reproduction, are a part of the bodily integrity capability. The capability of practical reasoning includes being able to interact well with other people, and to imagine and empathize with their situation and having the social basis for self-respect and non humiliation by not being subject to discrimination on the grounds of race

⁶² Republic of Yemen: *Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper*, p. 72

⁶³ World Bank www.worldbank.org

⁶⁴ *ibid*

and sex. Additionally, Nussbaum believes that being able to form a conception of the good and to engage in critical reflection for the planning of one's life is important. This is believed to entail protection for the liberty of conscience and religious observance.

Nussbaum believes family to be "precious but not private" and believes that the world community should protect individual liberties of people, including their right to choose to marry, develop a family, and associated rights. But the protection of human capabilities of family members is always paramount. Finding a new approach to the family that is both respectful and provides liberty and protection towards the capabilities of children should be a priority of the global public sphere, as it should be with domestic political debate in each nation.⁶⁵

Madagascar and Yemen:

The Malagasy PRSP states that women have limited access to participation in public life and the private sector and, therefore, prescribes that "participation of women in public problem solving, decision making and management will be substantially increased; and women's rights will be promoted and protected." This will be done by integrating gender issues in all the policies, plans, and development programs, supporting the access of women to economic opportunities, reducing the abuse of women in all its manifestations: physical, sexual and psychological, and eliminating traditional practices that negatively affect women.⁶⁶ Additionally, differences between genders, social categories, regions, urban and rural divides will be diminished, in school.⁶⁷

Yemen states that teaching girls is an important factor in the improvement of the maternal and infant health and nutritional conditions and in the reduction of the rate of fertility, aside from its role in bringing about change in the position of women in the society. Therefore, education has been placed as a central factor for equality in society.⁶⁸ Yemen recognizes that although there are "several factors that limit the participation of women, such as the prevalence of negative social and cultural values of life due to nurturing that focuses on traditional misconceptions with respect to the role of women and the poor application of effective laws and legislation on women which are essentially based on equality of both sexes."⁶⁹

Both Madagascar and Yemen prioritise family planning. This is mainly due to the rapid growth of the population in both countries. This puts added strain on national and local

⁶⁵ Nussbaum, Martha C, *Frontiers of Justice: Disability, Nationality, Species Membership*, p. 322

⁶⁶ Madagascar: *Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper*, p. 112

⁶⁷ *Ibid*, p. 53

⁶⁸ Republic of Yemen: *Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper*, p. 88

⁶⁹ *Ibid*, p. 23

resources including the environment, food supply and infrastructure needs. The goal of the Madagascan PRSP is to “reduce the average size of the Malagasy family to improve the well-being of each family member, the community and the nation.” To do this the Malagasy government will increase access and provision of contraceptives, provide educational programs to men, women and youth, and specifically reduce unwanted teenage pregnancies through family planning services.⁷⁰ Likewise, Yemen has the specific goal of controlling population growth in keeping with the available resources and with the needs of development, and thus plans to reduce the population growth rate to 3% by 2005 and the curtailment of internal migration to the cities. They plan to do this by expanding “reproductive health and family planning services in rural areas, educate men on the methods of family planning and develop their practice of such methods and support the voluntary efforts in providing family planning services.”⁷¹

Analysis:

Threats to bodily integrity, in form of violent assault might not be placed as a priority in the PRSPs probably due to already existing laws and regulations for that matter. On the other hand, gender equality is mentioned in the papers, specifically Madagascar’s which emphasizes the need to reduce the abuse of women in all its manifestations: physical, sexual and psychological, and eliminate traditional practices that negatively affect women.⁷² Even though, the situation for women in Yemen is “particularly dire”⁷³, they do not mention the abolishment of traditional practices that negatively affects women. Instead, in the concern of family planning, they emphasize that men should be educated in the family planning process. Now, the word men might even include women (as it does in the American constitution where “all men are equal”), but it is not for us to determine. Problems within families are usually, according to Nussbaum, associated with suffering and with inequalities in resources and opportunities, education deprivations, the failure of work to be recognized as work, and insults to bodily integrity.⁷⁴ However, adult freedom of association still supplies substantial limits to state interference with family life.⁷⁵

⁷⁰ Madagascar: *Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper*, p. 77

⁷¹ Republic of Yemen: *Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper*, p. 86

⁷² Madagascar: *Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper*, p. 112

⁷³ World Bank www.worldbank.org

⁷⁴ *Ibid*, p. 290

⁷⁵ Nussbaum, Martha C, *Frontiers of Justice: Disability, Nationality, Species Membership*, p. 212

What we can determine, however, is that the capability associated with practical reasoning is hard for a policy-maker to include and implement. For how shall the state make sure that their citizens have the right moral knowledge? Both Madagascar and Yemen's discussions about family planning can be seen as a supportive aspect of the capability of practical reasoning. Practical reasoning can also be connected to education which will be discussed in the next section.

4.4 Emotions, Affiliation, Senses, Imagination, and Thought

Nussbaum:

Being able to use the senses, imagination, think and reason, and to do this in a truly human way by being adequately educated, informed and free from repression, is another important capability according to Nussbaum. Education should by no means be limited, illiteracy should not exist and basic mathematics and scientific training should be provided to all citizens. Nussbaum believes imagination and thought in connection with experiencing and producing works and events of one's own choice, religious, literary, musical, and so forth, to be important aspects of a dignified life. Nussbaum stresses the need for people to "use one's mind in ways protected by guarantees of freedom of expression with respect to both political and artistic speech, and freedom of religious exercise." Additionally, humans should be able to have pleasurable experiences and to avoid unnatural pain.⁷⁶

According to Nussbaum, being able to live with others, being able to show empathy and to engage in various forms of social interaction is important for human beings to live their life with dignity. To feel empathy is important because it protects institutions that constitute and nourish such forms of affiliation, and also protects freedom of assembly and political speech. Additionally, having the social basis of self-respect, being able to be treated as a dignified being whose worth is equal to that of others. This entails enforcement of non-discrimination on the basis of race, sex, sexual orientation, ethnicity, caste, religion, national origin⁷⁷

Madagascar and Yemen:

Both Yemen and Madagascar want to develop their entire educational system. Madagascar wants to develop a wider and more developed school, from pre-school to university level.⁷⁸ One of the goals is that the "consolidation and the sustainability of knowledge, acquired competences as well

⁷⁶ Nussbaum, Martha C, *Frontiers of Justice: Disability, Nationality, Species Membership*, p. 76

⁷⁷ Ibid, p. 77

⁷⁸ Madagascar: *Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper*, p. 52

as literacy will be guaranteed.”⁷⁹ In addition, they aim to increase school capacities especially in vulnerable zones, through the development of school infrastructures and the training and the recruitment of new teachers.⁸⁰ Yemen, on the other hand, focuses on four basic priorities:

“(i) improvement of the educational environment; (ii) improvement of the management of the sector and the orientation towards decentralization; (iii) priority to basic education; and (iv) focus on the education of girls, which in turn will raise the overall enrolment rate.”⁸¹

Madagascar, as a country with enormous cultural diversity, benefits from a large number of cultural inheritances: traditions, music, dance, literature, architecture, costumes, craft industry and habits. However, many forms of the culture are in danger due to a lack of care and support. The Malagasy PRSP highlights the importance and the worth of the heritage and cultural traditions which they aim to honour and safeguard. The PRSP aims to secure the nation’s culture, tradition and art by “organize multicultural events that encourage dialogue, sharing of culture and build pride.”⁸² The Malagasy PRSP aims for their citizens to be prouder of their country by decreasing the misunderstandings and conflicts between the diversity of the ethnic groups in the country. Its goal is to unite their citizens and make them feel more responsible through affording them participation in all aspects of political, economic and social life. In this way they hope that the diversity of groups will be regarded as an asset in the nation’s governmental problem solving processes, the private sector and civil society. This will be done by improving the existing national events to ensure they promote and celebrate national solidarity, and harness the common values and aspirations that are shared by all Malagasy.⁸³ These aims and priorities can be connected to the capabilities of practical reason, and can inspire empathy for other people.

Yemen, on the contrary, does not mention cultural diversity or the need for cultural understanding. However, they highlight the need for religious awareness by prioritising the spreading of awareness among religious scholars, sermonizers, and by providing guides on population issues; by creating positive awareness among them on such issues and preparing guidelines for sermonizers. Additionally, this development of awareness should targeted at young people in order to “enhance the role of boy and girl scouts in spreading awareness on family planning, by including population issues within the activities of boy and girl scouts.” Lastly, they

⁷⁹ Madagascar: *Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper*, p. 53

⁸⁰ Ibid

⁸¹ Republic of Yemen: *Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper*, p. 77

⁸² Madagascar: *Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper*, p. 108

⁸³ Ibid, p. 110

aim to train their armed forces in morale guidance and to spread population awareness among the armed forces personnel.⁸⁴

Analysis:

Nussbaum highlights the importance of humans to be able to have,

“attachments to things and people outside of ourselves, to lose those who love and care for us, to grieve at their absence; in general, to love, to grieve, to experience longing, gratitude, and justified anger. Supporting this capability mean supporting forms of human association that can be shown to be crucial in their development”.⁸⁵

This capability is not easily illustrated by the states writing a PRSP. While, on one hand, education can be argued to provide the tools for developing reason, thought and imagination, these capabilities can be seen as clearly individualistic and, therefore, can be developed in different ways. It can, therefore, be argued that Nussbaum’s approach is a social analysis that makes strong assumptions about how the institutions of state and civil society operate. States might be able to provide education for their citizens, but the capabilities of emotions, sense, imagination and thought are very much a combined result of family, environment and other experiences a person may have. Yemen and Madagascar focus on education as a way to develop their citizen’s capabilities. Family planning, as discussed above, can also be seen as a factor, which can be observed where the state tries to develop the individual’s capability to be a parent and to develop sense, thought and emotions.

Nussbaum highlights the necessity in a dignified life for literacy, mathematical knowledge or an appreciation of music.⁸⁶ Nussbaum’s argumentation provides a universal social analysis which may be correct in certain places and times but also assumes everyone needs literacy and numeracy to live a dignified life. It can be argued that literacy is not an intrinsic value necessary for the flourishing of the senses, imagination, and thoughts or for demonstrating practical reasoning because this can be done in other ways if the society is not built in the same ways as a contemporary western society. Meanwhile, literacy might help in the process of human development, but to use the assumption that those without literacy are not living a dignified life is to grossly generalise.⁸⁷

⁸⁴ Republic of Yemen: *Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper*, p. 86

⁸⁵ Nussbaum, Martha C, *Frontiers of Justice: Disability, Nationality, Species Membership*, p. 76-77

⁸⁶ Charusheela, S., *Social analysis and the capabilities approach: a limit to Martha Nussbaum’s universalist ethics*, p. 1140-1141

⁸⁷ *Ibid*, p. 1142

4.5 Other species

Nussbaum:

Nussbaum highly regards the right of humans to be able to live with concern for the natural world such as plants, animals and the world of nature. She believes it is important for dignity in this area to be protected.⁸⁸

Madagascar and Yemen:

Madagascar prioritizes the environment and has many goals for the survival of their environment. Among other thing, they wish to keep the forest they have.⁸⁹ Yemen, likewise, strives to “enhance natural resources management and preserve the environment through involving beneficiaries and employing the poor in environmental projects, and expand women and youths role in development.”⁹⁰ However, none of the PRSPs mention nonhuman creatures as a part of their priority lists.

Analysis:

The environment has come to occupy increased space in the international political sphere. Therefore, that the environment should be a part of the PRSPs’ priorities is obvious. However, the nonhuman creatures can be argued to involve the nature as such and therefore there should be goals and aims to protect them as well. However, in Nussbaum’s take of capabilities she focuses on humanity’s individual relationship to the nature. Than individual relationship might not be for the states to promote but for the individuals themselves to establish.

4.6 Play

Nussbaum:

Nussbaum believes that play and laughter and enjoyment of recreational activity is one of the central human capabilities.⁹¹ Play enhances the imagination, which is a ground step in the establishment of reason, thought and empathy.

Madagascar and Yemen:

⁸⁸ Nussbaum, Martha C, *Frontiers of Justice: Disability, Nationality, Species Membership*, p. 77

⁸⁹ Madagascar: *Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper*, p. 101

⁹⁰ Republic of Yemen: *Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper*, p. 106

⁹¹ Nussbaum, Martha C, *Frontiers of Justice: Disability, Nationality, Species Membership*, p. 77

Madagascar uses sports as a part of their priority lists. The Madagascan PRSP prioritises the participation of young people in competition to “sharpen the sense of respect for rules, develop team work and instil discipline” through sports activity. They believe the

“spirit and mentality shaped through sports ethics and extra-school activities will lead to a better way of life for the Malagasy young people. Participation of young people in youth associations, sports programs and community organizations will contribute to smoother job-entry, job stability and civic responsibility. The sports ethics will motivate fair and constructive competition, in all areas of the life of the Nation (politics, economy and society).”⁹²

Yemen, on the other hand, does not mention sports or play as a part of its priorities. However, they mention the existence of boy and girl scouts which can indicate that they are aware of the importance of play in the learning process of youths.

Analysis:

Play is highly represented in the Madagascan PRSP in the form of a priority to develop sport activities for youth. Play is something that might not be a priority for a developing country when developing strategies for development. Yemen has not mentioned this aspect as it might be secondary consideration in their development. None of the PRSPs mentioned laughter as an important aspect in their development. Nussbaum suggests that laughter is important in all ages. The question is how a state shall be able to provide play and laughter for their poor citizens or if it is even a topic which should be dealt with by governments.

4.7 Control over one’s environment

Nussbaum:

To be able to participate in political processes and to have possessions and seek employment is seen as a central human capability of Nussbaum.⁹³ From a political angle, citizens should be able to participate effectively in political choices that govern one’s life; they should also have the right of political participation, with its concomitant protections of free speech and association. From a material angle, Nussbaum argues that all people should be able to hold property (both land and movable goods), and;

“having property rights on an equal basis with others, having the rights to seek employment on an equal basis with others; having the freedom from unwarranted search and seizure. In

⁹² Madagascar: *Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper*, p. 60

⁹³ Nussbaum, Martha C, *Women and Human Development: The capability approach*, 78-80

work, being able to work as a human being, exercising practical reason and entering into meaningful relationships of mutual recognition with other workers.”⁹⁴

Madagascar and Yemen:

The Malagasy PRSP aims to have a high level of citizen participation and interest in their community and nation. Therefore, the government will, among other things, promote citizen participation to ensure a responsive and accountable public service and to reduce abuses.⁹⁵ They aim to develop mechanisms for citizen training and participation in the governance of their local, regional and national communities. To do this they attempt, among other things, to “actively encourage the values of experimentation, risk-taking and action learning” and “encourage and promote learning practices throughout the country that include active citizen participation and dialogue”.⁹⁶ Yemen focuses on supporting elections to expand the democratic participation by “less fortunate segments including women, arsing public awareness on the importance of election and participation.”⁹⁷ Additionally, Yemen aims to adhere to democratic practice until it becomes part of “the daily behaviour of the Yemeni citizen.”⁹⁸ This shall be done by encouraging awareness relevant to citizen rights and responsibilities, involvement of political parties and civil society organizations to bear its responsibilities and take its role, and, lastly, to ensure periodical elections and freedom of the press.⁹⁹

Yemen’s PRSP does not mention property beyond public property. Madagascar, on the other hand, places priorities on fighting theft, to make an inventory, restore, and digitize land property documents and develop land property certificates to allow their allocation in guarantee.¹⁰⁰

Analysis:

Political planning requires choices that influence people’s lives and basic level rights such as adequate nutrition, education of the faculties, protection of bodily integrity, liberty of speech, religious self-expression and so forth. According to Nussbaum, “an intuitive argument must be made that a life without a sufficient level of each of these entitlements is a life so reduced that it

⁹⁴ Nussbaum, Martha C, *Frontiers of Justice: Disability, Nationality, Species Membership*, p. 77-78

⁹⁵ Madagascar: *Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper*, p. 109

⁹⁶ Ibid, p. 36

⁹⁷ Republic of Yemen: *Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper*, p. 100

⁹⁸ Ibid

⁹⁹ Ibid, p. 109

¹⁰⁰ Madagascar: *Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper*, p. 28+64

is not compatible with human dignity.”¹⁰¹ In other words, the capability for control over one’s environment is essentially valued meaning that it should be present in the PRSP due to the participatory assessment process which built the paper. Both Yemen and Madagascar stress the need for citizens to participate in politics. They both emphasize, beyond what have been presented above, infrastructural improvements and economic growth which is thought to attract foreign investors and develop employment. The reason Yemen does not prioritize property is unknown. It is important to keep in mind that these priorities must have been made in accordance with the participatory assessment process, which leads us to the assumption that the citizens of Yemen did not express the need for stronger property rights.

Martha Nussbaum’s liberalistic standpoints clearly shine through in her approach to this capability as the right to property is highlighted. Perhaps public rather than private property is more important to the citizens of Madagascar and Yemen.

4.8 Summary of Analysis and the Dignity Aspect

The problem with the dignity concept in Martha Nussbaum’s list of central human capabilities is that it understates the conceptual complexity of dignity. Meanwhile, as seen with the priorities of the Madagascan and Yemen PRSP, the capabilities of life and health are highly prioritized. These are the basic needs of life itself and are therefore essential principles for a dignified human life. However, Nussbaum wishes shelter and adequate nutrition to be a part of the priorities, which Yemen does not appear to support. Meanwhile, they might have in mind that their focus on creating jobs and foreign investors will create better shelters and food security for their citizens. As we can agree that life and health is an essential principle for a dignified life the definition of human dignity is affected by the individual idea of what a dignified life is. That said, the practical expression of human dignity lies in the daily human experience and in the relationship between individuals, the state, and society.¹⁰² Therefore, a common and unified definition of the concept is difficult to obtain and even perhaps unlikely to exist.

Since Nussbaum argues that her list of central capabilities is overlapping (universal), the essence of her capabilities should be found in the Madagascan and Yemen PRSP. Bodily integrity was not found as a specific priority in the papers, which might have been because it is already espoused in laws and regulations against violence and sexual assaults. Madagascar expressed the

¹⁰¹ Nussbaum, Martha C, *Frontiers of Justice: Disability, Nationality, Species Membership*, p. 278-279

¹⁰² Ritschle, Dietrich, “Can ethical Marxism be derived from theological concepts of human dignity?” in Kretzmer & Klein *The Concept of Human Dignity in Human Rights Discourse*, p. 90

need to abolish traditions which has a negative affect on women. Yemen did not specify the need for such abolishment. However, they did express the need for equality and special attention to be placed on changing the position of women in society.

Nussbaum's idea of fixed capabilities for the realization of a dignified life can be argued to underlying set of assumptions about human nature that masquerades as universal. By deploying her vision of state policy as a universal normative idea she assumes that existing institutions can be understood by referring to the modern ideal. S. Charusheela believes this moral ideal to be set into the following steps: fully modern, incompletely modern, or not modern at all.¹⁰³ But what is modern per se? Nussbaum's list can be argued to be of such wide scope that a strict modern perspective does not have to be applied to it. For example, as seen in the case of Madagascar and Yemen, they mention all capabilities in one way or another. That is not to say, however, that Madagascar and Yemen are not modern states but rather that they all apply the capabilities in different manners. Those capabilities they did not express in their priority lists can be argued to be upheld by other functions and priorities in the lists. A reason for this is the list's interconnectedness. For example, thinking about care means thinking about a wide range of capabilities on the side of both the cared-for and the caregiver. For that reason, good care stimulates the senses, imagination, and thought; and involves support for capabilities of life, health, and bodily integrity. Additionally, it supports social and political affiliation, the capacity to play and enjoy life and control over one's material and political environment.¹⁰⁴ In other words, the broad and rather vague definitions of dignity make the capability approach universal because it means different things to each individual.

Meanwhile, states might find it hard to implement capabilities, such as emotion, because the state has a responsibility to let their citizens live their lives in freedom. Madagascar and Yemen did not mention how to uphold emotions, senses, and practical reason because these capabilities are very individualistic and depend on more things than simply their citizens having a good education, healthcare and shelter. The human life is more complex and every inch of our environment affects development of capabilities. Therefore, for the states to raise their citizens would not only be to interfere in people's personal lives but also undermining their citizens capabilities to, for example, raise their children. Nussbaum believes that there is not such a thing as personal life but rather that the state should interfere with every single human being to make sure that they live a dignified life. The question then is how far the states responsibility actually is

¹⁰³ Charusheela, S., *Social analysis and the capabilities approach: a limit to Martha Nussbaum's universalist ethics*, p. 1147-1148

¹⁰⁴ Nussbaum, Martha C, *Frontiers of Justice: Disability, Nationality, Species Membership*, p. 168-169

so it will not affect their citizens right to flourishing in a negative manner. As previously mentioned, the capability of play which in accordance to Nussbaum include laughter is a hard thing for a state to establish for a state can not be in control of their citizens happiness. If a state have the responsibility of perusing their citizens right to live in a dignified life the first thing the state have to do is to determined what a dignified life is, and if laughter actually is a part of it.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights describes human dignity to be the foundation of freedom, justice, and peace by its connection to worth, moral and personal value. In article 22 and 23 in the Universal Declaration refers to human dignity by using it as a measuring instrument for a certain quality of life. The idea is that rights and dignity will create equality of human beings.¹⁰⁵ Nussbaum uses the concept of human dignity in a similar light as she believes dignity to connected to justice which will create equality. The role for the state should, in that case be to secure justice for their citizens. However, the different concept of human dignity might be a problem as it is viewed as something important to uphold and has, obviously, strong influence on the human daily life. The four definitions of dignity presented in the introduction are represented in contemporary references to human dignity, especially in international treaties and the documents of human rights.¹⁰⁶ However, the wide range of definitions of dignity serves as a vague substitute for legal language¹⁰⁷ and in political policies. In other words, Nussbaum's list of central human capabilities are just one of many definitions of what a minimum criteria for a life lived in human dignity should look like.

¹⁰⁵ Ritschle, Dietrich, "Can ethical Marxism be derived from theological concepts of human dignity?" in Kretzmer & Klein *The Concept of Human Dignity in Human Rights Discourse*, p. 96-97 + 118

¹⁰⁶ Ibid, p. 97

¹⁰⁷ Ibid, p. 93

5 Conclusion

The Universal Declaration on Human Rights declares, as stated in the introduction, that there is a universal recognition of the concept of dignity. This thesis has presented the complexity of the concept of human dignity by analyzing if Martha Nussbaum's ten central human capabilities are presented in Madagascar and Yemen's PRSPs. The PRSP was chosen as a tool for this because of its participatory assessment process which means that the paper should be done in accordance with interviews with a wide range of stakeholders. This process has been widely criticized by their researches but this thesis has acknowledges but ignored this fact due to that the focus was on the capability approach and the concept of dignity rather than the PRSP. The result of the comparison between the PRSPs and the ten central capabilities was that all of the capabilities were presented in the PRSP but not all in accordance to what Nussbaum requirements. For example, within the capability of life Nussbaum argues that shelter is an important aspect which both PRSPs ignored. However, it can be argued that adequate shelter can be upheld with the other principles presented in the PRSPs. Therefore, as a conclusion, Nussbaum's list of ten capabilities was presented in the PRSPs but Nussbaum's criteria for what should be included within each capability was not universally adapted. Nussbaum's list was also criticized for generalising the concept on dignity. The conclusion was made that the wide range of definition of dignity presents a problem to Nussbaum's theory of a unified dignity line. However, as the capabilities was actually mentioned in one way or another in both of the PRSPs the list has common aspects. Consequently, there is a universal recognition of the concept of dignity, as the Universal Declaration states, but a lack of a unified definition.

5.1 Discussion

As this thesis questioned Martha Nussbaum's list of central human capabilities in relation to something as highly criticized as the PRSPs this thesis might not be accurate in accordance to the will of the citizens of Madagascar and Yemen. How the participatory assessment process has been done in the countries has not been analysed which might provide this thesis less credibility. However, this thesis aim was not to find the accurate will of the citizens of Yemen and Madagascar but to problematize Martha Nussbaum's list to get a wider understanding of the

complexity of the concept of dignity. A future research could be to interview a wide range of stakeholders to get an understanding of their beliefs of what a dignified life should include.

Human dignity and the concept of living a dignified life is a concept which is interpreted differently from person to person. A dignified life can, consequently, be viewed differently depending on the individual experience of dignity. There is no doubt that dignity plays a large role in our society and is important for human beings. Nussbaum creates a dignity line where, for example, people who cannot read are categorized as living an undignified life. Then we have made the assumption that all human beings need to literacy in their lives without actually making a social analysis of their will and their lives. Obviously, in our modern, western society literacy is an important aspect of life due to our literally surroundings. However, this is not necessarily the reality for all the worlds' citizens. All human beings have the right to education and the state should, as Nussbaum argues, have the responsibility to provide education to all their citizens. However, the state or policymakers should not categorize those who do not know how to read as living an undignified life because none but individual themselves have the power to define if they live an undignified life or not.

It can be argued that human dignity is a summary of human rights itself. Human dignity, if seen as a conclusion of human rights as such, is a core morally value which ought to be enforced since the rights are held by everybody and is, therefore, the universal moral status of human beings.¹⁰⁸ Human rights claims are then argued to be basic claims of justice which is built on the moral idea of dignity. Nussbaum states, "human rights have been understood in many different ways and can give the illusion of agreement where there is deep philosophical disagreement."¹⁰⁹ However, the same thing happens with her discussion of dignity as there is not unified definition of dignity. The concept is, therefore, also an illusion of agreement where there is actually a deep philosophical disagreement. However, it can be questioned if it is necessary to have a thin theory of the good in relation to human right. A universalistic approach might be generalizing even though, obviously, good health and life is aspects that all human beings need. However, there can be argued that a universal definition of dignity does not have to be identical interpreted to all human beings. Even if rights, or capabilities, are highlighted as universal they can be interpreted differently and therefore can be universal even if they are not identical interpreted. For example, the capability of control over one's environment might be interpreted in a political participatory

¹⁰⁸ Ashford, Elizabeth, "Duties Imposed by the Human Rights", in Pogge, Thomas (ed.), *Freedom from Poverty as a Human Right: Who owes what to the very poor?*, p. 184

¹⁰⁹ Nussbaum, Martha C, *Frontiers of Justice: Disability, Nationality, Species Membership*, p. 285

light or might been seen from a personal light where the individual believe that their property is the entire environment that they have to control. Both aspects do not have to be realized and a life does not have to undignified if not all the aspects Nussbaum believes should be presents are present.

Nussbaum's list of central capabilities are important aspects of life which all states should try to implement and provide for their citizens. However, the dignity concept is what should be questioned. If she had stated that her list was the minimum criteria for what she believed to be a good life rather than a dignified life this discussion would not exist. The important is not to judge or to place people in a category of undignified, which makes assumption about how life should be lived. People have lived for hundreds of years without the knowledge of literacy or political participation. Obviously, the definition of dignity must have changed during the period of hundreds of years as human beings constantly need to widen their morally imagination. But the concept of dignity has, with no doubt, always been individualistic. The answer to the question if there is a reasonable statement to say that Nussbaum's list of central human capacities equal a unified definition of dignity is then no, because dignity cannot be measured due to the lack of a clear definition.

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