

### **The role of agency and morality in dehumanization - an integrative perspective**

Dehumanization is defined as denying others human qualities or humanness in general. Dehumanization in action, can be illustrated through the following example. In an episode of the science fiction series Black Mirror, soldiers were equipped with an electronic chip that distorted their perception of an enemy group as zombie-like monsters. This enabled them to fight the enemy without regrets. Yet, when one soldier experienced disturbances in the device's functioning, he saw that the zombie-like creatures were in fact harmless civilians. This awareness significantly impeded his ability to hurt the enemy and sleep without combat trauma. Even though this example is fictitious, in real life dehumanization is still present, for example in contexts of war. Given how important and pervasive is the phenomenon of dehumanization, in this research project our aim is to study what are the reasons for dehumanizing others (Goal 1) and what can be done to reduce dehumanization. To achieve these goals, we propose a systematic multimethod investigation, conducted in collaboration with partners from Israel, Spain, and the United Kingdom.

In order to study reasons for dehumanizing others (Goal 1), we will examine whether the two most basic dimensions along which people evaluate other humans, that is agency and morality contribute to dehumanization. Agency pertains to goal-orientation and having control over one's actions whereas morality pertains to differentiating right from wrong. In the research conducted so far, there are however mixed results as to which dimension is more involved in dehumanization and this requires clarification in a systematic research. Also when looking at groups that are dehumanized there is a complex picture, because dehumanized groups are as different as the rich and the poor or victims and perpetrators in conflicts. This chaotic picture, however, can be organized by placing groups in two categories related to whether they are at a disadvantage or have an advantage over others in unequal social relations. On the one hand, victimized or disadvantaged groups experience low agency, such as limited choice related to basic life conditions for example housing, education, and medical options. Accordingly, groups facing economic or political disadvantage may be dehumanized due to their lower agency or capacity to control their situation. On the other hand, perpetrators of violence or groups taking advantage of others can be seen as having responsibility over their actions, and their morality can be questioned given that their actions are carried at someone else's expense. Accordingly, these groups can be dehumanized based on their lower morality. To examine these assumptions, we propose a multimethod research program comprising three different methodologies: 1) systematic literature review comprising a detailed analysis of all studies examining agency and morality in relation to dehumanization research, as well as a comprehensive classification of dehumanized groups to examine whether dehumanization of different groups can be classified based on their position in social inequality; 2) linguistic analyses of online newspapers and Twitter data which will allow us to determine whether groups varying in their position within a conflict or social hierarchy are described in language with different amount of agency, morality, and dehumanization references 3) experimental studies conducted in different countries and contexts that will test whether the groups position (advantaged vs. disadvantaged) corresponds to dehumanization because they are seen as less agentic (for disadvantaged groups) or less moral (for advantaged groups).

In order to examine interventions decreasing dehumanization (Goal 2), we will focus on disadvantaged groups, as they are the most likely victim of dehumanization tendencies. We will study whether increasing groups' agency - by saying that they are successful in their actions (in comparison to unsuccessful) will decrease their dehumanization. However, when a group becomes successful it can also be seen as threatening to the dominant group. Gaining agency means that the victim's voice is more likely to be heard, they might also address the moral responsibility of the perpetrators and demand recognition of the injustice caused to them. In order to decrease that threat we will provide participants with an opportunity to act morally in the future. Such intervention can alleviate the threat and make the dominant group more likely to help the disadvantaged group.

The proposed multimethod approach guarantees a wide outreach and broad impact for the suggested proposal. We plan to publish the outcomes of this project in at least five international high-impact journals and present at three conferences. In sum, we are confident that this project will affect the current knowledge of DH and inform future research and policy-making.