

## Migrant Women and Dehumanization<sup>1</sup>

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### Abstract

*Dehumanization refers to the process of perceiving an individual or a group as inferior by stripping them of human qualities. This process is rooted in the denial of identity and community membership of those subjected to dehumanization. It involves a tendency to view individuals not as independent beings but as less human entities that may pose a threat to society. Often associated with violence in the literature, dehumanization legitimizes mistreatment and aggression against those who are not regarded as fully human. Migrants and women are frequently subjected to dehumanization, and migrant women, situated at the intersection of these identities, often experience compounded forms of discrimination and exclusion. This study seeks to offer a comprehensive account of dehumanization and to explore the underlying mechanisms through which migrants and women are subjected to it, drawing on illustrative examples from existing literature. The study reflects on the interplay of migration, media, political discourse, migration policies, empathy, social integration, and psychological resilience, with a particular focus on the experiences of migrant women in media representation and the labor market. Although dehumanization has emerged as a critical theme in migration research, the specific experiences of migrant women remain markedly underexplored. By addressing this gap, the study aims to enrich the existing literature and foster greater academic engagement with the issue.*

**Keywords:** *dehumanization, migration, migrant women, women, intersectionality.*

### Introduction

Dehumanization—defined as the denial of an individual or group’s humanity—entails perceiving others as lacking fundamental human qualities, which can legitimize harmful actions driven by emotions such as hatred, lust, or indifference, and may manifest at both individual and systemic levels (Açıkgöz, 2024; Haslam and Loughnan, 2014). This study addresses the dehumanization of migrant women through a theoretical lens, offering a synthesis of perspectives and frameworks found in the existing literature.

The phenomenon of dehumanization began to be systematically examined within the field of social psychology in the final quarter of the twentieth century. It was initially conceptualized by Kelman (1976) as the denial of victims’ “identity” and “community membership. Kelman

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(1976) argued that the legitimization of violence becomes possible when an individual's sense of individuality and capacity for empathy within interpersonal relationships is denied. Expanding on this perspective, Bar-Tal (1989) defined dehumanization as a set of collectively held delegitimizing beliefs that portray a group as subhuman or demonic. Although often grounded in ethnic conflict and hatred, such beliefs serve to rationalize intergroup conflict, justify ingroup aggression, and reinforce perceptions of ingroup superiority. Schwartz and Struch (1989) defined dehumanization as a process in which individuals are perceived as lacking prosocial values or as holding values fundamentally incompatible with those of the perceiver's ingroup. Similarly, Opatow (1990) conceptualized dehumanization as a form of moral exclusion, whereby individuals are categorically excluded from the moral community, resulting in indifference to their suffering and tolerance of their unjust treatment. Bandura's (1999) theory of moral disengagement further builds on this notion, suggesting that individuals develop internal rationalizations to justify harmful actions such as violence and discrimination. Within this framework, dehumanization functions as a core mechanism that enables moral disengagement by allowing individuals to detach from ethical standards. Building on the accounts of Opatow (1990) and Bandura (1999), dehumanization entails the portrayal of the perceived "other" as morally inferior, effectively diminishing feelings of self-reproach and empathic concern that might otherwise inhibit aggressive or harmful behavior.

The concept of dehumanization was later expanded through Leyens and colleagues' (2001) theory of infrahumanization, which focused on subtle distinctions within everyday social dynamics, and subsequently systematized through Haslam's (2006) dual model of dehumanization. The stereotype content model developed by Fiske and colleagues (2002) made significant contributions to this literature by classifying intergroup perceptions along the dimensions of warmth and competence. These theoretical frameworks help us understand how dehumanization takes shape within both interpersonal and intergroup contexts (Esses et al., 2013; Haslam and Loughnan, 2014).

Although dehumanization has recently gained increasing attention in social psychology and related disciplines, the existing body of literature on the topic remains relatively limited. Notably, there is a marked scarcity of studies focusing specifically on migrants, and migrant women in particular. It is now widely recognized that both verbal and physical violence directed at migrants and women often stems from deeply rooted negative perceptions and attitudes toward these groups (Kteily and Bruneau, 2017; Wackerhausen, 2023). This review article aims to contribute to the field by offering a review of conceptual framework grounded in contemporary theoretical perspectives on dehumanization. It seeks to synthesize recent research exploring the nexus between migration and dehumanization, and to examine how the intersectionality of gender and migrant status shapes dehumanization processes. In doing so, it highlights the broader social and psychological challenges confronting these two marginalized groups.

### **Contemporary Approaches to Dehumanization**

While early definitions of dehumanization emphasized varying dimensions, the concept is generally understood as arising in contexts of conflict—such as war and genocide—where it serves to rationalize and legitimize acts of violence. Dehumanization facilitates inhumane treatment, diminishes empathy, and is conceptualized as a profound attitudinal and cognitive process that transgresses both moral and psychological boundaries (Haslam and Loughnan, 2014). In contemporary discourse, it remains closely linked to issues of race, ethnicity, and



migration (Haslam and Loughnan, 2014; Haslam and Stratemeyer, 2016). Furthermore, dehumanization has been identified as a contributing factor in a range of violent and exploitative practices, including killing, rape, harassment, and human trafficking (Harris, 2017). According to Wackerhausen (2023), dehumanization need not be expressed solely through direct physical violence. Rather, it can also occur through the symbolic reduction of individuals' humanity—such as likening them to animals or inanimate objects and subjecting them to verbal degradation—particularly within the context of social media. From this perspective, Wackerhausen highlights that dehumanization extends beyond extreme acts of violence and is also embedded in everyday life. The systematic stripping away of human qualities from individuals or groups is not confined to overt brutality; it is perpetuated through routine representational practices in digital spaces, thereby contributing to the normalization of perceptual dehumanization directed at socially marginalized populations.

### ***The Model of Infrahumanization***

Leyens and colleagues (2001) identified that individuals have a tendency to perceive outgroup members as less human than ingroup members even in the absence of explicit hostility, defining this form of dehumanization as infrahumanization. This definition evokes the concept of ethnocentrism, which refers to the prioritization of one's own cultural and social values and the resulting discrimination against others (Tayınmak, 2020). In infrahumanization, the diminished perception of an outgroup's humanity is linked to the belief that they lack traits such as intelligence, language, or uniquely human emotional characteristics. Accordingly, traits that can also be exhibited by animals are classified as primary emotions, while those perceived as exclusive to humans are considered secondary emotions (Demoulin et al., 2009). Infrahumanization acts as a driving force for discrimination. The less human a group is perceived to be, the greater the degree of discrimination directed against it (Bruneau, Kteily, and Laustsen, 2018). The most explicit instances of dehumanization occur when individuals or groups are directly likened to non-human beings or objects through linguistic expressions. Infrahumanization is particularly evident in the negative discourse employed by media outlets toward migrants. It has been demonstrated that the use of descriptors such as "vermin" and "swarm" for refugees on social media positions migrants as beings devoid of fundamental human emotions and frames them as societal threats (Alikılıç, Gökaliç, and Alikılıç, 2021).

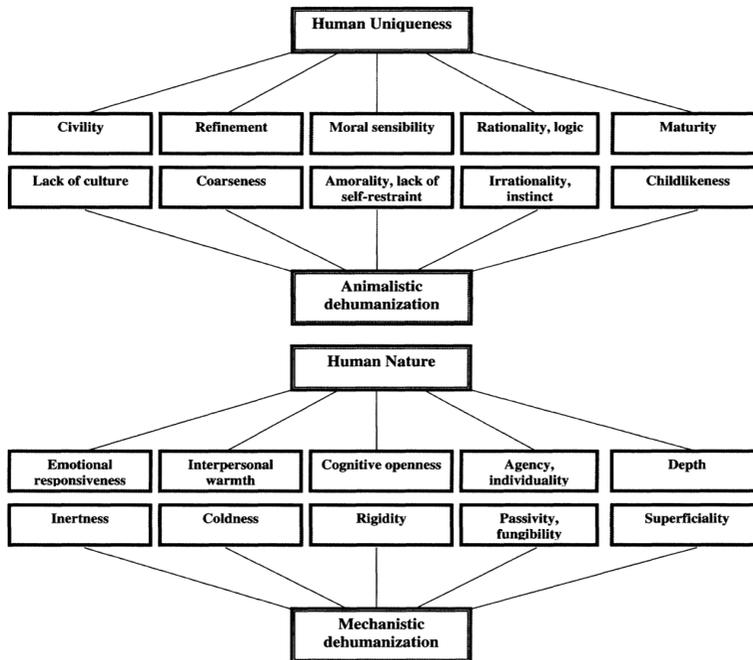
### ***Dual Model of Dehumanization***

Haslam's (2006) dual model of dehumanization is one of the most widely used theoretical frameworks for understanding the phenomenon of dehumanization. This model is based on the conceptualization of human attributes along two fundamental dimensions: human uniqueness and human nature. Human uniqueness refers to traits such as intelligence, language, and cognitive abilities that distinguish humans from animals, while human nature encompasses qualities such as emotionality, vitality, and warmth that differentiate humans from inanimate objects (Haslam, 2006).

According to Haslam's model (see Figure 1), dehumanization is divided into two main categories: animalistic dehumanization and mechanistic dehumanization. Animalistic dehumanization is characterized by the perception of individuals or groups as lacking refined cognitive abilities, politeness, moral sensitivity, self-control, and higher cognitive functioning. Individuals subjected to this form of dehumanization are often perceived as instinct-driven, thoughtless beings operating on basic impulses. Such individuals may be directly or indirectly

associated with animals, regarded as undeveloped, and evaluated through feelings of contempt or disgust (Haslam and Loughnan, 2014). Animalistic dehumanization is particularly evident in contexts of ethnic hostility and intergroup conflict, where outgroups are perceived as possessing fixed, immutable, and innate traits. A historical example of this phenomenon can be found in the Holocaust, where Jewish people were likened to rats to strip them of their humanity (Haslam, 2006; Haslam and Loughnan, 2014).

**Figure 1.** The connections established by Haslam (2006) between concepts of humanness and the corresponding forms of dehumanization.



Haslam, N. (2006). Dehumanization: An integrative review. *Personality and social psychology review*, 10(3), 257. [https://doi.org/10.1207/s15327957pspr1003\\_4](https://doi.org/10.1207/s15327957pspr1003_4)

Mechanistic dehumanization, on the other hand, refers to the perception of individuals as lacking human nature attributes such as emotionality, warmth, cognitive openness, agency, and depth. This perception often leads to individuals being seen as cold, rigid, shallow, and passive. Although it does not explicitly involve comparison to machines, mechanistic dehumanization supports the perception of individuals as objects or automatons (Haslam, 2006). This phenomenon frequently arises in interpersonal or intergroup contexts and becomes particularly prominent in fields where instrumental efficiency is prioritized, such as medicine and technology. Examples of this include patients being regarded merely as physical cases in medical settings or women being objectified. Mechanistic dehumanization may hinder individuals from developing empathy or moral sensitivity (Haslam and Loughnan, 2014; Haslam, 2006). In this context, when doctors perceive patients solely as functional entities, combined with the objectifying potential of technology, it can lead to the weakening of human



relationships. Such approaches toward different ethnic groups can also result in profound social conflicts within intergroup relations (Haslam and Stratemeyer, 2016).

### ***Stereotype Content Model***

The stereotype content model is built upon existing theories of prejudice and social exclusion. Harris and Fiske (2006) define dehumanization differently from other models, describing it as a failure to spontaneously engage in the social cognitive processes necessary to recognize another individual as a social being when assessing their mental states. They propose that social groups are evaluated along a two-dimensional framework based on their perceived intentions to help or harm (warmth) and their perceived ability or competence to enact these intentions. Through the interaction of these two dimensions, outgroups are categorized into four distinct clusters (Fiske et al., 2002).

Groups characterized by high warmth and high competence are typically perceived as ingroup members; these groups elicit feelings of pride and admiration because they are assumed to be both well-intentioned and successful. For example, middle-class professionals or military heroes who constitute the majority within a society may fall into this category. Groups associated with low warmth but high competence, on the other hand, are often attributed to wealthy elites, CEOs, or ethnic groups perceived as successful yet arrogant. Although these groups are admired for their achievements, perceptions of insincerity or opportunism can evoke feelings of jealousy and resentment. Those categorized as high warmth but low competence are perceived as well-intentioned but lacking sufficient ability. For instance, elderly individuals, people with disabilities, or children may be viewed in this way, typically eliciting feelings of pity and sympathy. Finally, groups attributed with low warmth and low competence are seen as both malevolent and inept, thus becoming the target of strong negative emotions such as disgust, exclusion, and contempt. This category often includes homeless individuals, drug addicts, or marginalized subcultures.

It is proposed that extreme outgroups located in the low warmth-low competence quadrant elicit feelings of disgust, contempt, and resentment, leading to experiences of dehumanization. Perceiving these groups as less than human results in the most severe form of prejudice (Harris and Fiske, 2006).

### ***Dehumanization in the Context of Objectification***

Although the concept of objectification is not explicitly situated within dominant models of dehumanization, the seven dimensions it encompasses offer a valuable lens for examining dehumanization processes. Objectification refers to the state of being perceived as less than human due to the negation of an individual's personhood (Açıkgöz, 2024; Nussbaum, 1995). However, not all instances of objectification necessarily constitute dehumanization; for an act to be considered dehumanizing, individuals must be deprived of specific human attributes (Heinämaa and Jardine, 2021). In this regard, Nussbaum (1995) identifies seven dimensions through which objectification can be understood. The first of these, instrumentality, involves perceiving a person solely as a means to serve someone else's purposes or goals. Denial of autonomy entails the failure to recognize an individual as an independent agent capable of making decisions. Inertness refers to perceiving an individual as lacking the capacity for self-initiated action. Fungibility involves viewing an individual as easily replaceable with similar or different individuals. Violability considers the individual as a being whose physical or psychological integrity can be disregarded, divided, or harmed. Ownership treats the

individual as an object to be owned, bought, or sold, thereby ignoring their fundamental rights. Finally, denial of subjectivity refers to the disregard of an individual's feelings, thoughts, and experiences, effectively negating their inner life. Nussbaum emphasizes that these dimensions are particularly prevalent in the context of women being sexually objectified by men and highlights the critical importance of the surrounding context.

According to Bartky (1990), sexual objectification arises when a woman's sexual functions or body parts are isolated from her personhood and treated merely as instruments. In the context of pervasive everyday sexism, it is well documented that women are subjected to sexual objectification significantly more often than men. Media and popular culture frequently exemplify this phenomenon, portraying women in ways that emphasize their bodies or sexuality at the expense of their individuality and agency. (Moradi and Huang, 2008).

### **The Relationship Between Migration and Dehumanization**

Migration movements today have reached unprecedented levels in human history, becoming one of the most prominent social phenomena of the modern era as a reflection of globalization and international dynamics. According to the International Organization for Migration's (IOM) 2024 World Migration Report, the number of international migrants worldwide has reached 281 million (World Migration Report, 2024). The relationship between migration and dehumanization is shaped within the complex structure of intergroup interactions and is fueled by social processes such as prejudice, exclusion, and discrimination.

Social perceptions of migration and migrants vary significantly depending on socioeconomic and political conditions and are often constructed around a sense of perceived threat (Başoğlu, 2023; Koser, 2009). These threat-based perceptions pave the way for the othering and dehumanization of migrants through mechanisms such as viewing them merely as a labor force or exposing them to hate speech and violent attitudes (Esses et al., 2013; Haslam, 2006; Leyens et al., 2011). For instance, describing migrants with metaphors such as "invading vermin" or "infectious diseases" represents examples of animalistic dehumanization, while portraying them as functional tools like work machines exemplifies mechanistic dehumanization (Haslam and Stratemeyer, 2016).

A review of the literature on the subject reveals that global studies conducted thus far have primarily examined the relationship between dehumanization and perceptions of migrants through three main focal points: the role of the media, political discourse and migration policies, and empathy, social integration, and psychological resilience.

### ***The Role of the Media in Dehumanization and Perceptions of Migrants***

Dehumanization has become a central theme in contemporary migration discourse, with media representations playing a critical role in shaping public attitudes toward migrants and refugees. A growing body of research demonstrates how media framing significantly influences societal perceptions of these groups. For instance, Martikainen and Sakki (2021), through an analysis of newspaper photographs in Finland, found that refugees are frequently visually dehumanized via strategies such as massification—portraying individuals as indistinguishable crowds—and pacification, depicting them solely as passive victims or threatening masses. Similarly, studies of Spanish media have shown that migrants are often framed as a "natural disaster" or an economic "burden," thus perpetuating harmful stereotypes (Montagut and Moragas-Fernández, 2020). Comparable patterns have been observed in the



United Kingdom and across Europe, where media frequently construct migrants as criminals or invaders (Costello and Hodson, 2009; Bugge, 2019).

Social media platforms further amplify these dehumanizing trends. Wahrer et al. (2024) found that 66% of migration-related tweets contained language that was explicitly dehumanizing or evoked feelings of disgust, thereby reinforcing anti-migrant sentiment. Markowitz and Slovic (2021) further demonstrated that such rhetoric disproportionately evokes negative emotional responses, particularly among male audiences, intensifying hostile attitudes toward migrants.

### ***Political Discourse and Migration Policies***

Political discourse plays a critical role in shaping both migration policies and societal attitudes toward migrants. In American political rhetoric, the use of dehumanizing language, particularly through disease metaphors, has been shown to heighten anti-immigrant sentiments (Utych, 2017). Similarly, threat-based rhetoric has been prominently utilized to justify restrictive migration policies, a trend evident not only in the United States but also across Europe (Kteily et al., 2015; Hodson and Dhont, 2023)

Louis et al. (2013) found that individuals with a strong sense of national identity are more likely to perceive migrants as threats, a perception that often translates into support for exclusionary policies. Social dominance orientation has also been identified as a significant predictor of anti-immigrant attitudes, with individuals high in social dominance showing greater support for punitive migration policies (Hartley and Fleay, 2017; Francis, 2018). It has been revealed that migrant workers in Hungary are often dehumanized by being referred to as "machines" or "robots," reflecting their economic exploitation (Jankó et al., 2024). These findings highlight the interaction between political discourse, economic interests, and dehumanization, emphasizing the need for policies that address structural inequalities.

### ***Empathy, Social Integration, and Psychological Resilience***

Empathy and social integration are pivotal in mitigating dehumanization and fostering positive attitudes toward migrants. Bağcı (2023) demonstrated that positive intergroup contact significantly enhances migrant integration while reducing prejudice. Similarly, Bruneau et al. (2018) found that lower levels of empathy are strongly associated with increased dehumanization. Social support mechanisms have also been shown to alleviate psychological distress and contribute to improved well-being among migrants (Hafsa, 2024). Conversely, heightened disgust sensitivity has been linked to stronger endorsement of anti-immigrant attitudes and policies (Dalsklev and Kunst, 2015). Moreover, the cultivation of positive emotions has been found to strengthen social cohesion and diminish intergroup conflict (Francis, 2018). Collectively, these findings highlight the importance of implementing community-based initiatives and psychological support programs aimed at promoting empathy and social inclusion.

### ***Gender-Related Findings on Migration and Dehumanization***

Research on migration and dehumanization reveals significant gender-based differences in how migrants are perceived and represented. The literature underscores that male and female migrants are often subject to distinct stereotypes, which in turn shape the dynamics of dehumanization. Female migrants are frequently portrayed as vulnerable or in need of protection, whereas male migrants are more commonly depicted as threatening or aggressive (Kunst et al., 2017). This gendered dichotomy plays a crucial role in shaping public

perceptions, particularly through media representations (Bugge, 2019; Costello and Hodson, 2009). For instance, a study examining newspaper photographs in Finland found that female refugees were typically framed in passive and vulnerable terms, while male refugees were more often portrayed as potential threats, thereby reinforcing entrenched public prejudices (Martikainen and Sakki, 2021). A similar gender distinction is also observed in the economic sphere. A study on perceptions of migrant workers in Hungary revealed that male migrants were often perceived as "machines" or "robots," legitimizing their economic exploitation (Jankó et al., 2024). Female migrants, in contrast, were commonly defined through their roles in family and childcare, emphasizing their social value. This distinction further contributes to the institutionalization of gender-based discrimination in economic activities (Hodson and Dhont, 2023).

Research on migration and dehumanization highlights notable gender-based differences in the perception and representation of migrants. The literature consistently demonstrates that male and female migrants are subjected to distinct stereotypes, which contribute to differential dehumanization processes. Female migrants are often depicted as vulnerable or in need of protection, while male migrants tend to be framed as threatening or aggressive (Kunst et al., 2017). This gendered dichotomy is particularly evident in media portrayals, which play a significant role in shaping public attitudes (Costello and Hodson, 2009; Bugge, 2019). For example, a study analyzing newspaper photographs in Finland revealed that female refugees were commonly presented through passive and vulnerable imagery, whereas male refugees were more frequently depicted as potential threats, thereby reinforcing existing societal prejudices (Martikainen and Sakki, 2021).

These findings underscore the importance of approaching migration and dehumanization as multidimensional phenomena that must account for gender-specific dynamics, revealing how patterns of discrimination are differentially embedded within dehumanization processes. A review of the existing literature indicates that, although research on the link between migration and dehumanization is relatively scarce, studies focusing specifically on the dehumanization of migrant women are particularly underexplored.

### ***Migrant Women: Labor and Exploitation***

While migration poses significant challenges and can be a traumatic experience for all individuals, it presents distinct and often intensified difficulties for women. In many cultural contexts, when men migrate for employment, their children typically remain in the care of their mothers. In contrast, prevailing gender norms often expect women who migrate to bring their children with them, placing additional burdens on them during resettlement (Adanu and Johnson, 2009). Economic hardship, childcare responsibilities, and precarious living conditions further constrain migrant women's autonomy, particularly in decisions such as pursuing divorce, and tend to leave deeper social and psychological impacts on women compared to men (Berger, 2004; Coşkun, 2014).

Women often migrate for the purpose of family reunification, though labor migration also constitutes a significant driver. Migrant women are frequently preferred by employers due to their willingness to accept lower wages and flexible working conditions, which increases their vulnerability to exploitation in the labor market (Şeker and Uçan, 2016; Sam, 2006). This exploitation reflects broader dynamics of economic objectification, aligning with Nussbaum's (1995) conceptualization of objectification, wherein individuals are treated as tools for others'



gain. Although many migrant women possess qualifications and experience in skilled professions in their countries of origin, they are often relegated to unskilled domestic and caregiving roles in host countries. In Turkey, for example, migrant women are primarily employed in household labor, childcare, and eldercare services (Etiler and Lordoğlu, 2015). Discrimination, coupled with language barriers and challenges in adapting to the cultural norms of the host society, further constrains their employment opportunities. Consequently, many are unable to access jobs commensurate with their skills and face significant barriers to upward professional mobility (Behtoui and Neergaard, 2010; Etiler and Lordoğlu, 2015).

Some migrant women fall into the category of undocumented migrants, a status that exposes them to a range of significant risks. The term "undocumented migrant" refers to individuals who lack legal residency or work permits, a condition that affects a considerable portion of the migrant population (Coşkun, 2016). For undocumented migrant women, this status often relegates them to low-wage, precarious employment, typically in domestic, childcare, or eldercare services (Dedeoğlu and Gökmen, 2020). Fear of deportation and legal repercussions deters them from reporting exploitative or abusive working conditions. In certain cases, women are employed as live-in domestic workers, which eliminates standard working hours and results in dehumanizing labor practices. Employers may confiscate their passports, enforce substandard wages, restrict their freedom of movement, and impose conditions that resemble modern-day slavery. Furthermore, undocumented migrant women are frequently excluded from legal protections, making them especially vulnerable to emotional and sexual abuse by employers, yet they face significant barriers to reporting such violations (Demirdizen, 2013).

A significant issue faced by migrant women is human trafficking, which exacerbates their vulnerability due to pre-existing gender disadvantages. During migration, women are particularly susceptible to sexual exploitation and trafficking, often falling prey to traffickers through economic desperation or deception (Sam, 2006; Adanu and Johnson, 2009). The dehumanization of migrant women in the context of sex trafficking is a multifaceted issue that intersects with broader migration dynamics. Women involved in sex trafficking not only suffer from the stigma of illegal status but also face the intense burden of societal stigmatization. They are often derogatorily labeled with terms such as "Natasha" and are blamed for the spread of sexually transmitted infections, which further reinforces public prejudices. These societal biases contribute to the dehumanization of migrant women, heightening their vulnerability to sexual exploitation (Gülçür and İlkaracan, 2002; Coşkun, 2016).

### ***Media Representation of Migrant Women***

The media has significant impacts on perceptions of migration. News headlines used by media outlets largely shape individuals' interpretations of news content and foster biased attitudes toward the subjects covered (Van Dijk, 1991). Repetitive biased headlines leave negative impressions on the minds of individuals who lack sufficient information about the issue, reinforcing feelings of hatred toward specific groups (Kurt, 2023). This emerging hatred further deepens prejudices against certain groups and paves the way for the spread of hate speech.

In a thesis study conducted by Kurt (2023), news coverage of migrant women in the media was analyzed. The study revealed that migrant women are often labeled with descriptors such

as "prostitutes" or "second wives." Even across different types of news content, migrant women are frequently portrayed as "homewreckers," reinforcing the perception that they are "dangerous" individuals. The objectification of women's bodies and gender in news headlines exacerbates negative perceptions toward this group and integrates them into broader processes of social marginalization.

### ***Violence Against Migrant Women***

Due to gender roles, women are assigned different societal responsibilities. During the migration process, women must cope with both the burdens imposed by their biological sex and the challenges arising from migration itself. This dual burden places migrant women at a compounded disadvantage at the intersection of gender and migration processes (Sam, 2006). Migrant women are often subjected to physical, psychological, or economic abuse and violence. However, undocumented migrants, lacking legal rights, are unable to pursue any legal action against such violence (Şeker and Uçan, 2016).

When migrant women encounter acts of sexual harassment, rape, or violence, they find themselves vulnerable. Especially due to a lack of knowledge about the host country's legal system or because of their undocumented status, they refrain from reporting perpetrators out of fear of deportation (Perruchoud, 2008; Coşkun, 2016). Biehl's (2014) research conducted in Kumkapı, Istanbul, found that migrant women were subjected to implicit propositions for sexual relations by male tenants and/or landlords.

As these three contexts demonstrate, migrant women face various forms of male violence, largely driven by their fear of deportation. The inability to access legal protections, coupled with perpetrators' awareness of this vulnerability, further exacerbates their defenselessness in instances of sexual violence and harassment. This exposure to violence—whether in the workplace, through media portrayals, or in their daily lives—contributes to a pervasive state of dehumanization for migrant women, reinforcing their marginalized position within society.

### **Discussion**

Dehumanization, by stripping individuals of attributes unique to humanity, leads to their exclusion from social, moral, and legal contexts, constituting a profound form of discrimination (Haslam, 2006; Opatow, 1990). This phenomenon becomes even more complex in the case of migrant women, where the intersection of gender and migrant status creates a multilayered foundation for exclusion and exploitation (Purdie-Vaughns and Eibach, 2008). Migrant women are subjected not only to the status of being "foreigners" but also to societal roles and sexual objectification stemming from their gender, placing them at the center of both overt and covert dehumanization practices (Bartky, 1990; Nussbaum, 1995).

The fact that female migrants are predominantly employed in informal and precarious jobs, particularly within the domestic labor market (Dedeoğlu and Gökmen, 2020; Etiler and Lordoğlu, 2015;), exposes them not only to economic exploitation but also to inhumane working conditions. In this context, practices such as employers withholding migrant women's passports, imposing low wages, and restricting their freedom of movement can be evaluated as parallel to modern forms of slavery (Demirdizen, 2013). Such instances directly reflect Nussbaum's (1995) dimensions of objectification, specifically instrumentality, ownership, and violability.



Sexual violence and exploitation experienced by migrant women due to their gender is particularly striking. Especially for women with undocumented migrant status, the fear of deportation prevents them from reporting instances of sexual violence (Coşkun, 2016; Perruchoud, 2008). Biehl's (2014) fieldwork in Kumkapı also revealed that migrant women were implicitly subjected to sexual advances by members of the host society.

Media representations further reproduce this cycle of exclusion. Migrant women are often portrayed as "homewreckers," "prostitutes," or "dangerous" individuals, framing them in a way that is both othering and sexualized (Kurt, 2023; Martikainen and Sakki, 2021). These representations align with Haslam's (2006) categories of mechanistic and animalistic dehumanization. Particularly, male migrant workers described with metaphors such as "machine" or "robot," and female migrants framed as "in need of help," are positioned within the low warmth–low competence quadrant of the stereotype content model (Fiske et al., 2002; Harris and Fiske, 2006).

The psychological impacts of these experiences must not be overlooked. Research indicates that migrant women face language barriers, social exclusion, and intense stress during their integration processes with the host society, reporting higher levels of anxiety and psychological vulnerability compared to male migrants (Hafsa, 2024; Bağcı et al., 2023). A lack of empathy toward migrants has also been shown to reinforce overt dehumanization attitudes, undermining social cohesion and creating a societal atmosphere that legitimizes violence (Kteily and Bruneau, 2017; Francis, 2018).

These findings reveal that migrant women experience intensified dehumanization not only because of their migrant status but also due to their gender. However, the existing literature does not sufficiently address this intersectional disadvantage. For example, differences in dehumanization experiences among various migrant categories, such as refugees, labor migrants, or asylum seekers, have not been comparatively examined (Esses et al., 2013). Similarly, the influence of cultural contexts on these processes remains largely underexplored (Gülçür and İlkkaracan, 2016; Jankó et al., 2024).

Future studies should focus not only on diagnostic but also on intervention-based strategies. Educational programs, the restructuring of media representation codes, and legal regulations aimed at combating discrimination are areas that need to be addressed within this framework (Markowitz and Slovic, 2021; Louis et al., 2013). In particular, initiatives targeting the transformation of the role of media and political discourse in dehumanization processes could pave the way for more inclusive and equitable migration policies (Wahrer et al., 2024; Utych, 2017).

In conclusion, it is evident that the dehumanization processes faced by migrant women are multidimensional and must be addressed not only at the academic level but also within political and social spheres. In-depth, comparative, and intervention-based research will not only contribute to the academic literature but also provide guidance for policymakers, civil society organizations, and the public.

This study aimed to make visible the structural inequalities arising at the intersection of gender and migrant identity by examining how migrant women are subjected to dehumanization processes from a multidimensional perspective. The findings reveal that migrant women are exposed to multiple forms of dehumanization, not solely based on their migrant identity but

also through the interaction of gender norms, media representations, economic exploitation, and legal insecurity.

Dehumanization is not merely a reflection of individual prejudice; it is a systematic process perpetuated through structural domains such as media, political discourse, law, and the labor market. Therefore, ensuring that migrant women live under conditions that respect human dignity requires interventions at both micro and macro levels. Strengthening social integration, implementing programs that promote empathy, providing supportive services to overcome language barriers, and establishing a strong legal framework against discrimination are critical in this regard.

Nevertheless, there remains a notable gap in the literature concerning studies that specifically center the experiences of migrant women. Future research must be designed with sensitivity to different migration statuses, cultural contexts, and gender-based differences. Through comparative studies, qualitative field research, and policy-focused applied analyses, the visibility of the dehumanization experiences faced by migrant women can be enhanced, thereby laying the groundwork for transformative social policies.

Ultimately, addressing the multilayered forms of exclusion experienced by migrant women is not only fundamental to migration policy but also integral to broader struggles for social equality and human rights. Every scholarly contribution in this area holds the potential to serve both academic advancement and societal transformation.

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