

The Dehumanization of Refugees: A Framework

An analysis of how dehumanization affects the lives of refugees in two different refugee camps/centers



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Abstract

In this thesis a framework is proposed for analyzing the lives of refugees in terms of dehumanization. There are three questions central to this thesis: How can we understand the term dehumanization? What are processes by which dehumanization might occur to refugees? What is the role of language in dehumanization and how does this relate to dehumanizing practices? The first four chapters of this thesis propose a framework of dehumanization and corresponding mechanisms of how dehumanization might occur. It is argued that the role of language cannot be underestimated – language is performative, not merely descriptive and this means that language can have a dehumanizing effect. Through the study of two refugee camps/centers (Idomeni in Greece and Dutch refugee centers) it is argued that while refugee camps can be dehumanizing, refugees are already dehumanized before they set one foot in a refugee camp due to the negative discourses in our society. Since this discourse does not differ much with regard to the location of the refugees (whether they are in Idomeni or a Dutch refugee center), the severity of the dehumanization occurring due to circumstances in a refugee camp is, to a large extent dependent on the government responsible for this camp.

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Introduction

The picture on the front page was taken at a demonstration in Vienna called ‘Gleiche Rechte für alle - Solidarität mit der Flüchtlingsbewegung’¹ on the 16th of February 2013. The picture has taken on a life of its own; a Google image search for ‘refugees are human beings’ shows the picture being used in numerous web articles on refugees. Banners like these appear to be a countermovement to the manner in which the discourse around refugees is often held, especially in media and (Western) politics. Refugees are called ‘asielplaag’² (Navis, 2017), equated with terrorists or terrorist supporters (Greenfield, 2015), portrayed as ‘testosterone-bombs’³ (Van de Wiel, 2015), or used as a vehicle to point attention to other problems in society. ‘Why spend money on refugees and not our own elderly’ is often said by those against giving refugees asylum (Bregman, 2015). In addition to this, there is the increased tendency to divide refugees in different groups: real refugees versus those who come here for economic reasons (economic refugees). It is thus not surprising that people feel the need to present a counter voice: refugees *are* human beings. This suggests that in the current discourse, refugees are somehow seen or treated as less than human, or not human. In other words: refugees are dehumanized. While this makes for a good slogan, it is of little help in critically engaging with the actual situation of refugees; for not every refugee camp shows outward signs of refugees being somehow treated as less than human.

Research questions

The study of the political and social situation of refugees is interesting and plentiful. For example, a 2008 study by Esses, Veenvliet, Hodson, and Mihic found that people who are higher in social dominance orientation are likely to dehumanize refugees, and that this dehumanization leads to contempt for refugees. In addition, there is much work on the precarity of the situation of refugees, which will prove helpful in making sense of the consequences of dehumanization. Nevertheless, academia has been lacking in analyzing how terminology like ‘dehumanization’ reflects upon the political and social circumstances of refugees. In addition, more needs to be said about the relation between language and practice in processes of dehumanization. In other words: it is quite clear that refugees are dehumanized, but there is either no theoretical framework on what this dehumanization consists of or it is unclear

¹ Translation: equal rights for all – solidarity with refugees.

² Translation: asylum plague.

³ ‘Testosterone-bomb’ is a word coined by right-wing politician Geert Wilders to describe the danger ‘our’ women are in when we open our borders to refugees.

how this dehumanization functions and affects refugees. In the first case the claim that refugees are dehumanized is vague, for dehumanization can occur in different ways and in relation to different human qualities. In the second case there is a lack of critical engagement with the lived experiences of refugees, which means that it does not tell us all that much about how refugees are affected by dehumanization.

Therefore, I aim to develop a framework of dehumanization in this thesis that can answer the following research questions:

- 1) How can we understand the term dehumanization?
- 2) What are processes by which dehumanization might occur to refugees?
- 3) What is the role of language in dehumanization and how does this relate to dehumanizing practices?

This framework is necessary, as the terms 'dehumanization', 'human' and 'less than human' do not actually tell us anything. After developing the framework, I apply it to two refugee-situations: refugee camps along the Greek border and refugee centers in the Netherlands. This has a double purpose: it shows what the actual socio-political consequences of dehumanization are and that the socio-political circumstances of refugees who can be called 'dehumanized' can greatly differ. Second, it tests the applicability of the framework to the actual lives of refugees. Throughout the thesis the importance of language and discourse will surface, for it turns out that the language we use plays an important factor in not just showing signs of dehumanization, but also in having a dehumanizing effect. In answering the above questions, this thesis will take the following shape.

Thesis structure

In the first four chapters a framework of dehumanization is built. In doing so, different accounts of what it means to be human are discussed, for if a framework of dehumanization is to be developed it first needs to be clear what it means to be human. A compromise is sought between normative theories focusing on agency and embodiment, which is then combined with a more descriptive account of human qualities. After this framework is developed, it is used to explain why dehumanization appears to occur more often to those that are racially or religiously other from those who dehumanize them. In the second and third chapter the framework is developed further by discussing mechanisms by which refugees are dehumanized. Starting with the theory of recognition, it is argued that when we dehumanize people we fail to recognize them either as having physical integrity, as having equal moral rights, or as living a worthy lifestyle. This theory is then combined with dispossession

theory to further explain how people come to be dehumanized and dispossessed of their status as human being. In chapter three one particular mechanism of dispossession is discussed to show how important language is: political instrumentalization. By studying the way language can be manipulated, it is shown that the words we use can have an enormous impact on refugees. In chapter four the framework of dehumanization as it has been developed so far is linked to the concept of necropolitics. By linking Mbembe's concept of death-worlds to dehumanization, it becomes clear how dire dehumanization can be and this also gives us the tools to recognize situations in which dehumanization is likely to occur. This approach also allows us to formulate what dehumanized lives look like, and gives us the tools to explore the relation between already being dehumanized and dehumanizing circumstances.

In chapter five and six the framework, as developed in the previous chapters, is applied to two case studies: the refugee camp Idomeni in Greece, near the Macedonian border, and refugee centers in the Netherlands. Both these locations have been referred to as dehumanizing, even though the circumstances between Idomeni and the Dutch refugee centers differ considerably. By applying the framework to these case studies it becomes possible to analyze the circumstances in Idomeni and the Dutch refugee centers and the language used concerning refugees there in terms of dehumanization. While in both case studies the discourse shows the same signs of dehumanization, it becomes clear that while both camps have dehumanizing effects there are stark differences between Idomeni and the Dutch refugee centers. These differences are most likely explained by the difference in location, for in the Netherlands rules and institutions are in place to protect refugees, whereas in the former the surrounding governments failed to alleviate the circumstances in which the refugees found themselves.

In conclusion, the thesis project aims to develop a framework concerning dehumanization that is attentive to both our practices as well as our language, and is suited for connecting with the actual situation of refugees. In doing so it is critical to think of dehumanization as encompassing different views on what it means to be human, for this allows us to develop an understanding of dehumanization that shows awareness of the complicatedness of this subject without losing ourselves in different conceptions of what it means to be human. This will, at the end of this thesis, allow us to formulate an answer to the overarching research question: how can we make sense of the concept of dehumanization in a way that is helpful in critically engaging with the actual situation of refugees?

1. Defining 'humanness' and 'dehumanization'

This chapter will provide a critical look into the concept of dehumanization. It will do so by asking three questions. (1) What is humanness? (2) What is dehumanization? (3) What is the significance of race and religion in relation to dehumanization? This later question will prove to be important in later chapters.

1.1 Different accounts of humanness

There are many accounts of what it is to be human: that of the human subject as an agent, that of the human subject as embodied, that of the human subject as a rational animal, that of the human subject as a political animal, etcetera. The first, the conception of the human subject as an agent, is primarily found in the human rights discourse.

1.1.1 Agency

James Griffin is one of the human rights philosophers who seem to adhere to such a conception of the human subject. Griffin states that we have human rights simply in virtue of being human (Griffin, 2008, p. 50). These human rights are supposed to protect our human standing, our personhood, and most of the conventional human rights can be developed from this notion of personhood. To clarify what he means with personhood, Griffin turns to the notion of agency:

To be an agent, in the fullest sense of which we are capable, one must (first) choose one's own path through life - that is, not be dominated or controlled by someone or something else (call it 'autonomy'). And (second) one's choice must be real; one must have at least a certain minimum education and information. And having chosen, one must then be able to act; that is, one must have at least the minimum provisions of resources and capabilities that it takes (call all of this 'minimum provision') [...] so (third) others must not forcibly stop one from pursuing what one sees as a worthwhile life (call this 'liberty') (Griffin, 2008, p. 33)

Griffin is not alone in turning to the notion of agency to describe what makes the human subject human. When Thomas Pogge discusses poverty and human rights he does not speak of the human rights of people or humans, but of the human rights of agents. Alan Gewirth's argument for his Principle of Generic Consistency also begins with the idea of an agent, which Gewirth defines as a

being that acts or that is engaged in action that is voluntary (behavior chosen in an unforced way) and purposive (Gewirth, 1981).

This view on what it is to be human is heavily influenced by Immanuel Kant, who argued that autonomous agency is important because it makes active agents of humans. Autonomous agents determine themselves by their own will, and are themselves the author of the laws they follow. This makes them not just passive means in nature's determined ends, but ends-in-themselves. This, in turn, means that they possess inherent dignity and thus deserve basic moral respect (Guyer, 2003, pp. 83–88). For Kant, this determining oneself is essential, for human dignity is closely related to human agency – the ability of humans to choose their actions themselves. This dignity is thus heavily dependent on a view of humanity as having this capacity for agency.

Views like this, which emphasize the agency side of what it means to be human, are often criticized by feminist theory. The above view of human nature and others alike that focus on concepts like rationality are seen as being biased: they (implicitly) make a masculine ideal the core of human nature. As Genevieve Lloyd argues, accounts of human nature or reasoning have a profound focus on qualities seen as 'male' (reasoning, rationality, etcetera), and this has affected accounts of human nature (Lloyd, 1995, pp. ix–x). Apart from being biased, these theories of human nature are also seen as essentializing. What is missing from such biased accounts are concepts like embodiment (Anker, 2012), interdependency (Butler & Athanasiou, 2013), and comparable notions that do not focus on rational aspects of humans. Anker states that human rights hold certain qualities (those central to agency) as sacred, while simultaneously ostracizing other qualities. As a consequence, we also ostracize the people that exemplify these other qualities from being seen as agents, and thus from being seen as human subjects (Anker, 2012, p. 15). Those values can best be described as being related to our body. The body is seen as an entity to be mastered through reason, subordinate to our will, and even though our bodies are frequently radicalized, sexualized and violated, this has no consequences for our identity. We are, after all, still agents (Anker, 2012, pp. 47–49). What Anker attempts to do is not to replace the agential account of human nature, but rather to broaden it to encompass other aspects of human nature. Anker's ideas are not new, and her theory can be interpreted as building upon the work of Merleau-Ponty, who provides an argument for the 'embodiedness' of human subjects.

1.1.2 Embodiment

In attempting to place reason within a broader context, Merleau-Ponty states that the basis for all subjective consciousness lies in perceptual experience. While we should not abandon reason, it is perception that is primary for consciousness, not reason (Low, 2003, p. 5). It is the world of perception that encompasses the possibilities for action, and it is thus in the intertwining of the human subject and the world that our embodied subjectivity can be found. This intertwining is first experienced within the dichotomy between touching and being touched. We observe external objects with our body, but our body itself is not something that we can observe in the same way we observe those objects. This is because our body has both a subjective and objective side that we cannot separate from each other. This is not only true for our body as the key to perception, but also for our body as a tangible object:

In so far as it sees or touches the world, my body can therefore be neither seen nor touched. What prevents its ever being an object, ever being 'completely constituted' is that it is that by which there are objects. It is neither tangible nor visible in so far as it is that which sees and touches. The body therefore is not one more among external objects, with the peculiarity of always being there (Merleau-Ponty, 2005, p. 105).

Our bodies do not just *exist* in this world; they are how we *perceive* this world. We are subjects that see everything from a certain point of view, and this point of view is our body (Merleau-Ponty, 2005, p. 107). We exist against a background of external objects, and our body is what makes it possible for us to observe this external world, while at the same time being part of the external world. Our perceiving of the external world is the background of our experiences, and it are these experiences that in turn govern and direct our actions. Our consciousness puts meaning onto the external world, but it is incapable of doing this without perception: "To be a consciousness or rather to be an experience is to hold inner communication with the world, the body and other people, to be with them instead of being beside them" (Merleau-Ponty, 2005, p. 111). If we do not have this communication, if we are not part of the external world, 'being' a consciousness and thus being a human subject would be impossible. Therefore, if we are to have a complete view of ourselves as human subjects we have to be aware that our body is not an object like all the other objects we observe, but that our body is instead at the same time both a subject as well as an object.

For Merleau-Ponty this ontology has political implications. The interdependence between the human subject and the external world has made it impossible to speak about the human subject without involving this world. The embodied human subject *can* be an agent that actively shapes its own behavior, but it can only do this in lieu of its interdependence with the external world. The capacity for being an agent has to be attributed to the body, where the internal and external world meet (Coole, 2007, p. 175). The ways we strive to accomplish our political ends should reflect this - that is, they must reflect the notion of the human subject as embodied in order to avoid misinterpreting the relations human subjects have with the world and each other.

Studies of trauma (Brison, 2003), also show that the body and one's perception of it are essential components for the self. As stated earlier, there seems to be a bias against identifying human nature with qualities that are seen as female (the body, emotions, etcetera). Unfortunately, alternative views (those embracing more than 'male' qualities) are still not always accepted. In an attempt to argue for a more nuanced account of human nature, Brison (2003) argues that the situation of rape victims shows that rationality is not all there is to human nature. This argument concerns a pathological situation, for sometimes it is in the extremities that certain aspect of humans come to the forefront. In the case of rape victims, Brison argues that they are often incapable of distancing the bodily self from their 'real' self. Their bodily aspects and capacity for thinking became nearly indistinguishable, with mental states feeling as if they were physiological. For these victims, their body could no longer be left out of the picture when they perceived of themselves as human subjects (Brison, 2003). What these trauma cases show is that for actual human subjects, embodiment is part of their being a human subject, part of what makes them human. This is, of course, not just the case for trauma victims, but the extremity of their situation brings this intertwining of embodiment and reasons into focus.

Merleau-Ponty is able to bring a focus on reason or rationality together with embodiment in a way brings together humanness as agency and humanness as embodiment. Now, it might be wondered why this should be done. After all, both accounts have value and neither necessarily excludes the other. However, if we want to provide a framework on dehumanization - the denial or taking away of humanness - we cannot do so with an account of humanness that only focuses on one aspect of what it means to be human. Thus, while there is no necessity to connect accounts of humanness with each other, it is beneficiary when these accounts are to be related to dehumanization. There is another way to connect the different accounts apart from Merleau-Ponty, and that is by

switching our viewpoint from a normative one to a descriptive one. The accounts discussed above, i.e. Griffin, Anker, Merleau-Ponty, etcetera, should be seen as normative theories. There is an *ought* implicit in what they claim. So, for example, for Merleau-Ponty his account on the human subject has consequences for politics, and Anker's account in turn influences a conception of human rights. By contrast, a descriptive theory describes what makes people human (by using psychology, sociology, and history) to understand what humanness is. Such a descriptive theory also looks at what people themselves believe humanness to be. Nick Haslam gives such a descriptive account of humanness.

1.1.3 Features that are uniquely human and features that are human nature

There are, according to Haslam (2006), generally thought to be two ways to define an object⁴ or concept. One way to do so is to list the features of the concept; the other way is to compare the concept or object with a related concept or object. There is a third manner in which we can define something, however, by stating what it is not. The majority of approaches to humanness take the second approach, for example when humans are compared to apes or computers in order to define what makes humans unique (examples of traits that are thought to make us unique are language and secondary emotions). As it will turn out it is important to differentiate between the first two ways of defining humanness, for both will lead to different kinds of dehumanization. Following Haslam (2006), let us call the features we define by comparison uniquely human (UH) and the features we define non-comparatively as human nature (HN). It will turn out that the difference between these two approaches is not as clear-cut as Haslam presents it.

If we define humanness comparatively we define those features that separate us from related categories of animals. This helps explain why we so often compare humans to apes in attempting to find what separates us from animals. There is a difficulty in comparing humans with apes however, and that is that of all animals, apes most resemble humans. The benefit of a comparison with apes lies in that if differences are found, these are likely to apply to the relation between humans and other animals as well, whereas differences between humans and, for example, toads, might not apply to differences with the more alike apes. Nonetheless, the comparison with apes is troubled:

The exclusion of animals has been, and still is, constitutive of much of the Euro-American anthropological discourse on humanness [...] great

⁴ Although there are philosophical views that argue that humans cannot be seen as an object in the way a chair can, such as Merleau-Ponty.

apes, and early hominids are still profoundly ambiguous, categorically, cognitively, and morally (Corbey, 2005, p. 200).

There is a small group of apes that have acquired some skill in language through human training. These apes are like chimera, states Corbey. They are not human, yet endowed with something human that they would not have if it had not been for years of human training. If anything, this shows that while some qualities might not be unique to humans – they can only be learned with human intervention (Corbey, 2005, p. 200).

Even though we know that unique human features might not be as unique as some like to think, what are qualities thought to be uniquely human? Social psychological research⁵ has given us a number of candidates: language, higher order cognition, refined emotion, openness to experience, conscientiousness, morally informative emotions that were internally caused and relatively invisible to observers, and prosocial values that involve moral sensibility are all seen as uniquely human features. Common themes in these features are sophisticated cognition, culture, refinement, socialization, and some kind of internalized moral sensibility (Haslam, 2006, p. 256).

What about features that are human nature? One study, mentioned briefly by Haslam, looked into differences in individual assumptions on human nature, but there has been little attempt to formalize features of human nature that are shared beliefs among individuals and groups. One source of this lack in research might be some inherent difficulty in describing the concept of humanness without contrasting it with something else. Nevertheless Haslam is able to give us a list of features that are considered to be human nature: emotional responsiveness, cognitive openness, depth, and agency.

Even in explaining what human nature features are, Haslam resorts to a comparison, namely with uniquely human features. In doing so, he comes to three distinctions. Firstly, while human nature features link humans to the natural world and focus on their biological disposition, uniquely human features (as we have seen) are concerned with our social disposition, and culture. Secondly, features that are human nature should be universal (not in the ethical sense but in that they are species typical), meaning that they can be found in all humans and are not culturally dependent. Features that are uniquely human are more likely to be cross-cultural, since they reflect social learning and internalized morality⁶. As a consequence, the features that we see

⁵ See for example: Leyens et al. (2001), Gosling (2001), and Demoulin et al. (2004).

⁶ The view that morality can vary across cultures is moral relativism.

as uniquely human might not have any overlap with the features that are human nature. The third distinction between UN and HU features concerns the ontological standing of the features. Uniquely human features are acquired features that vary between people and cultures. On the other hand, uniquely nature features are best seen as aspects of persons that are deeply rooted. They are part of what constitute a person and are essential to humanness. No matter how much persons might differ, they share in these features (Haslam, 2006, p. 256).

The last distinction does not mean to claim that humanness can be deconstructed to a number of features, which would mean a slide to essentialism. Instead, it is to acknowledge that if we want a general account of humanness there has to be something in this theory that makes it possible to see it as applicable to all humans. That is, there has to be something in the definition of humanness that is shared between all humans. For Butler, this is interdependency. For Merleau-Ponty, this is embodiment, and for Haslam they are certain features as found in social psychological research.

1.1.4 Researching features of humanness

Together with colleagues, Haslam performed several studies to see whether and how participants differentiated between the two kinds of features. One study (Haslam, Bain, Douge, Lee, & Bastian, 2005) had participants rate themselves and those who belonged to their 'in-group' and others who belonged to the out-group. In previous research it was already established that in general the in-group is rated more favorably. Hypothetically, this would also be the case with humanness. In other words, Haslam et al. (2005) expected that there would be a corresponding phenomenon: people would attribute a greater (amount of) humanness to the in-group than to the out-group. The studies done confirmed this. Participants rated themselves and others of the in-group higher than the out-group when it came to UH features. In addition, participants rated themselves higher than both their in-group and the out-group on features that were human nature, but not on features that were uniquely human. Furthermore, the participants demonstrated that people made a distinction between two kinds of humanness (UH and HN) and only viewed the latter as being inherent to humanness. Haslam et al. (2005) discovered this by having participants rate personality traits as either human nature or uniquely human. In all studies certain features were seen as UH or HN.

The above also gives us a better idea of the differences between the two kinds of human features. Features that were seen as uniquely human were, for

example, 'idealistic', 'talkative', 'conservative', 'artistic', 'absentminded', and 'analytical'. Features of human nature, on the other hand, were 'ambitious', 'curious', 'determined', 'imaginative', 'passionate, and 'sociable'. Added to this, HN features were comprehended in terms of interpersonal warmth, drive, and cognitive openness. Uniquely human features were more understood in terms of cognitive sophistication. Participants also say human nature features as more deeply rooted, immutable, discrete, and biologically based than features that are uniquely human. These latter features were seen as acquirable (often involving refinement, morality, and higher cognition), and hence could differ between people.

It thus appears to be possible to make a distinction between two kinds of humanness: humanness defined by features that are uniquely human and humanness defined by features that are human nature. Uniquely human features present us with a sense of humanness that is rather like the view presented in the Enlightenment, focusing on rationality and cultivation. Features of human nature present us with a more Romantic notion of humanness, one focused on a shared and fundamental 'nature' deeply rooted in every person (Haslam, 2006, p. 257). Is it possible to link these different notions of humanness to the normative accounts discussed earlier in this chapter? It would appear that human nature features might be more related to accounts focusing on embodiment and interdependency, for human nature qualities are qualities such as interpersonal warmth and emotional responsiveness. On the other hand, features that are seen as uniquely human include qualities such as civility, which can also be said to be related to interdependency. It would thus appear that the normative approaches focusing on humans as embodied and relational beings do not focus exclusively on one kind of human qualities. The same goes for normative accounts such as Griffin's, rationality (an uniquely human quality) and agency (a human nature quality) can both be said to relate to such accounts, but belong to different kinds of human qualities. What this shows is while both normative accounts are represented in the descriptive framework, they are not exclusively related to one kind of human quality (uniquely human or human nature) – strengthening the claim that bringing these accounts together is beneficiary for a more complete view of what it is to be human.

One might wonder at this point what the value is in distinguishing between two kinds of features in describing humanness. After all, do they not together make up the whole concept of 'human'? For the concept of dehumanization, however, the distinction is crucial because it allows us to differentiate between two forms of dehumanization.

1.2 Dehumanization

If we accept Haslam's understanding of what humanness entails, of how we might think about humanness in two different ways, we can develop an account of dehumanization. We will have to keep in mind that this account has some troubles and that later chapters will add some more philosophical detail to his social psychology. Let us now turn to the matter of dehumanization. Very broadly said, dehumanization occurs when that what makes people human is denied or taken away. It thus makes sense that, given that we have two kinds of humanness, there are two ways in which dehumanization can occur: animalistic dehumanization and mechanistic dehumanization.

1.2.1 Animalistic dehumanization and mechanistic dehumanization

Animalistic dehumanization occurs when we deny people those features of humanness that are uniquely human (Haslam, 2006, p. 257). These features are features like civility, refinement, moral sensibility, and higher cognition (rationality, logic). These are very much 'western' features, features that gained prominence during the renaissance and were used to contrast 'civilized' men with those who were seen to be inferior (indigenous people). While these features might be seen as old-fashioned and unrealistic, they are still very much part of the western discourse on humanness.⁷ Because they are still seen as having to do with humanness, denying people these features affects them – even though these features might not be as important to humanness as first thought. When we deny these features we perceive (or make people out to be) uncultured, lacking morality, and unintelligent. There are three consequences of this kind of dehumanization that I want to highlight. The first is that it involves stripping people of their rationality: we believe their behavior is less cognitive and driven by reason, instead being more driven by instinct, motives, and appetites. Second, we strip them of their maturity, instead seeing them as childlike, immature, and even backwards. Third, since uniquely human features are associated with morality, people who are dehumanized of their uniquely human features are seen as immoral (those who violate the moral code) or amoral (those who lack morality).⁸ If dehumanization occurs in this way, we deny people the features that were identified by contrasting humans with animals. People who are dehumanized in this way could thus be directly or indirectly seen as animalistic or animal-like (Haslam, 2006, p. 258). Animals, after all, are often perceived as not having rationality or a moral code.

⁷ See Griffin (2008) for example.

⁸ An interesting question here is whether viewing others as immoral or amoral makes us more likely to condone immoral actions towards these people that we would not condone towards non-dehumanized people. We will return to this question in the next part of this chapter.

Mechanistic dehumanization ensues when features of human nature are withheld from people. Recall that human nature features were features like emotionality, individual agency, and warmth (Haslam, 2006, p. 257). Denying people human nature features then takes the following shape. By denying that people have deeply rooted features (because human nature features are deeply rooted) we represented people in ways that put attention to superficial features. Because they are seen as not having emotions and warmth we see them as cold, unmovable, and devoid of feelings. Moreover:

Denying them cognitive openness (e.g., curiosity, flexibility) will give them the appearance of rigidity, and denying them individual agency represents them as interchangeable (fungible) and passive, their behavior caused rather than propelled by personal will (Haslam, 2006, p. 258).

Combined, the results of this mechanic dehumanization mean that we view people as objects, or machines (hence the term mechanic dehumanization).

Making a distinction between different forms of dehumanization is valuable for a number of reasons. For one, it allows us to give a more specified account of what we mean with dehumanization and its corresponding processes. Animalistic dehumanization and mechanic dehumanization have different end-results, and their corresponding processes of dehumanization might also look very different. Second, it does not mean that other accounts of dehumanization have to be turned down; instead they can either fit within the two forms of dehumanization presented here, or they add a potential new corresponding form of humanness to the two described above (provided, of course, that they offer such an account).

Schematized, these forms of dehumanization and their corresponding features of humanness look as follows:

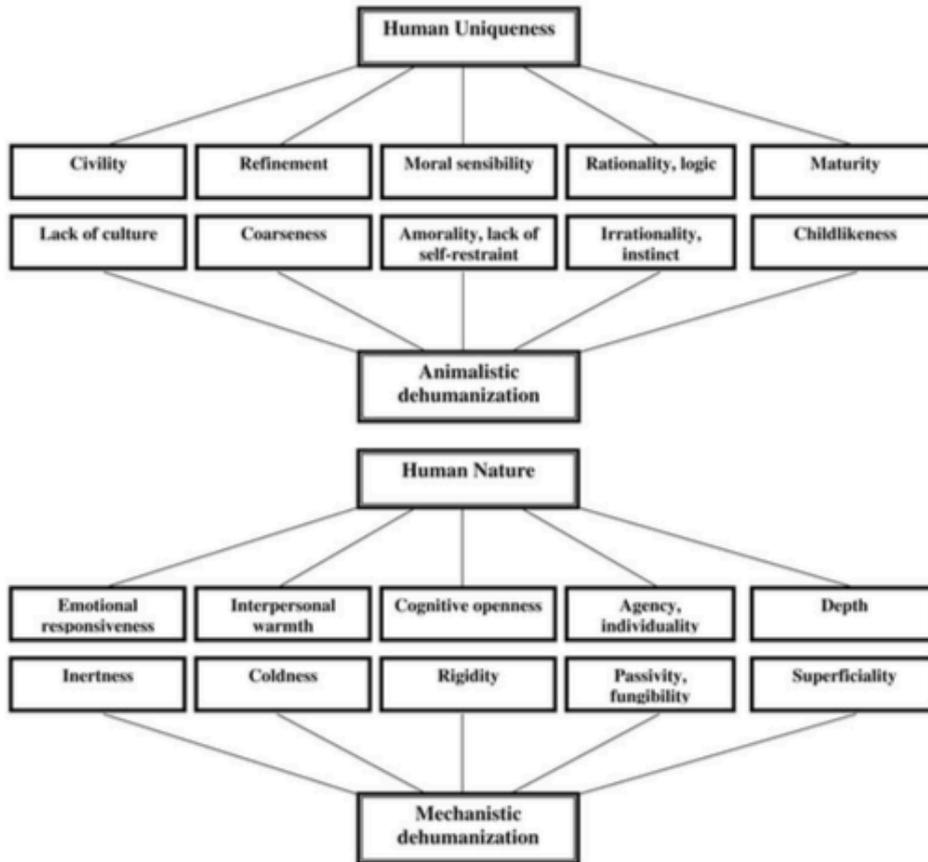


Figure 1. Proposed links between conceptions of humanness and corresponding forms of dehumanization.

(Haslam, 2006, p. 257)

Looking at this flowchart, it becomes a bit clearer how Dutch discourse reflects the dehumanization of refugees: terms like ‘asielplaag’ and ‘economic refugee’⁹ are signs of dehumanization. If humanness is defined by comparison to animals it is not so surprising that the term ‘asielplaag’ might be dehumanizing. After all, the word ‘plaag’ is meant to connote an invasion of animals (or a particular big spread of a certain disease, like the flu), so it might be that describing people as something animalistic denies them the features that are uniquely human. In the case of economic refugees there is an attempt to describe these refugees as trying to take advantage of the Dutch system. Could this be an example of mechanistic dehumanization? The group as a whole is denied individual agency, making them appear interchangeable and passive, which means their behavior is perceived to be caused rather than driven by personal will. Economic refugees are seen as a consequence of Western Europe’s wealth compared to poorer countries: poverty causes them to come to richer countries,

⁹ Economic refugee is the translation for ‘economische vluchteling’. The term ‘asielplaag’ is best translated as ‘asylum plague’.

rather than other, personal motivations.¹⁰ This also leads to the group being perceived as cold, they leave everything behind to make money¹¹, which leads to the view that these people lack emotional depth and warmth. How else can someone leave everything behind for monetary gains? As will be argued in chapter three, this is not the only way in which the term ‘economic refugee’ is a sign of dehumanization or dehumanizes refugees.

We now have an answer to the question ‘what is dehumanization?’ and some idea of how terms like ‘asielplaag’ and ‘economic refugee’ are signs of dehumanization. Thus far, the discussion has been held on the discursive level, given us insight in how dehumanization can occur on two different levels. A more concrete answer as to what life looks like for those we dehumanize will be given in later chapters. Before we look into processes of dehumanization there is one last question concerning dehumanization that needs our attention, and that is the question of race and religion. It often seems that we tend to dehumanize people of different races and religious backgrounds: what is the significance of this?

1.3 What is the significance of race and religion in relation to dehumanization?

This section will focus on two questions, namely (1) does it merely seem to be the case that we tend to dehumanize people from different races and religions more than we dehumanize people from our own racial and religious background, or is this actually the case? And (2), why does dehumanization tends to happen across racial and religious lines?

1.3.1 Race and dehumanization

When it comes to race, the answer to the first question is short: we more often dehumanize people from a different racial background than people from our own racial group. One need only look at the history of colonization, the accompanying portrayal of people of color as ape-like, and the horrible acts committed during this period to become suspect that dehumanization occurred there.¹² Dehumanizing representations of African peoples started to

¹⁰ That wanting to eat, or to provide for one’s family, is as much driven by personal will as it might be caused by poverty is conveniently forgotten, as is the idea that poverty can be as dangerous to people as war.

¹¹ Again, the idea that poverty is not as much of a problem and cause for fleeing one’s home country as war permeates this conception of economic refugees.

¹² There is a large body of work concerning colonization and dehumanization. Especially poignant on the dehumanization effect of colonization is the work of Aimé Césaire. See, for example Césaire (2000).

appear almost immediately after the first contact of Europeans with West-Africa (Goff, Eberhardt, Williams, & Jackson, 2008, p. 292). The people with whom the Europeans came in contact were described as more related to apes than to the white explorers themselves. The comparison of people of color with apes gained traction when a 'scientific' grounding was used to boost peoples' view of people of color as inferior. This 'science' consisted of an evolutionary spectrum with apes as the least evolved and the white man as the cultural epitome of evolution, and was used to "bolster growing stereotypes that peoples of African descent were innately lazy, aggressive, dim, hypersexual, and in need of benevolent control" (Goff et al., 2008, p. 293). Increasingly, African peoples began to be iconographically represented as ape-like. Movies with this kind of iconography were extremely popular in the 20th century United States and mirrored the racial tensions at that time. It is not only people of color who have been associated with animals; comparable associations were used during the holocaust and in violence against immigrants.¹³

Nowadays, representations of people of color as ape-like have somewhat disappeared from the public cultural life¹⁴, but does this mean that the related stereotypes of aggressiveness, hyper sexuality and dimness have also disappeared? Unfortunately, the mental association between (black) people of color and apes has not disappeared, as (Goff et al., 2008) demonstrate. Stereotypes of people of color as violent, criminal, less intelligent, musical (seemingly benign), athletic (also seemingly benign), and threatening still exists and do influence peoples perception and behavior. Participant studies¹⁵ into implicit stereotyping showed that the mental association between black people and apes still lingers to the point that it even influences people's basic cognitive processes, especially altering visual perception and attention (Goff et al., 2008, pp. 294-301). So, animalistic dehumanization still occurs even though explicit representations of black people as apes have largely disappeared. The implicit association of black people with apes was found not to be due to personal attitudes, and can occur beneath conscious awareness, in other words: this can be categorized as implicit bias. This animalistic dehumanization has dire effects on people's judgments towards violence: it leads to a greater

¹³ See (Goff, Eberhardt, Williams, & Jackson, 2008, p. 293) for an overview of previous research into this

¹⁴ While not as abundant as in the past, there are still many instances where people of color are compared with apes. Soccer supporters have been known to throw bananas or make monkey sounds at black opponents, for example.

¹⁵ One study took the form of a 3 (race of prime: Black prime vs. White prime vs. no prime) 2 (race of participant: White vs. non-White) 2 (animal type: apes vs. non-apes) mixed-model design, for the design of the other studies done see Goff et al. (2008).

endorsement of the usage of violence against black suspects than against white suspects. Additionally, representations of black suspects in the media as ape-like are associated with jury decisions that put black suspects on death row (Goff et al., 2008, p. 304).

Racial dehumanization does not just happen in the specific circumstances of the United States and its past. Animalistic dehumanization and the accompanying associations between animals and humans have been used to justify a number of events that had racial connotations, such as slavery in the United States and the Holocaust in World War II. What is problematic in ascertaining if and when dehumanization is happening along racial lines is that it is often denied because of its implicit nature, even by organizations such as the United Nations. An example of this is the genocide in Darfur. The Darfur situation is of particular interest to us because it is not only an example of race-based ideology in dehumanization, but also because this ideology has a state origin. John Hagan and Wenona Rymond-Richmond (2008) tackled the complexity of the Darfur genocide by looking at (1) historical material linking the Sudanese state to race-ideology and (2) U.S. State Department's Atrocities Documentation Survey data on dehumanization and violence in the Darfur genocide.

Dehumanization is significant in the context of the Darfur genocide because it functions as a legitimizing mechanism¹⁶. Racial and ethnic descriptions can be an important contributor to this dehumanization because they convey contempt and deny humanity (recall the ape-like characteristic ascribed to black people) (Hagan & Rymond-Richmond, 2008, p. 877). This contempt and view of others as animalistic leads to moral exclusion, which places people outside of the sphere in which moral values and rules apply (Goff et al., 2008, p. 293), which makes it easier for others to permit and participate in genocide (Hagan & Rymond-Richmond, 2008, p. 877). This happened in Darfur: through racial framing local Arab Janjaweed militia were localized towards violence. This racial framing did not just occur spontaneously, rather: "this racial targeting was the socially constructed and critically contingent mechanism that mediated the influence of population-resource competition on genocidal victimization" (Hagan & Rymond-Richmond, 2008, p. 876). The racial targeting of three black groups (the Zaghawa, Fur, and Masalit) in the Darfur genocide involved phrases as 'you are slaves, kill the slaves' and 'this is the last day for

¹⁶ This resonates with the previous case, in which the animalistic dehumanization of people of color led to increased legitimization of violence. It will become clear throughout this thesis that when people are dehumanized actions are legitimized that would have otherwise been condoned.

blacks'. Given that these phrases were used, and that we know that racial dehumanization occurred in other genocides, it should come as a surprise that the significance of race in the Darfur genocide is often denied.

In 2005 the United Nations International Commission of Inquiry stated that attackers and victims of violence in Darfur were not objectively distinct, and thus, the victims were not protected ethnic or racial groups according to the Genocide Conventions. In the judgment it was said that both groups spoke the same language (Arabic), held the same religion (Islam), and that due to intermarriage the three tribes and the group from which the attackers hailed were mostly physically indistinguishable. The commission advised the International Criminal Court (ICC) to investigate into Darfur as a crime against humanity, not as genocide¹⁷ (Hagan & Rymond-Richmond, 2008, p. 877). Hagan and Rymond-Richmond identify two reasons for the denying of a racial factor. The first they take from De Waal (2007), who states that if 'African' and 'Arabic' racial categories had been applied this might have had repercussions that could have led to the dismemberment of the Darfur society. Secondly, Powers (2004) speculates that there might have been a fear of an unsuccessful genocide prosecution. So, when the ICC pressed charges against a Sudanese deputy minister and a Janjaweed militia leader they were charges of crimes against humanities. The legal brief contained mentions of race but did not make any claims of racially motivated violence, even though numerous parties made these claims. When President Al-Bashar was charged with genocide, it was ethnically motived genocide, not racially motived genocide (Hagan & Rymond-Richmond, 2008, p. 878).

Nonetheless, while the ICC might not have supported claims of a racial motivation, racial dehumanization definitely occurred in Darfur. Hagan and Rymond-Richmond, by studying historical material linking the Sudanese state to race-ideology and U.S. State Department's Atrocities Documentation Survey data, concluded that one important factor was Arabization ideology. Arab-Islamic ideology gained a foothold in Darfur politics around the mid 1980's. The ideology that took hold was one of Arab-Islamic superiority, and demeaned black African groups. A difference was made by the state between Arabs and Black Africans, even though both groups were Muslim. The state often took the side of Arabs in land disputes, and soon started rejecting traditional African traditions, replacing them with Arabic ones. Increasingly, Arabs were seen as more civilized and black Africans became more and more subordinated. The

¹⁷ A conviction for genocide requires evidence of intent to destroy racial groups. On the other hand, a conviction for crimes against humanity requires 'only' proof of systematic, and widely spread, violence.

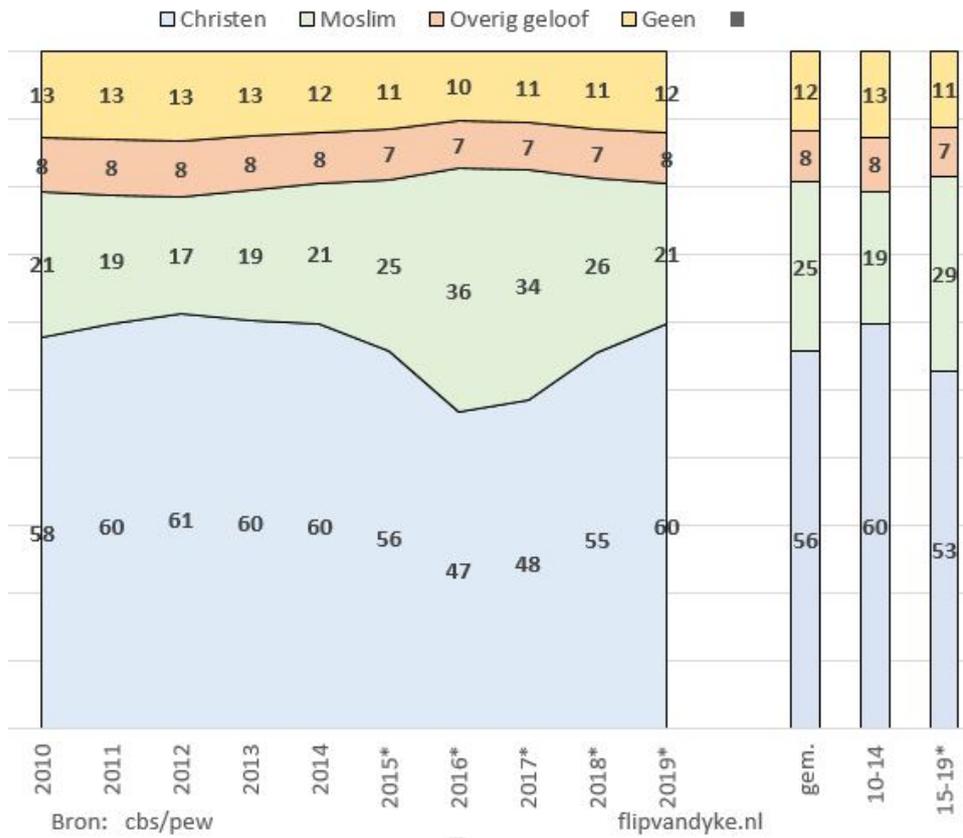
result of this was two socially constructed racial groups: Arabs and black Africans. The dehumanization of black Africans went hand in hand with these processes. During ground attacks racial epithets, involving references to slavery and animals, were shouted to black Africans. As we know now from Haslan's dehumanization framework, such terms are a sign of dehumanization.

What these two examples show is that racial dehumanization is not something of the past, and not always easy to distinguish. It also shows us that we must be aware of the fact that people are more likely to dehumanize those of other groups – racial differences are often perceived as making one belong to another group. It should be noted here that this belonging to another group is not always easy to determine, as for example in the case of the Darfur genocide. It should also be emphasized that, as the Darfur example showed, religion and race must be distinguished from each other. By conflating the two categories into another we lose sight of the complexities of both categories and the ways in which they relate to, but also differ from, each other. Additionally, it can be difficult to see how the dehumanization of a group is racially motivated if the dehumanized group consists of multiple races. Nevertheless, the fact that dehumanization has a racial component should remain on our minds as we progress towards the dehumanization of refugees.

1.3.2 Religion and dehumanization

Before we move on to what the results of dehumanization are, we need to talk about religion. As with race, the subject of religion in relation to dehumanization is especially relevant for our later discussion on refugees, for most refugees are perceived to be of a different religion or race than the host country (the Netherlands, in this case). It is an often-repeated 'fact' that refugees wishing to enter the Netherlands are of a different religion than the majority of the Netherlands, but this is not necessarily true. In 2014, over 60 percent of the immigrants identified as Christian, 21 percent as Muslim, 12 percent as non-religious, and 8 percent as 'other' (Van Dyke, 2016a). Even when taking in account the perceived increased immigration from Islamic countries, Christians are projected to remain the largest group of immigrants entering The Netherlands:

Figuur 4p **Immigratie Percentages** naar geloof. **Prognose va 2015** 1ste generatie allochtonen x 1.000. Laatste drie kolommen gemiddelden.



(Van Dyke, 2016b)¹⁸

Even though the percentage of Muslim refugees is much lower than usually thought, refugees are often seen as Muslim – and therefore as a threat. Facebook pages centering on the PVV (Partij voor de Vrijheid – Party for Freedom) are filled with anti-Islam posts. That a majority of the refugees entering The Netherlands are not Muslim at all does not appear to matter much. As a group, refugees have come to be seen as Muslim and together they pose a threat to our way of life, according to the PVV. The term Islamization is often used, referring to a process wherein a society is transforming to Islam with regard to its culture, laws, and religion. Dehumanization of refugees here thus goes hand in hand with the refugees being perceived as a threat, and it should be wondered if this dehumanization is not actively involved in justifying certain actions that are meant to neutralize this threat. This is not just speculation, as Emile Bruneau and Nour Kteily concluded after experiments:

¹⁸ The blue area is the percentage of Christians, the green area the percentage of Muslims, the orange area the percentage of other faiths and the yellow area percentage of people who do not subscribe to any religion.

Muslims, we found, are the most readily dehumanized groups. Our American participants rated Muslims about 12-15 points lower than Americans on our scale (they were rated over 20 points lower in a smaller sample of British participants). Consistent with the idea that dehumanization is driven by a sense of threat, we found that dehumanization of Arabs was greater in the days after the Boston Marathon attacks (Bruneau & Kteily, 2016).

The research also confirmed the above hypothesis that dehumanization and increased toleration of certain actions that might neutralize a threat are linked.¹⁹ In one study, Bruneau and Kteily gave the participants a story about two children that were caught shoplifting in a store. One of the children was white, the other Arab. In the story, the police sent the white child home while detaining the Arab child. Those who, earlier in the study, dehumanized Muslims and Arabs showed less sympathy towards the Arab child than participants who did not. What was even more alarming was that participants who dehumanized Muslims and Arabs were far more supportive of aggressive policies. Torture of Muslims and Arabs and drone strikes in the Middle East garnered more support among participants who dehumanized these groups than among participants who did not.

Religion, as race, appears to share a connection to dehumanization. Why dehumanization is prone to occur along religious or racial lines can be speculated on, but historically seen people from different races and religions have often been othered, perceived as a threat, inferior, and as in need of civilization. That these ideas are no longer necessarily present in public life does not mean, as the case of racism in the United States showed, that they do not linger subconsciously and can come to expression. In other cases, the contempt for those from other groups (in this case racial or religious) is more apparent, as is the dehumanization that accompanies it.

1.4 Studying Dehumanization

This chapter started out with an account of humanness and a corresponding account of humanization. It was then shown that dehumanization often happens along racial and religious lines, and that this does not just happen consciously but also subconsciously. But this does not tell us what a dehumanized life looks like, nor does it tell us *how* refugees are humanized. It is here that we need to acknowledge the need to combine the normative and

¹⁹ This mirrors what was found in the study concerning race and dehumanization of black Americans.

descriptive accounts of what constitutes humanness. Haslam's account is helpful in that it allows us to articulate and recognize certain qualities that are important for someone to be viewed as human. What is missing in Haslam's account, however, is an explanation of how dehumanization occurs. Sure, it is to deny someone certain aspects of humanness, and this can occur both unconsciously and on purpose. Yet, stating that dehumanization occurs by simple denial of certain qualities is very descriptive and theoretically rather thin: how does this denial occur? How come we do not acknowledge some people as having these qualities? The next chapter offers a philosophical and normative, as opposed to descriptive, answer to this question by employing the concepts of recognition, interdependency, and dispossession.

2. Mechanisms of dehumanization: recognition, disrespect and dispossession

In this chapter the concept of recognition is employed to see how the denial of aspects or qualities of humanness might occur. The strength in the concept of recognition lies in its ability to connect the descriptive qualities that Haslam formulated with the accounts focusing on agency, interdependency, and embodiment. Because the theory of recognition here employed consists of three modes of recognition, it is capable of giving room to multiple aspects of humanness. While this approach is helpful in that it allows us to see how different modes of recognition are related to dehumanization, it is also somewhat problematic. The concept of dispossession will be applied to complicate the theory of recognition, which will help us understand how complex processes of dehumanization are.

2.1 Recognition

Recognition has a tradition of being understood as related to self-consciousness, in that we can only understand our own actions as intentional by understanding the actions of others as intentional. This idea can be found in authors such as Hegel, Sartre, and Lacan and influenced writers such as Honneth and Charles Taylor. Both of these authors come to identify three types of recognition. Honneth's theory of recognition starts from the premise that what is known as human dignity can only be ascertained indirectly by looking at the different forms of disrespect people experience. According to Honneth, every person is dependent on receiving constant reassurance by the other in intersubjective relationships (Honneth, 1992, pp. 188–189). This reassurance can be upset when people experience different forms of disrespect, and when disrespect occurs there is the risk of an injury that could potentially cause the identity of a person to collapse.

The first kind of disrespect that Honneth identifies is disrespect in relation to a person's physical integrity. This form of disrespect harms a sense of security in expressing one's needs and feelings. The second type of disrespect affects the normative understanding of oneself through restrictions on autonomy and the feeling that one lacks the status of equal partners with the same moral rights in interaction. The last type of disrespect entails the downgrading of individuals by society and occurs when people are seen as inferior or deficient (Honneth, 1992, pp. 190–192). By determining the different forms of disrespect people experience, three patterns of recognition become visible. These patterns of recognition set the conditions for interaction in which human beings can be said to be treated with dignity or, as Honneth refers to it, integrity. The first

mode of recognition is the recognition expressed when we have unconditional respect for people's autonomous control over their bodies and is crucial for having self-confidence. The second mode of recognition is legal recognition, which is necessary for fundamental self-respect and facilitates a view of oneself as a person who shares with his or her community the qualities of a morally accountable subject. The third and last form of recognition pertains to having self-esteem and entails approval of, and solidarity with, life-styles (including unconventional ones) (Honneth, 1992, pp. 193–195). As is often the case with (practical) philosophers, Honneth links his theory of disrespect and recognition to morality:

By listing the three patterns of recognition, we have specified the moral infrastructure that a social life-world must exhibit if it is to be able to protect its members (Honneth, 1992, p. 196).

Using Honneth, we can formulate the ways in which the social-life world does not recognize refugees, that is, disrespects them: no respect for the autonomous body, no legal recognition as a full fledged member with equal moral rights, and being socially devaluated. It is not hard to find instances of these kinds of disrespect. Take, for example, being socially devaluated, which involves experiencing negative consequences due to one's social values. In an interview with Fox News Donald Trump said, when asked about Muslims and refugees (somehow conflating these groups):

They are a danger to our Christian way of life in America, it's that simple [...] By enforcing and requiring these possible terrorists to wear badges at all time they can be easily identified and tracked if necessary (Rustling, 2015).

This is a clear instance in which people are disrespected because they have a different lifestyle. The second form of disrespect, that of not receiving legal recognition also applies here. When we forcibly create a group like this, it is difficult for members of these groups to see oneself as a person who shares with members of his community the qualities of a morally accountable subject. Forcing people to wear badges when they belong to a certain group also falls under the first form of disrespect. It is an apparent violation of autonomous control of the body and a threat to people's ability to freely express their feelings. This is just one example, and it is extremely easy to find more situations in which refugees experience disrespect. In this example of Donald Trump it is language that shows Trump's dehumanizing approach. However, language can also be what dehumanizes: it is performative. In the words of

Judith Butler, performativity is “that reiterative power of discourse to produce the phenomena that it regulates and constrains” (Butler, 1993, p. xii). This means that statements in language and discourse, just by saying them, carry out actions and show some kind of power. When such statements are made repetitively and used consistently, they can have dehumanizing effects. An example of this is the term ‘asielplaag’ mentioned earlier. It disrespects people for it portrays them as mere animals. Not only is it dehumanizing to be compared to an animal, let alone an animal plague, there is also the connotation here that these refugees do not have the same claims to (moral) rights as humans do, for they are seen as animals, not humans. This disrespects refugees by not recognizing their equal claim to these rights, and thus dehumanizes them.²⁰

The solution to the problem of recognition and disrespect as formulated by Honneth appears to be the creation of a social-life world in which recognition flourishes and disrespect occurs as little as possible. Yet, this is not as easily done. What can the theory of recognition offer us, then? It’s value lies not just in explicating the interdependencies of human life. If condemnation of disrespect and insult gains traction and becomes a social struggle, it is capable of becoming a source of motivation of political resistance. It can then potentially form principles of morality. Nonetheless, it is difficult to ground principles of morality in the theory of recognition:

The principles of a morality construed in terms of a theory of recognition only have a meager chance of being realized in the social life-world to the extent that human subjects are incapable of reacting with neutral feelings to social injury, such as physical abuse, underprivileging, and degradation (Honneth, 1992, p. 199).

Thus, states Honneth:

A concept of morality based on the theory of recognition would rely, therefore, on the support of historical and sociological studies that are capable of showing that moral progress is born of the struggle for recognition.

Why would such a struggle be necessary to achieve this? The work of Judith Butler and Athena Athanasiou offers an answer to this question. In current society it is the neoliberal government that determines the acceptable ways of

²⁰ We will return to the dehumanizing effects of language in later chapters, but it is useful to be aware of this already.

living and thus determines which ways of living make one a recognizable human and which ways do not. This means that recognition is not 'free', it is not possible to be recognized unless one adapts to the ways of life that are deemed recognizable. Recognition is thus not always the good it appears to be for Honneth, for it can come at a price. When being recognized does not depend on terms chosen by the subject itself, can we really speak of recognition in the way Honneth does? I think Honneth would agree that we cannot speak of 'true' recognition in cases like this:

In Greece, for example, women migrants are prompted to perform an "authentic" self-identity of enforced migration and trafficked victimhood in order to become eligible for state or NGO assistance (Butler & Athanasiou, 2013, p. 113).

To understand better why recognition cannot come free and is not always as positive as it might seem, we need to take a closer look at the work of Butler and Athanasiou concerning dispossession and recognition.

2.2 Dispossession

Dispossession is the keyword running through Judith Butler's and Athena Athanasiou's book *Dispossessions: The Performative in the Political* (2013). The book focuses on the idea of being dispossessed, the situation of those who have lost property, basic conditions for living, land, but also a broader sense of belonging to a community or world, political and economical power, and citizenship. Butler and Athanasiou identify two broader forms of dispossession, namely:

- 1) "[d]ispossession [as it] encompasses the constituted, preemptive losses that condition one's being dispossessed (or letting oneself become dispossessed) by another" (Butler & Athanasiou, 2013, p. 2) which refers to "dispossession [...] as a heteronomic condition for autonomy" (Butler & Athanasiou, 2013, p. 2).
- 2) "[b]eing dispossessed [as it] refers to processes and ideologies by which persons are disowned and abjected by normative and normalizing powers" (Butler & Athanasiou, 2013, p. 2) which refers to "dispossession [as] imposed injuries, painful interpellations, occlusions, and foreclosures, modes of subjugation that call to be addressed and redressed" (Butler & Athanasiou, 2013, p. 2).

In this section it is explored how these modes of dispossession relate to recognition and to refugees, and how they work to dispossess these refugees of their status of human being.

2.2.1 The double valence of dispossession

What complicates an analysis in terms of dispossession is that it bears two valences that are often interweaved. Both meanings of dispossession are concerned with the subject's relation to norms and how assuming and repurposing injurious and passions are related to its becoming (Butler & Athanasiou, 2013, pp. 2–3). Perhaps the two valences of dispossession are best understood as ontological and empirical. In the ontological sense, dispossession shows us that we cannot always understand subjects as self-sufficient, but rather that their ontological status is also one of a relational and interdependent being. Our experiences of (for example) grief, passion, and love, show that we cannot view human beings as rational, self-propelling and self-driven individuals, because these experiences are caused by forces (others) that we ourselves cannot control. If we are not self-sufficient, our autonomy is always in some sense dependent on others. Thus, in this sense:

[w]e can say that dispossession establishes the self as social, as passionate, that is, as driven by passions it cannot fully consciously ground or know, as dependent on environments and others who sustain and even motivate the life of the self itself (Butler & Athanasiou, 2013, p. 4).

In the empirical (political, social, and economic) sense, dispossession refers to what happens when people lose their land, citizenship, livelihood, and/or become exposed to violence. If human beings can be deprived of these things this means that they are dependent on certain powers that can either sustain or deprive them, and thus (to a certain extent) these powers even have control over their survival. Hence, empirical dispossession always already reveals the first, ontological, valence of dispossession: that humans are relational and interdependent beings. This can be seen as an opposition to the view of humans as agents discussed in chapter one, for instead of focusing on our capacity for acting it focuses on our being relational beings. The first, ontological, kind of dispossession is always already occurring to everyone, even those who lack nothing in the material department:

Even when we have our rights, we are dependent on a mode of governance and a legal regime that confers and sustains those rights. And so we are already outside of ourselves before any possibility of being dispossessed of our rights, land, and modes of belonging (Butler & Athanasiou, 2013, p. 4).

In other words: according to Butler and Athanasiou human beings are interdependent beings. From the very start of their lives their suffering, but also their pleasure, hinge on living in a sustained social, political, and economical world. This means that from the very start of their lives, humans are already dispossessed in the ontological sense. Our not being self-sufficient but interdependent means that we are vulnerable to being deprived of things (land, livelihood, etcetera). The second, empirical valence of dispossession can only occur because humans are always already ontologically dispossessed (Butler & Athanasiou, 2013, pp. 4-5). While the two valences of dispossession are related, we should be wary of seeing them as having a causal link. While the ontological and empirical sense of dispossession are, as shown, bound to each other, there is no causal, chronological, or ontological link between being dispossessed in the first, ontological, sense, and becoming dispossessed in the second, empirical sense. This means that it is not necessary to first be disposed in the first way to be disposed in the second way. Nor does the second manner of dispossession causally follow after the first manner. In addition, Athanasiou warns that the idea that humans are in one sense always dispossessed is often used to legitimize the disavowal of political responsibility for forms of empirical dispossession (Butler & Athanasiou, 2013, p. 5). Political responsibility for social forms of dispossession and deprivation cannot be justified by claiming that people are simply always dispossessed. Thus, for example, the fact that some people are living below the poverty line in the Netherlands cannot be excused by pointing out that 'this is how the system works' or that everyone is to a certain extent dispossessed and that this is unavoidable.

With this in our minds, how, then, can we relate the theory of dispossession to refugees losing their status as human beings? Differently formulated: how do refugees become dispossessed of their humanness?

2.2.2 Dispossession and dehumanization

Dispossession means that someone has to submit to certain norms in order to qualify as a subject. Some forms of life, or ways of living, or being, conform to certain norms, established by power relations. An example of such a norm is heterosexuality. Power relations determine in advance those who count as recognizable human subjects and those who do not. Thus, eligibility for recognition and human subjectivity become equated (Butler & Athanasiou, 2013, p. 78). In order to count as a human being one is thus dependent on recognition - but the subject itself never chooses the terms upon which recognition depends. In our current society, it is the neoliberal, capitalist, governmentally that "makes live" (Butler & Athanasiou, 2013, p. 31). Some modes of life are fashioned in ways that are viable for recognition, while others

are made disposable. How then, are refugees dispossessed in this manner? Athanasiou gives an example of how categories are created for refugees:

In immigration policies, humanitarian reason objectifies and manages immigrants and refugees either as feminized, victimized, and coerced bodies, or as diseased and afflicted bodies (Butler & Athanasiou, 2013, pp. 113–114).

As an effect of these policies, refugees (and immigrants) become dependent on (self-) identification with terms they did not choose in order to be recognized and become eligible not only for the status of refugee, but also that of human being. Depending on the terms, the category of human being might not even be available anymore – which is when dehumanization occurs.

We now have an idea of what recognition entails, how we can view recognition as linked to the status of a human being with dignity, and how this relates to refugees being dispossessed and thus robbed of their status as human/being/subject. What should be kept in mind is that Butler and Athanasiou believe recognition is a situation in which we never chose the terms where our being seen as an intelligible being depends upon. Honneth is more optimistic, arguing that (in at least some) inter-subjective relations, we do ourselves choose these terms. Of course, we can hardly say the same about state-subject relations, which are much more applicable in the refugee situation. In the next section, these theories (both Honneth's and Butler's and Athanasiou's) will be used to study how refugees become dehumanized through the mechanisms of recognition and dispossession. While it is important to keep in mind that recognition, if it occurs, is not always benign, our inquiry will primarily focus on the absence of recognition: how does this relate to dehumanization?

2.3 Dispossessed refugees

The second, empirical, form of dispossession is concerned with social, political, and economic processes and ideologies that disown and abject persons by means of normative and normalizing powers. As quoted at the beginning of this chapter, this refers to dispossession as imposed injuries, foreclosures, and other modes of subjugation that need addressing and redressing. This manner of dispossession does not just occur to individuals, but whole groups can be dispossessed at the same time, for example in refugee camps, where refugees are dispossessed of land, freedom and livelihood (Butler & Athanasiou, 2013, pp. 23, 108). These refugees can be said to be in a position of precarity, a situation in which certain people and groups are exposed to injury, death, violence,

poverty, indebtedness, and etcetera, in ways that others are not. For Butler and Athanasiou, the word precarity describes the situation of people whose “proper place is non-being” (2013, p. 19). This place of non-being is very much related to being in a place of disposability, a socially assigned place and a condition very much fundamental in neoliberal regimes. What happens to these individuals and groups is that by appropriating or destroying the conditions for life, this form of dispossession renders these people unintelligible; making the status of human impossible something they cannot reach.

If we look at refugee camps, it is glaringly evident that this form of dispossession occurs. For instance, the UN has warned that the situation in a Damascus refugee camp is beyond humane (Shaheen, 2015). Refugees in the camp are starving and injured, and as a result of fighting between groups aid is cut off, leaving the refugees in this situation of precarity. This is not the only refugee camp where the situation has escalated. In 2015 Amnesty International called a refugee camp in Austria inhumane, stating that 1,500 people were sleeping in the open air, that medical care was insufficient, and that the facilities were insanitary and badly organized (BBC News, 2015).

There can be no doubt that the refugees in these camps face horrible circumstances that dispossess them of land, freedom, and livelihood. They are stuck in these camps until governments manage to process the asylum applications (or even facilitate the handing of these applications). An example of this was the border camp at Idomeni, at the border between Greece and Macedonia.²¹ While the Macedonian government said the fence (which resulted in the camp) was to properly process refugees, they did not manage to do so. This is a clear example of being in a socially assigned place of disposability; governments could easily arrange other asylum procedures that would not involve the inhumane circumstances of these camps. States like to claim that this would come at a great cost to their population, but as Joseph Carens argues, this is not convincing:

[it] is possible that there would be other circumstances in which admitting refugees would bring such high cost to the basic interests of those in the receiving society that exclusion would be justifiable [...] in the real world, however, this is a purely hypothetical speculation. I do not see how any democratic state in Europe or North America today could make the case that it has taken in so many refugees that it is now morally entitled to turn real refugees away (Carens, 2015, p. 220).

²¹ We will return to Idomeni in chapter five, where it is one of the case studies.

According to Athanasiou, immigration policies manage immigrants in refugees in two ways. They are either seen as feminized, victimized, and coerced or as diseased and afflicted (Butler & Athanasiou, 2013, pp. 113–114). That refugees (at the minimum those in refugee camps) are dehumanized is clear now, and that this happens through processes of social, political, and economic dispossession too. But what kind of humanness are refugees dispossessed of when the very conditions for life are destroyed?

2.4 Dispossession and dehumanization

The answer to this question lies, I believe, in the connection between Honneth's and Butler's and Athanasiou's texts and in particular the three kinds of disrespect and corresponding modes of recognition Honneth identifies. One way to construe the relation between these modes of disrespect and Butler and Athanasiou's theory of dispossession is to see empirical dispossession as the result of a failure in terms of recognition. If we fail to recognize people and thus disrespect them, we fail to recognize (part of their) humanness, and perhaps it is possible to link the different kinds of humanness as formulated in chapter one to the different kinds of disrespect Honneth describes. This resonates with what Butler and Athanasiou say on the subject of recognition and human subjectivity, namely that the power relations in our liberal world mean that eligibility for recognition and human subjectivity are equated (Butler & Athanasiou, 2013, p. 78).

The question here is thus whether it is possible to link the three kinds of disrespect to the different kinds of humanness. In doing so, our account of humanness is extended beyond the qualities named in chapter one to encompass the view of human beings as relational/interdependent. While someone might be said to possess the qualities Haslam identifies, they depend on the recognition of others to the extent that others view them as human or not. The types of disrespect were briefly mentioned in the previous section: disrespect pertaining to physical integrity, disrespect affecting a person's normative understanding of themselves, and disrespect concerning social downgrading of individuals. Of course, it is entirely possible that the different modes of disrespect are not exclusive to either human nature or uniquely human characteristics. This does not need to be a problem, for dehumanization does not need to be either exclusively animalistic or mechanistic, it can also be both. However, before we leap to conclusions, it needs to be determined whether the models of dehumanization and the modes of disrespect can be related to each other.

2.4.1 Disrespect of physical integrity

The first type of disrespect, relating to physical integrity, concerns practical maltreatment and shows an awareness of the importance of embodiment. It involves treating people in a way that they are deprived, by force, of the opportunity to dispose freely of their body. This form of disrespect and physical maltreatment is harmful to the subject's confidence, for it does lasting damage to the belief that one has autonomy over one's body. In addition, this form of disrespect leads to a deprivation of the recognition that we express in having respect for other's control over their bodies. This form of respect has to be acquired by the successful integration of both physical *and* emotional qualities, in particular by developing emotional attachments in socialization processes (Honneth, 1992, p. 190). Thus, this form of disrespect does not only show that we do not respect someone's physical integrity – but also shows a lack of respect for their (capacity to form) emotional attachments to not just others, but also to their body.²²

The importance of bodily autonomy or agency and emotional attachment connects this type of disrespect and its corresponding mode of recognition to mechanistic dehumanization. Mechanistic dehumanization was concerned with human nature qualities such as emotional responsiveness, interpersonal warmth, and agency (Haslam, 2006, p. 257). If someone is disrespected in this manner their agency over their body is taken away, and they are treated in a manner that disregards or damages their capacity for emotional attachment (interpersonal warmth and emotional responsiveness in figure 1). Thus, when dispossession occurs and this type of disrespect comes to pass, which happens when physical maltreatment or violence²³ take place, we can speak of mechanistic dehumanization.

2.4.2 Disrespect of rights

The second type of disrespect described what happens when people are “structurally excluded from the possession of certain rights within a given society” (Honneth, 1992, p. 190). Honneth takes the term ‘right’ to refer to the claims that individuals can make on society that they can legitimately expect to be fulfilled for the simple reason that as members of a community, we have a right to participate in the institutional order of this community (Honneth, 1992,

²² Rape victims are evidence that emotions and bodily integrity are very closely related. For example, rape victims are often incapable of distancing the body from their emotions. Their body and ‘mind’ become nearly indistinguishable, with mental states feeling as if they were physiological (Brison, 2003).

²³ Honneth mentions rape and torture as examples (Honneth, 1992, p. 190). In chapter five more is said about what ‘physical maltreatment’ might consist of.

p. 191). This shows again the idea that we are already dispossessed in that we are very much dependent on society fulfilling these claims – we are not self-sufficient but vulnerable to being denied our rights (Butler & Athanasiou, 2013, p. 4). When this kind of disrespect occurs, and people are systematically denied certain rights, this conveys the message that they are seen as not possessing the same kind of moral accountability as other people. What is significant here is that it is not just that someone's personal autonomy is restricted, but that this is combined with people feeling that they lack the status of being an equal in interactions with others who have these moral rights. Consequently, people are treated as if they are not capable of making moral judgments; they are not recognized as persons with moral accountability (Honneth, 1992, p. 191).

This form of disrespect is thus very much focused on treating people as persons having moral accountability, with moral rights, and capable of making moral judgments. Going back to our model of dehumanization, we see that qualities having to do with morality are seen as uniquely human qualities (Haslam, 2006, p. 257). Moral sensibility, but also qualities such as maturity, rationality, and civility are all related to recognizing the other as being a morally accountable person. If we are to see someone as morally accountable this implicitly also means that we see them as rational, mature, and civilized. After all, if one is to account for behavior for which one is morally responsible, one has to be able to reflect on one's behavior and consequences of this behavior, which is related to being mature and rational. Additionally, civility as polite, respectful, and reasonable behavior also has to do with morality – for moral norms are often related to these kinds of behavior. When we disrespect someone by not recognizing them as being a morally accountable person, by not respecting their moral rights, we deny them qualities that are uniquely human. In other words: if dispossession occurs through this kind of disrespect we can speak of animalistic dehumanization.

2.4.3 Disrespect of lifestyle

The third type of disrespect concerned the denigration of an individual or collective lifestyle. Words like 'honor', 'dignity' and 'status' signify the amount of acceptance in a society for the manner in which a person comes to their self-realization within the boundaries of cultural traditions in a society (Honneth, 1992, p. 191). The values in a society can be structured so that certain forms of living are downgraded and seen as inferior or deficient. People who are subject to this kind of disrespect suffer a loss of self-esteem, for they are not able to see their characters or traits (which we partly develop as a consequence of a certain lifestyle) as worthy of the recognition and esteem of others. In other words: they are not able to see their abilities as having social value and cannot see

themselves as having a positive significance within and for their community. This kind of dehumanization occurred in the example of the Darfur situation given in chapter one, where African traditions were rejected and replaced with Arabic ones, and where the Arab lifestyle was seen as more civilized.

If dispossession occurs as the result of this form of disrespect, what kind of dehumanization are we speaking of? In this case the answer does not lie in the different qualities (uniquely human or human nature), but rather in whether we see these qualities as essentialist or acquired. The argument for this is that the third form of disrespect is concerned with how people live their lives, something that is subject to change and also vary variable between people. Human nature qualities are thought of as present in all humans, as “deeply rooted, immutable, informative, discrete, biologically based, and consistently expressed across situations” (Haslam, 2006, p. 257). Consequently, these qualities can be expected to be recognized by people even in others of whose lifestyle they see as inferior, because they are fundamental to human nature. On the other hand, qualities that are uniquely human (those involving civility, morality, refinement, etcetera) are considered to be acquired later in life and as subject to variation between people (Haslam, 2006, p. 257). Because these qualities are subject to variation between people and acquired later in life, qualities that are uniquely human are also likely to differ between different lifestyles. It is thus very likely that when dispossession involves this kind of disrespect, we are denying people qualities that are uniquely human. As with the second kind of disrespect, this means that this form of disrespect is related to animalistic dehumanization.

As is now clear, the different kinds of disrespect are easily connected to the different types of dehumanization. This means that dispossession as a mechanism of dehumanization can lead to either animalistic or mechanistic dehumanization. However, there are two aspects of this framework that problematize making a clear distinction between the two forms of dehumanization when dehumanization occurs. The first of these is that it is not always possible to distinguish between the three kinds of disrespect as discussed above for they can occur simultaneously or alternate. Second, while applying Honneth’s theory of recognition to Butler and Athanasiou’s theory of dispossession has been fruitful, it has already been discussed that it has its shortcomings. In addition to this, the three forms of disrespect discussed here do not exhaust the different forms of dispossession that can occur. Nonetheless, the combination of the two theories has enabled us to give a first answer to the question of how dispossession or a failure to recognize functions as a mechanism of dehumanization. It is through a failure to recognize certain

aspects or qualities of people that we dehumanize them, but as the work of Butler and Athanasiou showed, dispossession (and thus recognition) is complex and the failure to recognize a certain aspect of humanness is not always simply a case of refusing to acknowledge someone as, for example, an agent.

In the next chapter, a specific example of dehumanization where people are denied aspects of their humanness is discussed, namely the instrumentalization of refugees. This type of dehumanization is relevant for a number of reasons. First, it is one way in which governments fail to recognize the certain aspects of the humanness of refugees, thereby dehumanizing them. Secondly, it shows how the very language we use to talk about refugees matters, which will be relevant throughout this thesis.

3. An example of a mechanism of dehumanization: the instrumentalization of refugees

In this chapter an example of how dehumanization can occur by not recognizing certain aspects of humanness is discussed, namely that of political instrumentalization. In current policies on refugees the legal status of refugee is critical for people who are in need of aid (Cole, 2016), for this label grants certain rights and duties to different parties. Because the legal status of 'refugee' is so critical, refugees become susceptible to political instrumentalization. Political instrumentalization of refugees means that refugees serve as a means of pursuing a political aim – refugees become a means to a political end. This can be seen as a process of dehumanization, for people are treated more as objects than as human beings because, for example, their agency is not recognized. A clear example of this is the discourse Geert Wilders uses. He links the arrival of refugees with an increased presence of Islam²⁴, and uses fear mongering to gain votes.

By applying a semiotic framework, it is possible to show how the meaning of the word refugee is changeable and is susceptible to multiple understandings occurring simultaneously, which makes refugees susceptible to this instrumentalization. This shows one of the ways in which our language is implicated in processes of dispossession and recognition. If we are to understand how refugees are instrumentalized due to the malleability of the term refugee, we first need to understand what instrumentalization involves and how this is related to dehumanization. This will be the topic of the first section of this chapter. In the second section, it is studied how this mechanism of dispossession works through language, e.g., the semiotics of the word refugee, and how this instrumentalization thus occurs to refugees.

3.1 Instrumentalization and objectification of refugees

The term instrumentalization is closely related to objectification, and this conceptual relation can be traced back to Kant's influence on western thought on human dignity. It was Kant who said that objectification of humans involves them being reduced to a mere instrument, to a tool used for the other's purpose (Papadaki, 2010). This linked instrumentalization to objectification, for central to the notion of instrumentalization became treating a person as an object. This understanding of objectification remains the commonly accepted view in (philosophical) literature. Thus, for example, both Catharine MacKinnon and Ronald Dworkin see objectification as reducing a person to the

²⁴ Which, as was shown in chapter one, is not necessarily true.

status of an object of mere instrumental worth (Papadaki, 2010). This means instrumentalization, rather than a process separate from objectification, can be better understood as what happens when objectification (i.e. the treating of someone as an object) occurs. If we want to understand whether or not instrumentalization leads to dehumanization, we need to understand what it means to treat someone as an object.

Martha Nussbaum proposed, originally in relation to sexual objectification, seven notions involved in treating the other as an object. Nussbaum further develops the idea that instrumentalization is (a form of) objectification. For Nussbaum there are seven ways in which a person can be objectified, and instrumentalization is one of these. For Nussbaum instrumentalization is a separate category of objectification, which focuses especially on treating the other as something to be used in achieving one's purpose. The other six notions are then other specific ways to objectify someone. According to Nussbaum, the following six other modes of objectification exist:

2. *Denial of autonomy*: The objectifier treats the object as lacking in autonomy and self-determination.
3. *Inertness*: The objectifier treats the object as lacking in agency, and perhaps also in activity.
4. *Fungibility*: The objectifier treats the object as interchangeable (a) with other objects of the same type, and/or (b) with objects of other types.
5. *Violability*: The objectifier treats the object as lacking in boundary-integrity, as something that it is permissible to break up, smash, break into.
6. *Ownership*: The objectifier treats the object as something that is owned by another, can be bought or sold, etc.
7. *Denial of Subjectivity*: The objectifier treats the object as something whose experience and feelings (in any) need not be taking into account (Nussbaum, 1995, p. 257).

While Nussbaum's approach is helpful in understanding the different modes of objectification, it seems to me that modes two to seven are better understood as different consequences of mode one, that of treating the other as something to be used in achieving one's purpose. While mode two to seven can also occur separately, when instrumentalization occurs by necessity at least one of the other modes also occurs. It is impossible to use someone for one's own purpose without at least objectifying them in additional ways. This means that when the

political instrumentalization of refugees occurs, that is, when refugees are used as an instrument to achieve some other purpose, one of the other modes of objectification also occurs. Take, for example, the refugees living in refugee camps along the Greek border who are dubbed 'economic refugees'. This term clearly serves a political aim: that of justifying the refusal to grant refugees entry. The term economic refugee obscures the original legal definition of the term refugee and its corresponding duties for states. By applying this term to a group of people that would fall under the legal definition of refugee, this group becomes a rhetorical instrument for politicians. In other words: they are instrumentalized. This instrumentalization goes hand in hand with another mode of objectification: that of the denial of subjectivity. In the political instrumentalization of refugees the refugees often find themselves stuck in refugee camps, such as those surrounding the Greek border. The circumstances in those camps are horrendous, yet little consideration for the lived experiences and feelings of these refugees can be found among those who are responsible for the refugees being there.²⁵

Employing the modes of Nussbaum in this matter, I propose the following relation between the framework of dehumanization and political instrumentalization: if instrumentalization occurs it should be asked if any of the other modes of objectification also occur, for these modes can tell us what kind of dehumanization is at play. Whether dehumanization occurs, and which kind (animalistic, mechanistic) is dependent on which human qualities are denied by the different modes of objectification – in other words, which qualities people are dispossessed of because these qualities are not recognized in one or more of the three ways identified in the previous chapter.

3.2 Objectification and dehumanization

The different modes of objectification mostly involved the one who objectifies treating the object as lacking a particular quality. Among these were autonomy, agency, activity, uniqueness, boundary-integrity, freedom, and subjectivity. If we are to understand the kind of dehumanization this leads to, we need to see if these qualities can be linked to the two different kinds of dehumanization and recognition we distinguished in chapter one and two. These qualities are to large extent qualities of human nature. As argued, animalistic dehumanization was concerned with qualities of human uniqueness such as civility, refinement, moral sensibility, rationality, and maturity. Mechanistic dehumanization related to qualities that are considered to be human nature, such as emotional

²⁵ Which in this case would be, at least partly, the leaders of the European Union who did not want to allow refugees entry to the EU. More will be said on this in chapter five.

responsiveness, interpersonal warmth, cognitive openness, agency, individuality, and depth. Qualities such as agency, individuality (uniqueness), can be found in the list of qualities Haslam names human nature. Qualities like subjectivity, boundary-integrity, and freedom, are less easily located yet nonetheless also result in mechanistic dehumanization.

Although the above position is not without criticism, it is possible to link freedom with agency, for it can be argued (as Kant does) that to be an actor requires the freedom to determine one's actions. The denial of subjectivity referred to the object being treated as though it has no experiences or feelings that need to be taking in account, which would involve a denial of the qualities of emotional responsiveness and interpersonal warmth – qualities that are human nature. By treating someone as an object, they are dispossessed of their subjecthood. The violation of boundary-integrity, treating someone as an object that they can smash or break, seems to involve at least a denial of the qualities agency and individuality, leading one to see someone as passive and fungible; that is, as expendable and thus 'smash-able'. The political instrumentalization of refugees (or any other person) is thus a textbook case of mechanistic dehumanization. This means that instrumentalization is at least related to the first kind of recognition: that of bodily autonomy and agency. However, as will become clear in the next section, there is also a failure to recognize refugees in the second sense, that of recognizing people as having certain rights within a society.

How is it possible that refugees are susceptible to this instrumentalization? The answer to this question lies in the term to denote them, 'refugees'. This term is very malleable and people use different interpretations of the term. How this is possible is the subject of the next section.

3.3 The malleability of the term refugee

In her paper 'Negotiating Durable Solutions for Refugees: A Critical Space for Semiotic Analysis' (2016) Georgie Cole takes a semiotic approach in analyzing what meaning actors attribute to the label 'refugee' and what the intent might be behind their use and manipulation of the word. While Cole takes the Rwandan refugees in Uganda as a case study, her analysis can be applied to the terms refugee and refugees in general.

3.3.1 The term refugee as a legal status

According to Cole, the term refugee suffers from chronic misuse, sometimes intentional and sometimes unnoticed. Even states and UNHCR, the decisive parties in making up refugee policy, are often vague in their usages of the word

when they discuss who is a refugee and who is not. This is despite the fact the actions of these governments concerning refugees are determined by whether an individual falls under the legal definition of refugee (Cole, 2016, p. 10). Having actions determined by a legal definition is not so strange if we consider the two underlying reasons for this. First, the diplomatic and financial resources for refugees are finite. Policy is made in a way that when we legally recognize people as refugees, states and organizations have to act. Without a framework that tells states and organizations who is a refugee and who has responsibility for this refugee, helping refugees seems unfeasible. Without a definition, states might feel as if these responsibilities never end, thus becoming hesitant in providing asylum. Second, without a legal definition it seems impossible to determine when people should stop being seen as a refugee. The legal label of refugee is therefore critical for people who are in need of aid (Cole, 2016, pp. 10–11). Strangely enough, there is a lack of literature that critically studies what role the label of refugee plays. By applying a semiotic framework, Cole intends to show how and why the meaning of the word changes. Semiotics studies (among other things) how words gain meaning, and is therefore relevant in studying the word refugee. Acknowledging that there are multiple strands of semiotics, Cole uses a combination of the work from Ferdinand de Saussure and Roland Barthes concerning signs.

3.3.2 The semiotic framework

Ferdinand de Saussure stated that languages are systems of signs that express ideas (Silverman, 1984, p. 4). Signs are composed out of two elements: the signifier and the signified. The signifier is the form that the sign takes; the signified is the concept it represent (Saussure, 1986, pp. 66–67). The association of the signifier with the signified results in the sign, and the relationship between signifier and signified is called signification. An example: imagine we have a shop that has a note on the door that says ‘open’. The sign ‘open’ consists of the signifier (the word ‘open’) and the signified concept that the shop is open at this moment. Signs like ‘open’ are elements in our language that signify, but they do so only in relation to each other. The composite of signifier and signified signifies through the connection between the two, but also because they differ in some aspect from other composites of signifier and signified. Saussure stresses that the connection between signifier and signified is arbitrary and conventional, and that signs can come to express different ideas without endangering their identity (Saussure, 1986, pp. 67–70).

While Saussure’s observation that signs can change is helpful for explaining how the word refugee can take on different meanings, it does not give us an

account of when or why this happens and what the effects of this are. Therefore, Cole turns to the work of Roland Barthes, who adds to the Saussurean idea of the sign by proposing that there are two orders of signification: denotative and connotative. At the first order we have the denotative Saussurean sign (meaning), composed of a denotative signifier and denotative signified. This first order sign is then itself transformed into a connotative signifier (form) and combined with a new connotative signified, the composite of which is then a second order or connotative sign. To clarify this, Silverman gives us a slightly adjusted version of an illustration²⁶ of Barthes:



(Silverman, 1984, p. 27)

What makes this tiered structure so useful for Cole is that it was intended to show that political processes and socio-historical conditions, such as class interests and values, can create changes in the relationship between connotative signifier and connotative signified, thereby creating changes in patterns of cognitive association (Silverman, 1984, pp. 29–30). Cole calls this the epistemological slide: a process “[w]hereby patterns of cognitive association change over time as a result of political processes and socio-historical conditions” (2016, p. 13). This epistemological slide is what allows different actors to draw on different meanings of words (Cole, 2016, p. 19)

There are two problems with Barthes’ approach for Cole (and thus for us) that needs to be remedied before applying this framework to the word ‘refugee’: Barthes’ insistence on the unstable and transient nature of myths and the under-theorization of the role of agency. The first problem stems from the role

²⁶ An almost identical illustration can be found in Cole (2015, p. 13).

the epistemological slide (see above) plays in creating myths. For Barthes, these myths constantly switch meaning, which would make researching such myths difficult. Cole circumvents the first problem by proposing that we can organize the endless ways in which signs may be interpreted into common understandings that are shared by certain communities. While this might homogenize the diverse views of individuals in communities, from a methodological standpoint she thinks the simplification necessary (Cole, 2016, p. 13). The second problem with Barthes' theory is that it misses a thorough account of the role of agency. While Barthes states that in myths the signified is historically and intentionally determined, thus acknowledging that agency does figure in linguistic change, he goes no further than this. As a consequence, Barthes' framework does not explain how situations come about where different second-order schemes of signification exist and compete with each other, nor can it explain why sometimes people use words intentionally to create ambiguity. This problem is somewhat mitigated by introducing Umberto Eco's notion of 'significant intention', which refers to semiotic strategies that authors employ to either "[c]onstrain interpretative possibilities" (Cole, 2016, p. 14) or to suggest an indefinite amount of possibilities. Both these strategies can be used to manipulate the usage and meaning of words.

3.3.3 Analyzing the term 'refugee'

Cole uses the above framework to explain how the word refugee has become susceptible to multiple understandings occurring simultaneously, to then discuss the implications of this for how the refugee regime envisages solutions to refugee problems. To make her argument Cole uses the case study of over 55.000 Rwandan refugees, who in the 2000's resisted repatriation and thus remained refugees despite encouragement from (amongst others) the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to return. In the beginning of the 2000's, discussions started with the UNHCR and African governments on whether the Cessation Clause should be applied to these refugees. A Cessation Clause sets out the only situations in which a refugee status, properly and legitimately granted, comes to an end. This means that once an individual is determined to be a refugee, their status as refugee is maintained unless they falls within the terms of one of the cessation clauses (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 1999).

Studying the various ways in which the word refugee was employed, Cole uses the semiotic framework described above to show how the multiple orders of meaning that are implicit in the word 'refugee' interplay. The first-order sign 'refugee' is, as mentioned earlier, critical for people in need of aid because it provides a legal framework in which the responsibilities of different actors are

formalized. Even though there is this clear legal framework, the sign is very malleable and the word refugee easily takes on supplementary symbolic meanings that obscure the word's original legal definition and its corresponding responsibilities (as formulated in the 1951 UN Refugee Convention). As Cole states, not only has

[t]he term come to mean different things to each actor over time; on the other hand, different actors have simultaneously held conflicting second-order interpretations based on what these 'refugees' have come to symbolise for them (2016, p. 14).

In the case of the Rwandan refugees this led to different understandings of the term refugee, and as a consequence new definitions surfaced to distinguish between different groups of Rwandan refugees (Cole, 2016, p. 18). As a consequence, arriving at durable solutions for the actual refugees became increasingly difficult for different parties understood the case in different ways (Cole, 2016, p. 19).

Unfortunately, the word refugee has proven to be very malleable, and thus very vulnerable to processes of political instrumentalization. While this is normal for any word in a language, it is especially tragic for refugees. Instead of holding up the legal definition of the word refugee, and viewing refugees as bodies in need of certain forms of assistance, refugees become rhetorical figures. This is problematic when it comes to arriving at solutions for refugees, because these solutions seem to come secondary to resolving the broader issues (the secondary or connotative meaning) that refugees have come to mean to all the actors involved. It is here that we come back to the dehumanization of refugees. Perhaps the most influential on this process of dehumanization is that the more refugees turn into myth due to epistemological sliding, the more marginalization occurs in regard to their actual bodies, voices, and futures (Cole, 2016, p. 14). The question now becomes: to what kinds of dehumanization can this epistemological sliding lead?

3.3.4 Epistemological sliding and the dehumanization of refugees

Central to the concept of epistemological sliding is the idea that political and social processes can change the relationship between the connotative signifier and signified. In other words: epistemological sliding involves in a change in our cognitive association between the form that the sign takes (signifier), and the concept it represents (signified). The kind of dehumanization that occurs is therefore dependent on which meaning the word 'refugee' takes for actors. Important here is that actors are free to draw on the different meanings of the

word as it suits them (Cole, 2016, p. 19), so it is possible that actors choose to employ a certain meaning even though they are aware of the alternatives. The consequence of this is that refugees become, as stated earlier, susceptible to political instrumentalization due to their being objectified.

How does this work in practice? The usage of the term ‘economic refugee’ in the Dutch discourse is an excellent example of how objectification through language occurs. According to Article 1 of the Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, the definition of refugee is as follows:

A person who owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it (UNHCR, 1951).

This definition is the amended version from 1967, when the temporal limitation was removed (UNHCR, 2005). The core principle of the UNHCR Convention of 1951 is the principle of non-refoulement. This principle states that refugees should not be returned to a country where there is a serious threat to their life or freedom (UNHCR, 1951). The principle of non-refoulement has nowadays become a rule of customary international law.

The term ‘economic refugee’ refers to someone who leaves their country to look for better job prospects or higher living standards than they have in their home country. The usage of this term is more complicated than might appear at first glance, for it attempts to obfuscate the meaning of the term refugee by adding the word economic to it. If we identify people as a refugee, certain legal rights and duties come into play – such as the principle of non-refoulement.

In the wake of the Syrian war and the influx of refugees, European governments were searching for a way to differentiate between ‘real’ refugees and those who in Dutch were called ‘gelukzoekers’²⁷ or economic refugees. Economic refugees were described as people trying to slip in with the real refugees but who were not refugees themselves, just people looking for better jobs and living

²⁷ Translation: someone who is seeking out happiness, a fortune hunter. ‘Gelukzoekers’ are people who are only coming to the Netherlands to benefit from the welfare state and the economy.

standards. Of course, it can be argued that the concern of these governments was not so much battling abuse of the refugee-system, but rather to control the amount of refugees who they allowed entry. This is evidenced by the discourse of (mostly right-wing) political parties, especially during elections, in which they argued that a minimal number of refugees should be allowed entry and that it would be better if these refugees were given shelter in a country more local to their home country. These parties forget, however, that these neighboring countries have their own problems (instable governments, for example) or have a bad track record when it comes to taking care of refugees. Turkey is an example of the latter. While the Turkish state promised to enable Syrian children to go to school and to protect them from abuse, there is evidence of child labor (BBC News, 2016b). In other words: it can be doubted whether the motivation between differentiating between ‘real’ refugees and economic refugees is all that pure and not just a way of being able to refuse actual refugees entry by labeling them as economic refugees.

What is so dangerous about this is that the term economic refugee still employs the term refugee – a legal term with important consequences – while at the same time being devised to refer to a group of people who supposedly do not fall under the description of refugee. As a result, the term refugee itself loses its legal meaning, for even if refugees flee for (amongst other) economic reasons – a refugee is a refugee. What makes the situation even more complicated is that war can have a devastating effect on a country, destroying its economy and leaving people without homes and jobs. Imagine someone fleeing a war. It can either be argued that the person is a refugee (after all, they have a well-founded fear of persecution) or that this person is mainly fleeing because of economic reasons: the war has made working nearly impossible. The term economic refugee represents the second interpretation, obfuscating the fact that wanting a better life for oneself or a better job does not mean that one does not have a well-founded fear of persecution. This has as a consequences that the meaning of the term refugee also becomes obfuscated. If an ‘economic refugee’ is not a ‘refugee’ in the legal sense of the word, there becomes the need to distinguish between ‘actual refugees’ and ‘refugees’, which further complicates the discourse around refugees.

This is where the danger of epistemological sliding lies. Political processes (such as described above) have changed the cognitive association of the word ‘refugee’ by obfuscating its original meaning. This means that different actors can draw upon different meanings of the word ‘refugee’ – for some it has lost its legal meaning due to the ‘economic’ connotation in current discourse, for others it has become a term to denote all migrants. Refugees become the victim

of this, for they have become susceptible to political instrumentalization: they become, in the case of Dutch politics, a means to an end in the discourse. Geert Wilders, for example, uses this discourse and the ambiguity of the term 'refugee' to insist on the Islamization of the Netherlands, a fear-mongering approach. His electorate has come to associate refugees with Islamic people looking for the riches that Europe has to offer. This gained him many votes during the elections. This shows that due to epistemological sliding, refugees become have become a political instrument, a political tool.

This chapter served to illustrate a particular form of dispossession: when one is not recognized as a human subject, but instead viewed and treated as an instrument or object. The consequences of this can be severe: when refugees are not recognized as refugees and are returned to their home country, their lives might be in serious danger. As stated in section 3.2, the mechanistic dehumanization was related to the first type of recognition or disrespect. It is now clear why also the second form of disrespect that Honneth identifies is relevant in the case of refugees. In addition, the term economic refugee also connotes a disapproval of lifestyle choices, and as argued in chapter one, this also leads to mechanistic dehumanization. Because the term refugee has lost some of its original connotation as a legal term with rights and duties corresponding to it, refugees are less and less seen as people with certain rights in our society. This means that they are seen as lacking moral accountability, moral rights, and the capacity for moral judgment. This corresponds with the portrayal of refugees as 'gelukzoekers', as people trying to benefit from the better circumstances in Europe. As a consequence, these people, including 'actual refugees', are seen as lacking moral accountability, for they are abusing the system. This leads to animalistic dehumanization.

It should be increasingly clear at this point how complex processes of dehumanization can be. Even with a more specified process of dehumanization such as the instrumentalization of refugees it is difficult to pinpoint what form of dehumanization is occurring and how refugees are dispossessed of their status as a human being. What this chapter has shown is how important language can be in relation to dehumanization, recognition, and dispossession. The next chapter cements the importance of language even further, for it introduces the concept of necropolitics, which finalizes our framework and gives us the final theoretical means necessary to analyze the circumstances of places where refugees are said to be dehumanized.

4. Necropolitics, death-worlds, and dehumanization

In this chapter it is asked what it means to be dehumanized, both animalistic and mechanistically, through the processes discussed in the previous chapter. It is all very well to claim that dehumanization means that refugees lose their status as human being, but what does that mean for refugees? This is the central question in this chapter. To answer it, we turn to the concept of necropolitics.

4.1 Necropolitics

While Honneth (recognition), Butler and Athanasiou (dispossession) and Cole (instrumentalization) employ different research methods, all these accounts are applicable to the situation of refugees and the politics at play in the discussions and treatment of refugees. Cole warns us of political instrumentalization, Butler and Athanasiou argue that socially assigned disposability is fundamental to neoliberal regimes, and Honneth gives us a normative account of how dehumanization might work: a failure to recognize certain qualities. The concept of necropolitics seems extremely helpful here to describe the situation of refugees that are dispossessed of their status of human being.

4.1.1. Power over life and death

As Achille Mbembe (2003) uses the concept, necropolitics refers to the relationship between sovereignty and power over life and death. Mbembe links 'sovereignty' with imperium (2003, p. 12), which refers to the imperialist and colonial past (or present) of states. Modern European democracies, such as the Netherlands, are also sovereign states in that they have a permanent population, a centralized government that has full power to govern itself and a defined territory without the interference of other states. These criteria for sovereignty or statehood stem from the Montevideo Convention, which, although only signed by a limited number of parties, is generally accepted in international law (Shaw, 2008, p. 198). In modern democracies, the ultimate expression of sovereignty is often thought to be the demos (the people) creating a collection of general norms and values as free and equal men and women. This is heavily influenced by Kant's view on agency and positive freedom, and the idea that to be 'worthy' of human dignity is to possess the capacity for agency and being one's own author of the law one follows.²⁸ This

²⁸ This is akin to the idea of positive freedom, which refers to Isaiah Berlin's concept of positive liberty, wherein the word positive connotes the wish of the individual to be its own master (Berlin, 2002, p. 178) If someone possesses positive freedom, they are in the capacity to act upon their own free will. Positive freedom is the kind of freedom that is involved in the answer to the

gives the idea that the core project of sovereign states is autonomy. However, the ultimate expression of sovereignty lies, according to Mbembe, in having the power and capacity to determine who dies and who lives. An excellent example of this is what happened in (former) colonies, where violence of the state was legitimized by viewing it as part of the 'civilization' mission (Mbembe, 2003, p. 24). Theories of just war only apply to wars between civilized states, (former) slaves and colonial natives were viewed as barbaric or more animalistic than human, and certainly not as civilized.

4.1.2 Status of living death

Sovereignty as the power over life and death is not something that is only applicable to the colonial past. Mbembe argues that in our contemporary (neoliberal) world death-worlds are created, a form of social existence in "which vast populations are subjected to conditions of life conferring upon them the status of *living dead*" (Mbembe, 2003, p. 40). Dead and death here do not necessarily mean physical death, but also social death, political death, and civil death, stemming from social relations of "death, decay, and dying" (Lamble, 2013, p. 242). People that are exposed to prolonged situations of violence, deprivation, neglect and suffering are essentially abandoned – the situation only need to go on long enough for these people to actually die - but what is also relevant here is that these people are treated as if they were already dead, as if their life has no value. These different forms of 'death' can be compared to being in a situation of precarity, as described by Butler and Athanasiou and mentioned in chapter two. When one lives in such a situation of precarity, or (for example) has the status of living dead, one can be said to be living in a death-world. Note that death-worlds are not necessarily lined-off physical locations. One can be socially dead, for example, while still living together with people outside this death-world.

Mbembe uses necropolitics to add to the notion of biopolitics or biopower, stating that these are not sufficient enough to account for the ways in which contemporary politics functions. As Lamble states:

In other words, while biopolitical powers work to manage, order and foster life for citizens worthy of protection, such powers work in tandem with necropolitical powers that produce death for those destined to abandonment, violence and neglect (Lamble, 2013, p. 242).

question: "What, or who, is the source of control or interference that can determine someone to do, or be, this rather than that?" (Berlin, 2002, p. 168).

4.2 Necropolitics and biopower

Biopower, in the Foucauldian sense, is summarised by Mbembe as the domain of life over which power has control (Mbembe, 2003, p. 12). Some clarification is necessary here. Foucault's model of power states that having power is more than the power to say 'yes' and 'no' and to enslave others. Rather, power regulates and controls by producing knowledges, categories, and identities. To conceive of power relations in such a way requires us to go beyond interpretations of power as a legal model where power is located in creating and enforcing laws. Instead, those in power govern through disciplinary power that is located in a number of institutions like education, psychiatry, and medicine.

In this conception of power and discipline, discipline is connected to norms and standards that subjects internalise and show in their behaviour. The norms and standards that are enforced through discipline are constructed by the repetition of normative requirements: "discipline results in the securing of normalisation by embedding a pattern of norms disseminated throughout daily life and secured through surveillance" (Hunt and Wickham in Spade, 2006, p. 318). Thus, the goal of discipline is ensuring conformity to these standards and correcting those that deviate from these norms and standards, thereby validating some forms of life while making others undesirable. In this model of power, law is supplemented by medicine, psychology, and psychiatry functioning as regulatory institutions that create categories of people who deviate from the norms and standards. Discourse also plays an important part here: it produces knowledge and meaning, and has, as Stuart Hall states, an effect on our practices:

[t]he very language we use to describe the so-called facts interferes in this process of finally deciding what is true and what is false [...] language [discourse] has real effects in practice: the description becomes "true" (S. Hall, 2006, pp. 166–167).

That language can affect our practices should, after the second and third chapter, not be a strange idea. It is well established that language is not merely descriptive but is, as discussed earlier, also performative. It does not only describe reality but also has the possibility to alter reality (as happens when epistemological sliding occurs).

4.3 Necropolitics and dehumanization

The question now becomes how necropolitics and dehumanization are related. There are two ways to conceptualize this relationship between these two concepts. One is that when someone can be said to belong to the 'living dead'

or that they are in a death-world, this person is being dehumanized. In other words: dehumanization occurs when people are being subjected to conditions of life conferring upon them the status of living dead because these conditions have a dehumanizing effect. Conceived of in this way, being in a death-world comes prior to being dehumanized. The other way to conceptualize this relation between necropolitics and dehumanization is to say that dehumanization has already occurred *before* people are subjected to these conditions. That is to say that dehumanization comes before the death-world, or in other words: that people are subjected to the circumstances of a death-world is a result of their being dehumanized by those who have the power over life and death.

4.3.1 Conditions in death-worlds are dehumanizing

Death-worlds are meant to connote a situation in which people face prolonged situations of violence, neglect, suffering, and deprivation. The lives of these people are supposedly valueless (to those in power) and they are essentially abandoned. Is this dehumanizing? Recall the three modes of recognition and disrespect we identified in chapter two: no respect for the autonomous body, no legal recognition as a full-fledged member with equal (moral) rights, and being socially devaluated. Prolonged violence and suffering are quite likely to involve disrespect to, or a failure to recognize, the bodily autonomy of people. Violence often leads to physical maltreatment, and if people cannot leave certain locations they are disposed of the possibility to move their body freely. The second type of disrespect was concerned with the consequences of being structurally excluded of the possession of certain rights, of the possibility to make a claim on society that one can legitimately expect to be fulfilled. Those that are condemned to death-worlds are abandoned and neglected, which makes it very likely that they are denied these rights and claims. While they might voice them, they do not share an equal status with those that can expect their claims to be fulfilled, let alone with those in power. If these forms of disrespect are present in death-worlds, dehumanization can be said to occur. It is not strange that the violence, suffering, neglect and abandonment people are subjected to have this dehumanizing effect – both mechanistic dehumanization and animalistic dehumanization.

Things are complicated, however, by the third type of disrespect. The third type of disrespect focused on the denigration of an individual or collective lifestyle. Does being living in a ‘death-world’ dehumanize people in this manner? Depending on the specifics of a ‘death-world’ it might be possible to say that only people with certain lifestyles are excluded by those in power (for example: refugees) – which would indeed be dehumanizing. However, perhaps it makes

more sense to turn the relation between death-worlds and dehumanization around here.

4.3.2 Dehumanization leads to death-worlds

In the last section it was argued that being in a death-world can be dehumanizing. In this section, this relationship is turned around: if we dehumanize people we might condemn them to death-worlds by subjecting them to certain conditions (violence, neglect, etcetera).

The first mode of recognition with its corresponding mechanistic dehumanization involved violating the personal autonomy of people. If this happens systematically, either through violence or other manners of physical maltreatment such as the denial of food or medical care, people are exposed to prolonged dehumanization and conditions that are comparable to those that define what a death-world means. If dehumanization by disrespect to bodily autonomy is to lead to people becoming 'living dead', this dehumanization has to be systematic, prolonged, and involve either violence, neglect, deprivation and/or suffering. If we look at history, such as the war crimes in Darfur and concentration camps, it becomes clear that such violent and prolonged disrespect to bodily autonomy, and with that the existence of death-worlds, is not only imaginable but very much a reality in the world.

What about the second mode of recognition and disrespect? This involved the systematic denying of certain rights, which conveyed the message that some people do not possess the same accountability as others, making them unequal in interactions. If people are treated in this manner they cannot make the claims that other people can. This can be claims to social benefits, but also claims to a fair trial, or even the claim to the bare necessities for survival. In addition, if people are seen as lacking moral accountability, as uncivilized, irrational, and immature, they fall outside the moral norms to which people generally uphold each other. As shown in the first chapter, this makes people more likely to approve of violence towards those they dehumanize in this manner. If this denial of rights and the increased approval of violence towards those that are humanized become prolonged and systematic, it is quite possible that people become second-rate citizens. Depending on how these people are treated, they might very well find themselves in a death-world, for at the very least they are suffering a 'social death' from being treated in this manner.

We now come to the third mode of recognition, concerning disrespect towards individual or collective lifestyles. In every society some lifestyles are more accepted than others, and societies are often structured in a way that

downgrades certain forms of living. This has a dehumanizing effect: people are treated as having less honor and dignity, which results in animalistic dehumanization. In addition, this kind of disrespect can condemn people to the status of living dead. If those in power systematically condemn the lifestyle of certain individuals this might result in these people being subjected to conditions that create death-worlds. This does not need to be a physical death, but can, as explained earlier in this chapter, also be a political or social death.

It is thus possible to view the relation between necropolitics and dehumanization in more than one way. This does not need to pose a problem for our framework, for it shows how closely the two are related. One way to bring the two conceptualizations of this relation together is to state that dehumanization can lead to people living in death-worlds, and that the circumstances in these death-worlds keep the dehumanization in effect. In any case one thing is abundantly clear: if one is subjected to the conditions in a death-world, dehumanization is very likely to have already occurred and still be occurring. In the next chapter, I aim to relate the framework of necropolitics and dehumanization discussed in this chapter, with attention to the role of language, to the situation of refugees. Before we can do this, however, we need to have an account of the refugee camps and centers and the circumstances there.

5. The case studies - dehumanization of refugees in refugee camps and centers

In this chapter the theories and mechanisms discussed in the previous four chapters come together in order to see whether this framework can be used to analyze situations in which refugees are said to be dehumanized: does dehumanization indeed occur when it is claimed that it does? I have chosen two sites where refugees live that are very different from each other so that we might see the differences and similarities that occur with regard to dehumanization. Nevertheless, we should remain aware that these are only two camps/centers. This is to say that we need to be careful when we form our conclusions. *If* dehumanization occurs at these two sites, it does not necessarily mean that it occurs at every site where refugees are located.

5.1 The two cases

In the first section of this chapter I discuss two cases: refugee centers in the Netherlands and a refugee camp on the Macedonian/Greek border. While the differences between the two locations should become clear in the next few pages, there is (at least) one similarity: both locations harbor (at least partially) refugees from the 'Syrian refugee crisis'.

5.1.1 Case 1 – the refugee camp Idomeni

In 2015 a border barrier was built by Macedonia between the Macedonian and Greek border to stop the influx of refugees and to allow for better registration of refugees as they pass through the border into Macedonia. The border barrier, a fence, is razor-topped and three meters high. Armed security teams, composed of members of six other Eastern European nations, will help Macedonia patrol the fence. Ideally, the fence should allow Macedonia to prioritize refugees from Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan, while stopping the entry of migrants from other countries whose arrival might be more driven by economic factors (J. Hall, 2016)²⁹. The construction of the fence was not without problems. Migrants attacked police with stones after an accident that injured a young man from Morocco, who was accidentally electrocuted on the top of a train carriage (Kantouris & Testorides, 2015).

While the official statement is that the fence was built to create some sort of organized processing of the refugees, it is also very much a reaction to border policies of other countries. It was the limiting and restriction of asylum applications in Austria, Slovenia, Serbia and other countries in the Balkan that resulted in Macedonia restricting migrant entries. The announcement of the

²⁹ Of course, as chapter three showed such statements can be highly problematic.

fence followed three days after Austria imposed the daily limit of 80 asylum claims (BBC News, 2016a). The building of the border barrier has led to thousands of refugees being stranded in Greece, specifically near the Idomeni border crossing (BBC News, 2016a). In March, in reaction to Slovenia barring migrants from entering and travelling through Slovenia, Macedonia announced that it would close the Greek border completely and that it planned to increase the 30km barrier to 320km (BBC News, 2016b).

The fence resulted in a huge refugee camp on the Greek side of the Macedonian-Greek border, with about ten thousand refugees. The Idomeni camp had no running water and while there were chemical toilets, those often overflowed. In the days before NGO's arrived, there was no food either. When food did arrive, refugees (including children) often had to wait more than three hours in line to receive soup or a sandwich. The circumstances in the camp worsened when heavy rainfall changed the terrain into a muddy, flooded camp for which the tents in which the refugees were staying were not suited (Salem, 2016). The lack of proper sanitation led to cases of pneumonia, septicemia, and complications during pregnancies. In addition the circumstances in the camp led to mental health issues, hepatitis A, and respiratory infections (Thomas, 2016). Over time the refugees started businesses and schools; the camp had three improvised mosques, a kindergarten, a school, barbers and food shops. However, basic facilities were still lacking. These budding enterprises were started when refugees realized that the border would probably stay shut, according to the head of UNHCR's field office in Idomeni (Reuters, 2016). The Greek authorities did repeated appeals to the refugees to leave, but most refugees refused to do so, stating that they have no country to go back to, or that if they leave Idomeni, Europe will forget about them. In May 2016 the Greek authorities started the relocation of refugees from the Idomeni camp.

5.1.2 Case 2 - refugee centers in the Netherlands

When refugees wish to apply for asylum in the Netherlands they need report to what is called an 'aanmeldcentrum', a center where they declare their wish to apply for asylum. Ter Apel is the primary aanmeldcentrum (AC) where all refugees travel through; from there they are divided over three other centers. Schiphol has it's own center for people who arrive by plane. In the AC's the refugees are given some time to rest and prepare their case. This period is at least six working days, during which refugees can speak with their lawyers and people from VluchtelingenWerk Nederland (an organization that looks after refugees). While the Immigration and Naturalization Service (IND) starts processing their asylum application by studying any documents the refugees brought with them and determining their identity, the refugees are given

medical advice. This advice is also passed through to the INS, since it is often relevant, for instance in the cause of trauma. After this rest and preparation period, the general asylum procedure truly starts (VluchtelingenWerk, n.d.).

On the first day an employee of the INS meets with the refugee to confirm their identity, nationality, and travel route. On the second day the refugee has the opportunity to meet with a lawyer to prepare for day three, during which the refugee tells an INS employee *why* they want asylum. On the fourth day the refugee and their lawyer meet again in order to see if additions or corrections to what was said the day before needs to be send to the INS. After the fourth day the INS determines whether they have enough information to make a decision; if they do not refugees enter the prolonged asylum procedure, during which refugees stay in an ‘asielzoekerscentrum’ (AZC), which translates to asylum seeker center or refugee center. This procedure can last up to six months (VluchtelingenWerk, n.d.). Because of the increased amount of applications, refugees have to wait seven months before the general procedure starts, often in facilities that were intended for short stays or were quickly built to deal with the increased number of refugees (NOS, 2016).

The ‘Centraal Orgaan opvang Asielzoekers’ (COA), responsible for the reception and supervision of asylum seekers, has a general description of how asylum centers look. People living in an asylum center live together with five to eight others in so-called ‘living units’. Every unit has a few bedrooms and a shared living room, kitchen, and sanitary facilities (COA, n.d.). In reality, the situation in most refugee centers is far from optimal. In Heumensoord, a campsite, refugees are faced with limited heating and sanitary facilities (De Gelderlander, 2015). Other complaints that are heard nationwide are the absence of any sort of activities to pass the time, no communication about the contents of the food (no information on whether it contains pork, for example)³⁰, and uncertainty about when they can expect to hear something from the INS. These complaints are often met with disdain from Dutch society. The most often heard reply is something along the lines of ‘I don’t get why they are protesting, they’re getting free money and a place to stay, go back if you don’t like it,’³¹ or they are called ‘gelukzoekers’³². While refugees complain about the circumstances, they are also grateful for being in the Netherlands (Rosman, 2015).

³⁰ More will be said regarding this claim later.

³¹ See, for example Heerugowaard Centraal (2016).

³² See, for example Dichtbij (2015).

5.2 Does dehumanization occur at Idomeni and Dutch refugee centers?

In this section we turn to the dehumanization framework developed throughout chapters one, two and three, and the necropolitical framework of Mbembe discussed in chapter four to develop a better understanding of what is happening at Idomeni and the Dutch refugee centers. In doing so, both frameworks will intersect with each other and thus be discussed together rather than separately. It will be argued that dehumanization does happen in both locations, albeit in different ways and with different consequences.

5.2.1 Dehumanization in Idomeni?

It is undoubtedly true that the circumstances in refugee camps can be horrible (Shaheen, 2015) and that refugees in these camps are disposed of livelihood, freedom, and their land. One of these camps in which the circumstances are so dire is Idomeni. The refugees there are stuck because they cannot cross the border and fear that leaving the camp will result in being returned to their country of origin. Additionally, the governments of surrounding countries fail to process asylum applications in a timely manner. As shown in the previous section the circumstances in Idomeni are terrible: sanitary facilities are lacking, the food is scarce, and the health of the refugees is poor and not taken care of. This is a clear example of being in a socially assigned place of disposability (Butler & Athanasiou, 2013); governments could easily arrange other asylum procedures that would not involve the inhumane circumstances of these camps. This socially assigned disposability and the conditions to which these refugees are subject is much like the status of living dead that Mbembe speaks about, making death-world an accurate term to describe these camps.

In the previous chapter it was established that living in such a death-world can be the result of dehumanization and that dehumanization also occurs in these death-worlds. How does dehumanization lead to the refugees being stuck in Idomeni, and how do, at the same time, the circumstances in Idomeni dehumanize refugees? The Idomeni camp is the result of the fence built between the Macedonian and Greek border, in other words: the camp is the result of governmental action. While it would be possible to claim that the governments responsible for the fence appear to have little regard for the lives of the people in these camps, this claim is too strong to make without evidence. It is nonetheless clear that if the governments knew the consequences of building the fence they did not do enough to prevent or solve the conditions in Idomeni. Furthermore, if they did not foresee what was to happen at Idomeni, they were certainly lacking in attempting to alleviate the horrible circumstances in the camp once the severity of the situation became clear. The evidence for this is overwhelming. Gabriel Bonis, a former refugee caseworker

at the British Red Cross in London was present in Idomeni, investigating the mobilization of locals to help refugees. He reported the following on the absence of the (Greek) government:

For many months, international NGOs and local groups of volunteers have provided support for the refugees in Idomeni almost entirely alone, just as in other parts of Greece. But there is only so much they can do. The Greek government and the EU must support them materially and logistically, which has not been happening. When Idomeni was turned into a refugee camp and the donations of food gathered by volunteers were no longer enough to feed the refugees, Médecins Sans Frontières financially helped volunteers to increase meal production [...] the EU and the Greek government must also help to guarantee that refugees get enough to meet their basic needs (Bonis, 2016).

It seems naive to assume that the Greek government and the European Union were unable, for any reason, to alleviate the circumstances in Idomeni. This makes it difficult not to suspect them of not caring or purposeful neglect. In both cases there is a failure, on part of the involved governments and the European Union, to recognize refugees as human beings, resulting in the circumstances at Idomeni.

5.2.1.1 Disrespect of physical integrity

Their first failure lies in disrespecting the physical integrity of the refugees, dispossessing them of their bodily autonomy (Honneth, 1992, p. 189). In Idomeni the refugees are deprived of food, shelter, sanitary facilities, and consequently their health. Not only is the Macedonian government to some extent responsible (the camp is result of their fence, after all), but in addition the Greek government fails to take any action to solve this violation of physical integrity beyond wishing to clear the camp. As argued in chapter and two, this form of disrespect is damaging to people's confidence, and does damage to their belief that one has autonomous control over one's body. This results in mechanistic dehumanization by taking away people's agency over their body. While classic examples of this kind of disrespect are rape and torture, the circumstances in Idomeni can very much have the same effect. After all, the people in Idomeni do not feel as if they have any choice but to stay: they cannot move forward into Europe, but going back means risking a return to the very place they are trying to flee. In other words: the fence has resulted in their being 'trapped' in the Idomeni camp.

With the circumstances in the camp leading to illness, starvation, and general poor health, it appears that those responsible for the camp feel little respect for the physical integrity of the refugees, whether this is due to impotence or willful neglect. This neglect leads to mechanistic dehumanization. If refugees are already dehumanized before their arrival in Idomeni, and thus seen as less than human, their physical integrity is not likely to be a priority of the governments responsible. When at the same time (as argued in the previous chapter) the circumstances in the camp have a dehumanizing effect, the situation becomes very complex. Not only are the refugees already being dehumanized before they arrive in the camp, the precarity of the circumstances in the camp dehumanize them further, for the dehumanized view of the refugees in Idomeni can come to legitimize the circumstances in the camp.

5.2.1.1 Disrespect of rights

The second failure of the parties involved lies in their not recognizing the fact that refugees, as human beings, have certain claims they can make on society that should be fulfilled. While refugees might not 'belong' to the society they are currently in by the traditional standards of belonging to a society by being a citizen of the state, they are humans – and that means that they have human rights that should be recognized no matter the institutional order of the state they are currently in. While we are already dispossessed in that we are thus dependent on the state recognizing this, the refugees in Idomeni are dispossessed further by the involved parties either failing to recognize their claims or by failing to act upon their claims. The circumstances in Idomeni clearly show a failure to recognize and respect basic human rights – such as the right to a standard of living that is adequate for one's health and wellbeing (United Nations General Assembly, 1948). With the lack of food, shelter, and sanitary facilities Idomeni clearly fails to fulfill the refugees claim to this right.

The dehumanizing effect of this should not be underestimated. The circumstances in Idomeni also have as a result that refugees cannot make any claim on any society at all – there is no governmental presence or institution where claims can be presented or rights can be claimed. As Honneth argues, this means that people are treated as if they have no moral accountability, it conveys to them the message that they are of a different moral standard than those that do have their rights and claims met. This has an animalistic dehumanizing effect – if people are treated or viewed as of a lesser moral standard we fail to see them as rational and civilized. As argued throughout this thesis, this opens the door to the justification of the circumstances the refugees find themselves in, which can come to create a vicious cycle. The circumstances in Idomeni are dehumanizing, which in time might come to

justify these circumstances. After all, we are likely to condone certain types of behaviors and treatments towards those we dehumanize that we would not condone towards people of equal moral standing. In this manner, the refugee camp is not only the result of governments having already a dehumanized view of refugees; it also further cements the dehumanized status of refugees.

5.2.1.1 Disrespect of lifestyle

The third failure of the parties involved concerns the systematic downgrading of individual or collective lifestyles by society (Honneth, 1992, p. 191). There is not enough known about the social relations *inside* Idomeni to determine whether this happened in the small society that formed there. Is there evidence that the (individual or collective) lifestyles of those in the camp were denigrated by those outside of the camp? There is, but one has to know where to look for it. One location of this evidence is the comment section on social media sites such as YouTube and Facebook. In the first chapter I discussed how people assume that most refugees are Muslim, and that Muslims are more easily and often dehumanized than non-Muslims. This becomes relevant now, since the disapproval of the Islamic faith can lead to the denigration of those who live their lives in accordance with the teaches of the Quran. To show that people did indeed denigrate refugees in Idomeni in this manner, I collected some online comments from YouTube regarding these refugees. The first is from YouTube user 'Noble Savage', who commented on a video of a Greek farmer destroying refugee tents while plowing his field: "CARMAGEDDON TIME!!! +100 Points for each Muslim pig. X2 for Multikill" (Noble Savage, 2016). Another video shows drown footage of a clash between refugees and police at the Idomeni camp. User VideoVEGAS comments the following "Those are not Refugees those are Animals" (VideoVEGAS, 2016) to which another user replies: "Muslims" (Tony McLean, 2016).

While these are just examples, a multitude of these comments can be found, showcasing that there is indeed an attitude of inferiority towards the refugees in Idomeni: they are animals, and their suffering is even seen as deserved. Other comments reflect what was written in chapter three on the term economic refugee. In the same comment section as that of the animal comment, comments claim that these refugees are not actual refugees but just here for economic gains. Of course, individuals, not society as whole, make these comments but these individuals are not alone. Others, who might not be so vocal, share these opinions, and if enough people share them, consciously or subconsciously, systematic downgrading can occur. And, as chapter three showed, the language we use can have an enormous impact. The question thus becomes whether such opinions (whether they are conscious or subconscious)

played any part in the lack of reaction from society. Given the studies in chapter one that showed that Muslims and people of color are more often (subconsciously) dehumanized this would not be surprising: it is very much possible that this form of dehumanization occurred not just on an individual level, but also in society as a whole. This would make it much more likely that, due to the dehumanization of refugees, people either do not disapprove of the circumstances in Idomeni or are not motivated to take action.

An actual example of the disapproval of the Islamic and thus halal lifestyle of the refugees in Idomeni is easily found. One such example is a comment thread on FOK.nl³³ concerning a video wherein refugees in Macedonia refuse food packages. Before long, claims that this was because the food was not halal were buzzing around the Internet. Commenters on FOK.nl questioned whether we should give asylum to 'this kind of people', argued for a 'moon high wall' around the Netherlands or Middle-East, and called the refugees 'dirty spoilt people' (FOK.nl, 2015). On other websites, such as GeenStijl.nl, comparable comments were made, including ones that called the refugees 'varkens' – pigs. Geert Wilders tweeted about the incident, claiming that all these refugees should be send back (Barbier, 2015). However, in the video itself little can be discovered about the motives of the refugees for refusing the food. Nowhere is it said or shown that this is because the food is supposedly not halal. A journalist who was present during the video provided some context: the refugees did not want food, they wanted attention for the fact that it had been raining, that there was no shelter, and that only two to three hundred refugees were allowed into Macedonia per day, meaning that most of them were left stranded in the rain. Refusing the food was an act of protest, not due to it not being halal (Barbier, 2015). What this shows is that even though the food being halal or not had nothing to do with the actual situation, people were all too keen on linking the protest to the refugees being Muslim. This led to a plethora of negative comments concerning the Muslim lifestyle of eating halal food. This shows a clear disapproval of the lifestyle of these refugees, denigrating not just those who identify as Muslim but also those who are thought to identify as such. This dispossesses the refugees of the possibility to see themselves as someone with positive significance to the community. This has a dehumanizing effect, for these refugees are then seen as less civilized and as lacking refinement. This points towards animalistic dehumanization, which is confirmed by the references to pigs.

³³ A Dutch website and virtual community with content such as news, reviews, polls, columns and a community forum.

Applying the framework of dehumanization to the circumstances in Idomeni has made it clear just how serious the situation, and the dehumanization, in the camp is. It is now time to turn to the other location in this case study: the Dutch refugee centers.

5.2.2 Dehumanization in Dutch refugee centers?

Earlier the circumstances in Dutch refugee centers were discussed, which were quite different from how they are presented on the website of the agency responsible for these centers. While there can be no doubt about the dehumanizing situation in Idomeni, can we really say the same about the Dutch refugee centers? Lamble's earlier statement that death-worlds are not necessarily about physical death is helpful here. Social, political, and civil death are very much part of death-worlds and lead to us ascribing the status of living dead to people. The complaints that refugees had concerning the circumstances in the refugee centers gives us an idea of what life is like in these centers and whether any of these deaths (social, political, civil) are occurring. One of the circumstances that make refugee centers death-worlds is the monotonous regime of life there. When people are without activities and freedom for a long and uncertain time, the wearing away of human vitality and the reduction of human experience can lead to a bleak existence (Lamble, 2013, pp. 243–244). While Lamble speaks of prisons, there are some comparable elements: overcrowding, often a lack of medical care, disconnection from family and friends, and little to no influence on what food is available. These conditions lead to higher risks of self-harm, psychological abuse, trauma and suicide. If, as Lamble argues, the prison is a death-world or a side of slow-death then certainly refugee centers are not far removed from being death-worlds if they are not one already. Prisons and refugee centers do share some common attributes, such as having no to little control over one's food, a lack of activities, and sharing a small space with multiple people.

The Dutch discourse concerning the refugees and their situation in the refugee centers cements their status as living dead and of those being in a socially assigned place of disposability. This discourse is implicated in how Dutch society behaves towards the refugees, since knowledge influences social practices and always operates in relation to power, being “[p]art of the way power circulates and is contested” (S. Hall, 2006, p. 169). The discourse concerning refugees and the situation in refugee centers is often negative, especially when refugees attempt to make the precarity of their situation known. There are many examples of the discourse around refugees turning

sour.³⁴ One occurrence stands out in that it shows how discourse is part of power relations and how attempts to break out of the socially assigned place of disposability are immediately disciplined not just through institutions but also through the dominant discourse.

In a refugee center in Haarlem refugees went on a hunger strike after finding out that it would be at least six months before their asylum application would be processed, meaning that it would take much longer than expected to be reunited with family still in Syria (Kragtwijk, 2015).³⁵ As Lamble (2013, p. 245) points out, hunger strikes are a last resort of collective action, a way of exercising a desperate form of agency by potentially reclaiming death. Instead of recognizing the hunger strike as this last resort, the Dutch public (and the right-wing media that gave the story a lot of attention) reacted with outrage, especially in online comments that varied from ‘go back to your own country’ to ‘I hope they starve themselves to death.’ This, coupled with the discourse concerning complaints from refugees, successfully re-establishes dominant discourses where refugees are expected to be thankful for all they receive here. If they complain they must not be refugees but ‘gelukzoekers’. As we know from Foucault, power regulates and controls by producing knowledges, categories, and identities, and, as Hall (2006) states, discourse produces knowledge through language. The discourse concerning refugees is thus instrumental for those in power: it produces knowledges of refugees as people who are ‘lucky to be here’ and people who ‘should not complain’. As we have seen, those in power immediately discipline those who challenge these knowledges, categories, and identities, making doing so undesirable and thus cementing the status of refugees as living dead or disposable.

Applying a necropolitical and biopolitical framework to the circumstances in refugee centers and the lives of refugees in these centers has shown us how complex the situation is and how difficult it is to escape it. While the circumstances are very much different compared to Idomeni, these centers can also be called death-worlds. Does this mean that dehumanization also occurs here?

5.2.2.1 Disrespect of physical integrity

Mechanistic dehumanization concerned the first type of recognition: respect for physical integrity. Do refugee centers violate the physical integrity of

³⁴ See, for example: Heerugowaard Centraal (2016).

³⁵ This incident received broad media coverage, but as it turned out there was no hunger strike. What concerns me, however, is the reaction of the public (who at the time did not know that it was not true).

refugees? This type of disrespect is dehumanizing because it involves (an attempt to) seize control over another person's body, which has a humiliating effect. Now, usually this type of disrespect is linked to torture and rape, but as we saw in the previous section, other forms of physical maltreatment can also be included. While the circumstances in the Dutch refugee centers are not ideal, it is generally ensured that people are healthy and that enough food is available. Refugees are also allowed to leave the center, that is, they are not held prisoner there. It thus does not appear to be the case that there is any form of physical maltreatment and thus no mechanistic dehumanization; refugees maintain their status as humans who are (among other things) agents, individuals, as people who are emotionally responsive and capable of interpersonal relationships. This might be a surprising conclusion, given the complaints that refugees had concerning the food – but later in this chapter it will be argued that this is not a case of physical maltreatment, but disrespect of the Islamic lifestyle. A possible exclusion to this is the center Heumensoord, where people could not cook and hygienic facilities were lacking. Here the physical integrity of refugees does indeed seem to be disrespected, leading to dehumanization.

5.2.2.2 Disrespect of rights

Are the refugees in Dutch refugee centers structurally excluded from the possession of certain rights? This is a difficult question, since some rights are dependent on one being a citizen of the state or country where one is located. In the case of the refugees in the centers, this complicates matters since they are often waiting for the result of their asylum procedure. Nevertheless, at the very least, the human rights of these refugees ought to be respected by the Dutch state. Does the Dutch government respect the human rights of the refugees? Note that a few instances of a violation of a human right is not enough, it will have to occur structurally and not just to one person. In addition, if the whole of Dutch society is denied this right as well it is difficult to determine whether the denial of this right to refugees is really due to their being refugees. One right that we should take under scrutiny is Article 7, the right that everyone is entitled to equal protection of the law without discrimination. It is becoming increasingly clear that this right is not granted equally to everyone in the Netherlands. As Marijn Nieuwenhuis argues: “A disturbing trend in the Netherlands towards more intense forms of racial profiling is converging with increasingly frequent and violent forms of police repression against minorities” (Nieuwenhuis, 2015). What is so disturbing about this is that the public and those executing the law often condone this racial profiling:

Dutch society seems to live in a comfortable shell of denial that condones, tolerates and therefore legitimises racial profiling, increasing police violence and extreme-right-wing rhetoric. Rather than confronting the discourse of race and the problem of racism, Dutch society seems to be more disposed to allowing for a further escalation of what is already a worryingly dangerous development. What is urgently needed, therefore, is a thorough and honest public discussion on the problem of racial Othering in the Netherlands (Nieuwenhuis, 2015).

It would thus appear that not all are equal before the law, and that the right to not be discriminated against is structurally violated for those who are racially other than white Dutch society. Does this also apply to refugees? While there are records of police discriminating refugees elsewhere in the world (Stark, 2016), there are no numbers on whether refugees also fall victim to this racial profiling in the Netherlands. Nevertheless, it is unlikely that refugees are exempt from this. Not only are they often racially othered and a minority, they are also often in a position of vulnerability: they are likely to have a lesser command of the Dutch language than others, and being accused and convicted of a crime can have a negative impact on the asylum application. If a refugee who has received asylum (and is thus now a Dutch citizen) commits a crime, their asylum can be rescinded. When a former refugee is convicted of a crime and receives a sentence (this can also be for a small crime resulting in a suspended sentence or penal labor), they are also at risk of losing their asylum and Dutch nationality (Rijksoverheid, 2016). This is without doubt discrimination and makes refugees unequal before the law, for the same does not happen to Dutch citizens who were born in the Netherlands who commit the same crime. Together with the danger of racial profiling, it is very likely that refugees are excluded from the possession of the right that all should be treated equally before the law (Article 7 from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights).

It is thus arguable that refugees in Dutch refugee centers are indeed structurally excluded from certain rights, which has dehumanizing consequences. Not only are these people already dispossessed ontologically, here dispossession also occurs empirically. By denying people certain rights, we deny them a standing as someone who is morally equal (Honneth, 1992, pp. 190–191). Instead, we see them as amoral, irrational, or as having a lack of self-restraint (Haslam, 2006, p. 257). This view of refugees as having a lack of self-restraint can be found in the Dutch discourse. Geert Wilders, a Dutch right-wing politician, accused the Dutch government of ‘importing testosterone bombs’ – refugees or immigrants who cannot control their sexual impulses and

threaten Dutch girls and women (Benschop, 2017). This is very much an example of animalistic dehumanization – portraying people as if they have no self-restraint. Therefore, refugees in Dutch refugee centers are at risk of being dehumanized by dispossessing them of an equal moral standing with other citizens. However, this is not due to the circumstances in the refugee centers themselves, but due to the discourse and policies surrounding refugees. It are not the refugee centers that deny refugees this right, but rather the policies made by the Dutch government and the dehumanizing effect that Dutch discourse has on refugees.

5.2.2.3 Disrespect of lifestyle

The third mode of recognition dealt with respecting or recognizing someone's individual or collective lifestyle (Honneth, 1992, p. 191). In the description that was given of the circumstances in the refugee centers, one of the complaints that was mentioned stated that the communication concerning what was in the food was lacking. Part of the refugees coming into the Netherlands is Muslim, and according to the Koran their food has to be halal. This goes further than the non-consumption of pork – it also means that animals have to be ritually slaughtered before they can be consumed. While not every refugee in these centers wishes to eat halal, there are refugees who wish to do so. Does not communicating towards these refugees whether or not their food is halal constitute disrespect of their lifestyle? This would indeed appear to be the case, but interestingly there is no media coverage or evidence of refugees complaining that their food is not halal, only that it is bland or that they are often eating the same kinds of food.³⁶ Claims that refugees are refusing food because it is not halal are made by online commenters on Facebook or sites such as FOK.nl – often in reaction to news articles that do not mention the term halal at all. These claims are then immediately followed by comments that are comparable to the ones discussed earlier, showing a clear disapproval of the Islamic lifestyle.

More worrisome is that some political parties and newspapers actively support the denigration of Muslims by arguing that halal food should not be made available or is not necessary. The 'Spakenburgse Vrijheids Partij (SVP)' is one of these parties, and identifies as a conservative party that agrees with the PVV and SGP when it comes to Islam (SVP, n.d.). One of the council members of the SVP released a statement wherein he complains about the how placidly the government makes concessions in providing halal meals (Frans Koops, 2015). The council member even cites one of his own tweets in which he calls Islam

³⁶ See, for example De Gelderlander (2016).

the antichrist and Allah a false God. He concludes his statement by claiming that the wish of Muslims to eat halal does not need to be respected.³⁷ To prove this he quotes a section of the Quran, Surah Al-Baqarah [2:173], which states:

He has only forbidden to you dead animals, blood, the flesh of swine, and that which has been dedicated to other than Allah. But whoever is forced [by necessity], neither desiring [it] nor transgressing [its limit], there is no sin upon him. Indeed, Allah is Forgiving and Merciful (Holy Quran, nd).

While it might be true that, in a truly dire situation, Allah can forgive the consumption of non-halal food, this does not justify the unwillingness of a government to provide halal food when this government is perfectly capable of doing so. What the councilman's statement shows is a disapproval of the Islamic lifestyle, and an attempt to find an excuse for not respecting this lifestyle in a way that is downright degrading to those who wish to eat halal. The same argument can be found in an article (co-written by the councilman) from the Christian newspaper *Reformatorsch Dagblad*. In addition to the (faulty) argument above, this newspaper makes the rather interesting claim that providing halal meat to Muslim refugees violates Christian norms and values because during the slaughter of animals for halal meat the name of Allah is pronounced. This makes the meat tainted by false gods or idols and therefore something that Christians should avoid. In other words: providing halal meat is the facilitation of paganism or heathendom, which is something the government should abstain from (Frans Koops & van Mulligen, 2015).

What the writers are suggesting here is that not only is it not necessary to provide halal meat to Muslim refugees, it is also wrong of the government to do so. The underlying thought of the writers is that the Netherlands is a Christian country, and that the government should act in accordance with this. However, this is a misunderstanding of the relation between the Dutch government and religion. The Netherlands is a secular country, which means that church and state are separated. In addition, there is freedom of religion, which means that people are free to choose their religion or to abstain from religion. It is thus not a task of the government to protect Christians from paganism or heathendom, but quite the opposite: the government should ensure that Muslims, like Christians, are free to practice their faith and that they are free from discrimination based on their religion.

³⁷ The councilman does not explicate by whom this wish does not need to be respected, but 'the government' seems the most likely candidate.

The online comments, the councilman's report, and the newspaper article support the claim that there is a denigration of those with a Muslim lifestyle. As argued in chapter two, this can have dehumanizing consequences. When we see people with a certain lifestyle as inferior and denigrate this lifestyle, we dispossess these people of their self-esteem and their ability to see themselves as having a value in the community (Honneth, 1992, p. 191). Depending on how people view these dehumanized refugees, animalistic or mechanistic dehumanization occurs. In this case, animalistic dehumanization is more likely to occur, for these refugees are compared to pigs, and, as with the refugees in Idomeni, portrayed as having no self-restraint when it comes to women. In addition, by portraying the Islamic faith as pagan or heathen, a view of Islam as lacking the cultural progress of Christianity is assumed. As a consequence, Muslims are viewed as lacking culture, a sign of animalistic dehumanization (Haslam, 2006, p. 257). A tweet from Halbe Zijlstra, a member of the Dutch parliament for the VVD (People's Party for Freedom and Democracy) is an example of this view of Islam: "The Islamic culture is a backwards one wherein women, gay's, and non-believers are inferior. We must fight against this" (Zijlstra, 2016). Thus, taken together, there is enough evidence to be found in Dutch discourse that points to the disrespect of those who identify as Muslim and the animalistic dehumanization that occurs as a consequence. Furthermore, non-Muslim refugees might suffer from this disrespect as well even though they do not identify as Muslim. As shown in chapter one, it is often assumed that refugees are Muslim even though the majority of them is not. This means that refugees do not need to be Muslim to be dehumanized in this manner, for if it is not recognized that they are not Muslim, they are viewed and treated the same as the refugees that do identify as Muslim. In addition, as in the previous case, it is not the situation in the refugee centers that is dehumanizing – but the discourse surrounding the refugees in these centers. This shows, again, that language is not merely passive but plays an important role in the dehumanization of refugees.

This concludes the analysis of the case studies of Idomeni and the Dutch refugee centers. As shown, the circumstances differ greatly between these locations, which leads to different results concerning whether or not refugees are dehumanized due to these circumstances. It became clear that in some cases, it is the discourse surrounding refugees that is dehumanizing, not the circumstances themselves. Thus, as said before, the language we use to talk about refugees is not innocent – it does not just show signs of dehumanization but can also perform a dehumanizing function. In the next chapter, I reflect on the findings of this chapter and the complicated relation between dehumanizing circumstances and dehumanizing language.

6. Discussion

In this last chapter I reflect on the knowledge gained from analyzing Idomeni and Dutch refugee centers based on the concept of necropolitics and the framework of dehumanization that was developed in this thesis. In the previous chapters it was discussed how Idomeni and the Dutch refugee centers have dehumanizing effects, but are also at the same time the result of refugees already being dehumanized. If refugees are already dehumanized, how can it be explained that refugees in Dutch refugee centers fare much better than those in Idomeni? Their treatment in the refugee centers does show signs of dehumanization, but the circumstances in these centers are much better and as a consequence not as dehumanizing as those in the camps. How can we explain these differences if we assume that both groups of refugees were dehumanized before they found their way to either Idomeni or Dutch refugee centers?

6.1 Dehumanization before dehumanizing circumstances

That refugees are dehumanized before they even arrive at our borders is not surprising; social media and news television share images from everywhere around the world, and dehumanization of refugees is not a new phenomenon. There is a tendency to portray refugees in a negative way (see Donald Trump, for example) both by governments who see a strict approach to immigration as a way to increase their voter base and as well by (mostly right-winged) media. The Australian Government, for example, campaigned against 'illegal' immigration³⁸ in 2001 and 2002, employing negative language in the representation of this group. Terms used were 'queue jumpers', 'boat people' and 'illegals'. In addition, foreign family structures were represented as 'foreign' and 'other' compared to Australian standards of parental responsibility and common decency. This narrative was then used to call into question the validity of claims for refugee status by asylum-seekers (Leach, 2003). If we take into account all the instances mentioned throughout this thesis in discourse that show signs of refugees being dehumanized through language, it does not seem farfetched to conclude that refugees are already dehumanized before they even arrive at a refugee camp or center. But if refugees are already dehumanized by a mostly negative discourse, how can we explain the differences between Idomeni and Dutch refugee centers? If the refugees in these centers are already dehumanized should their treatment not be equal?

Fact is, to what degree the dehumanization resulting from this discourse influences the behavior towards refugees and their treatment is to a large

³⁸ Recall the discussion in chapter three on the term 'economic refugee' – the same danger applies to the usage of the term 'illegal migrant' or 'illegal refugee.'

extent dependent on the location of these refugees. In Idomeni, refugees were suddenly stranded in a location where there was nothing – no shelter, no food, no sanitary facilities. It was a makeshift camp and to some extent the governments in the vicinity might have been unprepared for this. That attempts to alleviate the horrible circumstances were lacking or not enough might also to some extent be due to some vagueness concerning who was responsible: the Macedonian government that built the fence, or the Greek government on who's land the camp was located. An additional problem was that many refugees did not want to stay in Greece. And what, exactly, the responsibilities of the European Union are in a situation like this is also unclear. What is clear, however, is that all these parties failed to protect the refugees and to guarantee their lives. If dehumanization of the refugees played into this it was only worsened by the circumstances in which the refugees found themselves, which were undoubtedly dehumanizing. This opened the door to a vicious circle: dehumanized refugees found themselves in circumstances that were also dehumanizing. In addition, these circumstances were possibly legitimized in the eyes of those responsible because they already had a dehumanized view of the refugees.

The situation in the Netherlands differs from Idomeni in that the Dutch government has institutions that are responsible for the accommodation of and procedures concerning refugees, even though members of the government themselves participate in the negative discourse and the government appears denies refugees an equal standing before the law. In addition, there are volunteer organizations working with the refugees and these institutions that also signal when things do not seem to go as they should. What this means is that not only is there a system in place for the asylum procedure from the moment a refugee enters the country, but there is also some mechanism of control present. Both of these were lacking in Idomeni, and this might explain why the refugees in Dutch refugee centers found themselves in a better, less dehumanizing, situation than the refugees in Idomeni.

6.2 Reflecting on the case studies

There are multiple conclusions we can draw from the case studies. For one, the discourse concerning both groups of refugees intersects – people often do not separate one group of refugees from one another group and there is a tendency to think of all refugees as Muslim. These discourses also show sign of dehumanization, especially when it concerns Muslim refugees. Second: how severely dehumanizing the circumstances in different locations are depends to a large extent on the institutions in place to take care of refugees and the responsible government. This also means that governments that play an active

role in dehumanizing refugees through language (such as the Australian government did, or politicians like Geert Wilders) might be less likely to attempt to alleviate or prevent dehumanizing circumstances. Third, both Idomeni and Dutch refugee centers have dehumanizing circumstances, albeit to a different degree. In the Dutch refugee centers it are not so much the circumstances in the centers themselves, at the general discourse in the Netherlands that is dehumanizing.

The case studies hint to some degree to a careful conclusion that it is indeed possible for refugee facilities to be dehumanizing. However, since only two kinds of refugee facilities were analyzed here, we need to be careful in formulating such a conclusion. Rather, it would be better to say that due to discursive practices and the performativity of language, refugees are already dehumanized and that the chance that this dehumanization therefore also occurs in refugee facilities is large. Finally, it can appear to be a circular question to ask what came first: these dehumanizing circumstances or the dehumanization visible in discourse. The tendency to dehumanize Muslims and people of color (see chapter one), and the history of the dehumanization of refugees in our language point to refugees already being dehumanized before they arrive at Idomeni or a Dutch refugee center. This is not surprising, for language is performative and can, as chapters three to five showed, have a large impact on how we view refugees.

It has become clear that the framework on dehumanization developed throughout this chapter helps us recognize, and make sense of, dehumanization. It gives us the tools to analyze dehumanization in terms of recognition and dispossession, but also gives us descriptive terms that are valuable in recognizing situations in which dehumanization occurs. Applying the framework to case studies can help us understand the complexities of these situations and the dehumanization occurring there. Above all, however, it has shown us the importance of language in mechanisms of dehumanization – before refugees arrive at Idomeni or Dutch refugee centers they are already dehumanized through our discursive practices. This might seem depressing, but it might also prove to be the location of resisting the dehumanizing discourse in our societies: our own language is performative too. This is why such statements as on the title page of this thesis are so crucial: they form a necessary counter discourse and movement to the dehumanizing practices of (the political) discourse. Language matters, what we say about refugees and to refugees matters, and as shown throughout this thesis the effect of language on the lives of refugees can be enormous. However, this also means that we can

use language to form a counter discourse. If language can be dehumanizing, it can also be re/humanizing: *refugees are human beings*.

Conclusion

In this thesis I asked how we could make sense of the concept of dehumanization in a way that is helpful in critically engaging with the actual situation of refugees. In answering this question I aimed to develop a framework that enables us to understand the term dehumanization, the mechanisms by which this dehumanization occurs, and how language is related to these mechanisms.

In chapter one, a critical approach was taken in tackling the concepts of humanness and dehumanization, for there are many accounts of what it means to be human. It was argued that, while perhaps not necessary, it is fruitful to combine different normative approaches to encompass different views of humanness. As shown, these views are not inherently contradictory or oppositional to each other; they merely highlight different aspects of what can be called human qualities. In addition, a more descriptive concept of dehumanization was discussed, one that showed that there are many qualities that are recognized by research participants as human qualities. This led to a framework of dehumanization that distinguished between animalistic dehumanization and mechanistic dehumanization. In addition, this chapter discussed two groups that are prone to dehumanization: people of color and Muslims. In chapter two, the proposed framework of dehumanization was broadened to include the concept of recognition, so that it might be explained how mechanisms of dehumanization function. In doing so, this chapter formulated three ways³⁹ in which dehumanization can occur: disrespect of physical integrity, denial of claim to (moral) rights, and the denigration of lifestyles. The theory of dispossession was used to critically engage with the theory of recognition, for it turned out that recognition is not always simple or benign. The combination of these two theories allowed an extension of the framework of dehumanization, so that it now also included a theory of how dehumanization can occur.

Where chapter two shortly discussed how language can not only show signs of dehumanization but can also have a dehumanizing effect, chapter three showed a specific example of how language can be a mechanism of dehumanization by instrumentalizing refugees. It did so by looking at the political instrumentalization of refugees, and in particular the usage of the term 'economic refugee'. It was argued that instrumentalization denies people certain qualities which, when denied, have a dehumanizing effect. Instrumentalization disrespects people and thus dispossesses them of one or

³⁹ As said in chapter two, more mechanisms of dehumanization undoubtedly also exist.

more of the three kinds of recognition. It was then argued that refugees are susceptible to being dehumanized in this matter because the word 'refugee' is malleable and easily manipulated into carrying different connotations. The term 'economic refugee' is the result of such a manipulation and not only dehumanizes refugees by disrespecting and making light of their flight to a safe country, but the term also obfuscates the legal meaning of the term refugee.

In chapter four the concept of necropolitics was employed to give us the tools to describe the situation wherein refugees who are dehumanized find themselves. In addition, the relation between dehumanization and necropolitics was discussed: one is likely already dehumanized when one finds oneself in a death-world, but these death-worlds can dehumanize one even further due to dehumanizing circumstances. Chapter five saw the application of the framework of dehumanization and the concept of necropolitics to two case studies: the refugee camp Idomeni and Dutch refugee centers. First, the circumstances in both locations were described, and then both cases were analyzed in terms of necropolitics and dehumanization. While both locations showed signs of being death-worlds, only Idomeni had truly dehumanizing circumstances. While dehumanization did occur in Dutch refugee centers, this was due to Dutch discourse and governmental policies, not the circumstances in the centers themselves. In chapter six, these findings were discussed. How is it possible that the practices in Idomeni are dehumanizing, whereas those in the Dutch refugee centers are less so, if both groups of refugees are dehumanized in our discourse? As it turns out, political practices and the presence of a government taking action matter a great deal when it comes to the dehumanizing circumstances in refugee camps or centers.

In this thesis, I have thus shown how the concept of dehumanization, sufficiently embedded in a framework composed of both normative and descriptive theory, can help us to analyze situations in which refugees are said to be dehumanized. However, whereas our framework is helpful in analyzing situations where dehumanization occurs, it does not yet give us any solution to the problem of dehumanization. Rather, it shows us how complicated the interplay between dehumanizing language and dehumanizing circumstances is, and that governments and institutions play an important role here. Nevertheless, the framework is not only useful for analyzing situations that are dehumanizing, it also shows us where we might locate a site of resistance: discourse. This is why signs and banners, such as the one of the front page, are necessary; they form part of an affirmative discourse that attempts to counter the effects of the dehumanizing language used in society. Rethinking the language we use to refer to refugees in this manner hopefully allows us to find a

way to resist the discursive production of refugees as less than human. After all: *refugees are human beings*, and refugee policy might change drastically if this simply truth was at the heart of the discourse on refugees. Care should be taken, however, in that refugees are made part of this counter-discourse. While they might be seen as victims of dehumanization, they need not be *passive* victims. Refugees themselves can, and should, be part of a re/humanizing discourse.

In conclusion: I firmly believe that the framework on dehumanization developed here is useful and should be developed further. In achieving this, it is crucial that refugees are part of this development. Therefore, the central starting point in developing this framework should be listening to what refugees themselves have to say on dehumanization. After all:

[u]nless one lives and loves in the trenches it is difficult to remember that the war against dehumanization is ceaseless (Lorde, 2007, p. 119).

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