'Migrant' Is a Label, Not a Justification: The Media's Role In Dehumanising and Humanising Migrants Between 1979 and 2024

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'I declare that the research contained herein was granted approval by the SPAIS Ethics Working Group'

Abstract

This study examines the evolution of the media's discourse on migrants from 1979-2024, specifically looking at how such discourses have either humanised or dehumanised migrants. This research uses three events to monitor the media's migrant discourse over time: the 1979/81 Southall Riots; 2015 Migrant 'Crisis'; 2024 UK Summer Riots. This study employs both qualitative (thematic and discourse analysis), and quantitative (the Humanisation-Dehumanisation Scale) analysis, to interpret the data from four news media outlets (Daily Mail, The Guardian, The Telegraph, and The Sun), and X (formerly known as Twitter). Such findings indicate that since 1979, the media's discourse has shifted from humanising migrants to severely dehumanising them, both in 2015 and 2024. Additionally, the primary vehicle from which these discourses emanate has shifted from news media to social media, suggesting a 'digitisation of dehumanisation'. Such findings inform those reproducing dehumanising discourses of their role in the hope this may discourage the continuance of migrant dehumanisation.

Word Count: 9993

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List of Abbreviations

DA   Discourse Analysis

DSI   Discourse Severity Index

DSV   Discourse Severity Value

EU   European Union

ITA   Inductive Thematic Analysis

MP   Member of Parliament

QoL   Quality of Life

UK   United Kingdom

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1.1: Introduction

On 29th July 2024 a mass stabbing in Southport led to the injury of ten and the deaths of three young girls (BBC, 2024). False information spread regarding the perpetrator's identity, labelling him Muslim and a migrant, which led to eight days of rioting across the UK by far-right groups. These riots took place from 30th July to 7th August 2024, involving attacks on mosques and hotels housing asylum seekers – these are the UK's Summer 2024 Riots (Choonara, 2024: 4). Axel Rudakubana, the convicted perpetrator of the Southport stabbings, was jailed for life in January 2025, with many rioters also receiving prison sentences.

Migration has always been an issue present on the world agenda, however the 2024 Riots renewed such interest, manifesting as both opposition and support for migration. For example, Channel 4 aired the documentary 'Go Back to Where You Came From' in February 2025, soon after the 2024 Riots, which aimed to create awareness of migrants' struggles by following British individuals travelling the migration route from either Syria or Somalia to the UK (Collins, 2025). Furthermore, Cammaerts writes of the UK's increasingly woke society in reaction to the far-right's growing political influence (2022: 730), making the far-right's ability to muster enough support to cause UK-wide riots an interesting phenomenon. Additionally, earlier in the month of rioting (4th July), the UK's switch from a Labour to a Conservative Government put the UK's politics in flux, highlighting the context in which the Riots arose. Moreover, the 2024 Riots prompted me to ask what factors stimulated such a sudden outburst of unprecedented (Newburn, 2015: 50) far-right violence against the UK's migrant community? How would one investigate the changes in the public perceptions of migrants and what events could support this research considering the 2024 Riots were unprecedented? Moreover, due to the difference in 2024's

political and societal conditions, compared to pre-2024, public opinion on migrants may have changed.

1.2: Research Goals

To investigate if and how the public's perception of migrants may have altered prior to, and during the 2024 Riots, this study employs media discourses as both a research theme and a data source, due to discourse's role in creating and reproducing racism (Flowerdew and Richardson, 2018), and the media's role in moulding "overall societal attitudes" (Kosho, 2016: 86). This will monitor both positive and negative discourses and public opinion on migrants.

Furthermore, my interest in human rights, because of the field's context-dependent nature, helped me make the connection between the 2024 Riots and dehumanisation as a possible facilitator, and with humanisation considered the "opposite process" (Kirkwood, 2017: 115), specifically measuring levels of migrant humanisation and dehumanisation to investigate possible changes in public opinion of migrants becomes a fitting research theme. Such investigations into the evolution of the media's dehumanising/humanising discourse requires analysis of this discourse prior to 2024 to support discussions on the 2024 Riots. The 1979 and 1981 Southall Riots and the 2015 Migrant 'Crisis' are best for developing this narrative because migration was a key motivator for both events, meaning feelings towards migrants may be more pronounced and thus clearer to measure.

The 1979 and 1981 Southall Riots were two interlinked riots referred to collectively as the 1979/81 Southall Riots. The 1979 Riot was a left-wing peaceful protest against the National Front (a far-right political party) (De Kauwe, 1980: 13) that became a white attack on Asians in Southall, and the 1981 Riots were motivated by antecedent grievances from the 1979 Riots and

societal racism. The 2015 Migrant 'Crisis' ('crisis' is in inverted commas as the assumption that it was a crisis could be seen as dehumanising, something I do not wish to fuel) refers to the large influx of migrants into Europe, including the UK (De Genova et al., 2016: 5). This latter event is relevant to investigating the 2024 Riots because it revived the debate about migrants' place within UK society, and the former event's anti-migration motivations were closely aligned with the motivations in 2024 (Laverick et al., 2019: 62), creating parallels for comparison with the 2024 Riots.

Considering the research themes relayed above, this study seeks to answer the research question: how have news media and social media discourses humanised and dehumanised migrants between 1979 and 2024? To address this question, sub-questions have been formulated to break this question into three constituents: 1. how can the media's humanising/dehumanising migrant discourse be conceptualised between 1979 and 2015?; 2. how can the media's humanising/dehumanising migrant discourse be understood during the UK's Summer 2024 Riots?; 3. what factors explain possible shifts in the media's migrant discourse? The former two sub-questions map the evolution of the media's discourse over time, whilst the latter attempts to explain *why* changes in the media's migrant discourse occurred to establish the *how* within this study's research question.

This study analyses news media and social media excerpts using discourse and thematic analysis, and then applies the discourses discovered to the Humanisation-Dehumanisation Scale to allow for comparison of the media's humanising/dehumanising migrant discourse over time. Analysis spans from 1979 to 2024, with migrants being the main actors analysed due to their driving role in all three events analysed. Additionally, to acknowledge the complexities within the 'migrant group', the group will be dissected to look at sub-groups most frequently mentioned in media

discourses, including both black and white migrant racial groups. My study unfolds over six chapters.

Following this chapter, Chapter Two explains my data collection and analysis methods. Chapter Three relays my findings in response to sub-question one, by allocating 1979-2015 discourses to severity indexes across the Humanisation-Dehumanisation Scale. In response to sub-question two, Chapter Four relays findings and allocates 2024's discourses to severity indexes. Finally, Chapter Five addresses this study's third sub-question, by discussing the overarching trends gathered from chapters three and four, whilst Chapter Six draws conclusions from the prior three chapters to answer this study's research question.

Ultimately, this research aims to locate the divergence between humanisation and dehumanisation in the hope it informs social media users, news media authors and policymakers on how to prevent re-perpetuating negative/dehumanising discourses, and how to promote positive/humanising discourses to create a more comfortable society for those that become part of the UK's fabric.

1.3: Literature Review

Media and Discourse

The media's role in moulding societal attitudes is well documented (Kosho, 2016: 86; Arendt and Northup, 2015), and when combined with discourse's role in establishing and reproducing racism (Flowerdew and Richardson, 2018), it becomes apparent how prior literature supports this study's investigation into the public's changing perceptions of migrants, because media discourses both reproduce and shape societal views. Furthermore, current literature is helpful in outlining the media's complexities, which helps acknowledge the many influences present when

ascertaining the logic behind spreading a certain discourse. Such complexities range from the concept of sensationalism; that news media publications tend to privilege engagement at the cost of its content's accuracy (Ransohoff and Ransohoff, 2001: 185-186), to the role of news media's political leanings in determining the type of migrant discourse they tend to perpetuate, and the more recent phenomenon of social media algorithms (Threadgold, 2009: 224). Such literature highlights the importance of analysing both news media and social media, due to them being vital vehicles through which information is processed and spread (Verma et al., 2025: 1), and allows the implicit influences determining the media's decision to dehumanise or humanise migrants to be considered. Moreover, past literature on both the media and discourse is rich, and therefore helpful in supporting this study's analysis of media discourse as a research theme, because the way migrants are discussed within news media and social media alters public perceptions of migrants.

Humanisation and Dehumanisation

The sphere of human rights can be linked to a multiplicity of issues, however the concept of dehumanisation represents a facet of the field that is frequently explored, reflected in the vast body of literature that spans from dehumanisation and housing rights (Hohmann, 2018: 1) to the more common concept of dehumanisation and migrants (Bleiker et al., 2013; Jones et al., 2017; McLoughlin and Over, 2019). Such literature tends to analyse media's role in creating this negative rhetoric (Kosho, 2016), however there is "little research [that] has explored the opposite process" (Kirkwood, 2017: 115); humanisation. This exposes the first research gap this study intends to contribute to closing, by uncovering humanisation's prevalence over time, and how this concept operates in conjunction with dehumanisation, to expand understandings beyond the commonly investigated concept of dehumanisation.

Events

Currently, scarce literature on the UK's Summer 2024 Riots exists due to its contemporary nature: Choonara (2024) details the riots in relation to the far-right's growth, and Willmott et al. (2024) outlines the police's role in both controlling and exacerbating the riots. In 2025, Venkataramakrishnan (2025) dissected misinformation's role in eliciting the Riots' violent attacks, Ismail and Ardalan-Raikes (2025) conducted an interview to explore options for tackling hate crime in light of the 2024 Riots, whilst Verma et al. (2025) investigated social media's role in creating a 'web-of-influence' that facilitated the Riot's inception. Whilst such pieces are invaluable in starting to close the research gap around the 2024 Riots, they tend to focus on the Riots' causal factors, rather than the repercussions. Furthermore, Boukari and Devakumar's (2024) piece on the Riots as a result of culminated dehumanising rhetoric is most useful for informing my research due to its explicit reference to migrant dehumanisation, presenting a parallel with my study. However, this piece falls foul of the same criticism as the former pieces; it analyses dehumanisation as a driving force, rather than as a factor during the Riots. Thus, the second research gap this study aims to address becomes apparent; the investigation of the factors present during the 2024 Riots, specifically the prevalence of dehumanisation and humanisation.

Due to the scarce literature on the 2024 Riots, previous migration-related events rich in literature are required to support the 2024 Riots' forthcoming analysis, with the 1979/81 Southall Riots and 2015 Migrant 'Crisis' subsuming this role. For the 1979/81 Southall Riots literature tends to focus on the role of race and racism in both creating and fuelling the riots (Unsworth, 1982; Vivekanandan, 1982), for example Solomos analyses the political responses to the violence through the understanding that blacks were seen as a "'social time bomb'" (1984: 21). Such antecedent studies are useful for my research as they provide a baseline for comparison; does

societal racism occur simultaneously with a dehumanising media discourse? For the Migrant 'Crisis' the literature is also dense, spanning from European integration's links with the 'Crisis' (Scipioni, 2017) to the application of Critical Security Studies to the event, to highlight the EU's failure to securitise actors within the 'Crisis' (Hintjens, 2019). Therefore, whilst no clear literary gaps can be identified with regards to the 1979/81 or 2015 events, they support the 2024 Riots' literary deficit by providing understandings of the media's dehumanising/humanising discourse pre-2024 Riots to establish a baseline for comparison.

Whilst current literature acknowledges many constituents of my research question, there are literary deficits concerning the influences during the UK's 2024 Summer Riots and the concept of humanisation. By combining such research deficits, I propose to make an original contribution to the combined field of migration, human rights and media discourse by answering the question: how have news media and social media discourses humanised and dehumanised migrants between 1979 and 2024? In pioneering the field, I endeavour to provide a foundation from which research into both the dehumanisation *and* humanisation of migrants can stem, in the hope that the juncture between the concepts can be identified to better understand why they occur.

1.4: Theoretical Framework

There are no agreed characteristics that make a subject human, however, this study understands a subject to be humanised, if they are depicted as equal to other humans within society through language and/or actions. This may manifest as humans interacting with the subject the same way they would with other humans, or be evident within the human tendency to form social relationships with other humans, opposed to non-humans such as animals (Evans, 2016: 23-25). Dehumanisation can be understood as the opposite process to 'humanisation' (Kirkwood, 2017: 115); how "through means such as language, humans are depicted as less than human" (Haslam

and Loughnan, 2014: 399), and as such are regarded as subordinate to others within society. Such understandings inform this study's Humanisation-Dehumanisation Scale (see Section 2.2.1).

Furthermore, when applying the concepts of humanisation and dehumanisation to the migrant group, this study understands a 'migrant' to be an individual who moves from their "original country of residence" (IOM UN Migration, 2024: 21). The ambiguity of this term allows many migrant groups (migrant-ethnic groups, refugees, immigrants) to be analysed despite possible differences in, for example, legal status. This research also uses intersectionality theory, understood as how an individual's characteristics intersect to produce a hierarchy whereby some individuals are more secure than others (Cho, Crenshaw and McCall, 2013: 785), for example race and class. Intersectionality helps to identify the media's criteria for humanising or dehumanising migrants, which establishes behavioural logics.

Lastly, this study conceptualises 'discourse' as the creation of an overall idea or outlook on a subject (Van Dijk, 1997: 1-2). A discourse is produced from a culmination of many sources and excerpts which intersect to create an overarching idea. Such excerpts may take multiple forms, however this study focuses on written dialogue as a discourse producer to narrow this study's focus and help identify patterns.

Chapter 2: Methodology

2.1: Data Collection:

This study's news media data was drawn from four sources; *Daily Mail, The Telegraph, The Sun,* and *The Guardian,* with the former three UK news outlets having the highest readership in 2024, and *The Guardian* being within the top ten (Ofcom, 2024). These outlets were also all established prior to this study's first event, meaning their discourses can be monitored in response to all this study's events. Such outlets also fall across the spectrum of perceived ideological alignment: *The Guardian* is commonly understood as ideologically liberal; *Daily Mail* and *The Telegraph* as ideologically conservative; and *The Sun* as more ideologically conservative than the previous two outlets named, because of its perceived sympathy to right-wing politics (Akkerman, 2011: 942). Such sources present a microcosm of the UK's news media ecosystem, meaning analysis will provide holistic conclusions surrounding the media's dehumanising/humanising migrant discourse. The lack of an impartial outlet is justified by limited archive accessibility (see Section 2.3).

Articles collected for the 1979/81 study were drawn from news outlets' personal historical archives, whereas Lexis+ UK provided newspaper articles for the 2015 and 2024 events. Relevant sources were filtered by searching for the name of the event; 'Southall Riots', 'Migration Crisis', and 'Summer 2024 Riots'. Articles that had been published within one year of each event's start date were also filtered to ensure only articles covering the events were elicited, whilst allowing for discourses delayed in publication to appear. Discourses were then drawn from these articles. In total, forty-six news articles and opinion pieces were analysed.

Social media excerpts were drawn from X (formerly Twitter) to gather data concerning the 2015 and 2024 events, because from 2015-2024 X was in the UK's top four social media sources for news (Ofcom, 2024). Social media was created in the 2000s (Edosomwan et al., 2011: 79), meaning social media analysis was not applicable for the 1979/81 event. X was relevant for monitoring social media's discourses because of its ability to capture emotion in real time (Paris et al., 2015: 54), due to the little time it takes to post (Papacharissi, 2012: 5).

I overcame the challenge of X's abundance of material posted in relation to my two events by using X's Advanced Search tool to screen for key phrases relevant to my study; '2015 Migrant Crisis' and '2024 Riots', and by filtering for Tweets that had been posted between the start date of the event until one year from this date to ensure information was relevant to my research. From this, discourses were collected from the search results. The accounts belonging to commenters on posts were also analysed to uncover more discourses. In total thirty-nine social media posts and accounts were analysed.

2.2: Data Analysis:

To conduct my study into the evolution of the media's migrant discourse I employed a mixed-methods approach that combined qualitative and quantitative research methods. My qualitative methods involved the use of both discourse and inductive thematic analysis, and my quantitative analysis used my Humanisation-Dehumanisation Scale.

Firstly, inductive thematic analysis (ITA) was used to code excerpts from news and social media sources to identify patterns and themes (Clarke and Braun, 2017: 297). I used inductive coding to sort the data into themes which was apt for my study as overarching trends between findings

could more easily be identified across chapters, which promoted a comprehensive integration of understandings to answer this study's sub-questions, and thus its main research question.

Next, to dissect these themes discourse analysis (DA) was employed to discern meanings "above the level of a sentence" (Handford and Gee, 2023: 1), allowing implicit insights to be elicited from text, including justifications behind certain opinions, which may help ascertain the driving forces and possible misconceptions that create certain discourses. Thus, when DA is combined with ITA a rigorous analysis of excerpts and their discourses occurs, helping to create a holistic and reliable answer to this study's research question.

Further, such qualitative methods support the subsequent application of a quantitative research method; the Humanisation-Dehumanisation Scale, which is paramount in directly addressing the focus of this study by measuring the change in the media's humanising/dehumanising migrant discourse over time. It also provides a consistent defence of this study's argument. Moreover, using these three methods in combination serves to create a conscientious analysis of the data, and thus a thoroughly researched answer to this study's research question.

2.2.1: The Humanisation-Dehumanisation Scale

The Humanisation-Dehumanisation Scale measures the severity of humanising and

dehumanising discourses by applying a quantitative scale to qualitative data, so the evolution of

the severity of the media's humanising/dehumanising discourses can be assessed, addressing this

study's main research question. The application of a quantitative research method warrants high

intercoder reliability to ensure conclusions are trustworthy and systematic (O'Connor and Joffe,

2020: 1). The scale consists of five Discourse Severity Indexes (DSIs), with an excerpt's DSI

determined through a three-step process, outlined in Section 2.2.1a. However, first the scale and

its indexes will be outlined:

Figure A: Humanisation-Dehumanisation Scale (Own Elaboration)
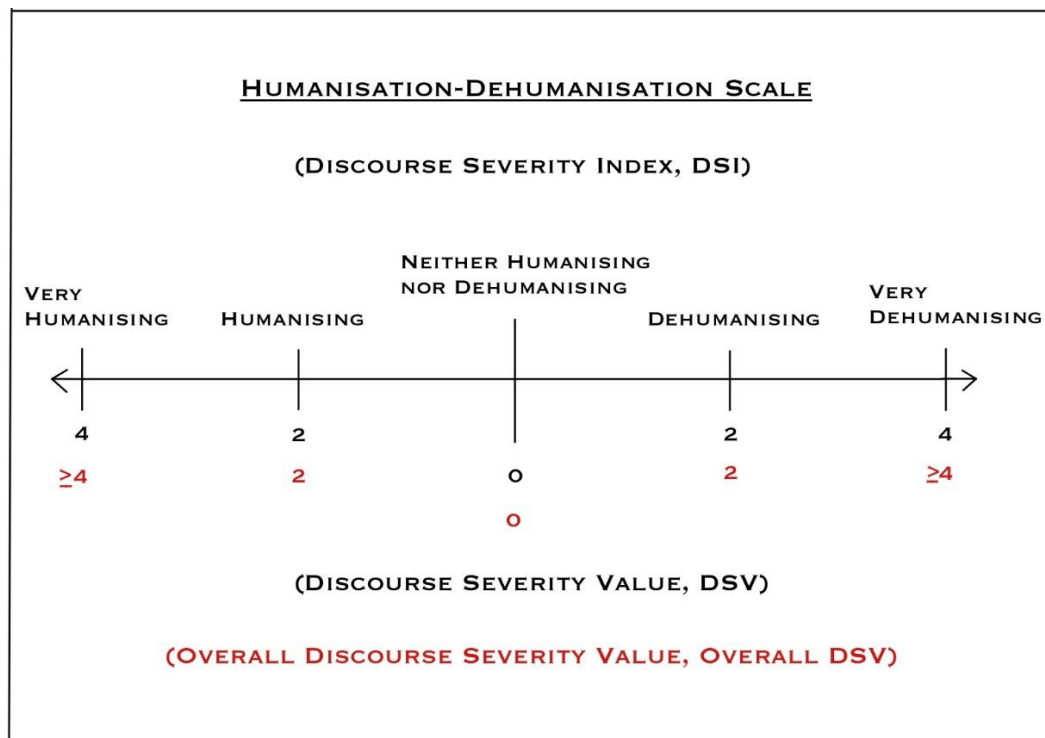
A figure to represent a visual of the Humanisation-Dehumanisation Scale, including the Discourse
Severity Indexes and their corresponding Discourse Severity Values and Overall Discourse Severity
Values

Discourse Severity Indexes Definitions:

*'Very Humanising' and 'Humanising' can be understood as sub-categories under the broad term of humanisation and 'Very Dehumanising' and 'Dehumanising' can be understood as sub-categories under the broad term of dehumanisation.

Very Humanising = A more intense and explicit form of humanisation that goes beyond depicting a subject as equal to others within society through language or actions. A very humanised subject can be conceptualised as essential to society through their positive contributions to society. For example, the UK's health service "is critically reliant on staff from overseas" (Shahvisi, 2018: 334).

Humanising = through means such as language, a subject is portrayed as human, because they are depicted as equal to other humans within society. Whilst there is no universal way of determining migrants' societal position in terms of equality, this study evidences equality through actions or language. For example, such evidence could manifest as humans interacting with the subject the same as they would with other humans within society or be evident within the human tendency to form social relationships with other humans, opposed to non-humans such as animals (Evans, 2016: 23-25).

Neither Humanising nor Dehumanising = a discourse that cannot be classed as humanising or dehumanising, i.e. it is neutral.

Dehumanising = Understood as the opposite process to 'humanisation' (Kirkwood, 2017: 115); how "through means such as language, humans are depicted as less than human" (Haslam and Loughnan, 2014: 399), and as such are regarded as subordinate to others within society. For example, this may be evident through the vilification of migrants (Bleiker et al.)

Very Dehumanising = A more intense and explicit form of dehumanisation that goes beyond depicting a subject as subordinate to others within society through actions and language. A very dehumanised subject can be conceptualised as hindering how society functions. For example, labelling the subject a terrorist depicts them as a security threat and thus synonymous with danger (Sajjad, 2018: 40).

2.2.1a: Determining an Excerpt's Overall Discourse Severity Index

To determine an excerpt's DSI follow the three following steps:

Step 1: Determining the DSI for each indicator

Using the criteria outlined in Table A (see below), allocate the excerpt to a DSI for each applicable category. If an excerpt falls into one DSI for all applicable indicators, steps 2 and 3 are not relevant to the excerpt; the excerpt can be classed as this DSI overall. For example, if an excerpt is classed as 'Humanising' for each applicable indicator, the excerpt can be characterised as having a 'Humanising' DSI overall.

Note, all indicators may not be applicable to an excerpt.

If all applicable indicators for an excerpt are not all the same DSI follow steps 2 and 3.

Table A: Discourse Severity Index Criteria (Own Elaboration)

This table consists of three indicators and two sub-indicators to determine the DSI of excerpts using a multi-dimensional scoring system:

1. Tone

2. Content

    - Meanings of words and semantic prosodies

    - Frequency

3. Impact

Such criteria have been chosen to determine an excerpt's DSI because they best reflect ways people project emotions through written dialogue. 'Tone' reflects emotional charge, 'Content' monitors the overall negativity or positivity of dialogue, and 'Impact' measures the engagement with dialogue on social media, which may reflect whether the sentiment is mainstream or divisive. For the sub-indicator 'Meanings and Semantic Prosodies', semantic prosodies can be understood as when a word is perceived in a positive or negative light dependent on the words it tends to be used with (Louw and Chateau, 2010: 755). Moreover, using a combination of these indicators to determine the DSI of excerpts will produce accurate reflections of the public mood and the consequent severity of discourse elicited.

Indicator	Very Humanising	Humanising	Neither Humanising nor Dehumanising	Dehumanising	Very Dehumanising
Tone	The presence of humanising words or phrases in capital letters. E.g. 'ESSENTIAL'	No humanising words or phrases in capital letters.	No words or phrases all in capital letters.	No dehumanising words or phrases in capital letters.	The presence of dehumanising words or phrases in capital letters. E.g. 'TERRORISTS'
Content (**Meanings and Semantic Prosodies**)	Migrants are portrayed as essential to the working of society. E.g. working within the health sector	Migrants are depicted as equal to others within society	No positive or negative words or phrases are present	Migrants are depicted as subordinate to others within society	Migrants are depicted as a hindrance to the working of society. E.g. through terrorism or illegal actions
Content (**Frequency**)	The presence of 3 or more words or phrases deemed to be positive	The presence of 1-2 words or phrases deemed to be positive	No words or phrases deemed to be positive or negative present	The presence of 1-2 words or phrases deemed to be negative	The presence of 3 or more words or phrases deemed to be negative
Impact	A minimum of 1,000: -Views -Comments -Likes -Reposts -Bookmarks, in **two or more** categories on a post deemed to be positive	A minimum of 1,000: -Views -Comments -Likes -Reposts -Bookmarks, in **one** of these categories, on a post deemed to be positive	Less than 1,000: (used 3.2) -Views -Comments -Likes -Reposts -Bookmarks, in all categories, on a post deemed to be neither positive nor negative	A minimum of 1,000: -Views -Comments -Likes -Reposts -Bookmarks, in **one** of these categories, on a post deemed to be negative	A minimum of 1,000: -Views -Comments -Likes -Reposts -Bookmarks, in **two or more** categories on a post deemed to be negative

A table to relay the criteria that determines an excerpt's Discourse Severity Index

Step 2: Determining an excerpt's overall DSI

Once the excerpt has been allocated to a DSI for each applicable indicator, first use the Table B to determine the corresponding Discourse Severity Values (DSVs). Then, input the DSVs into the formula below to determine an excerpt's Overall DSV. The Overall DSV will either elicit two possible corresponding DSIs for which this discourse can be classed as overall, or if the Overall DSV is 0 then the corresponding DSI makes this excerpt 'Neither Humanising nor Dehumanising'. If the latter situation occurs, *Step 3* does not need to be undertaken.

Table B: DSVs, Overall DSVs and DSIs (Own Elaboration)

Discourse Severity Value (DSV)	Overall Discourse Severity Value (Overall DSV)	Discourse Severity Index (DSI)
4	≥4	Very Humanising
2	2	Humanising
0	0	Neither Humanising nor Dehumanising
2	2	Dehumanising
4	≥4	Very Dehumanising

A table to show DSIs and their corresponding DSVs and Overall DSV

Formula:

Note, if all indicators were not applicable to an excerpt then all parts of this formula will not be needed. If so, simply remove any non-applicable brackets from the formula.

(Add together all DSVs classed as 'Very Humanising' and/or 'Very Dehumanising') - (Add together all DSVs classed as 'Humanising' and/or 'Dehumanising') - (Add together all DSVs classed as 'Neither Humanising nor Dehumanising') = Overall DSV

Example:

"Some of our towns are festering sores, plagued by swarms of migrants and asylum seekers, shelling out benefits like Monopoly money"

(Hopkins, 2015: 11)

This excerpt is 'Very Dehumanising' for both 'Frequency' (DSV of 4) and 'Meanings and Semantic Prosodies (DSV of 4), however, for 'Tone' it is 'Dehumanising' (DSV of 2). 'Impact' is not applicable to this excerpt because it is a news media source, and the impact cannot be measured using Lexis Library News Archive. Inputting these values into the formula looks like this: (4+4) – 2 = Overall DSV of 6. This Overall DSV corresponds with the DSIs 'Very Humanising' and 'Very Dehumanising'.

Step 3: Determining which of two DSIs characterises an excerpt overall

Lastly, to determine which of the two DSIs elicited from Step 2 characterises an excerpt overall, and therefore what side of the scale (humanising or dehumanising) that an excerpt falls, sentiment analysis is employed. Sentiment analysis refers to determining if dialogue portrays a "positive or negative evaluation expressed through language" (Taboada, 2016: 325). For this, refer to the DSI determined for the indicator 'Meanings and Semantic Prosodies' outlined in Table A - this ensures consistency across the data for high intercoder reliability. This DSI determines whether the excerpt is overall positive or negative. One can assume dehumanisation is a negative concept and humanisation is a positive concept. As a result, an excerpt's overall DSI has been determined.

For example, using the excerpt analysed and the findings elicited from Step 2, this excerpt can be classed as 'Very Dehumanising' overall.

2.3: Limitations:

Due to the UK's multitude of diverse media sources it is near impossible that a singular study could encompass all elements of the UK's media discourse in relation to the three events used in this study. I acknowledge that my study has not encompassed all social media platforms and news outlets, however due to the lack of previous research into the 2024 Riots, I instead hope this study can provide a foundation from which future research can form, through the investigation of different outlets and platforms and their media discourse production. Also, my news media analysis does not include the BBC, despite it being an impartial news outlet (Belair-Gagnon, 2013: 478) that would complete my news media's political leanings spectrum. However, I could not access the BBC's archives, so data could not be drawn for my 1979/81 event, and I wanted to use the same newspapers for all analysis of events to allow for a standardised comparison. GB News was not included in this study for similar reasons: it was only created in 2021, meaning its impact in this study's 1979/81 and 2015 events could not be analysed, despite it being vocal during the 2024 Riots on "right-leaning (…) political issues" (Hagerty, 2024: 34). Finally, I stopped collecting my data in March 2025 to ensure all data was uniform for reliable comparison. Whilst this meant developments in the Riot's timeline after March could not be captured, including the media's discourse in reaction to developments, due to this study's time restrictions for completion, this limitation instead presents an interesting avenue for future research.

Chapter 3: The Media's Migrant Discourse between 1979 and 2015

This chapter focuses on two historic events (1979/81 Southall Riots and 2015 Migrant 'Crisis') that have stimulated the media's creation of humanising and dehumanising migrant discourses, to answer this study's first sub-question: how can the media's humanising/dehumanising migrant discourse be conceptualised between 1979 and 2015? Over three sections the three themes that arose from thematic analysis of the data will be explored, and subsequent Discourse Severity Indexes (DSIs) (see Humanisation-Dehumanisation Scale in Section 2.2.1) will be relayed. Section 3.1 will explain the dominance of a 'Very Humanising' discourse in 1979/81, Section 3.2 will demonstrate how this discourse became dehumanising in 2015, before Section 3.3 outlines how media discourses differ across migrant-ethnic groups. This chapter concludes that the media's discourse shifted from being humanising to dehumanising prior to the 2024 Riots, with the media's differing discourses for different migrant-ethnic groups acknowledging the complexities within these discourses. Such findings facilitate the dissection of the migrant group, whilst avoiding its homogenisation.

3.1: The Dominance of a Humanising Discourse

The first theme emerging from the dataset was that in the context of the 1979/81 Southall Riots a 'Very Humanising' migrant discourse prevailed. News media provides an example of this:

"Some extremes of opinion do not recognise the enormous contribution that different racial groups have always made to British life"

(The Guardian, 1981: 2)

This 1981 excerpt outlines how a positive rhetoric has been formulated, referring to the advantageous and vital contributions migrants make to society. Therefore, this excerpt's DSI is

'Very Humanising', because it explicitly adheres to the 'Very Humanising' 'Meanings and Semantic Prosodies' criteria; the only applicable indicator for this excerpt, giving it an Overall Discourse Severity Value (DSV) of 4. Such findings suggest that migrants were more readily accepted into UK society during this time, with their culture and skills being recognised as the societal contribution of diversification, which promotes ingenuity through the exposure to diverse information (Chua, 2018: 1119), thus progressing society.

Whilst the data demonstrates the media's 1979/81 discourse to be predominantly 'Very Humanising', some 'Dehumanising' media discourses were present in 1979/81. This is evident in The Guardian referring to the 1981 Southall Riots, and therefore the rioters, as "detritus" (1981: 10). Detritus bears negative connotations of dirt and waste, giving this excerpt an Overall DSV of 2 for 'Meanings and Semantic Prosodies', making it 'Dehumanising'. Interestingly, this article from which this excerpt was sourced was published in the same month as the prior excerpt also from The Guardian. This highlights the variation within the type of discourse news outlets produce, suggesting that during the 1979/81 period newspapers did not project discourses that emulated their political leanings. One may expect The Guardian, as a traditionally left-leaning newspaper, to view migrants positively and therefore humanise them, because being left-leaning tends to mean one has "an open stance on migration" (Broning, and Mohr, 2018: 9), however the data shows this is not always the case.

Despite the existence of dehumanising discourses within the media's discourse during the 1979/81 Southall Riots, it can be concluded that this period's predominant DSI was 'Very Humanising' because this discourse arose most frequently from the data collected during this period. Additionally, humanising migrant discourses were constant across all three newspapers analysed, suggesting that despite the political leanings associated with The Telegraph, Daily

Mail, and The Guardian, such news outlets did not project humanising/dehumanising discourses to emulate these leanings (if humanisation is more closely associated with left-leaning politics, then since dehumanisation is the opposite process, dehumanisation is more closely associated with right-leaning politics). The next section will analyse the media's prevailing migrant discourse in 2015.

3.2: A Switch to a Predominantly Dehumanising Discourse

The second theme interpreted from the data was that in response to the 2015 Migrant 'Crisis' the media's DSI became 'Very Dehumanising', evident in the movement of the media's dominant discourse across the Humanisation-Dehumanisation scale. A poignant example of dehumanising language was present in news media:

"Some of our towns are festering sores, plagued by swarms of migrants and asylum seekers,

shelling out benefits like Monopoly money"

(Hopkins, 2015: 11)

This excerpt is littered with dehumanising language: 'festering sores' creates a parallel between migrants and infection, and the use of 'swarms' to describe the influx of migrants into Britain, a biological behaviour performed by insects such as wasps (Garnier et al., 2007: 4), has connotations of suffocation. Additionally, insects are lower in the classification hierarchy due to their size and mental capabilities (Lockwood, 1987: 70), illustrating how this excerpt depicts migrants as inferior to non-migrants. This excerpt's DSI is 'Very Dehumanising' overall, because despite it being 'Dehumanising' for 'Tone', for both 'Content' sub-indicators it is 'Very Dehumanising', meaning this discourse's DSV is 6; for 'Meanings and Semantic Prosodies', the reference to 'benefits' implies an added economic strain on society due to migration, hindering

society's economic functioning. Considering that media shapes "societal attitudes" (Kosho, 2016: 86), such sensationalist dialogue suggests the post-2015 public opinion on migrants may become increasingly dehumanising. 'Very Dehumanising' discourses were also present on social media:

"WHAT will it take for these MORONS from opening their doors to these ISLAMIC TERRORISTS?"

(User A, 2016)

User A articulates an assumption that migration poses a security threat through terrorism. This excerpt is 'Very Dehumanising' overall, because both 'Tone' (DSV of 4) and 'Meanings and Semantic Prosodies' are 'Very Dehumanising' (DSV of 4), with the latter being because of the co-occurrence of 'terrorism' with crime and fear, eliciting a negative semantic prosody. 'Impact' is 'Neither Humanising nor Dehumanising' (0 DSV), and 'Frequency' is 'Dehumanising' (2 DSV). Consequently, this excerpt possesses a DSV of 6. Such findings demonstrate the media discourse's evolution from 'Very Humanising' in 1979/81, to 'Very Dehumanising' in 2015.

Closer analysis of the data reveals such migrant dehumanisation is predominantly produced by news media, due to a higher frequency of dehumanising sentiments being present in news media outlets analysed, as opposed to social media excerpts analysed. Furthermore, through constant references to an 'invasion' and migrants as a 'burden' among many of the traditionally right-leaning news media sources analysed (Tweedie, 2016; Littlejohn, 2015; The Sun, 2015), and the simultaneous absence of this word in traditionally left-leaning news media sources, the data suggests that newspapers' discourses diverged to emulate their political leanings in 2015, polarising the spectrum of news media's political leanings. The creation of GB News in 2021

may further polarise this spectrum due to the extreme right-wing views it publishes (Hagerty, 2024: 35), which could create an environment where dehumanising views are more readily created. This may further threaten humanising discourses' prevalence, as they could be drowned out in a sea of right-wing dehumanisation.

Moreover, whilst this section has recounted media's humanising/dehumanising migrant discourse up to 2015, the next section will investigate how this discourse varies between migrant groups to demonstrate the complexities within discourses.

3.3: Differing Discourses Across Migrant-Ethnic Groups

The final theme emerging from the data was that the media creates different discourses for different migrant groups, specifically migrant-ethnic groups: a group of migrants who share ethnic distinctions based upon shared factors, such as language, religion, history and culture (Anderson and Bulatao, 2004: 9). The following media excerpt evidences the media's discourse for the Asian ethnic group:

"Asians - as an ethnic group normally well disciplined"

(Daily Mail, 1979: 1)

This demonstrates the media's ability to explicitly perpetuate perceived stereotypes (Arendt and Northup, 2015: 2370), with the Asian ethnic group, and therefore Asians as migrants, bearing a positive stereotype, because 'disciplined' has positive connotations, including orderliness (Edgar, 1955: 1). Therefore, this excerpt is 'Humanising' because it falls into this DSI for all applicable indicators ('Frequency' and 'Tone'). However, The Telegraph's article entitled: "Jamaica versus the rest" (West, 1981: 12) demonstrates how not all migrant-ethnic groups possess positive connotations. The article's title demonises Jamaicans, creating a stratification between the

Jamaican ethnic group and UK society, whilst also labelling them as outsiders: "individuals or groups set apart for a purpose" (Kasumu, 2023:7). Furthermore, the article goes on to label Jamaicans as a "cult of marijuana and other drugs" that brought mugging to London (West, 1981: 12). This incorrectly blames many UK problems on Jamaicans by spreading factually incorrect information: Marijuana's "ethnobotanical origins" are in central Asia (Merlin, 1972: 9-10). Moreover, this article about the Jamaican migrant-ethnic group is 'Very Dehumanising' overall, because whilst 'Tone' is 'Dehumanising', both 'Content' indicators are 'Very Dehumanising', giving this article an Overall DSV of 6. Blair Peach's death at the 1979 Southall Riots, a New Zealand-born anti-racism demonstrator, provides a dichotomic discourse on an individual from a white migrant-ethnic group:

"The victim of Southall"

(Daily Mail, 1979: 1)

This excerpt correctly conceptualises a fatality as a 'victim'. However, the fact Peach was a white migrant raises questions about how the media would have portrayed other migrant groups in this same situation, as research shows black migrant groups tend to be dehumanised more frequently and severely than white migrant groups (Albarello and Rubini, 2012: 877). This excerpt is 'Humanising' because the term "victim" tends to be associated with human experiences (Enns, 2015), thus humanising Peach by furnishing him with a quality given to other humans within society ('Meanings and Semantic Prosodies'). Additionally, The Telegraph echoes such humanising sentiments by defining Peach as a "martyr" (Simple, 1979: 16), outlining the humanising discourse's continuity across newspapers for a white migrant-ethnic group. Such findings suggest that due to antecedent connotations associated with migrant-ethnic groups, that a migrant's ethnic group presents a characteristic within an intersectional migrant

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hierarchy that may determine how likely they are to be humanised or dehumanised by media discourse.

3.4: Conclusion

In sum, this chapter has investigated three research themes to answer this study's first sub-question: how can media's humanising/dehumanising migrant discourse be conceptualised between 1979 and 2015? By interpreting data from the 1979/81 Southall Riots and 2015 Migrant 'Crisis' this chapter concludes that the media's discourse has evolved from being 'Very Humanising' in 1979-81 to 'Very Dehumanising' during 2015, with the dehumanisation in 2015 being primarily conducted by news media outlets. Additionally, the media's dehumanising/humanising discourse varied across migrant-ethnic groups. Such findings establish foundations for the analysis of the overall evolution of the media's humanising/dehumanising migrant discourse, which the next chapter will add to by analysing the media's migrant discourse during the 2024 Riots.

<u>Chapter 4: The Media's Migrant Discourse in 2024</u>

This chapter presents my findings elicited from analysis on the data collected from the 2024 Riots, with discourses being placed onto the Humanisation-Dehumanisation Scale (see Section 2.2.1) to address this chapter's sub-question: how can the media's humanising/dehumanising migrant discourse be understood during the UK's Summer 2024 Riots? Such investigations will relay the two themes divulged from thematic analysis on the data over two sections: Section 4.1 will highlight how the media's 2024 migrant discourse was 'Very Dehumanising', and Section 4.2 will outline how social media has become the main vehicle through which this discourse was produced. Both themes are equally significant in answering this chapter's sub-question, because only when viewed in combination does the full picture of the media's 2024 migrant discourse become visible. Ultimately, this chapter will suggest that whilst the media's severely dehumanising migrant discourse was sustained from 2015 to 2024, the primary vehicle producing this discourse changed.

4.1: The Dominance of a Dehumanising Discourse

The first theme interpreted from the data was that a 'Very Dehumanising' media migrant discourse was dominant in response to the 2024 Riots, because this discourse arose most frequently from the 2024 data collected. This means the media's migrant discourse has stayed constant from 2015 to 2024. User B demonstrates how this 'Very Dehumanising' discourse was present on X:

"1m+ Illegals incl [sic] 150k trafficked into Dover, 43k Muslims on terror watch list, 550 hotels filled with parasites targeting women & children"

(User B, 2024)

This excerpt has a 'Very Dehumanising' DSI because it has an Overall DSV of 10: whilst this excerpt is 'Dehumanising' for 'Tone', it is 'Very Dehumanising' for 'Frequency', 'Impact'; it gained 52,900 views and 1200 likes, and for 'Meanings and Semantic Prosodies', due to the allusion that migrants hinder society through terrorism. Additionally, the links between migration and terrorism are baseless, as the UK's terror watch list is not publicly accessible, demonstrating how the media can misinform. Furthermore, User B suggests that only 'women and children' are seen as possible victims, not men. This alludes to more possible characteristics within the intersectional migrant hierarchy, in the form of gender and age, that may determine if the media humanises or dehumanises a migrant (see Section 3.3). Specifically, such characteristics may reflect migrant's perceived threat to society. User C's post demonstrates how this understanding is present across X: "292 men invaded the UK yesterday (...) not a single kid or woman in sight" (User C: 2024). Such sentiments imply women and children are seen as a lesser societal threat than men, possibly because women and children are stereotyped as vulnerable (Krause, 2014: 36). Moreover, a migrant's age, gender and ethnic group (see Section 3.3) can be understood as characteristics in the intersectional migrant hierarchy that determines the likelihood of a migrant being humanised or dehumanised. In terms of the wider dominance of a 'Very Dehumanising' discourse during 2024, a Tweet from a Conservative Councillor's wife demonstrates how those in positions of power helped sustain a severely dehumanising discourse:

"Set fire to all the f*cking hotels full of the bastards for all I care"

(Connolly, 2024)

Lucy Connolly's Tweet presents a particularly striking finding, because due to her close relation to an authoritative figure, her Tweet had a widespread impact prior to its deletion; 310,000 views

and 940 reposts (Murray and Ambrose, 2024). Also, due to her elevated societal status, such severely dehumanising language gained a degree of legitimacy, suggesting a possible reason for how a severely dehumanising discourse was maintained in 2024.

Lastly, some instances of humanising discourses were present on social media, evident in calls to halt the prejudice against migrants (Britishfuture, 2024), and through hashtags: #TogetherWithRefugees (RefugeeTogether, 2024). However, such sentiments were not widespread, not because they were absent, but because social media's algorithms may be raising the profile of dehumanising Tweets above humanising Tweets, making social media's migrant discourse appear homogenous in its production of a dehumanising discourse. X's recent change in ownership to Elon Musk in late-2022 may be promoting this dehumanising environment, because he utilises the platform to spread his far-right values at the cost of misinforming users (Ismail and Ardalan-Raikes, 2025: 4-8). Many users may not realise such influences are present when using X, leading to the implanting and normalisation of dehumanising sentiments. This may help severely dehumanising discourses remain dominant on social media.

Moreover, this section has helped build an understanding of the media's 2024 migrant discourse and some of its complexities, by outlining the dominance of a 'Very Dehumanising' DSI for the 2024 Riots, and suggesting two possible influences that may determine how easily a humanising or dehumanising discourse can arise: that algorithms make humanising discourses less potent than dehumanising discourses and that gender and age may decide a migrant's place on the intersectional hierarchy that determines if they are humanised or dehumanised by the media.

4.2: Social Media's Dominance in Dehumanising Discourse Production

The second theme that emerged from the data was that social media has become the main vehicle through which the media's discourse is produced. The article entitled "Warning to keyboard warriors as woman who posted 'Blow the mosques up' is jailed" (Hull, 2024: 19), evidences how in 2024 news media tended to reproduce dehumanising migrant discourses by regurgitating sentiments posted on social media, rather than the discourse emanating from news media as an original discourse:

"Blow the mosques up with adults in it"

(Hull, 2024: 19)

This excerpt refers to a post by a user on Facebook, a social media platform, that was referenced within a publication by the Daily Mail. The shift from news media in 2015 to social media in 2024 as the main vehicle through which a 'Very Dehumanising' migrant discourse is produced, highlights news media's loss of ability to shape the public mood, compared to before 2024, on the issue of migration. The shift to social media as the main vehicle through which the media's severely dehumanising migrant discourse is produced, may have repercussions on how easily a 'Very Dehumanising' discourse is maintained. News media is a mediated information source, whereas social media is unmediated (Ceron and Memoli, 2016: 226). This means text posted on social media is not monitored to ensure it is factually correct, which may promote extremism, as extreme views can be posted and spread with minimal accountability and consequence.

Moreover, Section 4.2 has exemplified how social media has become the main vehicle from which the media's 'Very Dehumanising' migrant discourse emanates, which may promote future extremism, fuelling the future continuance of severely dehumanising discourses.

4.3: Conclusion

In sum, this chapter has outlined two themes that arose from the data on the 2024 Riots to answer this chapter's sub question; how can the media's humanising/dehumanising migrant discourse be understood during the UK's Summer 2024 Riots? Ultimately, this chapter concludes that the media's migrant discourse can be conceptualised as 'Very Dehumanising', with social media becoming the main vehicle through which this discourse was produced. Additionally, this chapter has suggested more possible characteristics within the intersectional migrant hierarchy that may determine if the media humanises or dehumanises a migrant. The next chapter will combine these findings with those from Chapter Three to discuss the overarching trends and answer this study's last sub-question.

Chapter 5: Discussion of Findings

This chapter uses the information divulged from the Humanisation-Dehumanisation Scale (see Section 2.2.1) from the previous two chapters to suggest possible explanations for why the media's discourse shifted from 'Very Humanising' during the 1979-81 Southall Riots, to a 'Very Dehumanising' discourse during both the 2015 Migrant 'Crisis' and the 2024 Summer Riots. Such discussions address this study's final sub-question: what factors explain possible shifts in the media's migrant discourse? This establishes *why* changes in the media's humanising/dehumanising migrant discourse occurred, to support answering the *how* within this study's main research question.

Such explanations occur over two sections; Section 5.1 explains the shift between 1979/81 and 2015 as driven by the decrease in the 'romanticisation' of migration and changes in the perceived societal role of migrants as a repercussion of changes within the UK's political and economic landscape. Section 5.2 proposes explanations for why the media's DSI remained constant between 2015 and 2024, alluding to the 'digitisation of dehumanisation', political accommodation, and the increased polarisation of migrant groups as 'good' or 'bad' as possible explanations.

Ultimately, this chapter suggests that a combination of societal, technological and political factors explain the media's shift to a severely dehumanising discourse, because they helped create an environment where severely dehumanising discourses could survive and flourish. Political factors were most significant in facilitating this shift due to their presence as a driving factor in both Section 5.1 and 5.2.

5.1: From 'Very Humanising' to 'Very Dehumanising' (1979/81-2015)

From the 1979/81 Southall Riots to the 2015 Migrant 'Crisis' the media's migrant discourse shifted from 'Very Humanising' to 'Very Dehumanising'. This section outlines two possible explanations – namely, the UK public's changed perceptions of migrants' societal role and the decrease in migration's romanticisation.

Firstly, the UK public's changing perceptions of migrants' societal role presents a possible reason why the media's migrant discourse became dehumanising. Wimmer and Glick-Schiller (2002) detail how prior to the late-1970s societal perceptions of migrants were positive. They outline how migration was viewed as a consequence of colonialism and therefore a natural feature of society, with such understandings meaning migrants were more readily accepted as a constituent of the UK's fabric due to a sense of responsibility and the shared commonality of British citizenship (Wimmer and Glick-Schiller, 2002: 304). Additionally, migrants were also viewed as beneficial economic commodities (Wimmer and Glick-Schiller, 2002: 312-317), making migrants and their economic contributions a societal asset.

However, from the late-1970s onwards "the economic restructuring of current globalisation" (Wimmer and Glick-Schiller, 2002: 321) catalysed a drastic shift in the public perception of migrants. New perceptions portrayed migrants as "endangering a collective way of life" (Huysmans, 2006: 46), due to the growth in the idea that migrants were 'stealing' jobs from those native to the UK (Ballard, 1987: 25), because of the UK's continuing migrant influx and the assimilation of cultures through globalisation. Such understandings established an 'us' and 'them' rhetoric; that migrants are fundamentally different to non-migrants. The September 11th, 2001 attacks in New York provided supposed 'evidence' of the link between migrants and danger through the "social construction of migration as a high level security issue" (Wadia,

2015: 91). 9/11 also fuelled the association of migrants with villainy, with Muslim migrants being particularly stigmatised due to the 9/11 perpetrators being Muslim (Wimmer and Glick-Schiller, 2002: 309). The spread of Muslim migrants' increased vilification has been reflected in a sharp rise in Islamophobia since 9/11 (Al Atom, 2014: 87). As such, increased vilification within the collective migrant group suggests a possible reason why migrants became dehumanised; the migrant group is no longer associated with the advancement of society as it was in the 1970s, rather it is now seen as a hindrance through its perceived role as a security threat.

A second possible explanation for the media's migrant discourse shift may be due to the decrease in migration's romanticisation from the 1980s. Prior to the 1980s, migration tended to have positive connotations. The American Dream presents an epitomal example of how migration was romanticised; a journey for a better life, increased opportunity and respectability in the United States of America, with popular novels contributing to this romanticisation, including *Death of A Salesman* by Arthur Miller. The UK also has examples of past romanticisation of migration; the Windrush generation (the migration form the Caribbean to the UK) and the Ten Pound POMs (the migration from the UK to Australia), with both examples demonstrating how the concept of migration used to be romanticised as an admirable endeavour, associated with exploration and bravery (Murphy, 1977: 679). However, Huysmans highlights that as a repercussion of the increased politicisation of migration, including the increased stringency of immigration policies in the last three decades and politicians' framing of migrants as "threat[s], (...) enemies and dangers"" due to a rise in modern nationalism, migration has become associated with danger and illegality (2006: 60-64). Moreover, the altered perception of migration, and therefore migrants,

from a positive to a negative perception from the 1980s onwards, provides another possible reason as to why the media's discourse shifted from humanising to dehumanising migrants.

Moreover, this section has suggested that the media's migrant discourse shifted from 'Very Humanising' in 1979/81 to 'Very Dehumanising' in 2015 due to changes in the societal and political landscape that saw migrants become increasingly perceived as security threats, due to events such as 9/11, and because migration became an issue that was no longer romanticised, as the issue became politicised. The next section will turn this chapter's focus to expounding the continuity of the media's migrant discourse between 2015 and 2024.

5.2: 'Very Dehumanising' in News Media to Social Media (2015-2024)

The prior section outlined possible explanations as to why the media's dominant migrant discourse shifted from 'Very Humanising' in 1979/81 to 'Very Dehumanising' in 2015, raising the question: how was this severely dehumanising discourse then sustained from 2015 to 2024? This section outlines three possible facilitators of this phenomenon, from the altered political and technological environments that accommodated migrant dehumanisation, to the role of the Russia-Ukraine War in further dichotomising migrant groups.

Firstly, the political environment in which the 2024 Riots took place may explain how a 'Very Dehumanising' discourse was sustained between 2015 and 2024. During this time, British politics rapidly evolved to create an environment where severely dehumanising language became more socially acceptable. This was evident during the 2016 Brexit campaign, where the issue of immigration, as a type of migration, "assumed a prominent role" (Goodwin and Milazzo, 2017: 451) - the UK Independence Party created support for the 'Leave' campaign using "anti-immigration (...) sentiment[s]" (Goodwin and Milazzo, 2017: 455). This placed severely

dehumanising sentiments at the forefront of the political arena, which legitimised consequent "public hostility towards immigration" (Goodwin and Milazzo, 2017: 451).

The increased social acceptability of severely dehumanising discourses was also evident from 2022-23 during debates on the Safety of Rwanda Bill, through the evocation of inflammatory language from MPs in Parliament. The Home Secretary Suella Braverman referred to the influx of migrants as an "invasion on our southern coast" (House of Commons, 2022), creating a war-like rhetoric whilst insinuating a dichotomy between 'us' and 'them'. The use of dehumanising language from an authoritative figure gives such language legitimacy, which may have further induced the social acceptability of more severely dehumanising migrant discourses.

Additionally, it is interesting to note that within the political arena the July 2024 General Election saw Nigel Farage, leader of the far-right party Reform UK, elected to Parliament after running six times previously from 1994-2024 (UK Parliament, 2025). This reflects a change in the far-right's popularity, and the anti-immigration sentiments they perpetuate, amongst the UK public just prior to the 2024 Riots, which arose twenty-six days later. Moreover, it becomes apparent that the political environment failed to hinder the growing acceptance of far-right ideals within the UK public, meaning such opinions became socially acceptable, leading to the continuation of a 'Very Dehumanising' migrant discourse.

Secondly, the movement from news media in 2015, to social media in 2024 as the primary means of producing a 'Very Dehumanising' discourse presents another possible explanation as to why a severely dehumanising discourse was sustained between 2015 and 2024. Social media can capture emotions at their rawest because users update the platform in real time (Paris et al., 2015: 54), with X being the epitome of this because posting a Tweet takes little time and is often part of one's daily routine (Papacharissi, 2012: 5). However, such platforms have downfalls; the idea

that social media is separate from reality, enabling users to dissociate from their actions (Redmiles, Bodford and Blackwell, 2019: 409) and subvert responsibility due to the perceived safety of operating behind a screen. Combined with social media's lack of mediation, some users may post more severely dehumanising discourses because they feel emboldened by their perceived safety. This can be understood as the 'digitisation of dehumanisation'. Additionally, algorithms undoubtedly played a role in creating environments for certain users where their severely dehumanising discourses appear quotidian, because their personal social media algorithms alter so they only see sentiments that comply with views they have previously expressed online (Milan, 2015: 1). When this phenomenon is conceptualised as an 'echo chamber'; social media's power to only provide information in-line with pre-existing beliefs (Mahmoudi, Jemielniak and Ciechanowski, 2024: 12), it becomes apparent how severely dehumanising discourses are created and sustained, because algorithms provide a community of like-minded individuals that reinforce one another's opinions.

Finally, the British Government's 'Homes for Ukraine Scheme', in response to the Russia-Ukraine War, presents the final possible explanation as to why the media's 'Very Dehumanising' migrant discourse was sustained between 2015 and 2024. The scheme invited UK residents to apply to house Ukrainian asylum seekers fleeing the Russia-Ukraine conflict. Zschomler and Berg highlight how the scheme created a '"new bespokism"' that characterises the government's approach to asylum" (2024: 9), whereby Ukrainian asylum seekers were selectively given unprecedented agency compared to others within the UK's asylum system. This further distinguishes between 'good' and 'bad' migrants, which may facilitate more extreme views, and thus enables the media's upkeep of a severely dehumanising migrant discourse, because 'bad' migrants appear more villainous against the backdrop of increasingly 'good' migrants.

Moreover, it becomes clear how the increased polarisation of migrant groups as 'good' or 'bad', has helped foster and sustain severely dehumanising views on the migrant group as a collective, thus sustaining the media's 'Very Dehumanising' migrant discourse.

Overall, Section 5.2 has relayed three reasons to explain the sustaining of the 'Very Dehumanising' discourse between 2015 and 2024: the political accommodation of such sentiments; the 'digitisation of dehumanisation'; the 'Homes for Ukraine' Scheme and its role in further dichotomising the migrant hierarchy.

5.3: Conclusion

In sum, over two sections this chapter has explained possible reasons as to why the media's discourse on migrants altered from 'Very Humanising' (1979/81) to 'Very Dehumanising' (2015 and 2024). Ultimately, this chapter attributes such changes to shifts within the UK's social (migrants being increasingly viewed as a danger rather than an asset), technological (the 'digitisation of dehumanisation' and algorithms) and political (the increased social acceptability of dehumanisation via authoritative figures) landscapes that created an environment where severely dehumanising discourses could survive, sustaining the 'Very Dehumanising' discourse. Such explanations answer this chapter's sub-question: what factors explain possible shifts in the media's migrant discourse? Answering this sub-question, addresses *why* the change in the media's discourse occurred, to support answering the *how* within this study's research question, which is addressed in the last chapter.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

This study's main research question asked: how have news media and social media discourses humanised and dehumanised migrants between 1979 and 2024? Ultimately, this study concludes, in opposition to Cammaert's suggestion that the UK's society has become increasingly woke (2022: 730), that such wokeness has not been demonstrated by the media's discourse between 1979 and 2024. This is evident in the media's discourse shifting from 'Very Humanising' in response to the 1979/81 Southall Riots to 'Very Dehumanising' in response to both the 2015 Migrant 'Crisis' and the 2024 UK Summer Riots. The study proposes such shifts in the media's migrant discourse were driven by changes in the UK's social, political and technological landscapes, which created an environment where dehumanising sentiments could thrive. This research also suggests that the media's increasingly severe dehumanisation of migrants over the last four decades may have occurred due to the creation of an intersectional migrant hierarchy, whereby characteristics such as a migrant's age, gender and ethnic group intersect to determine a migrant's likelihood of being humanised or dehumanised by the media.

Such findings contribute to filling the literature gaps previously identified, by developing our understandings of the 2024 Riots through the exploration of dehumanisation and humanisation during the 2024 Riots, rather than focusing solely on such concepts as facilitators of The Riots, and by addressing the research deficit surrounding the concept of humanisation, specifically the presence of the concept over time in the media's discourse. Such research highlights that whilst areas in the study of humanisation could still be expanded, the concept's presence over time is scarce, because society tends to dehumanise more than it humanises, suggesting why the concept may be under researched. Such conclusions present a concerning question as to why our current society tends to favour negativity over positivity? This question demonstrates my study's

influence in stimulating future academic conversations and leads me to this chapter's final section; the broader implications of my findings.

Whilst my study's strengths lie in the rigorous defending of my research question due to the high inter-coder reliability afforded by the Humanisation-Dehumanisation Scale, this study did bear some limitations; the contemporary nature of the 2024 Riots meant that, despite constant developments in the post-Riot timeline, discourses and the environment in which they were formulated could not be monitored past March 2025. However, such limitations present an interesting avenue for future research, for example, looking at the impact of the new Labour Government (a left-leaning political party) on far-right activism, and therefore the far-right's production of dehumanising discourses. This would be an interesting line of research, but would need to be undertaken in a few years' time as the party is still in its first year in Government, thus their influence is unlikely to have taken effect. Moreover, my research stimulates the creation of avenues for future research, making it academically relevant.

In terms of societal relevance, my study alerts both news media authors and social media users to the power they hold in perpetuating humanising/dehumanising migrant discourses, in the hope that bringing attention to this power will stimulate awareness to the impacts of perpetuating certain discourses prior to voicing such opinions through news media and social media. Additionally, the acknowledgement by some news media authors and social media users of their power to shape the UK's dominant discourse may manifest into positive action, whereby those with opinions humanising migrants feel encouraged to spread such sentiments to offset the domination of migrant dehumanisation within society.

Lastly, I hope this study provides a foundation from which policymakers can create legal frameworks to prevent migrant dehumanisation and stimulate humanisation within British

society. For example, to provide a panacea to the UK's high migrant dehumanisation rates, a policy could take the form of information boxes above social media users' posts and news media authors' articles, who are known to either spread misinformation about migrants and/or dehumanise migrants, to alert readers that such elements may be present in the text. This attempts to prevent dehumanisation by making society more perceptive and conscientious about the information on social media and news media in an age of increased negativity and misinformation. Such policies could also increase migrants' QoL within the UK, with successful policies also presenting possible frameworks for export to decrease dehumanisation globally. This highlights the very essence of why I chose to conduct this study, because no person deserves to be dehumanised for attempting to improve their QoL, or simply because home no longer feels like home. Migration leads to a melting pot of different cultures which should inspire us to understand and respect the richness of heritage and traditions. Migration is not, and should never be, a justification for dehumanisation.

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