

The Guardian

(4 September 2015)

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The boat flipped. They just slipped through my hands

● Father's anguish at death of sons Aylan and Ghalib
 ● Tragedy sparks calls for action across Europe

Helena Smith Hodson

Even now, one night and a day after the disaster, the detritus of their devastation still lies on the beach. This was not the place any of them should have died: they had escaped Syria, tried Turkey and, in the form of the Greek isle of Kos, freedom beckoned from across the sea.

For Abdullah and Ihsan Kardi and their two small children, Aylan and Ghalib, the dream of a life in Canada, far from war and civil strife, had never been nearer. But then came the waves: a sea so ferocious overturned their cramped plastic dingy. "I took over and started steering," said Abdullah Kardi yesterday. "The waves were so high and the boat flipped. I took my wife and kids in my arms and realised they were all dead."

The Kardi's dinghy was not the only one to run into trouble on Wednesday. Another vessel capsized early in the day, leaving 12 dead altogether. The telltale signs still line Ali Saka beach - ruggies, shoes, socks, rope and bits of the lifejackets the children wore. Yesterday, more than 24 hours after the tragedy, photographs, medicines, handwritten scraps of paper - preserved in plastic bags - could be seen in the crevices of rocks beyond which a ripped rubber boat still lay.

Within hours of being taken, photographs portraying three-year-old Aylan lying dead on the beach had sparked renewed and ferocious debate over Europe's response to its migration crisis and the casualties of war. They appeared

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Aylan and Ghalib Kardi were drowned after the boat they were in capsized. Photograph: Tima Kardi/The Canadian Press/AP

PM bows to pressure to admit more refugees

Patrick Wintour and Nicholas Watt

David Cameron bowed to growing international and domestic demands for Britain to take more refugees fleeing the Syrian civil war by indicating that the UK will admit thousands more.

Final details of the numbers, funds and planned location of the refugees is being vigorously thrashed out in Whitehall with local councils insisting that the programme must be fully funded by central government.

Those selected to come to Britain are likely to be drawn from UNHCR (UN high commissioner for refugees) camps on the border of Syria, and not from Cairo or other locations near the UK. But the final number of people allowed into the country will amount to fewer than ten thousand, well short of the number likely to be taken by Germany.

The prime minister argues that accepting a large number of Syrian refugees who are already in Europe will make the crisis worse, as it will only incentivise criminal gangs to persuade more people to undertake the risky journey across the Mediterranean and eastern Europe from the Middle East.

With 2 million Syrian refugees in the Middle East, Cameron also believes the ultimate answer does not lie in taking refugees, but finding a political solution within Syria. Downing Street officials acknowledge, however, that the prime minister has been moved to act by the scale of the gathering crisis as well as the change in the public mood, brought to head by the heartbreaking publication of photographs showing a dead Syrian boy washed up on a beach in Turkey. Ministers maintain that British financial aid to run the UNHCR-run camps has been as generous as any other country.

With a steady build-up of politician chatter, council leaders and community groups urging the government to show greater humanity, Cameron signalled change of tone yesterday, saying, "This is a moral nation and we will fulfil our moral responsibilities."

Before details of the plan had emerged the prime minister, speaking at a House of Commons debate, said:

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(4th September 2015)

Component 1: Exploring the Media

Focus areas:
Media language
Representation
Media contexts

PRODUCT CONTEXT

- *The Guardian* is a British national daily newspaper with an average daily circulation of roughly 189 000 copies of their print edition in the UK.
- *The Guardian* newspaper targets a well-educated, relatively young, predominantly male and liberal audience. The demographic is 89% ABC1. Fifty-two percent of *Guardian* readers are male, and the average reader age is 44.
- *The Guardian* has a UK online edition which has over 42.6 million readers (as of October 2014).
- In 2006, *The Guardian* went through a complete redesign. It became smaller, had a new typeface and balanced the longer pieces of journalism out with many shorter stories. The reasons for this were twofold: to adapt to what was going on in the market (*The Independent* and *The Times* had already changed to a tabloid format) and to adapt to people's reading habits, with people now having little time to spare and increasingly 'reading on the go'.

PART 1: STARTING POINTS – Media language

Social context

In March 2011, civil war in Syria broke out and an estimated 11 million Syrians have fled their homes since then. The majority of these have sought refuge in countries that border Syria, but an estimated one million have requested asylum in Europe. Families have been broken up and many are making dangerous and difficult journeys across land and sea to get to, what they consider, a safe place. Opinions on these migrants vary: there is a lot of support and aid being offered by individuals and charities, but there is also a lot of fear and uncertainty about how countries

will cope with the increased populations and the impact such migrants will have on their societies.

Cultural context

It is expected that the audience will recognize the two robots portrayed in the top third of the magazine. This recognition of such icons and their very famous film franchise helps to create social inclusion and a shared knowledge and cultural understanding. It is also a subtle form of advertising, as the front cover is dated 4 September 2015 – just 3 months before the release of the latest film in the *Star Wars* sequel trilogy, *The Force Awakens*, and the day that all the new merchandise was released. These images can be considered to be intertextual references that the audience will spot and then be able to bring a shared understanding to the text.

Consider how media language creates and communicates meaning:

- Unlike many of its counterparts that use block, capitalised text for their mastheads, *The Guardian's* **masthead** is written all in lowercase and uses a curved font. This uniqueness makes the newspaper stand out from the crowd when competing for sales on the news-stands and, arguably, is a more personal **mode of address**, one which offers an alternative form of journalism to the rest of the industry.
- The **dominant image** of the two little boys who drowned, along with their mother who is not pictured, whilst crossing from Turkey to Greece gives a human face to the Syrian refugee crisis. The image depicts happy little boys, wearing typical clothing and a cheeky smile. This **human angle is a common convention** of the news, as it allows the readers to engage with the stories on a more personal level and the use of children is particularly effective as they are often associated with innocence and vulnerability.
- The photograph is **anchored with the caption**, "Aylan and Ghalib Kurdi were drowned after the boat they were in capsized" and the headline, "The boat flipped. They just slipped through my hands", explaining their deaths as wholly accidental.

- The **emotive language** used at the start of the article, “anguish”, “tragedy” and in the lead paragraph, “disaster” and “devastation”, evokes a huge sense of sympathy from the reader. The **audience is positioned** in such a way so as to support these families and apportion blame to Europe’s governments and international authorities who have created this crisis and allow it to continue.

Consider how choice of elements of media language portrays aspects of reality and conveys messages and values:

- Alongside the main article, there is a **linked article** about how the Prime Minister at the time was under increasing pressure to allow more refugees into Britain. The phrasing of the headline, “PM bows to pressure” attempts to show David Cameron in an unfavourable light, stating that he felt that he should agree because so many people were putting pressure on him to do so, suggesting that the Prime Minister doesn’t agree with the idea or wish it to continue.
- When placed alongside the main article, and more notably the image of the little boys, the **subtext** is that he lacks compassion and empathy for these victims of war, arguably reflecting the values and political leaning of *The Guardian*.

Consider the codes and conventions of media language:

- A much smaller part of the front page is given over to g2 film & music, a **regular segment** in the paper which, because of its placing, when displayed on news-stands may well be the section people see first. This entertainment segment offers a lighter alternative to the hard hitting news stories of the rest of the newspaper and may well be a reason why people choose this paper over others, many of which will undoubtedly be covering the same main stories
- **Iconic images** of R2D2, C-3PO and Woody Allen, amongst others, engage part of the target audience who will be familiar with these and the reference to “Aciid” and “Rave classics” along with Emma Stone may be more appealing to their younger readers.

Possible areas for further investigation:

- **Code and conventions** of newspaper covers – layout, use of cover photographs/ images, house style, mastheads.
- **Narrative** – headlines used to tease people to

want to read certain stories (could be linked to Roland Barthes – enigma codes).

- **Active/Passive audience.** Historically, readers of print newspapers were considered to be passive (i.e. they read what was in front of them and believed it), especially as there is an expectation that what is shared in the news genre is true. However, today’s audiences are much more active and can interact with the news they read. They have the option to read it online, comment and discuss below an article, as well as sharing it on social media. This potentially changes the way they interpret the information they are given.

PART 2: STARTING POINTS – Representation

Political context

The Guardian is described as having mainstream left political values. It does not have an affiliation with any political party, but does lean towards the left and has a very liberal tradition. It is therefore not surprising that the language of the two main articles seeks to apportion blame to the European governments suggesting they are the reason for this crisis, and also paints a picture of an uncaring Conservative Prime Minister. It is also unsurprising that they are presenting an alternative viewpoint to the more right-wing press, encouraging their readers to see the refugees as victims of war who deserve our help.

The Guardian isn’t owned by a group of shareholders like most other newspapers, for whom making a profit is imperative. Therefore they believe that they can hold true to their core journalistic principles.

Consider the representation of refugees as a social group and the representation of the migrant crisis as an issue:

- The **text** of the main article is carefully constructed to position the audience into accepting the newspaper’s **viewpoint, analysis and opinion**. The image and the language used position the Kurdi family, and therefore all refugees, as blameless victims. It is a story of personal tragedy which, in other circumstances unrelated to a migrant crisis, would be viewed as a heartbreaking catastrophe by all who read about it. However, in the **political and social context of the Syrian refugee crisis**, this is the kind of story that divides people – some considering it the father’s fault, and suggesting that they shouldn’t have been making the

crossing in the first place as the journey to Europe was too dangerous and unnecessary.

Consider theoretical perspectives on representation, such as selection and omission:

- The **selection** of this particular image could have been to show how they look just like any other youngsters, their nationality being irrelevant. The previous day, the image used by many papers, including *The Guardian*, was a much more shocking picture of Aylan's body being carried by an official. *The Guardian* could have used this image again or a similar one but didn't and it's worth considering why that was.

Consider the functions and uses of stereotypes:

- In contrast to the unfavourable **dominant media stereotype** of refugees as potential terrorists, benefit scroungers and criminals, this image serves to remind the readers of the reality of the situation and show just how desperate many are to flee their homes in search of safety.
- The two boys are also being used, in this context, perhaps to **represent** all migrant children involved in this war, and once again highlighting their innocence, vulnerability and defencelessness.

Possible areas for further investigation:

- **Theoretical perspectives** (e.g. Stuart Hall) – representation, stereotype, selection/omission and perhaps how, in some ways, this newspaper front page has sought to move away from the more typical right-wing representations of refugees and the migrant crisis.
- It would be helpful to **compare this article** with another from the tabloid right-wing press, such as *The Sun* which often paints refugees as potential terrorists, parasites, and people to be despised and/or feared.