



Issue on Migration of Asylum seekers and refugees

Alan Kurdi: A Frame of the Migration Crisis

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Abstract

This paper examines the migration crisis through the iconic imagery of Alan Kurdi which sparked numerous interest in the topic of migration of refugees and asylum seekers. While the topic on refugees and migration has been an existing issue, this paper discusses how a single photograph was able to increase outsider interest. It covers the emotiveness of the photograph and its ability to personify the topic on migration. It then covers how frames are effective in constructing the perception of imagery and how it can transmit emotion. This paper hence showcases the framing theory and how Alan Kurdi's photograph has served as an iconic frame for the migration crisis.

[**K e y w o r d s**] : Alan Kurdi, Refugee, Migration, Framing theory, Visual imagery.

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INTRODUCTION

Discussions on migrants and refugees already existed but it was not until 2015 that they were placed in the spotlight in Europe (Olesen 2018). Yet, the issue of migration was not foreign to the public who recognise refugees as people who are forced to leave their country due to anything ranging from war to political persecutions. The refugee crisis has grown to encompass millions of migrants who seek alternative routes to cross the Mediterranean Sea, putting their lives at risk during their journey. Possible risks include life threatening issues such as the possibility that the boat which they utilise to sail through the Mediterranean capsizes, which could ultimately lead to death. These refugees mostly move with their children representing 100's of children who make their way through the Mediterranean Sea. Today, the European union (EU) faces the largest influx of refugees and migrants and the numbers have increased tremendously since the second world war (Zhang and Hellmueller 2017). These millions of migrants cross the sea with hopes of applying for asylum and obtain refugee status in the country. Within the context of the EU, the debate on migration covers issues surrounding factors such as the political affiliations of the migrants, the continuing in the demand for labour, the desire to protect natural resources as well as human rights and obligations of such migrants (Morris 2003). This propagated certain concerns about the economic implication of their migration, job access and sources of income, and the health and mental status of migrants. These reasons raised concerns concerning the spur of migrants in European countries. Hence the following sections will provide a snapshot of the migration crisis within the year of 2015.

Migration focused on 2015

In April 2015, over 1000 people drowned when attempted to cross from Libya to Europe (Olesen 2018). As a result of this devastating effects, the then British Prime Minister, David Cameron, described the migration particularly, the Calais crisis as unacceptable. He recounted the disruptions the whole situation had caused the area. However, this comment was followed by certain backlashes, for one the guardian newspaper in July reported how Cameron's comment was condemned as his description was a 'dehumanising description of migrants' (Elgot 2015). The refugees council tweeted

their disapproval to Cameroun's description of the refugees as a swarm of people coming across the Mediterranean (Swinford 2015). Philip Hammond also commented on the influx of African migrants particularly the case of the Calais. He addressed certain conditions such as the difference in the standard of living between migrant's country and the intended country of migration as a motivation for them to migrate. He emphasised that migrants who are not entitled to asylum should not be given asylum. While these comments were occurring, it was not until September 2, 2015 that a certain photograph framed the migration crisis.

On the 2nd of September 2015, the image of a Syrian toddler whose body was washed on the Turkish beach went viral on mass media and raised concerns throughout the world (Zhang and Hellmueller 2017). Kurdi's, who was 3 years old, image represented certain aesthetic and iconic qualities that shaped the already occurring migration crisis (Olesen 2018). This image diffused through social media within hours after it has been released. Kurdi's iconic imagery led to the circulation of the twitter hashtag #humanitywashedashore (Mortensen 2017). Along with subsequent usage of the hashtag, was also the usage of the word 'shame' which was repeatedly written three times to show emphasis. This photograph became the symbol of the hopelessness of the migration crisis (Mortensen 2017). After the release of this photograph the guardian subsequently released report that Cameroun had changed his stance and is now extending support for the refugees (Sparrow 2015).

He stated how there was now a £900 million program in place to provide resettlement for Syrian refugees, how they will be taking refugees directly from the camps to stop hazardous migration. He subsequently visited the refugee camps in Jordan showing the affliction of the British aid and further commitment of another £100 million to the refugee camp. Hence, photographs become political when they are symbolised (Olesen 2018). Alan Kurdi's photographs, represents the influence that a visual representation of refugee deaths can have on public opinion and political will (Lenette and Miskovic 2018). Now, google search images on the death bodies of migration are represented by the photograph of Alan Kurdi (Lenette and Miskovic 2018). This oversaturation of visual images

raises the question of how imagery shape and define popular imagery about contemporary conflicts (Mortensen 2017).

Visual imagery of Alan Kurdi

The image of Alan Kurdi leads to research interests on the use of visual imagery and its effect of bringing emotions. Visual research is concerned with the production, organisation, and interpretation of imagery (Prosser 2007). These pictures are normally scored for posture, expression, and orientation towards significant objects (Bouchard 1976). In this case, the particular orientation of the photograph which calls for emotional outcomes of grief and compassion to the termed 'refugee crisis' (Mortensen 2017). Alan Kurdi's image serves as an iconic image that addresses the larger concerns of the refugee crisis pointing to the human suffering and despair (Mortensen 2017). This can be explained through utilising the framing theory. Mass media actively construct social reality by framing images of reality in a predictable and patterned way (Scheufele 1999). Entman (1993) comments that to frame an image is to select some aspect of a perceived reality and make them more salient to promote a particular problem, definitions, casual interpretation, moral evaluation and treatment recommendations. These ultimately act as frame of references which the viewers use to interpret and discuss public events (Scheufele 1999). The Alan Kurdi's photograph has been personified as a figurative and literal embodiment of the intensity of the suffering caused by the migration crisis (Mortensen 2017). This is because it powerfully symbolises the disaster caused by the refugee crisis (Mortensen 2017). Imagery itself is ubiquitous, serves as a representation of society and provides insight into social processes and types.

The framing theory in the context of visual analysis can be understood as the selection and emphasis of some aspect of a perceived reality, in this case the body of Alan Kurdi and it is their iconic and implicit nature that makes them effective as framing tools (Zhang and Hellmueller 2017). Frames are ideal to call attention to some aspects of reality while obscuring other elements which may lead audiences to have different reactions. Scheufele (Scheufele 1999) who cites Neuman, Just, and Crigler describe how framing taking into account their organizational and modality constraints,

professional judgments, and certain judgments about the audience gives the story a ‘spin.’. Hence, politicians seeking support are completed to compete with each other and with journalists over news frames (Entman 1993). This represents two kinds of frames the macro which represents how the journalists frame the contexts of events and the micro depicts how the individual public perceive the frames created (Zhang and Hellmueller 2017) The media frame is a central organising ideal story line that provides meaning to unfolding strip of events (Scheufele 1999) with an emphasis on framing refugees as voiceless, helpless and passive (Lenette and Miskovic 2018). This hence emphasises the usefulness of framing in eliciting emotion from photographs

CONCLUSION

This paper has articulated the Alan Kurdi’s case as one frame of the migration crisis. Framing reality depicts an angle or perceptive of an event and hence frames the world. Nevertheless, many organisational and management practices can be further explored with the framing theory. Particularly, has the play of emotions in photographs influenced top managerial decisions? The framing theory though used in other sociological realms has been inadequately utilised in communication and general management. For one, it is not understood how despite the proliferation of various frames why one becomes more salient than the rests. Also, how does frame perception change over time. Over three years since the release of Alan Kurdi’s imagery while still powerful, a lot is still needed to examine how it has been influential to institutional polices. While issues have been focused on the European migration, research is required to investigate migration practices in other continents. Further exploration of the framing theory might prove useful in explaining other aspects of the migration crisis.

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