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# **#HUMANITY WASHED ASHORE. VISUAL METAPHORS AND EMOTIONS IN SOCIAL MEDIA**

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### ABSTRACT

In 2015 almost 3000 refugees died trying to cross the Sea to Europe. 3-year-old Alan Kurdi was one of them. Together with his mother and brother, the boy drowned when a boat carrying migrants sank at dawn of September 2, 2015. His body was found on a Turkish beach, where Nilüfer Demir took memorable pictures of the boy and a policeman cradling Alan in his arms. The photos appeared on front pages around the world, in news and social media. The toddler has become a tragic human face of the humanitarian crisis, a symbol, an icon, an emblem, and emotional vehicle allowing thousands of Internet users to express their grief and outrage and manifest their compassion through sharing the dramatic images of Alan and creating their own stories about the boy's afterlife. Visual metaphors generated in this unprecedented way provide us with insight into the sentiments of media consumers, who watch the evening news and create their own narratives reflecting their feelings about Europe's refugee crisis. Extremely strong emotional response of social media users who shared and disseminated the images of Alan, hash tagged *#Humanity Washed Ashore*, is the focus of my paper which demonstrates how Internet users manifest their views and express what words cannot express, resorting to metaphorical representations that can be discussed in terms of storytelling. My study investigates how the stories created by media audiences go beyond the narratives prevalent in traditional media and what it tells us about Compassion 2.0, fear, grief, anger and other emotions in the digital age.

**Keywords:** social media, emotions, visual metaphors, narratives, media coverage, refugees, humanitarian crisis, grief, compassion, anger, Internet

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He had a white teddy bear and a red T-Shirt; and no life jacket, when a rubber boat carrying him and his family, together with several other refugees, capsized. 3-year old Alan Kurdi did not reach the Greek Isle of Kos. His body was found at dawn, on September 2, 2015, on the Golden Beach in Bodrum, Turkey, where Nilüfer Demir took memorable pictures which hit global headlines and went viral on social media. It was only then, that the world learnt his name was Alan Kurdi and he'd spent his 3-year-old life in a war zone in Syria (Hodalska 2018, p. 185). The image of his lifeless body "broke into our lives" (McKoy 2015) and "spoke to people in a way that thousands of words hadn't or couldn't" (Mailer 2015).

In 24 hours following Alan's death 20 million people saw the photos and images of the drowned toddler were being tweeted 15 times a second (Withnall 2015). The boy became a symbol of suffering of three thousand "boat people" who drowned in 2015 trying to reach European shores. The boy clad in tiny T-shirt looked like any other boy in Europe and his photo made the faraway conflict close and personal for the audience familiar with the images of boys dressed in T-shirts and shorts, but unfamiliar with the images of blood, debris and shattered glass.

From the beginning of the war in Syria more than 10 000 children have been killed, an average of seven a day, "and nobody has taken much notice", wrote Liz Sly (2015), who asked: "How many photos of dead Syrian children show up on social media every day?", and answered: "If it takes photographs of dead children to make people realize children are dying, so be it" (Sly 2015). Liz Sly is a *Washington Post* correspondent, one of the first who tweeted the photo of Alan Kurdi.

The toddler has become a human face of the humanitarian crisis, a symbol, an icon, an emblem, and emotional vehicle allowing thousands of Internet users to express their grief and outrage and manifest their compassion through sharing the dramatic images of Alan and creating their own stories about the boy's afterlife (Hodalska 2018, p. 190).

Visual metaphors generated in this unprecedented way provide us with insight into the sentiments of "spectators" (Chouliaraki 2006) who watch the evening news and create their own narratives reflecting their feelings about Europe's refugee crisis.

Max Fisher (2015) was right when he said: "The overwhelming sentiment among Western countries is that a single dead refugee child is a tragedy, but a million suffering refugees are a threat". In her analysis of the humanitarian discourse on refugees, Lilie Chouliaraki (2012a, p. 14) pointed out that in public discourse the refugee is a fundamentally ambivalent figure, i.e. someone who is, simultaneously, a *sufferer* of a geo-political conflict and a *threat* to the Westphalian order.

Contradictory emotions, like compassion and outrage or hostility go hand in hand in West, because the news coverage of Europe's refugee crisis is dominated by two main narratives: the narrative of Suffering and the narrative of Threat and Fear, which overlap in traditional media (see Hodalska and Ghita, in press). The new media, however, especially the social networking sites, offer its users tools to react, to comment upon, to add their own content, in a word, to create a narrative that

challenges those officially existing in public and traditional media (Hodalska 2018, p. 188).

Extremely strong emotional response of social media users who shared and disseminated the images of Alan, hash tagged *#Humanity Washed Ashore*, is the focus of my article which demonstrates how Internet users manifest their views and express what words cannot express, resorting to metaphorical representations that can be discussed in terms of storytelling. My study investigates how the stories created by media audiences go beyond the narratives prevalent in traditional media and what it tells us about Compassion 2.0 (expressed in social media), fear, grief, anger and other emotions in the digital age.

### *1. Screams of the world, compassion fatigue and emotional response*

“Photographs are the screams of the world”, wrote Juliet Reichelt, the editor of *Bild*, “Without pictures the world would be more ignorant, the needy even more invisible, more lost” (quoted in: Lewis 2016). In her fabulous book “Compassion Fatigue: How the Media Sell Disease, Famine, War and Death” Susan D. Moeller observed:

Watching and reading about suffering, especially suffering that exists somewhere else, somewhere interestingly exotic or perhaps deliciously close, has become a form of entertainment. Images of trauma have become intrinsic to the marketing of the media. Papers are laid out, newsmagazine covers are chosen, television news is packaged to make the most of emotional images of crisis (Moeller 1999, p. 34).

Susan D. Moeller (1999) investigated the causes of compassion fatigue, which is „easy to catch” but “hard to overcome” (p. 40), and sets in when people are exposed to media coverage of wars, famine, disasters, diseases and dramatic events which they can do nothing about: “In a world that moves steadily from massacres to genocide, from images of chaos, destruction, death and madness [...] the public resorts to compassion fatigue as a defence mechanism against the knowledge of horror” (p. 226). Indeed, “Regarding the Pain of Others”, discussed by Susan Sontag, is one of the most difficult experiences of our times:

Being a spectator of calamities taking place in another country is a quintessential modern experience [...]. Wars are now also living room sights and sounds. Information about what is happening elsewhere, called “news”, features conflict and violence—“If it bleeds, it leads” runs the venerable guideline of tabloids and twenty-four-hour headline news shows—to which the response is compassion, or indignation, or titillation, or approval, as each misery heaves into view (Sontag 2004, p. 16).

Heartlessness of spectators goes hand in hand with amnesia (Sontag 2004, p. 103). Sontag (2004) noted that “consumers of violence as spectacle, adepts of proximity without risk” will do just about “anything to keep themselves from being moved” (p. 99):

Parked in front of the little screens—television, computer, palmtop—we can surf to images and brief reports of disasters throughout the world. It seems as if there is a greater quantity of such news than before. This is probably an illusion. It's just that the spread of news is "everywhere". And some people's sufferings have a lot more intrinsic interest to an audience (given that suffering must be acknowledged as having an audience) than the sufferings of others (Sontag 2004, p. 103–104).

The picture of the drowned toddler, who became a symbol of suffering of thousands of victims of the recent Syrian war, reached global audience with an impact that knew no precedence. It led although it did not bleed.

Usually painful images cause people to turn away, contributing to compassion fatigue (Moeller 1999, p. 35). There is, however, one case, in which compassion fatigue stands no chance:

The media know that the ultimate heart-tugger is a story or photograph of a child in distress. When the victims are children, compassion fatigue is kept at bay longer than it might be if adults were the only casualties represented. Adults can be seen as complicit in their own demise; it's difficult to justify the death of a child (Moeller 1999, p. 110).

Images of a lifeless body of Alan Kurdi „cut through the compassion fatigue night to have their moment in the bright lights” (Moeller 1999, p. 111) and those *surfers* and *spectators* who saw the pictures on “their little screens”, as Sontag would have put it, felt very uncomfortable in their cosy armchairs. Some of those who felt uncomfortable sitting in front of computer, did move to do something, even if that “something” was just a simple key stroke: to tweet, to like, to send or forward the images and their remakes carrying messages with which identified.

“Images make us care about the news”, said Barbie Zelizer (2015) who studied the way news images move the public (2010). She pointed out that the photos which „make us care” also give us a chance to engage emotionally and by doing so they stay with us long after the details of the story have faded (Zelizer 2015). Roland Barthes (1981) said that photography is the “collective memory of the world” (quoted in: Moeller 1999, p. 44). Susan D. Moeller (1999, p. 44) stated that we remember events “by reference to the pictures of them”.

History of photojournalism has recorded examples of press photographs that have been translated into posters, jigsaw puzzles, cartoons, paintings, or films (Zelizer 2010; Lucaites and Hariman 2007). Alan's case, however, knew no precedent. His body was literally cut out of the original setting and moved to different contexts, charged with meaning and rhetorical power. And this is how Alan's metaphoric afterlife began, turning his body, cut out of a photojournalistic frame, into a vehicle of emotions – sentiments not only expressed, but manifested by thousands (Hodalska 2018, p. 185).

Photos showing Alan's body washed ashore and a policeman cradling the boy in his arms, sparked a debate in newsrooms around the world “about whether the sight of a dead toddler was too distressing to show – or too important to ignore” (Lewis 2016). When readers complained that the photos were violating the boy's

dignity, journalists argued that they would be violating the dignity of those who perished by not publicizing the images of death and “having them die in silence” (Lewis 2016).

If publishing a photo (taken by a reporter) on a front page of a newspaper has been considered by some as a token of shameful disrespect, then how shall we call the remixes created by Internet users, who cut out the image of Alan’s body to paste it into different contexts, thus replicating the so-called “user generated content”, where Alan’s body is no longer the boy’s body, but has become the *signifier*, only without the *signified*? Or, maybe it has been filled with too much meaning?

Internet users manifested their feelings through images they shared, replicated, tagged and modified. Tribute pages, opened on websites such as the *Bored Panda* (2015) or *Buzzfeed* (2015), were viewed by thousands who responded to the dramatic image of a toddler washed up on a Turkish beach. Their emotional response tells us a lot about sentiments brought into the open in an unprecedented way. Internet users were invited to submit their own compositions, they commented upon and shared across social media platforms: drawings, paintings, graphic manipulations, cartoons, photos of sand-sculptures, and performances (Faulkner 2015; Vis 2015) which document how “Alan Kurdi is turning into its own icon” (Drainville 2015, p. 49).

## 2. The iconic photo of a toddler washed ashore

The simplicity of the photo facilitated all sorts of graphic manipulations and inspired visual montages. Simon Faulkner (2015, p. 53) notes, “Like most iconic images, the photographs of Alan’s body on the beach are relatively simple in terms of their formal content, constituted [...] by the body lying at the meeting point between the sea and the sand”. The toddler is stilled by death, but he looks as if asleep, his head is “resting on the sand as the waves lap at his hair” (van Versendaal 2015). The sea is calm. At first glance, says Harry van Versendaal (2015) the picture is “deceptively benign”. As Helen Lewis (2016) put it, “There was no blood, no violence, no panic. Just a little boy’s body washed ashore, one of thousands of victims of the refugee crisis unfolding along the borders of Europe”.

The Greek Isle of Kos, that Alan’s father, mother and his 5-year-old brother were trying to reach at dawn of September 2, 2015, is a “popular gateway to Europe for thousands of people seeking to flee war and poverty in the Middle East and Africa. The boy’s body was washed ashore along with several other victims” (van Versendaal 2015). But we don’t see other people on the shore. We only see this little boy, alone and motionless, lying on the sand like a “doll of wax” (de-Andrés, Nos-Aldás and García-Matilla 2016) the impression of which is magnified by the paleness of his left cheek – the only bit of his face that we can see.

The boy is dressed in red T-shirt which, together with tiny shoes, has become the *punctum* of the photo, which in terms of Roland Barthes (1981, p. 84) is

the “piercing element”, a sting, a speck, cut, which “bruises the viewer” (p. 26) and arouses sympathy, or embarrassment born of witnessing something we would never want to see.

The close-up makes the viewer so close to the boy, as if the viewer was situated within the same frame. “Who are we? Someone on land, residing in that yearned-for destination of Europe. It is a Eurocentric vision that differs from that which a group of refugees would have on reaching European shores. This also creates an inside/outside situation” (de-Andrés, Nos-Aldás and García-Matilla 2016). Spanish researchers, Susana de-Andrés, Eloísa Nos-Aldás and Agustín García-Matilla (2016) duly pointed out that Alan’s image is perceived from the perspective of a European who is standing on the shore, which reminds us of the division between those who suffer and those who watch (see: Chouliaraki 2012b). This time, those who watched, were also “bruised”, as Roland Barthes would have put it, and struck by the power of the image, that they decided to do something to manifest the pain they felt, the outrage, grief and compassion.

### 3. #Humanity Washed Ashore. Visual metaphors and emotions expressed in social media

Probably the most significant and heartrending is the way in which Internet users denied Alan’s death and offered different endings of this dramatic story. Hundreds shared the image, submitted by Steve Dennis, and hashtagged *#How His Story Should Have Ended...*<sup>1</sup>, that domesticated the scene of horror: The surf approaching Alan’s face in the original photo has been turned into a pillow (Drainville 2015, p. 47).

The boy’s body washed ashore, was virtually taken care of and put to sleep. Social media users were tucking Alan under the blanket, or putting his head on the pillow of stars, as if they had wanted to offer the boy the comfort which the world failed to offer him when he was alive (Hodalska 2018, p. 191).

The same tenderness, as the one cherished by those who shared the abovementioned drawing by Dennis, is found in another image, submitted to *Buzzfeed* by Azzam Daaboul, who prepared for Alan a white blanket and pillow decorated with stars. The author of this image “covered” the boy’s body with a white cloth, he

left the surrounding context still recognisable: the surf is visible, but has been blurred, its impact lessened by the use of a spotlight filter to sharpen attention on Alan, and away from it. It is as if Azzam is trying to deny the reality of the situation (Drainville 2015, p. 47).

The tweets accompanying the picture read that Alan was sleeping or was „in heaven and safe”. That Narrative of Heaven, in which Twitter users felt much

<sup>1</sup> Submission ranked 2 in popularity on *Bored Panda* gallery. *Huffington Post* attributed the image to Omer Tosun. See: Drainville 2015, p. 47.

safer than in the reality, that went beyond their belief, tell a lot about the sentiments of those who preferred to deny the boy's death.

Similar comments were found beneath the image, submitted by Yante Ismail (submission ranked 57 on *Bored Panda* website): "Alan is lying between Heaven, symbolized by the stars, and the Sea, which in reality claimed his life, and here, in the drawing is turned into a puffy coverlet" (Hodalska 2018, p. 191). Those social media users who liked it and shared the image, wanted to offer Alan the comfort, peace and protection, wrapping him with kindhearted tweets, and putting his body to rest in a cosy bedroom decorated with stars and surf-like patterns of bedlinen. The teddy bear, sleeping beside him, is a subtle reminder of other photos circulated after the death of Alan Kurdi, i.e. the photos of a laughing boy clutching his teddy bear. Transported to the peaceful environment of sleep, together with Alan's body tucked in bed, the teddy bear is supposed to bring the boy even more comfort. Such pictures suggest "the notions of failed protection and withdrawn care" (Ryan 2015, p. 46). To make it up for the lack of care when Alan was alive, those who shared the images offered virtual care to... the representation of his lifeless body.

When he was washed ashore Alan Kurdi did not look dead, his red T-shirt was not torn, "his body was not bloated; there were no visible wounds [...]; sea scavengers have not violated him. This is important: by his position, it is easy to see the image as that of a sleeping child" (Drainville 2015, p. 47). According to Raymond Drainville (2015, p. 47) the position of the boy's body and its condition facilitated the associations with sleep. The metaphor of death as sleep has a long tradition, which charges the visual metaphors, employed in images discussed here, with additional meaning and makes them so persuasive. Khaled Karajah (*Bored Panda* submission, ranked 14 in popularity) used the motive of sleep to juxtapose the safety of home environment with the dangers of the journey which the refugees take: Alan's head is resting on a pillow, in a big bed, lit by a bedside lamp, while Alan's legs are left in the original frame the photo was taken – on the beach in Bodrum, with the waves gently touching the boy's tiny body. That contrastive juxtaposition evokes deep emotions, only the words "From embrace of Syria to drowning in a sea of Turkey", spread across the image, sound like bitter irony for the viewers know what "the embrace of Syria" means today, and that Alan's family was trying to escape that deadly embrace of war and atrocities. The verbal means amplify the power of this juxtaposition.

Drainville (2015) suggests that the photos of Alan captured European imagination so much because they offer a "photogenic and cleansed image of death" (p. 47). There were several variations of Alan depicted as a sleeping angel. Internet artists put Alan on a cloud, and attached wings and aura, evoking Christian symbols and iconography of baby angles, with their obligatory attributes such as wings and aura<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> See for example: submissions ranked 5 in popularity on *Bored Panda* website, or number 12, hash tagged *#Flying Angel* and many other drawings similar to those discussed in this article.

In Mariyana Koleva's submission, ranked 56 on *Bored Panda* website, hash tagged #Faith in Humanity – Lost the visual narrative includes teddy bears discussing the condition of humanity. Teddy bears are sitting on the moon, one teddy is wiping his/her eyes, comforted in loving embrace of another.

Teddies are looking at Alan, now turned to an angel and resting on a cloud in heaven. Knowing the boy's plight, and looking down to earth from the sky, one soft toy says to the other: "I see humans, but no humanity". The powerful metaphor of teddy bears crying over humanity builds the Narrative of Lost Humanity (Hodalska 2018, p. 192).

Powerful were the "images that juxtaposed Alan's lifeless body with those of living political leaders" (Ryan 2015, p. 45). In the most popular submission, ranked 1 on *Bored Panda* tribute page, and hashtagged #Do you see it now?, Alan's corpse is magnified and displayed right at the centre of an Arab League meeting. Noteworthy is another montage, showing EU leaders turning their heads away not to notice Alan lying at their feet (submission ranked 63 on *Bored Panda* website). Simon Faulkner noted:

One cartoon circulated on Twitter involved the relocation of his body to the centre of a large round table situated in a room decorated with the European Union emblem. Around this table sit a number of EU officials who are facing away from the body. The implication is straightforward: the officials have failed to respond to the refugee crisis that caused Aylan's death and are now refusing to see his corpse. This format was repeated in a montaged image that involved the relocation of the body to the United Nations Security Council chamber. Although this time the council members face the body, they appear to not see its blatant and shocking presence on the floor (Faulkner 2015, p. 54).

This type of images puts the blame on political leaders, charging them with passivity. Politicians are blamed for building fences with barbed wires, and for sealing off their world and drawing a "New World Map", like the one on a cartoon submitted by Nora Khat and ranked 26 on *Bored Panda* website. The representations discussed in this article went viral and that virality in social media resonated in political discourse in many countries, even more than the continuous coverage of crisis.

Thanks to the power of these images, politicians from the UK, Germany, and other countries have been roused from indolence to their desperate plight [...]. It is another tribute to the power of virality in social media to direct social change (Drainville 2015, p. 48).

The day after Alan's body was found on a Turkish beach, Turkish president Tayyip Erdogan said: "European countries, which turned the *Mediterranean Sea*—the cradle of ancient civilizations—into a migrant cemetery are party to the crime that takes place when each refugee loses their life" (quoted in: Rossington 2015).

Most persuasive metaphor of "Sea turned into a cemetery", used by Pope Francis in 2014 (Biles 2014), is very often employed in political discourse of the last two years.



Heart-breaking is the image hash tagged #*Just Sleeping* (submitted by Mahnaz Yazdani and ranked 6 on *Bored Panda* tribute page) which is a “form of artistic tribute to those children who perished without their names being displayed on front pages, hundreds of unnamed babies who lost their lives crossing the Sea on their way to Europe: serene kids with rosy cheeks; smiling; clutching teddy bears or dolls, dressed in pyjamas. The children “rest in different poses on their backs or bellies, like Alan, covered by the sea waves which take the form of a polar blanket with handcrafted edges. It’s another striking metaphor of afterlife digitally crafted by imagination of Internet users” (Hodalska 2018, p. 191).

Worth mentioning is the fact that in these pictures the Sea, “turned into a cemetery” and blamed for taking the refugees’ lives, is portrayed in a very friendly manner.

Cartoons and drawings depict no storm, no high waves, no tides. The nature is gentle, unlike humans who sometimes force others to flee their land. Maybe that is why, according to the narratives discussed here, humans have no right to cry over Alan’s death, or... they no longer have the right to cry (Hodalska 2018, p. 192).

That is why the cartoon submitted by Azzam Daaboul (ranked 3 in popularity on *Bored Panda* website) is so powerful in form and meaning. It shows Sea Creatures crying. Shark, whale, turtle, fish, sea star – all of them standing in line and bowing their heads to pay respect to Alan who is lying on the sand next to a very indifferent coast guard. The only human in the picture is busy taking notes, he is not crying. Shark, whale and fish are weeping, putting their fins in respectful gesture of a humble prayer.

The Narrative of Lost Humanity, which includes sea creatures who are more humane than humans, is reinforced in cartoon submitted by Abdal Mufti, hashtagged #*Noblest of Them All* and depicting a whale carrying Alan on its back. “Thousands of social media users shared the images of compassionate Sea creatures, who witnessed not only Alan’s death, but the deaths of thousands like him” (Hodalska 2018, p. 192).

Press reports were accompanied by a family photo of Alan and his brother at play: two boys and a white teddy bear. The same photo was central to a powerful drawing of a teddy bear crying over a photo of him and his human friends. In the image submitted by Adolf Witzeling (ranked 40 on *Bored Panda* website) the same white teddy bear, known from press coverage, is grieving the loss of his friends. He’s lying on his belly, holding the dear photograph close to his cheek in a loving gesture known to those who lost someone close. Compassion and grieve of Internet users took the form of crying sharks and cuddly toys.

Visual metaphor of a crying teddy who recalls the happy moments he spent with Alan and his brother was seen on social media platforms in many forms at the time when Internet users grieved the drowned toddler. Confronted with the boy’s death, Internet users shared images that portrayed Alan together with material attributes of happy childhood, such as: football, balloon, bucket and spade.

In submission hashtagged *I[t] should end this way*, ranked 94 on *Bored Panda* website, El Vigia de Ponce offered alternative ending, showing Alan dribbling a football toward the viewers. The boy, literally “put together” from pieces of photos in a Photoshop program and thus given “new life”, is surrounded by characters from Peanuts, popular children’s comic (Hodalska 2018, p. 193).

Denial of death, and refusal to accept the real tragic story is something that can be found in those “safe” fantasies of Internet users, who shared and produced images projecting happier endings to Alan’s story, showing the boy happy at play. Particularly disturbing is the image, ranked 25 in popularity on *Bored Panda* website, which depicts Alan lying motionless on the sand, next to a bucket and spade – only his shadow (or his soul?) is playing, in a different dimension. This time, the “happy childhood attributes” only remind the viewers that Alan is somewhere else, and there is no boy who could play with the spade in the picture.

Heart-wrenching is the cartoon, submitted by Gunduz Aghayev (ranked 4 on *Bored Panda* website) which shows Alan playing next to a sand figure, the shape of which resembles the toddler’s body. The living boy, dressed in red T-shirt, is kneeling next to the “sand boy” and he is preparing a house of sand. Is it a house for the “sand boy” lying on the shore? On one hand it calls to mind the fragility of houses built on sandy lands, on the other hand it is a painful reminder of those who lost their homes and set on a dangerous journey to Europe, looking for a roof for their heads (see: Hodalska 2018, p. 193).

In their remarkable study “Shoes of Childhood: Exploring the Emotional Politics Through Which Images Become Narrated on Social Media” Lisa Procter and Dylan Yamada-Rice (2015, p. 58) point out that Alan’s body, its position and clothing became symbolic of childhood in general. Internet users who produced and shared happy-ending stories about Alan’s playful moments, were in fact generating representations of idealized view of what childhood should be like.

Colourful balloons, being a part of decorations of happy family celebrations, are significant parts of early childhood representations. Cartoon submitted by Tihomir Cirkvencic, ranked 36 on *Bored Panda* website, depicts Alan lying dead at the edge of the sea and holding a dark-red balloon, with a bitter reproach: “Thank you World”.

Another childhood object depicted in one of most circulated images (submitted by Murat Sayin and ranked 10 on *Bored Panda* website) is the one of “a paper boat” floating on the sea. “Fragile paper ship recalls childhood games, but also chillingly reminds us of the boat which sank on September 2, 2015, with Alan and eleven others on board. Equally persuasive is the image of Alan’s body locked in a bottle washed ashore. A glass bottle is an archetype of communication, where one cannot reach the addressee” (Hodalska 2018, p. 193). Message written on a scrap of paper and put in an empty bottle, set adrift on the sea, may reach its destination, but there is no guarantee. The same is in Alan’s case and the message he brought on September morning in 2015. In the picture shared in social media, Alan’s body, locked in a corked bottle, has become a message, as one Twitter

user put it in her comment: „Instead of a message in a bottle – it’s a message in a baby – this is important message... Do not let this happen anymore!!!”<sup>3</sup>.

The sad truth is “that this is happening”, on everyday basis, at the shores of Lampedusa, Kos, or in popular tourist resorts, such as Bodrum, in Turkey. The chilling postcard-style image, hash tagged *#Mare Nostrum*<sup>4</sup>, a black and white holiday photo taken on a beach, shows Alan in his red T-shirt lying dead among the living tourist, who are sunbathing and too busy to notice the boy stilled by death, and presented in colours, in contrast to the black and white world. The postcard montage resembles the scene from a film *Schindler’s List* by Steven Spielberg. The girl in the red coat is the only person in the whole movie, who was pictured in colours (red colour, actually), symbolizing children in the Cracow ghetto and the hell they had to go through during World War II. Alan Kurdi’s red T-shirt will be remembered long after the refugees’ story falls victim to compassion fatigue.

Ten thousand children died during the war in Syria or on their way to Europe. Neda Kadri’s cartoon shows Syrian children welcoming Alan Kurdi in heaven: “You are so lucky Alan! We are the victims of the same war but nobody cared about our death” (Mailer 2015). UNHCR media officer Claire Wardle, responsible for sharing stories, images and videos on social channels, recalled:

On the weekend of August 30, two days before the image of Alan Kurdi emerged, I saw [...] a collection of images from a Libyan beach showing a group of dead babies that had washed up after their boat had capsized. They were face up, their bodies bloated and their eyes rolled back. They were still wearing nappies. I saw the images, and was taken back to the daily sadness I had felt at UNHCR as we saw and heard about the realities faced by refugees on a daily basis (Wardle 2015, p. 66).

Raw and graphic images filled the newswires archives and websites, but none of them provoked such a surge of emotions, followed by Internet users reactions, as the touching image of Alan Kurdi. Why? Maybe because his image was incredibly upsetting but not graphic (Wardle 2015, p. 67). Maybe because the gut-wrenching photos of bloated bodies of a group of drowned children, were too big a challenge for the sensitivity of social media users, who could cut out the image of Alan’s body, but would never reach for the image of a bloated or injured body to remix it with other stills.

#### 4. Images in social media and traditional news media

Confronted with the images of the drowned toddler, social media users reacted: they shared Alan’s photos, they shared the remixes of his images, they commented upon cartoons and tagged the drawings depicting Alan. Representations went viral and that virality in social media resonated in political discourse.

<sup>3</sup> Comment by Kelly Noble, under the drawing ranked 49 on *Bored Panda* website.

<sup>4</sup> Submitted by Robert Tauber Calvo Jimenez and ranked 38 on *Bored Panda* website.

Roland Bleiker (2009, p. 12) noted that art cannot tell us how to stop wars or genocide, but it can give us insights into the feelings we have about them. In so doing, art can shape the way we understand and remember past events. Artistic responses to Alan's photos may also be considered as a form of collective dealing with trauma, or at least collective dealing with disturbing images. Collective Catharsis online.

In September 2015 thousands of social media users shared images hash tagged *#Humanity Washed Ashore*. If we looked at those drawings, paintings, and cartoons in terms of story-telling, we would learn that stories written by media audiences go far beyond the narratives prevalent in traditional news media, where we see photos of: boats filled with *boat people*; refugees marching at night, nameless, and faceless, covered with blankets; fences, screens and barbed wires; photos of migrants fighting with the police. In traditional news media we see arrows, counts, numbers and maps showing where and how fast refugees move across Europe. People are turned into numbers; they are reduced to arrows crisscrossing borders. Graphics offer visualization of the migrants' moves but tell very little about their hunger, cold and despair. There are no people behind statistics. Traditional media narratives are now and again dehumanizing (Hodalska and Ghita, in press).

Thousands of bodies and corpses that wash up on beaches of Greece, Turkey, Italy are usually unidentified, buried in mass unmarked graves and their stories are never told, as Evelyn Ruppert and Funda Ustek (2015, p. 68) brilliantly pointed out. Migrants are depicted as a series of lines crisscrossing states and numbers that change (Machin 2014, p. 126). "Yet it is the image of one body in transit washed upon a shore that has turned such lines on a map into living and dying people" (Ruppert and Ustek 2015, p. 68).

### 5. *Compassion 2.0*

Critics warn against "the pornography of pain and the superficial, self-satisfied feelings of sadness and morality when sharing a grisly picture on social media" (van Versendaal 2015), mocking the hypocrisy of many Internet users, whose love for the child is no stronger than hostility to the child's fellow men. Max Fisher (2015) complained that social media, "at its most hollow", create an opportunity for Internet users to simply "wallow in some feeling". He stated: "I am uncomfortable with the way those images have been converted into just another piece of viral currency. There is a line between compassion and voyeurism. And as that photo was shared and retweeted over and over again, converted into listicles and social-friendly packages, it felt more and more like the latter" (Fisher 2015).

Susan D. Moeller (1999) wrote about compassion fatigue, that sets in when people feel there is "nothing they can do" (p. 235). When we see such images, we can no longer say we did not know, "we will share the guilt if we just turn the page. We will become complicit" (Moeller 1999, p. 39). Susan Sontag (2004)

warned us: “Compassion is an unstable emotion. It needs to be translated into action, or it withers” (p. 90).

In 2015 Internet users did take action, tailored according to their limited means, but still their voice was powerful enough, to be heard by those who so wished. Social networking sites offered them platforms and gave them means to express their complex feelings and ideas. Thus, they gave them tools to ACT, even if acting means only forwarding a message, pressing the “send” button, sharing, liking, commenting – all this is still better than nothing (Hodalska 2018, p. 194).

Susan Moeller wrote about compassion fatigue, caused by the coverage of death in traditional news media. Today, thanks to the social media we have something that might be labelled *Compassion 2.0*. Magdalena Hodalska (2018) presented its characteristics in a paper titled “Compassion 2.0: How Internet users share «virtual care»?”.

Social media users are showing compassion through sharing the disturbing images. To manifest their feelings? To demonstrate their ideas? To tick a box which says: “I am a human”? Or to SHOW others in their network that they care. To “share” their “virtual care”? Whatever it is, it is a sign of our (digital) age.

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## STRESZCZENIE

We wrześniu 2015 roku morze wyrzuciło na turecką plażę ciało 3-letniego uchodźcy, Alana Kurdi, który razem z rodziną próbował dotrzeć do greckiej wyspy Kos. Zdjęcie ciała chłopca znalazło się na łamach gazet na całym świecie, wywołując w newsroomach dyskusję o wrażliwości odbiorców, a w Internecie falę komentarzy. Emocje zapisane w wizualnych metaforach są przedmiotem analiz zaprezentowanych w tym artykule. W ciągu zaledwie 24 godzin od śmierci Alana Kurdi 20 milionów ludzi widziało zdjęcia zrobione przez Nilüfer Demir. Setki tysięcy użytkowników mediów społecznościowych przesyłało fotografię opatrzoną często hashtagem *#Człowieczeństwo wyrzucone na brzeg*. W artykule analizuję graficzne przekształcenia fotografii prasowej, zgromadzone na stronach *Bored Panda* i *Buzzfeed*, gdzie znaleźć można rankingi popularności kilkudziesięciu rozsyłanych wiralowo obrazów, które w 2015 roku pomagały tysiącom użytkowników Internetu w wyrażaniu żalu, współczucia, bólu, gniewu i oburzenia poprzez dzielenie się obrazami zmieniającymi Alana Kurdi w ikonę kryzysu. Omawiam wykorzystane w obrazach symbole, archetypy, intertekstualne nawiązania, które sprawiały, że wizualne metafory były perswazyjnie skuteczne. Chłopiec, który utonął u wybrzeży Europy, otrzymał drugie życie w przestrzeni Internetu, gdzie jego ciało „wycięte” z fotografii było np. układane do snu, ożywiane albo prezentowane w kontekstach uruchamiających nowe znaczenia. W artykule pokazuję, w jaki sposób Internauci manifestują swoje poglądy i uczucia, których słowa nie mogą wyrazić, a w ekspresji emocji pomagają wizualne metafory tworzące nowe narracje i wiele mówiące o Współczuciu 2.0, smutku, złości i innych emocjach w epoce cyfrowej.

**Słowa kluczowe:** media społecznościowe, emocje, metafory wizualne, narracje, nagłośnienie medialne, uchodźcy, kryzys humanitarny, ból, współczucie, złość, Internet