

# Satire at the expense of a dead child?



NAHELA NOWSHIN

**If the whole point is to highlight the role of world leaders in creating and failing to manage the refugee crisis, why on earth isn't David Cameron, François Hollande, Viktor Orban or Bashar al-Assad being turned into a caricature?**

**C**HARLIE Hebdo strikes again. This time the French magazine that is desperately trying to cling onto the title of king of controversy

published a cartoon of Aylan Kurdi, the drowned Syrian refugee, suggesting that had he grown up he would have been one of the sexual assaulters in Cologne, Germany, on New Year's Eve.

Charlie Hebdo is supposedly taking a jab at the alleged link between the spate of sexual assaults during the New Year celebrations and the influx of migrants into Germany which in turn has reignited the refugee debate and put the spotlight on the 1.1 asylum seekers who entered the country last year. "Based on testimony from witnesses, the report from the Cologne police and descriptions by the federal police, it looks as if people with a migration background were almost exclusively responsible for the criminal acts," said Ralf Jaeger, interior minister from the state of North Rhine-Westphalia. Hundreds of women have supposedly filed complaints of harassment against men who bear the appearance of a North African or an Arab.

According to Charlie Hebdo, this is 'satire'. Apparently depicting a dead toddler -- washed up ashore a beach in Turkey -- as a future sex offender is supposed to drive home a point. One may wonder, what godforsaken point is Charlie Hebdo trying to make with what seems like character assassination and racism, the same logic one finds among the far-right? If the aim is to deliver a meaningful political statement, why do it in such a tasteless manner that could be misinterpreted as xenophobic and that seems to echo right-wing anti-migrant, anti-Arab rhetoric? Why confuse the masses if the supposed message of the cartoons is so righteous? And most importantly, why is a dead refugee child the object of mockery?

Just last year, Charlie Hebdo, keeping in line with its 'controversial' image, published a cartoon depicting Aylan Kurdi's dead body under the caption "So close to his goal..." A sign on the beach, with a character that resembles Ronald McDonald, says, "Promo! 2 kids

menus for the price of one". Defenders of the cartoon said that it was meant to "mock the West's handling of the refugee crisis". Again, if the whole point is to highlight the role of world leaders in creating and failing to manage the refugee crisis, why on earth isn't David Cameron, François Hollande, Viktor Orban or Bashar al-Assad being turned into a caricature? Why is the lifeless body of a toddler who died trying to flee his war-torn homeland being satirised?

Many have started to question whether or not Charlie Hebdo has a far-right political agenda -- one that is conveniently masked behind terms such as 'controversial', a term that the magazine has become synonymous with. If Charlie Hebdo does in fact have such anti-migrant, Islamophobic

political views, we, along with the media, should probably stop calling Charlie Hebdo 'controversial' (a gross understatement) and call it out for what it is -- a hateful tool of propaganda.

This isn't the first time that the French magazine has raised the debate about 'freedom of speech' (a term that has become distorted, politicised, and self-serving). Why is the criticism and disapproval of the caricature of a dead Syrian refugee seen as a 'curb on the freedom of expression'? Are hate speech and free speech the same? But this is where Charlie Hebdo cleverly maneuvers its way out of this quagmire. Hiding behind the veil of 'satire', the magazine seems to steer clear of incriminating itself of propagating toxic political agenda.

**WHAT WOULD LITTLE AYLAN HAVE GROWN UP TO BE?**



Jordan's Queen Rania publishes own Aylan cartoon in response to Charlie Hebdo: "Aylan could've been a doctor, a teacher, a loving parent."

New Statesman, Laurie Penny questions as to why violence against women isn't a much bigger deal when migrants and Muslims are involved as perpetrators of sexual assault. Despite the fact that one in three German women and 35 percent of those above the age of 15 (exceeding the EU average) have experienced physical and/or sexual violence, and around 40 percent of German women claim they have experienced unwanted touching or kissing (also higher than the EU average of 29 percent), why are we suddenly acting like violence against women in Germany didn't exist until the arrival of 'Arab-looking' migrants? This is not at all to trivialise the horrific sexual assault against women in Cologne, but can we stop pretending, as Laurie Penny so astutely points out, that the right wing suddenly cares about rape culture? The same fanatics who continuously attempt to police the woman's body -- restrict the right to abortion and deny women their full reproductive rights -- are suddenly raising a hue and cry about sexual assault because it pushes their agenda of anti-migrant policies.

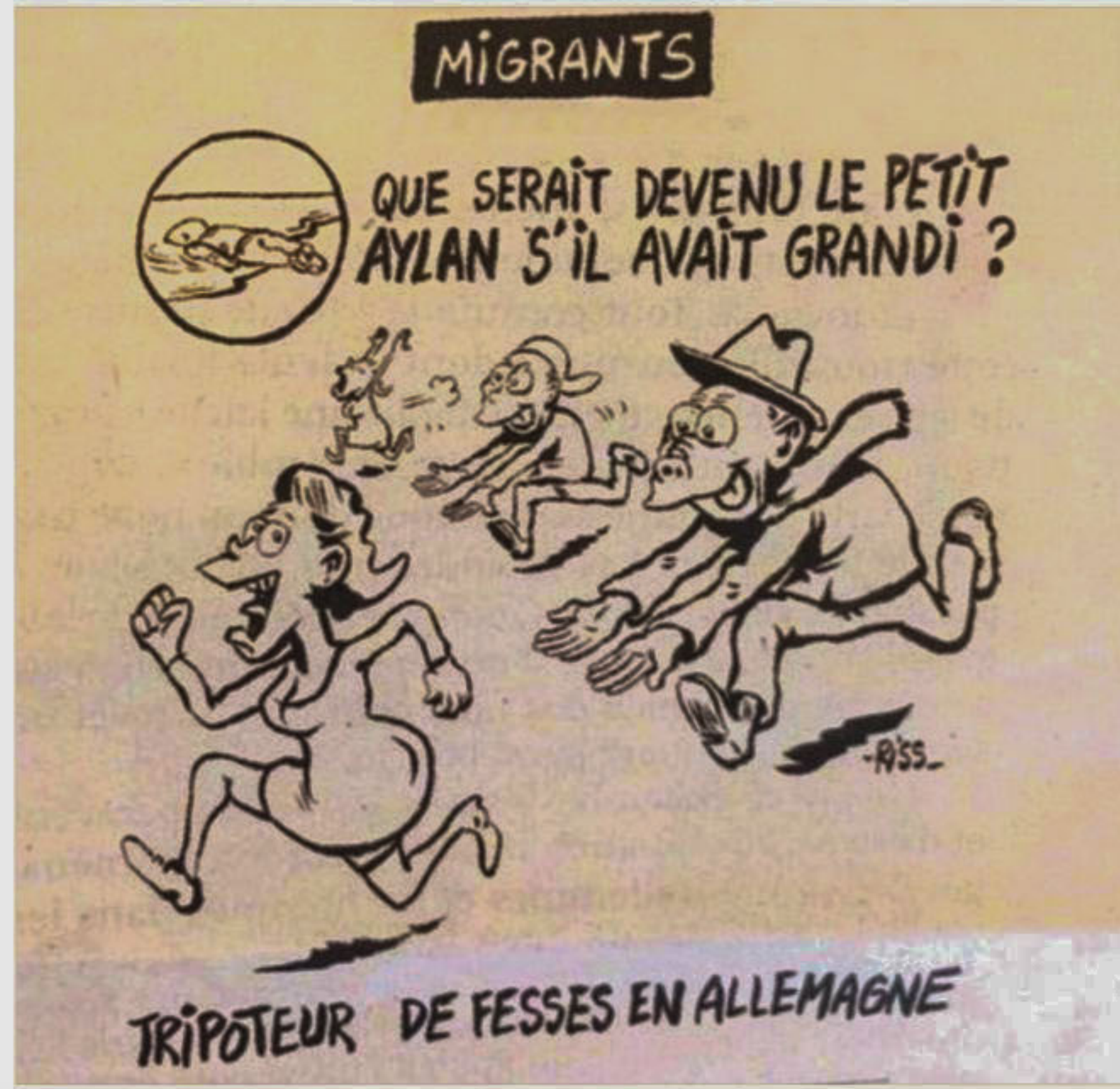
Since 2008, the clergy has been organising a march to restrict access to abortion with slogans like "No to euthanasia and abortion". Fundamentalist Christians, the right wing of the Christian Democratic Union of Germany (CDU) and anti-feminist, racist offshoots of the anti-Islamic Pegida movement are some of its participants. By shamelessly capitalising on the interlink between

the influx of migrants and the incident in Cologne in its latest cartoon depicting Aylan as a potential sex offender, Charlie Hebdo not only serves the interests of those like Marine Le Pen, leader of the far-right National Front who has warned France of the "giant migratory wave", but also endorses the Orientalist view that sees the West as 'superior' and 'more cultured' than the East, insinuating that 'savage' Middle Eastern men are more likely to sexually assault women than white men.

As public outrage poured on social media over Charlie Hebdo's latest cartoon, the best responses were those that hit back with scenarios of Aylan growing up to be something much more different. Many posted a cartoon of Steve Jobs, whose father was a Syrian migrant, suggesting Aylan could have grown up to a "new international inventor". Queen Rania of Jordan joined in on the conversation, posting a cartoon on Twitter, saying, "Aylan could've been a doctor, a teacher, a loving parent..."

But the only response worth remembering is that of the dead toddler's father who wept when he saw the cartoon of his son, "I appeal to this magazine and to the world, and urge everyone to respect the memory of all the dead children. Do not reopen the wounds of their loved ones as they continue to bleed," said Abdullah Kurdi, who will forever be haunted by the two-year-old's lifeless body.

The writer is a member of the Editorial team, The Daily Star.



Charlie Hebdo cartoon: "What would little Aylan have grown up to be? A groper in Germany."

political leanings (which wouldn't be surprising given the terrorist attacks it came under last year), don't adjectives such as 'controversial' often used by the mainstream media only help disguise/minimise the dangerous motives behind its cartoons? If these are actual attempts to propagate toxic

Let's also not forget that this is the same organisation that fired cartoonist Maurice Sinet for being anti-Semitic because he mocked a young Mr Sarkozy for converting to Judaism for money. So much for 'freedom of speech'!

In an article titled "After Cologne, we can't let the bigots steal feminism" in

# A campaign for litter-free Bangladesh

ABDULLAH AL MASUD

**O**NCE a lush pasture of greenery, the landscape of Bangladesh is now on the verge of becoming a spectre of polythene littered waste ground. Take the instance of any locality of Bangladesh, be it a tourist area or an ordinary rural or urban zone, pervasive littering is the norm. The roadsides, the high and low grounds by the canals, the open space, the drains in the city, your neighbourhood; it is all the same - polythene, plastics and packaging litters cluttering the surface. Would any discerning visitor planning a business or holiday trip to Bangladesh in his or her right mind want to be steeped in a vast waste ground dotted with litter everywhere? And what does it indicate about our national mindset?

Bangladesh has the highest number of polluters per square kilometre than any other country in the world. Those who have lived or grown up in the midst of a littered environment may take it as an element of everyday life without being disturbed, but unbridled littering is setting the country's landscape on a path to become a mega dumpster, and turning the country into a wasteland.

Be it the picturesque shore of Jamuna in Sariakandi, the roadside by the grand resort in Srimangal, the various train stations of the country, unrestrained littering ruin the serenity of the area. The deluge of plastics, polythene and papers in the beach town, Cox's Bazar, its malls and roadsides by the beach, the heap of polythene and waste that surrounds the decrepit pier where tourists and locals board for Moheshkhali, all create an

unhealthy and uninviting ambience, and cannot be the signs of a tourist zone that wants to attract international tourists. In Dhaka, the area alongside the Dhaka City Corporation's (DCC) head office is also heavily littered and indicates the inability of the DCC to tackle this crisis.

The danger posed by such 'spontaneous' littering not only damages our natural habitat and ecosystem, it also depicts an ugly side of our Bangladesh identity. It is an antithesis to our achievements as a hardworking nation, which aspires to be a model of development.

The lessons from Singapore, the fabled island nation that transformed itself from impoverishment to prosperity in a few decades, could guide us, even though the country is too small and unique as an example. Aside from its founding leadership's vision of a Singaporean identity that calls for "rugged individualism with emphasis on excellence", one of the first national campaigns of Singapore as an independent nation was the "Keep Singapore Clean" campaign. Launched on October 1, 1968 by Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew, the month-long campaign aimed to make Singapore the cleanest and greenest city in the region by addressing the problem of inconsiderate littering. The government believed, according to authors Joshua Chia Yeong Jia and Lim Tin Seng, that improved environmental conditions would not only enhance the quality of life for Singaporeans and cultivate national pride, but also attract foreign investors and tourists to Singapore. Singapore today is one of the cleanest, most beautiful and prosperous

countries that attract tourists and investors from all over the world. It has also become a more compassionate and inclusive society than in the past, and continued the legacy of building a clean and beautiful country through active public and private participation.

A national campaign for litter-free Bangladesh will be a timely call and a befitting tribute to the honour of 'Champion of the Earth' bestowed upon Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina recently, as well as the people of Bangladesh.

The success of the campaign will depend on the government's ability to engage civic and local leaders, opinion makers, local governments, students and the public. It will be an opportunity to ignite the positive energy of the youth to demand a cleaner and beautiful Bangladesh, and initiate a behavioural change towards the way we live and manage our environment. The clogged canals, polythene piles on high and low grounds, plastic bottles in public places such as train stations, recreational spots, tourist zones, and roads and pavements need to be clean.

While many Bangladeshis recognise the environmental menace of littering, a national wake-up campaign, actively championed by the national leadership, would be far more effective than the occasional focus on the issue by the media. It should be a regular year long activity and a continuous programme. The strategy should aim to contain inconsiderate littering through prevention and clean-up campaigns. This may create a momentum for initiating visible

changes on the ground.

Business houses can donate and actively participate in the cleaning activity. The general public, shopkeepers and traders who generate waste should be given guidance on how to manage and dispose of waste. Non-biodegradable collectibles should be taken off the grounds, from roadsides, low and high lands, canals, marshes and rail tracks, and recycled. Children should be taught and encouraged to take ownership of the environment as an inalienable part of their livelihood. They should be urged to take action and encouraged to change social behaviour. School students could be involved in campaigns of cleaning up their schools, while colleges and universities can also participate in the litter free campaign to introduce behavioural change.

Educational campaigns, enactment and enforcement of anti-littering laws may contribute to long-term behavioural change. A culture must gradually emerge that instils environmental consciousness and values, and induces people to stay away from littering. This would require intervention in educational curriculums at school level, as well as active engagement of social and political leaders. Individuals must understand that if you pack something in, you must pack that out, meaning no leftover trace should remain in an open, public space.

Improved and modern technological solutions, such as geographic information systems for environmental mapping and waste management, can act as effective tools for the relevant agencies, which will be part of the

campaign. The campaign should be part of the environment management programmes within an Ecologically Sustainable Development Strategy (ESDS), involving local governments, community and religious leaders, business houses, shopkeepers, NGOs, media and political parties across the board. Ecologically sustainable development would require an effective regulatory framework within which waste could be effectively managed to minimise or avoid adverse impacts on the environment, while still allowing for economic development and improved quality of life for Bangladeshis. It will involve public and private costs, but the benefits will include protecting environmental values, health and safety, efficient use of resources, and avoidance of cleanup costs. The regulatory framework can also initiate a waste management industry for waste recycling and collection, thereby leading to associated industries involving mandatory trash bags and bins, and waste to energy projects, if viable, with active private and public sponsorship.

The cost of community inaction leads to an environmental disaster that affects all members of a society. We must prevent irreversible environmental damage and protect environmental productivity for future generations. The importance of a clean environment and resulting benefits on the mind, health and economy must be recognised by the public as well as by all levels of leadership. The sooner this is done, the better it is for our country.

The writer is an economist and Deputy Registrar at the Shanto-Mariam University of Creative Technology.

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## CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

- 1 Exotic market
- 7 Surgery reminder
- 11 Familiar with
- 12 Ring of light
- 13 DiCaprio movie
- 15 Colander's kin
- 16 Astonish
- 18 Track figures
- 21 Shower need
- 22 Cut in half
- 24 Possess
- 25 Feeling down
- 26 Cow call
- 27 Inheritance
- 29 Diner order
- 30 Extinct bird
- 31 Transmitted
- 32 Kept in reserve

- 34 DiCaprio movie
  - 40 Made baskets
  - 41 Menu choice
  - 42 Had debts
  - 43 Excited
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  - 2 Fire result
  - 3 Last letter
  - 4 Makes sense
  - 5 Dined at home
  - 6 Tug-of-war need
  - 7 Tatters
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  - 9 Tavern drink
  - 10 Fishing pole
  - 14 Stay away from
  - 16 Planted
  - 17 Passionate dance
  - 19 Evil spirit
  - 20 Baseball team employee
  - 21 Peruvian coin
  - 22 Inlet
  - 23 Summit
  - 25 teatime treat
  - 28 Found darling
  - 29 Taken care of
  - 31 Fragrance
  - 33 Carrier's partner
  - 34 Binary base
  - 35 In what way
  - 36 Second person
  - 37 Bible boat
  - 38 Maiden name label
  - 39 Slugger Williams

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## YESTERDAY'S ANSWER

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