

Tell me...

Aude Mourin

English abstract
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Research work in design,
under the supervision of
Anne-Catherine Céard,
Bertrand Courtaud
and Catherine Pradeau

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Preface

The notions of travel, translation and culture have always interested me. I'm working on these ideas in my practice as a graphic designer, particularly by working on language, alphabets or even visual translation.

I also met children while traveling around the world, we were not speaking the same language but the way of connecting, laughing and playing is, in a way, universal. I have this feeling that children are less influenced by the culture of their country and have fewer social codes than adults.

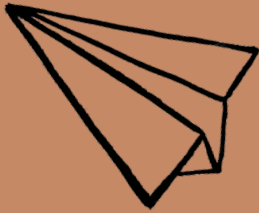
So I told myself that working with this audience in my project would allow me to change my habits, look at it differently and question the visual codes that I use. This is how the idea of a research work on the adaptation of migrant children came naturally to me. It turns out that in the school context of language learning, there is currently a real lack of pedagogical support. I want to know how graphic design by creating pedagogical tools can help them to learn and to adapt to their new lives.

Marwan's Journey, Book, (2018)
Patricia De Arias (Author), Laura Borràs (Illustrator)

Introduction

In my French diploma dissertation, I chose to work on the issue of the adaptation of migrant children to French elementary school. My graphic design work will consist in creating pedagogical tools to teach emotions and feelings to them. Needless to say, this topic is particularly difficult as we are dealing with children with special emotional experiences. That's also why I'm collaborating with a teacher to achieve this work. Thus, the aim of this abstract is to analyse picture books about migration and understand what graphic design choices have been made to talk about this difficult subject to children. I may find some significant graphic techniques that may help me consider some possibilities to develop my project.

First of all, let us begin with a reminder of the current context of migration in Europe which seems much needed regarding the subject. This will lead to the main part that will consist in analyzing five picture books made for children about migration. In order to make it as relevant as possible I'd like to focus on the graphic design aspect in the analysis.



1.

*How has the
migration context
put children
in emotional trouble?*

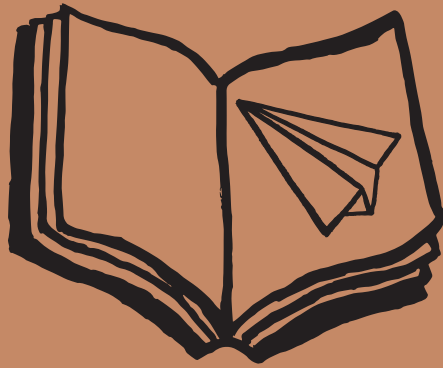
The current context

The number of migrants arriving in Europe has been increasing since the 2010s. They are mainly coming from Africa, North Africa and the Middle East. This is due to wars and conflicts like in Libya, Turkey or Afghanistan for example. To escape the civil war in Syria, more than one million people arrived in the European Union in 2015, which was the peak of that decade. It is difficult for refugees to obtain the asylum seeker status in the European Union. This leads many migrants to have to stay illegally in Europe, forced to live in camps without having the right to work. Many of them have taken dangerous roads to reach Europe, such as the Balkan route or the Mediterranean sea. This situation is a source of traumas for migrants who were forced to leave their countries. When looking at the impact this has on children, psychologists identify different issues such as isolation, loneliness or speechlessness. This is about the notion of emotional experience which means that some situations can lead to a painful psychological state, such as sudden changes or uncertainty, as in the case of migrant children.

Welcoming these children

Obviously, this makes a child's adaptation to a new school quite complicated. Teachers are observing that some children are isolated and silent. Without being psychologists, teachers have to adapt to these children. Thus, they are creating their own pedagogical materials and are dealing a lot with pictures and illustrations, since they do not speak the same language as their students. While examining how to create suitable pedagogical tools, we can ask ourselves how picture books can help children understand what their classmates are going through, and from another perspective, how illustrated stories can liberate children's voice and may enable them to talk about their experience. How can a graphic designer use her skills to conceive pedagogical tools in order to make it easier for migrant children to learn a new language and adapt to a new environment? How can a graphic designer create tools that would prompt children to exchange about what they are feeling?



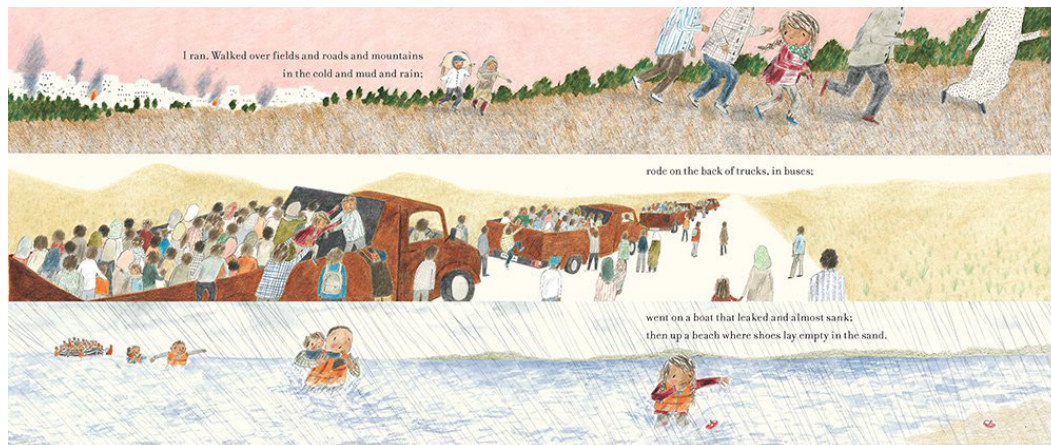


2.

How can illustrated books allow children to understand a difficult subject?

The first selected book is *The Day War Came*. This is the story of a little girl, who suddenly becomes a refugee. The war has come suddenly and the place where she was living is destroyed overnight. The little girl has to flee to an unknown and strange place. The language used to express this heartbreaking situation is really affective. What I find meaningful is that the main character and the everyday life context allow readers to identify and understand that migrant children are just like them. Identification is also the aim of the illustrations. Indeed, by the use of soft pencils with simple style is really powerful because it reminds us of drawings that children could have made and makes the illustration accessible and understandable for them. The layout of the book is also interesting as in the double page below, for example, which is spread into three long sections. So, on the same page, different environments are represented (war in the city, the desert and the sea). This framing technique is used to convey the sense of passing time and of long

distance as the little girl escapes. This book shows how dangerous, scary and uncertain it is to flee far from home. The unexpectedness of war is also the main theme of *Marwan's Journey*. Marwan is a young boy and a refugee going to an unknown place. This book focuses on the number of refugees forced to leave their countries as the little boy is surrounded by thousands of human beings. It also shows the hardships of the trip while they are crossing deserts, seas and wars one after the other, looking for a safe place. Marwan experiences different feelings during his journey: courage, homesickness, fear, hope and uncertainty. The quality of this book is that, by focusing on the migration journey, it gives a human face to the plight of refugees. Laura Borràs has chosen to use muted earthy tones to illustrate this story. Those colors used for watercolor landscape drawings refer to exotic travel paintings and this could be any oriental city, which gives a universal dimension to the story.



The Day War Came, Book, (2018)
Nicola Davies, Rebecca Cobb – Page 3



I take giant steps
even though I am small.

One,
two,
three,
crossing
the desert.

Marwan's Journey, Book, (2018)
Patricia De Arias, Laura Borràs - Page 1

What's relevant regarding my research work is how these two books have been conceived to make people and especially children, understand what migrants are going through. The authors have chosen to create young characters and do not name any place, which are strategies to make the stories feel universal and allow many people to identify with them.

This leads to the next book which is entitled *My Beautiful birds*. This is the story of Sami, a young Syrian boy. As in *Marwan's Journey*, refugees are depicted and illustrated among a long line of people. Together, they are walking through the desert to escape what was their home place. As we can see, the topic expressed here is really horrific and sorrowful. In order to make it readable by children, the author chose to focus on a bird. While he is escaping, Sami thinks about his pet pigeons, hoping that they will be able to survive too. Then, Sami and his family finally reach a refugee camp, they settle and life keeps going. But Sami cannot join in as he cannot forget his birds that symbolize what he has left behind. One day, a canary, a dove and a rose finch arrive in the camp, flutter around Sami and settle on his arms. This is the first step of the long healing process that Sami will have to go through. Thus, we can see that this is the first book we have analyzed that tells about a refugee camp. It shows the reality of those places and how people attempt to carry on with their lives. The illustrations of the book are created with plasticine, polymer clay and acrylic paint which give a sense of 3D or perspective and that's create vibrant and realistic pictures.



My Beautiful Birds, Book, (2017)
Suzanne Del Rizzo (Author & illustrator)– Page 8

So, these first three books are telling about the war and journeys of refugees. This leads to the next step: arriving in a new school.

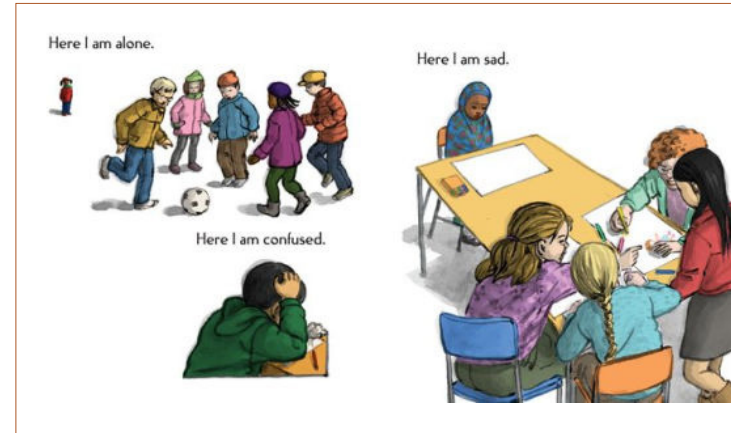
We can move on to the first book about this topic and it is *My Name is Sangoel*. It tells the story of Sangoel, a refugee from Sudan. When he arrives in the United States, it is hard for him to feel like at home as everything seems strange, he is lonely and homesick. One of the hardest things for him is that no one is able to pronounce his name correctly. But, he comes up with a solution: he sews two pictures on his tee-shirt: a sun and a football goal. Finally, the children can pronounce his name and the whole class translate their names with graphic signs. What's different from the other stories is that migration has been a success for the family and they are not struggling materially but we can see that there is an other level of suffering. The « name » is about the issue of identity, which is a main loss when dealing with migration. This story is really relevant regarding a design research work as it already provides some solutions on how graphic signs can be used in this situation. Speaking of graphic production, we have to mention the mixed-media (watercolor, photographs and collage) technique that has been used for illustration which is really relevant as it embodied Sangoel's life as a mixture of cultural experiences.



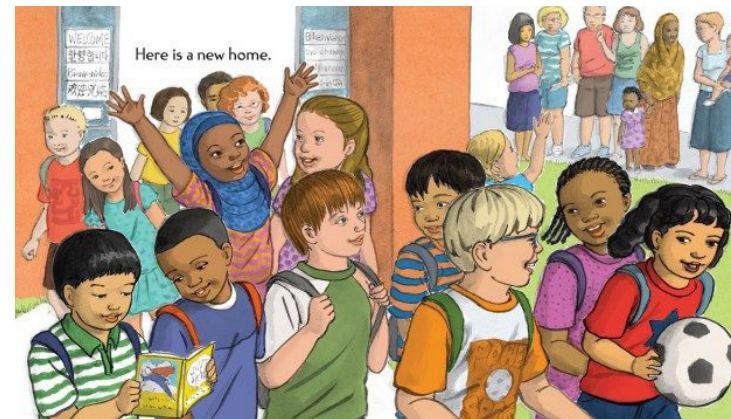
My Name Is Sangoel, Book, (2009)
Karen Williams, Khadra Mohammed, Catherine Stock
From the left to the right: page 12 , double page 13

This leads to the last book: *I'm New Here*, which tells the story of three immigrant students arriving from Guatemala, Korea and Somalia. We can see how hard for them it is to speak, write, and express themselves in their new American elementary school. With courage and help, they progressively feel more confident and comfortable. This story shows to children what difficulties their classmates can get through and encourages them to be tolerant and supportive. Regarding graphic design, the diversity that the illustrator conveys with the children that are of all body shapes- one student is in a wheel chair and one of the protagonists wears a hijab- seems relevant regarding the subject. The pictures are crucial in this story as the text is really simple and minimalist, which makes this book accessible to young children. It is less poetic than the previous ones but practical and didactic and has been designed for students.

To sum up, we have seen how picture books with different narrative and graphic strategies can prompt children's exchanges about what is hard to understand. The use of two semiotic codes, text and picture, stimulates the imagination. In fact, they are not conveying the same things, illustration is not merely a visual translation of the text. Each tells a story in their own way. The illustrators have made different choices to convey those hard stories and this provides meaningful clues to create educational supports, such as the creation of characters that children can easily identify or gentle figures like birds to make it easier to read. So, these picture books should be considered as a way to prompt exchanges and talks about a hard subject with children.



*I'm New Here, Book, (2015),
Anne Sibley O'Brien - Page 6*



*I'm New Here, Book, (2015),
Anne Sibley O'Brien - Page 13*



3.

*The role of
graphic design
and illustration*

As we saw, these books deal with a very painful topic and are made for children. In this situation, illustration has an essential role in making the story bearable and understandable for readers. We are going to analyze them visually through one main aspect: emotion, to see how it is defined graphically and what techniques are used for this. We are also going to look at what visual elements have been chosen to help express those stories.

Facial expression

To start, we can analyze how the illustrators of these books have defined graphically the characters' feelings through their physical appearance. We are going to begin with facial expression thanks to which we can physically see other people's emotions. In *The Day War Came*, we cannot see the girl's face when she is sad and struggling. But when we reach the last page, we move from darkness to color and we can now see the little girl's full facial expres-



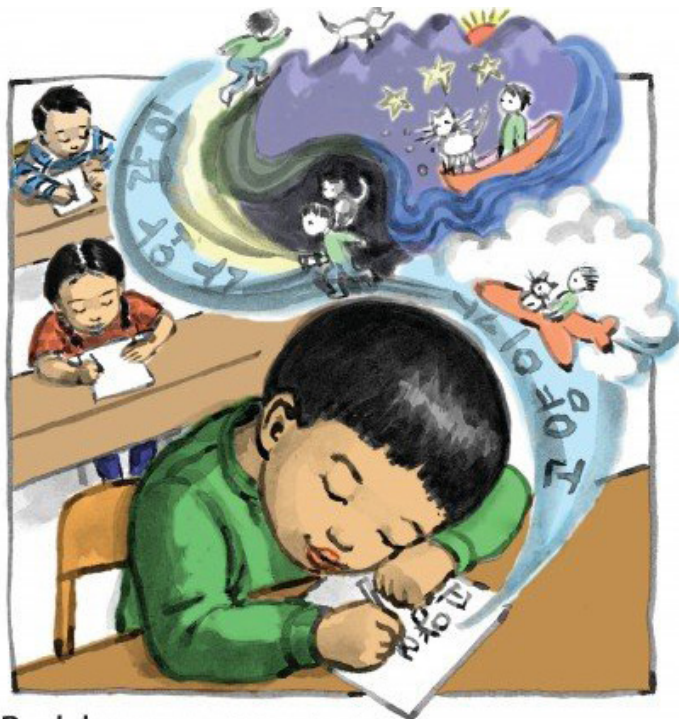
sion. The feeling of happiness is here illustrated with a smile on her face.

This technique is also used in *I'm New Here* which is an attempt to illustrate the experience of kids exposed to an unfamiliar and foreign culture. On the left page the kid is at school in Korea. He is smiling while writing and we can see stories and pictures going out of his mind. But on the right page, he has arrived in a new country and cannot understand the language, he cannot read or write. His struggle is illustrated by a kind of cloud of letters that mingle without making any words or pictures on a dark blue watercolor background. Besides, we cannot see his face anymore as this time he is seen from behind.

The facial expression choice is also interesting to study, indeed, it is different on this double-page spread from *My name is Sangoel*. On the left, the family are eating together and Sangoel is explaining to his mother how he is feeling about losing his name. What is really relevant here is that sadness is conveyed by his mother's face as much as his.

To sum up, we can see that the representation of characters' faces is essential to express what they are feeling. To qualify my remarks about this, we can notice that some illustrators have chosen to not show the faces of the kids when they are sad or struggling, but these complex emotions are illustrated in another way, especially through textures and colors.

The Day War Came, Book, (2018)
Nicola Davies, Rebecca Cobb – Page 13



Back home I could read and write.
I shaped the letters and stacked them like blocks into words.
The words opened like windows and doors into a story.

Here there are new letters.
They lie on the page like scribbles and scratches.
All the windows and doors are shut tight.





My Name Is Sangoel, Book, (2009)
Karen Williams, Khadra Mohammed, Catherine Stock -
page 10

Dark colors and textures

Thus, the illustrators have chosen different techniques to create textures, colors and atmospheres with a view to depicting visually what the children are feeling. The double page below from the first book, is relevant in this respect, as there is only one drawing taking all the space and no text at all. The little girl is in an unknown place, surrounded and overwhelmed by fear, confusion and anxiety. This is even more efficient considering how small the girl looks in this scene.

Here, the use of a black color pencil is obviously relevant to convey the girl's feelings. The use of color pencils is rough and provides a lot of textures, which produces expressive illustrations to evoke the mind and the psychological experience of the child.

But, another medium seems more efficient while being as sensitive. It is watercolor, a paint mixed with water that can evoke something that spreads and invades the mind. This technique is used in *My name is Sangoel*. On the right page the boy is sleeping on the floor, as he used to in Sudan. It may be a way to connect with his past and we can guess that he is sad and melancholic. On this page, dark shades of watercolor spreading all over are illustrating those feelings. This technique has also been chosen by the illustrator of *Marwan's Journey*. The third page is completed in shades of ochre and brown watercolor paint and a black ink spiral is smeared with water

and paint splatters underlining how difficult the walk through the desert is and how uncertain the journey is as well. Texture is also central in the graphic design aspect of *My Beautiful Birds*, as the illustrator chose to use polymer clay and acrylic paint to create pictures with relief. Like the previous one, the illustrator also chose dark shades to embody the feelings of the child. On the two-page centerfold, Sami paints his worst fears and they are represented by black paint taking over the two-page spread and his birds. So here we can see how an artistic technique can be used both in the illustration and in the story to express what the boy is feeling, which is really interesting.

On the whole, even if the illustrators use different techniques to express feelings (soft pencil, watercolor...), they all have in common to produce visual texture. Besides, dark shades are often used to express emotions such as fear, sadness, anxiety or loneliness. So, even though the subject of war refugees is hard to explain to children, it is possible thanks to illustration and to some techniques creating textures or colors, that give keys to understand what some children like them are going through. Using such techniques might be a sensitive graphic design means to illustrate an emotion.



The Day War Came, Book, (2018)
Nicola Davies, Rebecca Cobb - Page 4



Smoky black smears from edge to edge, swallowing everything underneath. I tear my painting piece by piece. Black paint stains my hands and my clothes. My stained heart is torn to pieces too.

Outside I run. I run to escape the blackness.

My Beautiful Birds, Book, (2017)
Suzanne Del Rizzo (Author & illustrator) – Page 7



My Name Is Sangoel, Book, (2009)
Karen Williams, Khadra Mohammed,
Catherine Stock - Page 10



I walk...
and I don't know when I will get there,
or where I am going.
I carry a heavy bag.

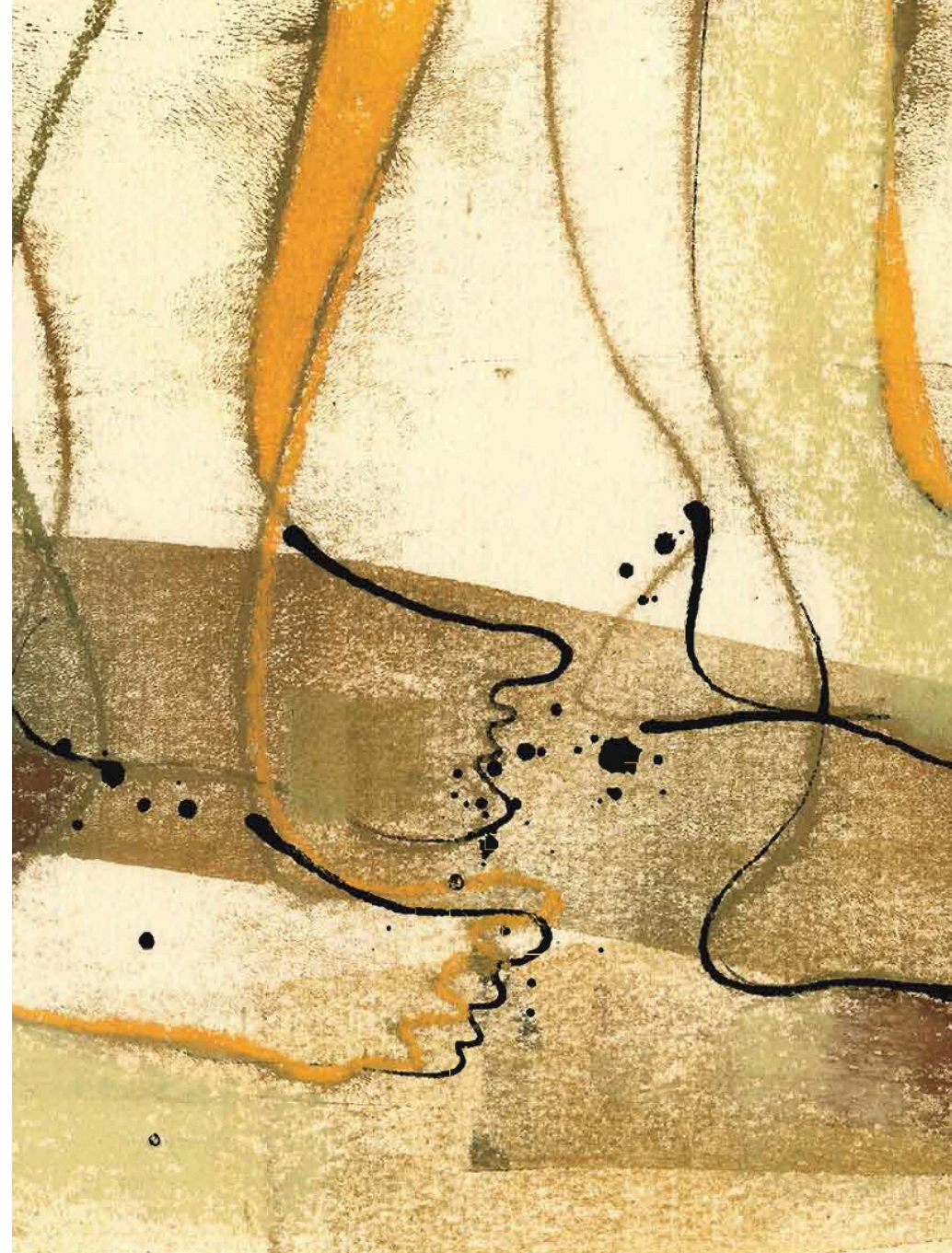
Marwan's Journey, Book, (2018)
Patricia De Arias, Laura Borràs - Page 3

The use of symbolic objects

The last facet I want to address in this essay is the question of how to make a link between the past and the new culture, that I am developing in my dissertation. Some of these books are using objects to embody the memories of the past life and make them understandable for readers.

We can begin with *Marwan's Journey*, here the chosen objects are shoes. On the cover of the book, a pair of laced up shoes sits among the luggage and knapsacks. Marwan sits on top of one suitcase dreaming of a peaceful future. The shoes symbolize how the journey involves traveling, walking, crossing, floating and moving. One dramatic page displays long legs and bare feet drawn in a contour style with pencil, crayon, ink or charcoal. The words state: "One... / two... / three... A line of humans like ants crossing the desert." This image and words are powerful and describe how difficult leaving your home and walking to an unknown place can be. This is really relevant in a graphic design perspective as footprints can be associated with the physical imprint which connects with the texture work. At the end of the story, Marwan has lost his shoes, which symbolizes the life he has left behind.

Marwan's Journey, Book, (2018)
Patricia De Arias, Laura Borràs – Back cover



In *The Day War Came*, the symbolic object is a chair. When the little girl arrives in her new school, the teacher tells her that there is no room for her as there is no chair left. The protagonist is sad and lonely until a boy comes to her with a chair. Then, she finds her place in the class and the book ends with an illustration showing the path made for her by the chairs. The convergence line constituted by the chairs may illustrate the optimistic future. Needless to say that the chair is a symbol of the difficulty for children to adapt in a new school and a new culture and to find their place. What is relevant is that it is a simple object that every child knows. But this object also expresses the link with the past (culture) as the story began at school with that powerful picture of the war destroying the school and knocking the chairs down. So chairs are present during all the story. On the last illustration, we can also notice that all the chairs are different, which refers to diversity.



The Day War Came, Book, (2018), Drawing, Jackie Morris
Nicola Davies wrote The Day War Came when in 2016 the UK government voted against giving sanctuary to 3000 lone child refugees and after she had heard a story about a little girl refugee being turned away from a school because she was told there was no chair for her. Nicola started the #3000chairs campaign with the illustrators Jackie Morris and Petr Horáček, drawing chairs as symbols of solidarity with all those children.

Out of every hut a child came
and we walked together,
on a road all lined with chairs.



Pushing
back the war
with every step.

At first, just like a spattering of hail
a voice of thunder...
then all smoke and fire and noise, that I didn't understand.



*The Day War Came,
Book, (2018)
Nicola Davies, Rebecca
Cobb – Page 13*

*The Day War Came,
Book, (2018)
Nicola Davies, Rebecca
Cobb – Page 3*

Finally, in *My Beautiful Birds*, the pigeon character allows the reader to focus on something else than war, bombs and refugees. It holds hope and creates a gentle and joyful figure in this heartbreaking story. If we are looking at the story from a different perspective, birds symbolize freedom and peace. I also think that there is another level of reading if we think of birds and migration. Many species of birds migrate every year to go to warmer countries. This should remind us that migration is a universal and historical phenomenon that concerns many animal species as well as human beings. Getting back to the story, the kid cannot settle in the new place as he cannot forget his birds. He is happy again when new birds come to the refugee camp. This symbolizes the painful feeling of loss experienced by migrants, when thinking about what they have left behind, and the necessity to have something similar to their previous life in the new one to be able to keep going. Saying that, I find this book is amazingly meaningful.



My Beautiful Birds, Book, (2017)
Suzanne Del Rizzo (Author & illustrator) – Page 5

Conclusion

Moving to my own practice, this project makes me think about the role of the graphic designer. In fact, this is about pedagogical design. Studying these picture books was particularly interesting. We notice, first of all, that illustration is essential to tell children a story. The study of this type of picture books, where there is always a kid character, raises a question about the distance that could be created by the illustration of a situation and that would allow the viewer – a migrant child – to talk about what he has lived without talking about him directly. The illustrators have used different techniques but the choice of colors, textures and shapes has not been left to chance and that is what makes it possible to represent what is very difficult to illustrate: emotions. Thus, I will be able to use these techniques in my work to help children understand the emotions by associating graphic design and sensorial perception. Finally, this abstract ends with an important and complicated question in this research topic: how can a graphic designer make a link between the new and the past culture of migrant children to help them adapt in their new school? As a graphic designer, my aim is to give these children some tools and support to enable them to express themselves.

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Bibliography

The Day War Came, (2018)

Nicola Davies (Author), Rebecca Cobb (Illustrator)

Candlewick, 32 pages, 24.28 x 1.09 x 28.91 cm
ISBN-10: 1536201731
Reading age: 6-9

Marwan's Journey, (2018)

Patricia De Arias (Author), Laura Borràs (Illustrator)

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ISBN-10: 9888341553
Reading age: 5 - 7

My Beautiful Birds, (2017)

Suzanne Del Rizzo (Author & illustrator)

Pajama Press, 32 pages, 8.3 x 0.4 x 10.3 inches
ISBN-10: 1772780103
Reading age: 6 - 10

My Name Is Sangoel, (2009)

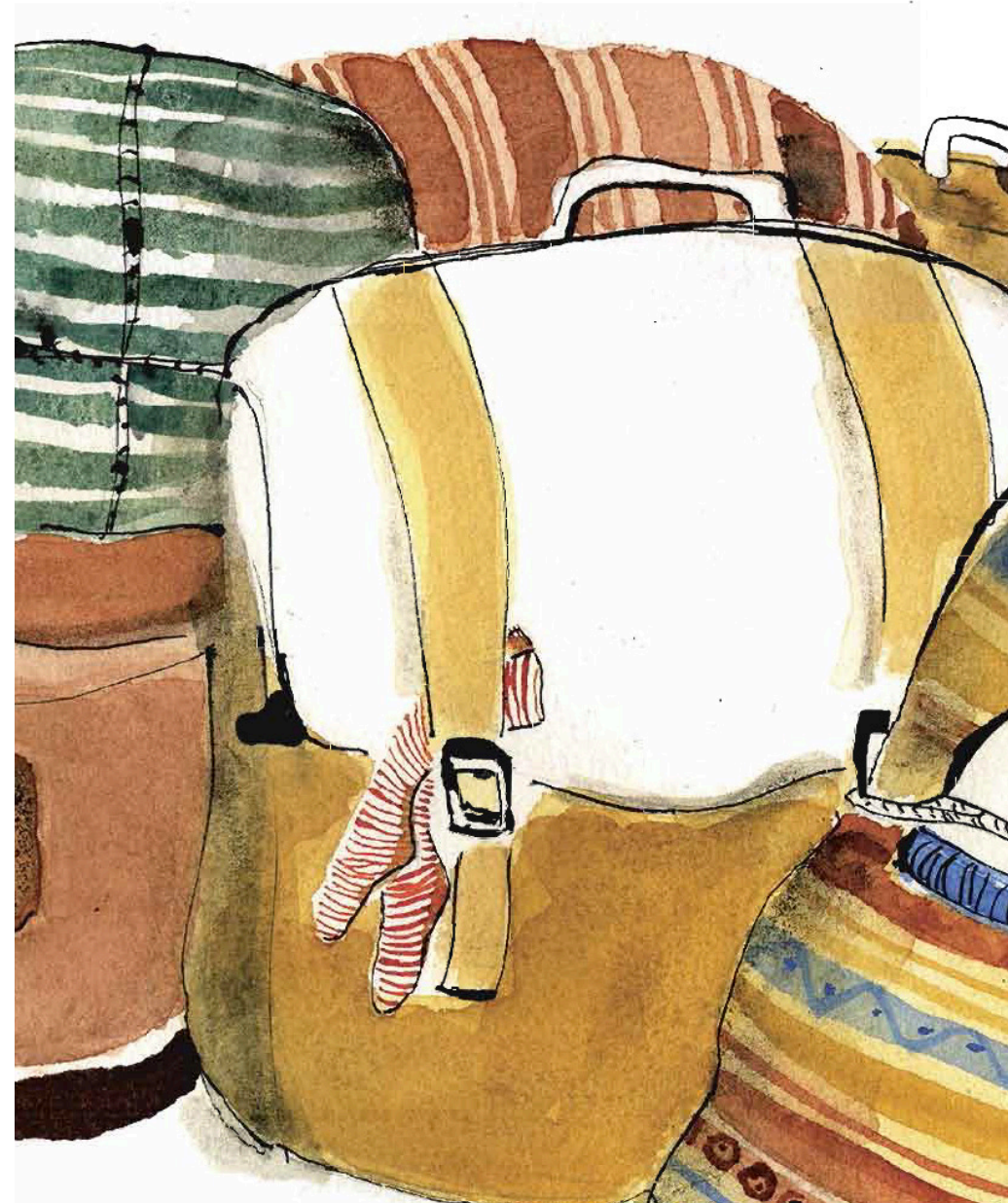
Karen Williams (Author), Khadra Mohammed (Author), Catherine Stock (Illustrator)

Eerdmans Books, 36 pages, 8.5 x 0.13 x 11 inches
ISBN-10: 0802853072
Reading age: 6 - 10

I'm New Here, (2015)

Anne Sibley O'Brien (Author & Illustrator)

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