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Her academic work mostly focuses on the social economy and management of the arts & culture. Her primary focus is on issues in the public sphere, education, and curatorship. She develops visual narratives and creates conceptual frameworks for contemporary art exhibitions and facilitates debates.

As a native Turkish speaker, she is fluent in English and French, and a beginner in Greek.



Settling / Unsettling — Leaving / Returning



Figure 1. ‘Stories from Our People’ Performance, Sirkeci Station- Istanbul, 2013 (*halka sanat projesi* Archives).

ABSTRACT:

The paper's focus is the issue of Migration, with the project ‘Stories from Our People’ as a case study. It is a recollection of the actualised project, a series of exhibitions and mini performances realised by Artship Initiatives-San Francisco and *halka sanat projesi*-Istanbul, responding to the migration crisis and related issues through arts, which used inclusive multi-disciplinary expression and sharing.

The purpose of this paper is to reflect on the way in which arts represent situations of crisis poetically, focusing on the human element instead of political theories of conflict. Broader issues are contextualised through train journeys and railway stations of the last century through the experiences of emigrants/immigrants.

The exhibition and performance initially took place at Sirkeci Railway Station on the European side of Istanbul, the “starting point” of international trains from Istanbul to Europe crossing several Balkan countries, mostly carrying emigrants leaving their homeland and going to the West with the hope of finding work and shelter. The station’s public character enabled the project to involve not only art focused audiences but also curious by-passers and travellers. Performances and exhibitions were simultaneously presented at *halka sanat* gallery in the Moda District, Kadıköy Municipality on the Asian side of Istanbul.

The project involved local and international dancers/actors, visual artists, musicians, architecture historians, as well as academics, and university students of culinary arts and architecture from Istanbul and primary school children from Anatolia.

The paper deals with some of the possible ways of representing crises in art. Critical recollections in response to the notion of crisis, as well as organisational elements and curatorial sensibilities deployed in the creation of a performance and exhibitions are at the centre of our reflection. The discussion of the paper is based on the assessment of seed stories, memories of participants, archival material, all of which lead to opening questions about representing crises in art.

Keywords: Migration, storytelling, performance, contemporary arts, arts management



RÉSUMÉ :

L'article se concentre sur la question migratoire, ayant le projet « Histoires de notre peuple » en tant qu'étude de cas. C'est une réflexion critique sur un projet actualisé composé d'une série d'expositions et de mini-performances réalisées par Artship Initiatives-San Francisco et *halka sanat projesi*-Istanbul, répondant à la crise migratoire et aux problèmes adjacents à travers des arts qui ont utilisé l'expression et le partage multidisciplinaires inclusifs.

L'objectif de cet article est de réfléchir sur la manière dont les arts représentent les situations de crise en se concentrant poétiquement sur l'élément humain au lieu de théories politiques du conflit. Des questions plus larges sont contextualisées à travers les voyages en train et les gares du siècle dernier autour des expériences des émigrants/immigrants.

L'exposition et la performance ont d'abord eu lieu à la gare de Sirkeci du côté européen d'Istanbul, le « point de départ » des trains internationaux d'Istanbul vers l'Europe traversant plusieurs pays des Balkans, transportant principalement des émigrants quittant leur patrie et se rendant en Occident avec l'espoir de trouver du travail et un abri. Le caractère public de la gare a permis au projet d'entraîner non seulement le public concentré sur l'art, mais aussi les passants curieux et les voyageurs. Les performances et les expositions ont été présentées simultanément à la galerie *halka sanat* dans le district de Moda, municipalité de Kadıköy, du côté asiatique d'Istanbul.

Le projet a impliqué des danseurs/acteurs, artistes visuels, musiciens, historiens de l'architecture locaux et internationaux, ainsi que des universitaires et étudiants en arts culinaires et en architecture d'Istanbul et des écoliers d'Anatolie.

L'article s'occupe de quelques-unes des manières possibles de représenter la crise dans l'art. Les pensées rétrospectives critiques en réponse à la notion de crise ainsi que les éléments organisationnels et les sensibilités de conservation déployées dans la création d'une performance et d'expositions sont au centre de la réflexion. La discussion de l'article est basée sur l'évaluation des histoires de graines, des souvenirs de certains participants, du matériel d'archives, menant à des questions ouvertes sur la représentation des crises dans l'art.

Mots-clés : Migration, narration, performance, arts contemporains, management des arts



This essay, through its title - Settling / Unsettling — Leaving / Returning - and the ambiguities that it brings forth by representing Migration Issues of survival, identity, and crisis on many levels, is a reflection on a realised art project with multiple components.

The project called ‘Stories from Our People’ is a series of mini performances and visual art and documentary exhibitions that took place in 2013-2014 in Istanbul as a collaboration of two art initiatives, *halka sanat projesi* – Istanbul and Artship Initiatives – San Francisco.

‘Our people’ in the title referred to people facing similar crises without insisting on any nationality, and ‘Stories’ referred to the unifying human sensibilities and shared experiences. The choice of a non-art public venue, Istanbul’s active Sirkeci Station, which was the historic gateway to Europe particularly in the twentieth century, is a challenge in itself.

Creating an exhibition is always a combination of many factors. In this case, migration as a seed for the theme and the Railway Station as the venue come together in many expected and unexpected ways and demand overcoming numerous challenges. One of them is the integration of a group of people with diverse inputs and ways of executing ideas, which are collaboratively shaped curatorially and through the experience of organising input.

The four categories assessed in this paper are:

- I. Theme** - Migration Stories of Our People - Multiple ways of enduring, forms of expression with respectful responses to migrant life challenges
- II. Location** - Sirkeci Station, Terminus for European Trains - Ways of representing
- III. People** - Two initiatives coming together - Concerns, intentions, co-creation addressing social crisis
- IV. Execution** - Curatorial Choices, Performance Direction, Visible and Invisible Management

Assessments are based on my personal involvement as the founding director of *halka sanat projesi* and a member of the organising team, and the recollections of actively involved participants in the making of the project as well as both academic and historical research in the background.



I. Theme - Migration Stories of Our People - Multiple Ways of Enduring, Forms of Expression with Respectful Responses to Migrant Life Challenges

The project ‘Stories from Our People’ grew out of the idea of bringing upfront the human stories behind the challenges of emigrants/immigrants of the last century, and revealing the ways in which train journeys and railway stations were a binding element.

Migration in the form of seeking work and shelter by leaving the homeland behind is a global and painful challenge. ‘Stories from Our People’ collects oral histories of migrants and train travellers of the post-Second World War era from the East of Europe to the West and presents them through exhibitions and mini performances.

The theme focuses on what the migrants physically and psychologically endure in their journeys. While the visual art exhibition gathers responses from artists reflecting diverse elements of migration and being an emigrant/immigrant, the stories narrated in the project respond to the atmosphere, confrontations, and expressions encountered during this process. In developing this theme, we preferred to bring forth the human element in the stories instead of insisting on theories of conflict. A narrative rich in poetical expression which gathers respectful responses to migrant life challenges has been our selective decision, especially in creating the stories for the performances.

The priority in developing this theme seeks to articulate cultural needs and dynamics of possible community support and safety for global migrants and refugees of the present moment. To that end the project engages in collecting and expressing the stories, trials, and victories of the migrants of the last century so that the past would be a mirror to shed light on today; in the making of the project we stand for the idea that basic human sensibilities such as pain, fear, hope, or solidarity, independent from the passing of time, remain the same. Articulating these needs and dynamics through performances and exhibitions represents for us an immediate goal and a show of respect for those who undergo this life burden in their personal and community experiences.

The performative aspect of the project is composed of storytelling, movement, and music. Two dancers/actors personified the characters in the stories. A train station waiting and departure areas and the inside of train cars have been modestly recreated as the stories’ settings for pieces that are about ten to twenty minutes long. Costumes and accessories such as hats, fabrics and suitcases reflecting the era and cultural elements of the travellers have been used.

Stories are constructed around moving with lots of luggage - not for short trips of leisure, but the life altering experience of long journeys, unexpected encounters with strangers and other



situations - and commonly featured shared human sensations roused by uncertainty and exhaustion, stress, perseverance, and hope have been expressed.¹

The visual art exhibition gathered thirteen artists in different stages in their careers who were from or in close collaboration with the organising initiatives. As the project was a group effort, closely collaborating artist and designer friends contributed as well. Also, selected emerging artists and former students of *halka sanat projesi*'s founders at Istanbul Yeditepe University Fine Arts Faculty, who answered to the project's open call, were invited to take part in the exhibition.

The general theme of the works in the exhibition are our values, our daily life stories, love, and heartbreak which come out from the nature of these stories, and from struggling for better life conditions, working hard, finding roots, and losing them again. It is not about dramatic, fabricated conflict or exaggerated emotions prevalent in current media and commercial entertainment. Instead, it is about the intimacy and beauty of every human life.

Some artists proposed their already existing work that responded to the theme of migration, for others the work was curatorially connected to the theme, whereas some other artists created new work specifically for the project. At the end, the exhibition featured works in a variety of media such as painting, drawing, installation, collage, and video.



Figure 2. (In order) *Memory Card*, Semih Dilekçi / *Sending Money Home*, Doğu Çankaya / *Untitled*, Öykü Ersoy / *Rupture*, Esra İlbeyli, 'Stories from Our People', Istanbul, 2013 (*halka sanat projesi* Archives)

In addition to the visual art section of the project, the meaning of homeland and experiences of new places are enhanced by a documentary exhibition featuring collected archival photographs of migrant families, in which historical train stations are displayed as contributing thematic elements. Architectural historian Anas Sufan closely collaborated with Slobodan Dan Paich, one of the initiators and curators of the project. Historical photos of railway stations of North Africa and the Middle East resembling Sirkeci Station were displayed in the exhibition.

'Stories from Our People' featured many layers of being a traveller taking a train journey. One of the main elements of travelling is the travel food. Long train voyages of the twentieth century meant having practical, affordable, and specially prepared food to eat during the journey. To honour this tradition, Culinary Arts students from Istanbul Arel University, class of Nursen

¹ A synopsis of the performance pieces is in Appendix-1.



Kılıç, Aslı Mert Karagöz, and Mehmet Kavanoz, also one of the initiators of the project, recreated some customary travel food from Turkey and the Balkans. Their process and the result were photographed and exhibited alongside the recipes.



Figure 3. Culinary Arts students and Mehmet Kavanoz recreating well known travel foods from Turkey and the Balkans for ‘Stories from Our People’, Istanbul, 2013 (*halka sanat projesi* Archives).

The inspiration of the train travels of the last century made another dimension to the project possible: the involvement of university students and primary school children’s participation. Architecture students of Istanbul Bilgi University, class of Burcu Kütükçüoğlu and Deniz Çalış Kural, explored the idea of a Migration History Museum adjacent to or adopting Sirkeci Station. Also, the drawings of children from Mersin Muhsin Yapar Primary School, class of Ece Kelleci, from South Turkey were included in the exhibition. At the time, the majority of these young children had never seen trains; yet the concept of train travels was explained by their teacher and some children, who already had emigrant relatives mostly in Germany, participated with their renderings of train cars carrying migrants.



II. Location - Sirkeci Station, Terminus for European Trains - Ways of Representing



Figure 4. Sirkeci Station in a historical postcard exhibited in its original frame, ‘Stories from Our People’, Istanbul, 2013 (*halka sanat projesi*-Artship Initiatives Archives).

Istanbul, the starting point of long-distance passenger trains passing through the Balkans to reach Western Europe is one of the main elements of the theme; it also serves as a meaningful space as the project’s main location.

‘Stories from Our People’ was not conceived as a site-specific project having the Sirkeci Railway Station in mind, but when the possibility of presenting performances and exhibitions in the public areas of the station emerged, it generously contributed to the modality of the project, given that Sirkeci was the most frequently used historic public gateway of the city for a very long time.

The basic route of the European trains in the late 1940s, 50s, and 60s started from Sirkeci, Istanbul-Turkey, used to go through one city in each of Greece, Bulgaria, Romania, Albania, and Yugoslavia, ending up in Central Europe. In my opinion, the historic Sirkeci train station itself, as a public location and a witness of migrating communities throughout its history, inspired and enhanced the development of the project very much.

This venue was a place that I had been familiar with for most of my teenager years to reach the city centre as had been thousands of others. Up until the new millennium when Istanbul shifted from having a single city centre to becoming a multi-centred megapolis, the axe of Eminönü-Taksim which contained the Sirkeci Station was considered the central axe of the city.

Designed by the Prussian architect August Jasmund, Sirkeci Station was the first railway station in Istanbul, built between 1888 – 1890. The station was considered a gateway to the East as it was connecting Europe to Asia. Back then, its location was presumed to be the centre of the



city as it was situated in the historic peninsula of Istanbul and near the grounds of Topkapı Palace.²

The local use of trains lost its priority in the local transportation services in the early twenty-first century; nevertheless the public character of the station remained unchanged since its construction in 1890.

Sirkeci's oriental style suggests a symbolic 'entry to the East' for the European passengers who see Sirkeci as the last stop,³ whereas the local people saw it as 'a gate opening to the West'.⁴

In a local sense, coming along the shores of the Marmara Sea, Sirkeci station is the terminus for local trains carrying thousands of people from the west of the city every day, and internationally a terminus for all European trains including the Orient Express.

Depending on the storyteller, every story has at least two ways of representing the narrative; in the case of Sirkeci it is its connection to the West: Sirkeci can be considered either as a 'terminus' or a 'starting point' depending on where one stands. In the project we considered it as the latter. As illustrated in many books and films including the two Agatha Christie adaptations of the *Murder on the Orient Express*,⁵ Sirkeci Station most frequently represents the initial step to a voyage to Europe, especially until the late twentieth century.

Taking this point of view, 'Stories from Our People' formed a natural link with Sirkeci Station where the journey to the West began for all voyagers including many emigrants of the Middle Eastern, Turkish and Balkan regions in the twentieth century. Then, the choice of a non-art public venue such as the Sirkeci Station as the exhibition/performance space was unconventional, difficult to obtain, but highly inspirational and it made perfect sense within the project's context.

² Handan Güzelci, Okan Zeynel Güzelci and Ali Kemal Terlemez, "Sirkeci and Haydarpaşa Railway Stations: Isolated Landmarks of Istanbul" (paper presented at the SPACE International Conference 2019 on Architectural History and Theory, London. 3-5 May 2019), 65, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/332902164_Sirkeci_and_Haydarpaşa_Railway_Stations_Isolated_Landmarks_of_Istanbul

³ Kataryza Jarosz, "Bridging the East and West: The Orient Express as a Driver of the Sociocultural Development in the Balkans", in *Living on the Ottoman Lands, Identities, Administration and Warfare*, eds. Hacer Kılıçarslan, Ömer Faruk Can, Ö. & Burhan Çağlar (İstanbul: Kronik Books, 2021), 98.

⁴ Sena Durmaz, "Avrupa'nın İlk Durağı: Sirkeci Garı / Europe's First Stop: Sirkeci Station", *Yerel Kimlik. Geçmişten Geleceğe*, July-August-September 2019, <https://www.cekulvakfi.org.tr/makale/avrupanin-ilk-duragi-sirkeci-gari>.

⁵ "Murder on the Orient Express" (1974), directed by Sidney Lumet; "Murder on the Orient Express" (2017), directed by Kenneth Branagh.



III. People - Two Initiatives Coming Together - Concerns, Intentions, Co-Creation Addressing Social Crisis

Ambiguities and uncertainties of a collaboration may naturally grow in time if the involved parties' commitment to the theme, participating artists and community enrichment overrides idiosyncrasies and possible self-serving goals not related to the project; when the by-product of spontaneous and natural mutuality is marked by care and energy of development and carrying out the project.

In this respect, the *halka sanat projesi* and *Artship Initiatives* relation since 2012 can be described as showing congruence in nurturing diversity of expression, tone, and motivation that creates a nourishing partnership in continuous projects.

Based in the San Francisco Bay Area for more than four decades, Artship Initiatives collaborate with diverse artists, arts agencies, foundations, and other socially relevant organisations with the intention to emancipate Culture Making as a convening force in the re-creation and re-interpretation of the "Community Commons".⁶ The root of the initiative goes back to the Artship Ensemble, which is a professional company open to all who come through its doors and have an irresistible desire to perform, sing or dance. The company rarely holds auditions, but rather works with those who find its atmosphere significant. Artship calls this approach "people specific" work, which is an extension of its process of Inclusive Art, with access to disciplines of oral traditions, indigenous cultures, and inward turning, personal, poetic work. Artship does this through gathering short pieces, a kind of theatre miniatures that have become the hallmark of Artship Theatre presentations since 1988.⁷

Much younger, *halka sanat projesi* is founded in 2011 in Istanbul as a not-for-profit art initiative without depending on any institutional or corporate sponsorship.⁸ In that sense it is rooted in and maintained by the ongoing individual and collective commitment of its founders. Throughout the years *halka's* interest has grown in three areas: Firstly, helping young art professionals to find their way in the maze of the local art world by creating time and space for them to share their work. Secondly, functioning almost like a laboratory in which future art managers can turn the theoretical knowledge they have just received at university into practice. These two interests have been incubated in my teaching at university level in the first decade of *halka*, which entailed coming across several emerging artists and art managers to be and being engaged in their professional process. Finally, maintaining close dialogues with established artists who navigate the arts scene by preserving their authentic voice. This final point has enabled *halka* to bring to the local art scene a form of artistic and curatorial practice that differs subtly from commercial or fashionable perspectives. That is how *halka* has been

⁶ "About", Artship Initiatives, accessed 11 January 2022, <http://artship.org/about.html>.

⁷ *Washed Ashore: New Stories with and without Words*, performance by halka sanat projesi & Artship Initiatives (İstanbul: halka sanat projesi & Artship Initiatives, 2018).

⁸ "What we do", halka sanat projesi, accessed 11 January 2022, <http://halkaartproject.net/aboutus.html>.



able to give voice to diverse views and practices some of which were rare, even unprecedented, in the local art communities. The Artist-in-Residence programme of *halka* through which the paths of *halka* and Artship crossed has been a significant source for this engagement.

When in 2012 Slobodan Dan Paich, founder and director of Artship Foundation, came to participate in the fresh Artist-in-Residence programme, it was the initial step of a long collaboration. Since then, the two initiatives create exhibitions, performances, workshops, and gatherings every year to be presented both in Istanbul and San Francisco.

‘Stories from Our People’ is the second year’s project and one of the substantial products of this collaboration. In the realisation of the project which addresses a timeless global crisis, both initiatives were carefully and actively engaged; Paich as the conceiver of the project and curator and the *halka* team in the execution and management stages.

Our primary concern was to bring a respectful approach to a very critical and traumatic subject: losing homeland and searching new hopes in unknown lands. Our intention in the performance stories and bringing visual works together was to prioritise human sensibilities without being judgemental or generic. Challenges and painful experiences, life-changing crises as well as hopes, achievements, and solidarity among individuals were at the centre of the project’s goal of marking and preserving shared histories of people coming from similar backgrounds.

The diversity of the project’s participants (dancers, actors, visual artists, designers, architects, historians, culinary arts and architecture students, and primary school children) was the way to give voice to a multi layered perspective. This spectrum also underlined our aim of broadening the customary borders of art and the definition of the artist which continued to be our recurrent target for many co-creations in the following years.

Finally, the selection of Sirkeci Railway Station as the main venue for the programming reflected our intention to reach not only a wide audience, but also individuals who may not necessarily be a part of an art-oriented community.



IV. Execution - Curatorial Choices, Performance Direction, Visible and Invisible Management

Dwelling upon the curatorial choices, it would be difficult to ignore the fact that Paich's expertise and compassion for the project as the initiating curator are based on him being a Balkan emigrant of the 1960s. Also, this major theme that dealt with human responses to a life-changing crisis was very relatable for the *halka* group since migration from Anatolia to European urban centres has been a major social issue with influences spreading over at least four generations in Turkey. Every one of us had a story about emigrants. Almost everyone had a close relative or a friend who was an emigrant/immigrant. As *halka* we aim to be involved in meaningful projects that are relevant, relatable, and community-minded. So, collaborating on diverse dimensions of a multi-disciplinary cultural project such as this was a serious commitment for both initiatives.

The planning and developing stage of the project took almost two months. Based on curatorial sensibilities, reaching out to the possible participants was led through private invitation letters and open calls within the close creative circles.⁹

One of the singularities of working in small to medium scale not-for-profit initiatives is carefully building up a group of friends and collaborators without insisting on attracting numbers and crowds. The same principle applies to reaching out to the audiences. Interested parties bond with the initiative in time, as they keep following upcoming projects and organically enlarge the initiative's circle.

In the history of *halka*, examples of an artist bringing a fellow artist, a teacher reached out to by a committed young creative, or even a member of the audience proposing an idea to conduct a workshop or share their intimate work happen to be recurrent cases. Based on my dialogue with Artship and research on their archive, it would only be accurate to say that the same invitation, openness, and encouragement towards those who feel the urge to be involved in their projects have been their ethos since the beginning of the initiative. In fact, this is what they call the "people-specific" perspective and which in retrospective, I think, had an affirming influence on *halka's modus operandi* since it was an element close to the nature of *halka* people.

The conceptual framework of the project explored three thematic threads: the Train through Anatolia and the Balkans, the Concept of new place/old place, and Construction of the past, Construction of the future. As discussed earlier, the train through the Balkans found its voice in the performance stories in detail. The concept of new place/old place which referred to a patchwork of records of changing reactions to new places and the homeland aimed to offer insight into the diversity of cultural memory, and this concept was explored mostly in the exhibition part of the project. The unspoken or voiced themes of conflict forming part of the narrative text, implied or present as almost palpable subtext, were interwoven throughout the

⁹ An invitation letter sample is in Appendix-2.



project. Finally, the thread carrying the construction of the past and future was concerned with the roots of the exhibitions and performance research as being the exploration of the fragility of the relationship of personal and family memories to the collective sense of time and epoch.

The curatorial framework discussed the ‘Stories from Our People’ project as an appraisal, celebration and reflection on the validity and necessity of hearsay, oral histories, storytelling, and performative reconstruction.¹⁰

For the direction of the performance, Slobodan Dan Paich led the group to what they call the Artship Matrix. In his 2009 paper entitled *Giving Birth to a Performance*, Paich explains this matrix as all the repeatable elements of a live performance. This living blueprint is a generative relationship which is a unified field that holds all the elements of expression engaged in the performance: Image sequences, choreography, stage action, music improvised and scored, the text’s narratives and dialogues, and all the written and orally transmitted and remembered elements. Since the Artship Ensemble does not start with a text or score, this matrix is born through improvising, incubating, remembering, cherishing (rehearsals), and sharing the Matrix (performances).¹¹

These five distinct and interconnected phases of the process have also been applied in the creation of ‘Stories from Our People’ performances.

Strategically, events were spread over two locations: The Station as the main venue on the European side of Istanbul, open to public access for a not necessarily art audience, and *halka sanat projesi*’s gallery in Kadıköy, an art space on the Asian side of the Bosphorus. Performance dates were scheduled for both venues separately. In the case of the exhibitions original artworks and archival documents were displayed in the Gallery, and the printed versions were exhibited at the Station by respecting the authentic architecture of the historical building.

In the making of an art project, timing, circulation, and care towards artists’ intentions, project staff and the audience form a crucial part. Between planning on paper and turning it into reality, a deep focus on simultaneous details – technical and logistic – and delicacy in handling the human presence are needed every single day of the project. The visible side of managing a project such as ‘Stories of Our People’ is textbook information. In my opinion what makes the difference is the invisible management, which is considered successful when the project team is focused on contributing to the same cause in the best way they can. By this, I don’t mean running the show flawlessly but with sincere efforts to bring upfront the issues and not the people who make it. Invisible management requires taking distance from self-promotion and caring equally for all participants and the audience.

¹⁰ The conceptual framework of the Project is included in Appendix-3.

¹¹ Slobodan Dan Paich, “Giving Birth to a Performance: Some thoughts on dynamics of creating a theatre piece,” (paper presented at the International Conference Performing Arts Training Today, Bovec, Slovenia, 21-24 April 2009), 2, http://www.artship.org/research_pages/GivingBirthToAPerformance.html.



Behind the visible show with multiple components (live performances, exhibitions of visual art, historical documentation, culinary arts, architectural sketches, and children's drawings) in two venues, the behind-the-scenes group of ten consisting of the curator, gallery team and interns worked closely and ceaselessly on the execution of the 'Stories from Our People' for the period of the project's season. In terms of experience, it was both challenging and rewarding for all of us.

Conclusion:

This paper aimed to give a retrospective critical take on one of many ways of representing crisis in art, placing at its core the ‘Stories from Our People’, an actualised multi-disciplinary art project, and its multiple dimensions, as a case study.

The complexity of the topic of ‘crisis’ can be addressed in diverse aspects and tones. Building the project upon the human element, unifying sensibilities and shared experiences instead of direct assertion, affirmation, or refutation of politics of conflict informed our expressive choice. The perspective discussed in this paper is an indirect and considered presentation of a crisis. Taking this path means that the project deals with the subtext of any adverse situation by giving a larger visibility to the implied edges of experiences shared. Performance stories in Appendix-1 strongly suggest this approach.

One final example from the project may also illustrate the paradox of conceptual, discreetly stylised expression evoking the reality of the itinerant human, better than any dissertation on the resourcefulness and plight of migrants.

Wanderer (2013) is the title of Nazlı Çetinel’s work in which she designed and tailored a custom-made vest for an imaginary traveller.

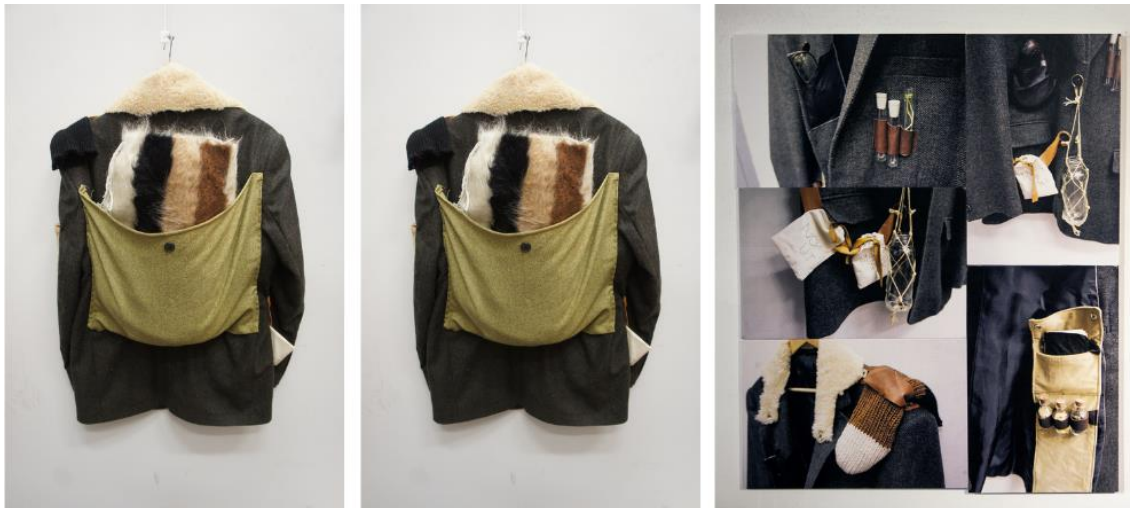


Figure 5. *Wanderer*, Nazlı Çetinel, Stories from Our People, Istanbul, 2013 (*halka sanat projesi* Archives).

The caption reads:

Wanderer on the move collects plants and herbs that catch his attention and puts them in three little glass jars placed in his left inside (removable) pocket which includes a notebook to research them afterwards. To see what is happening in front of his eyes and



in life he sprouts lentils, chickpeas or whatever he comes across, in the tubes placed on the left of his jacket. There is a place for his pipe and tobacco in his sleeve pockets. He likes to eat with his own fork and spoon, so he carries them in his right upper pocket. On the road he comes across all kinds of incidents, sometimes he finds food sometimes he can't. Thus, he carries chickpeas and lentils in the pouches he himself sewed.¹²

Since the project's aim was to allow for observations on the construct of memory through stories, this work was exhibited as a tribute to those who sometimes willingly and sometimes reluctantly or beyond their preferences find themselves on the roads. It honours their journeys and pays respect to their experiences.

In closing, one final summarising reflection about the issues of this paper can be found in the following statement of the project's curator. In a personal communication Paich reflected:

For the ambiguity and complexity of the phenomenon of conflict, one of the roots of crisis, the context of migration offers rich sampling and invites delicacy of approach and respect to people's experiences. Ranging from obvious brutal physical confrontations, to clandestine resistance, internalized anger, tacit disapproval or inherited traumas often hidden in cultural and family milieu. These few themes mentioned open both societal and psychological reflections. The expressive arts can tune in to them and share, evoke empathy and sense of bonding without explaining them.¹³

We hope that the material presented in this paper contributes to the general lively discussion on conflict and representing crises in art, to our understanding of conflict and possible resolutions.

¹² Nazlı Çetinel, "Wanderer," in *Stories from Our People*, Istanbul, 2013, Exhibition caption, *halka sanat projesi* Archives.

¹³ Slobodan Dan Paich, Email to author, 16 January 2022.



Appendix-1

Performance Programme and Synopsis

1. Reluctant Emigrant

(movement)

Sound of the wheels of a train moving on the railways is heard. Sounds gradually decelerate as if the train stops. On the stage, the audience sees a pile of fabrics covering something unidentifiable on the bench, not moving. A man enters, sits on the bench, gently leans on the pile, and gathers and lifts it up. Underneath, a woman appears, exhausted, almost sleeping. He holds her, finally they stand tall facing each other. Slowly they start to move, and the movement turns into a dance and exchange as if arguing on what to do next. When they reach some sort of agreement, they hold on to each other and leave the scene.

2. Train through the Balkans

Story of a young child travelling on the train with her mother and two siblings from Istanbul to Yugoslavia where the mother would be remarried. The young child travels through the cars from the 3rd class to 1st class cars where she was amazed by the glamour and generosity of the 1st class passengers who welcomed her in their compartment. After the early amicable responses, she felt she was treated mostly like a human-toy by them; she runs back to her worried mother who was looking for her. Finally, she finds comfort in her arms, falls asleep and becomes a child again.

3. *Gevrek* seller

Story of a man who came to Istanbul to earn money. The train station is the first and only place he sees in the city. After a difficult negotiation with the station director, he was given one of the cabins, to work and stay next to a sausage seller, an apple seller, and a fortune teller. He begins to sell simit, the cheapest everyday food, very unsuccessfully until he becomes friends with the unsuccessful fortune teller. The friendship improves both of their lives.

4. Remembering Rondo / music

(music)

Distant sound of playing a guitar and someone humming a song.

5. Anatolian Travellers' Spirit

(movement)

A man tapping on wooden tools and a woman dressed in white traditional dresses dancing according to his tune and responding to him by tapping on her traditional wooden bath slippers.



6. Strumming and Hamming for those long gone / music

7. Train Passengers

A man and a woman's struggle with their many pieces of luggage, they finally find a seat in the train car; the woman is almost invisible behind the suitcases on her lap whereas the man holds on to his one small suitcase. Finally, when the train stops, they get up and off the train car.

Intermission (10 min.)

8. Impossible Journey

Story of an Ottoman princess and her traditional wooden bath slippers passing down to the women in the family on their wedding day for generations

9. Phrases from Train Stories

Excerpts from modern Turkish literature on trains and train journeys read by the actors/dancers

10. Found un-tuned instrument /music

11. Connected

(movement)

The performers moving in and with a large fish net

12. Return to Anatolia

A couple meeting at the station with an elderly emigrant who was away from his homeland for 37 years



Appendix-2

Letter of Invitation

Artship Crossroads Initiatives and *halka sanat projesi* invite you to take part in their collaborative project conceived and curated by Slobodan Dan Paich, Director of Artship Initiatives, and guest artist and curator of *halka sanat projesi*'s Artist-in-Residence Programme for October 2013 – January 2014.

The project entitled 'Stories from our People' is constructed as a series of exhibitions and mini performances in which selected artists, architects, academics, and students are welcome to contribute.

The conceptual framework of the project is attached to this letter.
We'll be happy to have you among us in this project.

For any further questions and inquires please reach us at: directors@halkaartproject.net until November 25th, 2013.

A group meeting with the interested parties will be held in the following weeks to further discuss the project in detail.

Until then cordially,
halka sanat projesi



Appendix-3

Conceptual Framework

Thematic threads explored:

Train through Anatolia and the Balkans

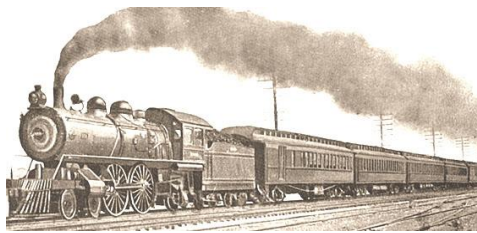
Presented are the memories and stories of people who were on a train in the late 1940s, 50s, and 60s of the twentieth century. Going first through Turkey and then the Balkans with similar people from Greece, Bulgaria, Yugoslavia, Albania, and Rumania to work or study in northern Europe. Also included are the stories, the memories of coming back.

New place / Old place

A patchwork of records of changing reactions to new places and the homeland offers insight into the diversity of cultural memory.

Construction of past, construction of future

The Exhibition with storytelling components explores the fragility of the relationship of personal and family memories to the collective sense of time and epoch. The 'Stories of Our People' project is an appraisal, celebration and reflection on the validity and necessity of hearsay, oral histories, storytelling, and performative reconstruction.



Description of activities and possible participants:

Architects and Architecture students:

Sketch exercise of envisioning a performance / exhibiting space expressing the journey of our people to work in the West and coming back. The performance structures could be portable and not tied to the station. These ideas of proposed forms of travelling architecture will be mounted and exhibited at the station.

Visual artists, designers, artisans:

Smaller portable pieces like sketches, personal works, collages, photographs, embroideries, craft, or design objects. New or existing works adapted for the occasion of the exhibition and the theme of railway journey.



Writers:

We have collected a number of photographs of people from the period and are inviting writers to create a paragraph long story or caption inspired by the atmosphere of the person and in response to the thematic context of stories of people who were on a train in the late 1940s, 50s and 60s of the twentieth century. Going first through Turkey and then the Balkans to work or study in northern Europe or the stories, the memories of coming back.

Actors, dancers, musicians:

Alongside writers, we invite performing artists to respond to the theme with new or existing work from their repertoire reflecting the people on the journey. An Ensemble process is on the way, and we plan several rehearsals before the event.

Culinary artists:

Reconstruction of foods that people carried with them on the long journey. Most of them will be known, everyday food but contextualized by the railway travel. We shall exhibit recipes and photographs of preparation.

Interdisciplinary scholars, cultural anthropologists, sociologists, etc.:

As with writers, we invite scholars and researchers to point to issues related to our theme by writing a caption or a paragraph with possible illustrations, if available.

Children and youth:

The theme will be offered to the next generation as classroom activities and the result will be part of the exhibition.

Guest artists from abroad:

Some artists we know have shown interest in participating and in the first year of the exhibition we showcase a few.

Interested citizens:

Anyone interested in the project as a volunteer or exhibitor/performer will be considered.





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