

## THE ANALYSIS OF MIGRATION PHENOMENON IN NORTHERN CYPRUS PAINTING ART

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**Abstract:** Migration, which is one of the important issues affecting human life, can take place both voluntarily and involuntarily. Life, migration and art are interrelated concepts and such interrelationships can be observed in every geographic territory and in every society. Cyprus is one of the most important regions where such conceptual relationships can be found. It has lived through two world wars and ethnic conflicts. Consequently, various forms of migration took place in North Cyprus and left traces in the life of society. This article analyzes migration in Cyprus in general and migration in North Cyprus specifically, and the influence of migration on the life of Cypriots. As life encompasses art, the influence of migration in the lives of the people living in Cyprus are examined through works of art. Firstly, certain examples in the world are examined. Afterwards, works of art by artists who were painting prior to 1974, namely Emin Cizenel, Guner Pir and Emel Samioğlu are studied. Finally, works of art by artists who were painting after 1974 namely Mustafa Hasturk, Fatma Miralay and Serkan İlseven are analyzed. This article is about how a sociological event influenced art. Therefore it neither suggests any other thesis, nor does it have any other mission.

**Keywords:** Migration, North Cyprus, Painting, Art, Life.

### Introduction

The concept of immigration is the sudden and rapid change in the environment, which is defined as the movement of people from one region to another within a certain time period for economic, social, cultural, geographic or political reasons (İlseven, Hidirer & Tümer, 2014). Migration is influenced by ethnic and cultural differences in many societies and leads the formation of economic, demographic and social dynamics (Okray, 2017; Frankel, 2000). The migration phenomenon, which can be examined in two groups as internal and external migration, emerges from the needs such as war, conflict, lack of livelihood, desire to achieve better living conditions and higher income expectation (İlseven, 2017; Şahin, 2012; Çağlayan, 2011).

There has been intense migration from Cyprus to other countries in every period of history. Internal problems and warfare which were experienced particularly before and after 1974 forced thousands of people to emigrate from Cyprus (İlseven, Sorakin & Ersoy 2018). Towards the end of the British colonial years, thousands of Greek Cypriots migrated to more secure areas inside and outside the island due to the repressive policies and attitudes of the Greeks against the British and the Turks and even progressive Greeks. Especially after the 1974 Peace Operation and exchange of population (1975), 65,000 Turks migrated to the North and 100,000 Greeks migrated to the South, which deeply affected the people of Cyprus (İlseven, 2017; Şahin 2012; Atatsoy, 2012). Cypriots who lived on the island heavily emigrated to foreign countries such as Turkey, Greece, Britain, Canada, South Africa and Australia.

Migrations have always deeply influenced human psychology and caused emotional trauma. Migration has been an important phenomenon which affects life satisfaction of people. It is known that people experience psychological traumas as a result of abandoning their memories and settling in another region (Atatsoy, 2012). A person may be overly upset and withdrawn, longing for where he/she was born and had grown. Depression can be seen in the individuals who settle in new regions with alienation and culture conflict (Akman Köse, 2012). Therefore, the individual who has difficulty in adapting to the environment may not be able to benefit from the job opportunities in order to earn a livelihood for a certain period of time and may experience economic difficulties. In order for the individual to get used to the new environment and to continue his/her life, it is important in this respect that he/she feels himself / herself belonging to the new environment and is satisfied with it. Therefore, it is very useful for individuals to get psychological help in order to overcome this difficult process.

*“An artist can only add to his/her life the opportunities he/she has been donated to by the conditions of his era and society”* (Fisher, 1995). Turkish Cypriot artists also produced paintings on the island with the impact of warfare and the chaotic conditions of the island. In the 1950s, a number of intellectual initiatives were launched in order to develop Turkish Cypriot nationalism and reinforce the ethnic Turkish Cypriot identity (Miralay, 2018; Hürsen & Miralay, 2016). One of them was in the field of education and was related to the training of art education teachers (Hastürk 2018). In this period, Emin Çizenel, Güner Pir and Emel Samioğlu who received art education in Turkey left their mark in this era and they made a strong impression as young talents of Cypriot Turkish painting art which was newly emerging.

In the works they produced in their early periods, these artists included subjects from social life and, these artists who examined the phenomenon of immigration in their works, were forced to leave their homes with their families overnight. Therefore, it is natural that these artists examine in their paintings the phenomenon of migration which they

experienced in a number of ways. Afterwards, when the island was divided into two regions, namely North and South, both societies gained their independence under two different states. The post-1974 developments showed their impact in many areas in Northern society including art and the products of artists (Miralay,2108).It is observed that the artists of this era continued to work the subject of migration and expressed it using modernism and other contemporary artistic approaches.

### **Objective of the Study**

The aim of this study is to investigate the effect of immigration phenomenon on the art of painting, which emerged from the needs of war, conflict, livelihood, better living conditions and higher income expectation in the Turkish Cypriot community before and after 1974. In this context, this study is based on the memories of artists which were affected by migration, their experiences and emotional expressions which were concretized in the work of art. The study also discusses the phenomenon of immigration in the recent political history of Cypriots and demonstrates how the phenomenon of migration reflects on the artists and their works as a result of the human, political, cultural and ecological transformations that the island has undergone.

### **Method**

This study covers the examination of “migration” phenomenon before and after 1974 in the painting art of Cypriot Turkish society based on Feldman’s “Investigative Art Criticism” method. The steps of “Investigative Art Criticism” method include description, analysis, interpretation and judgement sub-titles. The study provides findings under description and analysis sub-titles whereas judgement is included in the discussion section.

Feldman’s “Investigative Art Criticism” is a method whose validity is tried in the fields of art and art education which is frequently used at present. As with any analysis on the work of art, the interpretation part differs from person to person. The evaluations included in the commentary are tried to be explained in an objective manner and in a versatile way so as to give the reader a broad perspective (Prater, 2002).

### **Findings**

Research findings cover the analysis of the works of Cypriot Turkish painters in pre-1974 period, namely Güner Pir, Emin Çizenel and Emel Samioğlu. The post-1974 period is analysed based on the works of Serkan İlseven, Mustafa Hastürk and Fatma Miralay who are Cypriot Turkish painters.

### **Pre-1974 Period**

#### **Güner PİR**

The artist Güner Pir, who was forced to emigrate from Baf as a child of an immigrant family, used the theme of migration immensely in his works of art. In general, Cypriot artists have been subject to forced internal and external displacements after the 1950s as a result of increasing conflicts and warfare. It is seen that Pir treated in his works such topics as immigration, abandonment, leaving, and lack of sense of belonging to a certain place.



**Painting 1: Güner Pir“Migrants” Oil paint on canvas, 200x250 cm, 1988.**

### *Description*

In the 200x250cm size painting titled “Migrants” which is in the collection of the Republican Assembly of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, the artist depicts the size of the tragedy during the period. The absence of a male figure in the first two chapters refers to the lives of families living in Cyprus and their deprivation of proper parents and husbands. In the same frame, he depicted the yearning for school of migrant children wearing school uniforms who looked sad, bored and collapsed with utmost simplicity. In the last part of the work, women and children with open hands and rejoining families herald the end of migration and the coming of beautiful days.

Pir divided this study on canvas into three parts as tryptique. Each section of the painting was used to describe a different event. The war, which is a social trauma, and the concept of migration as a result of warfare, were brought to the foreground in this painting which makes the audience to experience a living theater scene. In this work, which is dominated by blue color, the tones of grayish blue make the calm and dignified mourning mood feeling to be transferred to the viewer with a monochrome color understanding. Even if miniature painting attitude is not applied completely, the figures which are placed in an order remind that attitude and the application of plastic values implicate a masterful manner.

This pictorial attitude of Pir developed and matured in following years. As a result, the figurative, descriptive manner of the artist was expressed in the visual narration of several social phenomena other than the migration phenomenon. In his work titled “Migrants”, Pir sincerely felt the effects of migration as an artist who experienced migration and expressed them in a plain and understated manner without the need of agitation of any kind creating a very successful and humanist perception. With this artistic attitude, Pir transferred to universal dimension the damage given by warfare and its consequential migration on human life without giving a chance to extremism and fanaticism of any kind.

### **Emin Çizenel**

One of the artists who experienced migration with his family is Emin Çizenel. As a child of a Malyan family in Southern Cyprus, he emigrated to Kanduya due to conflicts and then to Kyrenia with population exchange at the end of the war in 1974. As a result of the war that started in Cyprus, Çizenel knows well what displacement means. He has used it as a source of inspiration in his work exploring movement, travel, new cultures, people and lands.



**Painting 2: Emin Çizenel, Root Mirror, Oil painting on canvas, 72x112, 1981.**



**Picture 3: Emin Çiznel “Jasmies”, 24x30 mixed media, 2006.**



**Picture 4: Emin Çiznel “Peace Pirze Antique Project”, 120x480 mixed media, 2015.**

*Description*

In this work which can be found in the collection of the Republican Assembly of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, Çiznel examined the phenomenon of migration and used a real root mirror as a frame. Here he described the plasticized photos of the young men going to the military service or going away from their family to work which were attached to the edge of the mirror until they returned. The black and white photo is important in terms of reflecting the chaotic atmosphere of the period. Another interesting work of Emin Çiznel is Yasemin.

This is a watercolor painted in 2006 and is part of a series of similar works. Yasemin is a flower that is special for Cypriots, which you can feel even when you say it, and which is common to both communities. It is possible to come across the jasmine in the garden of almost every house in this island. By placing the leaves of the jasmine in the form of the island of Cyprus, he promises the viewer a map with no border lines and no migration. Here you can see the Island as free from any divisions. In the work you can combine with an element that can be common to both sides. Beyond an island that is separated by political boundaries, it is perhaps an important work to end the tragedy of future migration, reminding that there are common geographical and cultural features that still connect the two sides.

Çiznel frequently uses the phenomenon of migration in her works. The “Peace Prize Antique Project” exhibition of the artist which was opened in 2015 at CVAR (Center of Visual Arts and Research) urges us to see Cypriot Island from a totally novel perspective. Here Çiznel describes “Peace Prize Antique Project” as a fantastic tale. This project was prepared for an exhibition in Sweden which was organized in 2010. The artist was inspired by Swedish United Nations Peace Force (U.N.) soldiers who were deployed in Cyprus. He used the Swedish soldiers who were on a mission in the island and antique terracotta soldier figures which were found in Cyprus and taken to a museum in Sweden years ago side by side. With an intelligent transformation, he brings together these soldiers who were carried from Cyprus to Sweden and from Sweden to Cyprus. In the thinking of the artist, the island is turned into a vessel and takes on a journey where no one can search and ask for it and reach it. In this land which can be considered “nowhere” it gets ready to start a new life with new habits. This project describes people who are forced to migrate for different reasons and them being forced to leave a place due to warfare or economic reasons despite not wanting to leave at all. “This idea of



the artist is not something that can be physically applied. However, this project is an invitation of the artist to all Greek-Turkish Cypriots and the peacekeepers in the world in order to save the island from being a geography where the superpowers are in conflict with each other and the fights never end” (Hastürk, 2017).

### **Emel Samioğlu**

In Emel Samioğlu's works, the influence of her grandmother, who was a migrant from Crete, occupies an important place. The grandfather of Emel, who migrated to Cyprus with the transfer of Crete to the Greeks, chose Karpaz region in Cyprus as a living space. The artist's family fled from the clashes on the island of Crete to save their lives by maritime trade sailboat and came to Cyprus. Having settled in Limassol first, her family settled in the island and found heaven in Karpaz. When her grandmother chose another Cretan immigrant as her husband, Cyprus became their new homeland. In one of the worst periods of Cyprus, where the Turkish-Greek conflicts reached its peak, Emel Samioğlu experienced another emigration and left her family behind to study at Ankara Gazi University Art Education Department.



**Drawing 5:Emel Samioğlu, “Findings”, Oil Painting on Canvas, 100x70, 2006.**

#### *Description*

In her series titled “Findings”, the artist explains: “*Influenced by my family's history, I was dragged to the tracks that nudged me. My art is shaped by the stories I heard about the migration of my grandparents from Crete to Turkey and then to Cyprus, their adoption of this island as their home, the voyage of the sailor family with their own boats, and their fears, joys, hopes and findings. The title “Findings” for the series reflects these experiences and realities and my emotions from the basic form of my works*” (Hastürk, 2017).

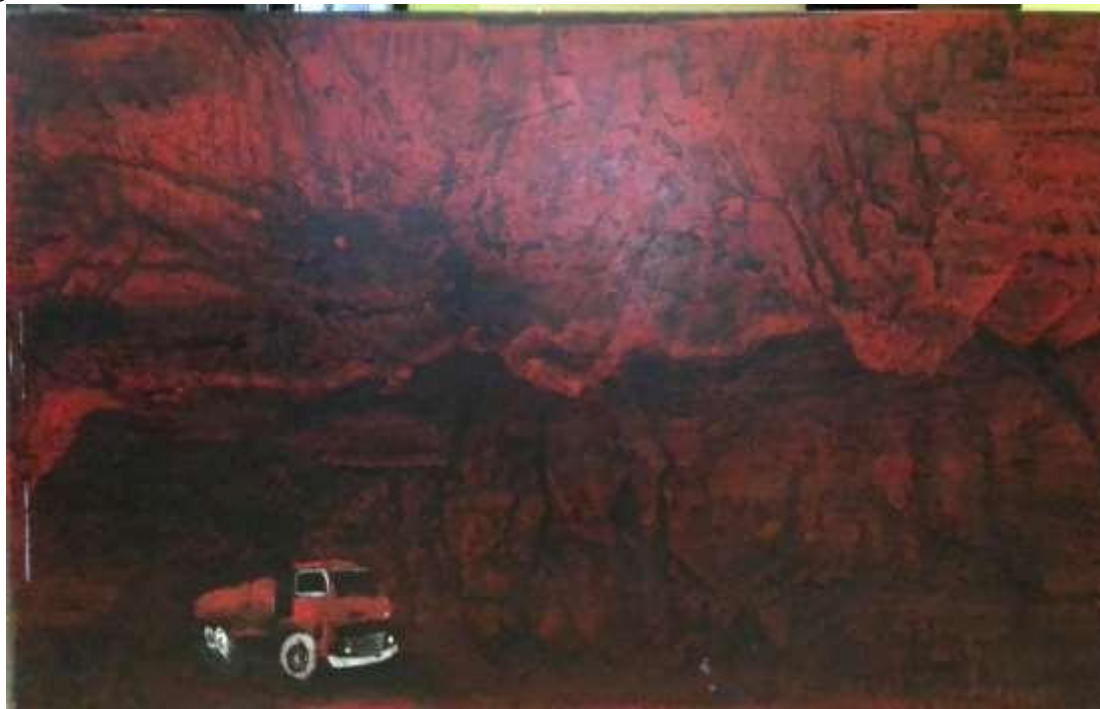
Emel Samioğlu described the migration from Cyprus which she heard from her family in her works in a variety of ways. These paintings, which are accompanied by a lyrical visual language and occasional poems or writings, make the migration experienced by the family of the artist felt by the audience as a strong emotion transfer. In these paintings, where the rich tones of blue are used, the sailboats described with a warm brown and symbolic expression provide important clues about the artist's strong patterns and colors. Samioğlu does not omit using ready-made objects in her works which constitute the “Findings” exhibition to treat the migration of her family to Crete. This attitude empowers the migration phenomenon in emotional aspect and exhibits an avant-garde stance with the contemporary artistic attitude which was introduced by Marcel Duchamp. These works of Samioğlu, who created a visual language using stories that she heard from each member of her family, verify the saying “*art includes life*”.

#### **Post-1974 Period**

##### **Serkan İlseven**

Migration is the most important determinant element of topics in Serkan İlseven’s works. Born in Baf, İlseven lived there with his family until 1974. At the age of 9, even before the population exchange, he had to migrate from Southern Cyprus to Northern Cyprus in a water truck with his family. This traumatic event that he experienced with his family

and relatives has been subject of several paintings of the artist, and it is in front of the viewer in the painting “tanker” in plain sight.



**Painting 6: Serkan İlseven, Tanker, Acrylic on Canvas, 200x100, 2011.**

#### *Description*

In Serkan İlseven's paintings, the issue of immigration is not limited to a single area of Cyprus. It moves from North to South and from South to North. In the “Question-Query” painting exhibition in 2011, he depicted people in different places of Cyprus migrating in red and green wooden buses, and women and children who were seeing off their husbands and fathers in front of the barricades. Reflecting the reality of a society in which desperation is intensified, these paintings include hope and frustration, resistance to despair and helplessness. The artist treats the concrete images of the reality of the society with an understated observing approach. In the most dramatic painting of the artist titled “Tanker”, he makes reference to the lost bus and depicts the thoughts focusing on the infrastructure of migration such as roads with indefinite targets and countless barricades that emerge in the way.

#### **Mustafa Hastürk**

Although he was not physically in the migration events, he combined the events that he heard from his family and identified himself with the places that he lived with the sensitivity of an artist. The “Birds” series of the artist which treats the migration phenomenon is the depiction of leaving the motherland and searching for a better life in different countries. It is remarkable that this road taken with an adventurous spirit for a better life is expressed with colours. The answer to the question of “can migrants who are identified with these birds find a better life?” is sought in colours. “Birds and Seasons” series of Hastürk describes migration in universal sense. The artist, who depicts the phenomenon of immigration through the bird symbol, describes his life as an endless migration in his works representing the Spring, Summer, Autumn and Winter seasons. Although the bird in Figure 6 appears alone, it is understood from the wings of other birds at the end of its wings that it moves with a series of birds. The narrative here states that each individual is a member of a group while sharing his / her own destiny with the journey of life, and that they all share a similar fate. The geometric shapes on the picture represent the past, the future, and the deformed surfaces that have been transformed into a plastic language.



**Painting 7: Mustafa Hastürk, Birds and seasons, Acrylic on Canvas, 100x100, 2003.**

The fact that the artist did not experience the war and the immigration himself led him to express the events in a more abstract manner. These works which continue as “winter” and “migration”, “summer” and “migration” have a composition understanding which includes the elements of balance and rhythm in a minimalist and plain plastic language. With a mystical impact, this composition triggers the philosophical questioning of “where do we come from and where are we heading to”. As a result, the expression of migration phenomenon in a strong but simple language determines the level of the artist in the field of art. Hastürk’s paintings which describe the journey of humanity and life with an abstract expressionist artistic language take the viewer to an endless venture of art with his strong expression.

#### **Fatma Miralay**

Fatma Miralay, member of an immigrant family of Larnaca origin, grew up with stories of immigration from her elders. Like other Cypriots who had to leave during the crises between 1950 and 1960, the family of Miralay also migrated from Larnaca to Nicosia. The experiences of those years are the most important conversation topic in the family and have been a decisive factor in the works of Miralay.



**Painting 8: Fatma Miralay, “Maraş” Acrylic on Canvas, 70x100, 2016.**

#### *Descriptipn*

Migration and identity phenomena are frequently mentioned in the works of Fatma Miralay. She has illustrated four abandoned houses in her works on Maraş. Choosing the shape of houses as a symbol of universal identity, each house that the artist presents with bullet holes glows with a warm inviting light on the one hand, and the reversed lives, violence, disasters or dislocations on the other. Just like the city of “Maraş”, the North and the South were also abandoned and lives and identities there were weak; lack of hope for the future and the fear of starting the life from scratch are clearly felt in the works of the artist.

The bullet holes observed on the buildings represent the wounds in the body and soul of people who are forced to leave their homes. These violent bullet marks in the living spaces of people who left their homes in Maraş region are proofs of the impacts in their soul. In her work titled “Maraş”, the artist makes an analogy between buildings with bullets and

human body. Here she makes reference to the living area of people who were struck by warfare and tries to combine the psychological effects of the war experienced in the country with the viewer through an architectural structure.

### **Discussion and Conclusion**

Human beings have migrated for various reasons since the beginning of life. This migration occurred in times due to natural conditions and in others due to the lives of a group of people threatened by another group of people (Durrant & Lord, 2007).

In this study, immigration phenomenon which emerged as a result of clashes between different ethnic groups on the island of Cyprus was realized by examining the works of artists from two different age groups. There is a remarkable difference in terms of expression and plastic language between the artists who experienced the war and thus the migration themselves, and the artists who live with the experiences and expressions of the war and the migration (Miralay, 2018). While the war generation artists benefit directly from the objective instruments of war and immigration, the other group shows a tendency to describe the outcome of war and migration. These works, in which the phenomenon of social migration is expressed through art of painting, are examined as an intellectual accumulation of the Turkish Cypriot community. The permanence of the journey of existence, which begins with migration, in these works means that those who have it will continue to exist forever.

When we look at the results obtained from the works of the artists analyzed in the research, it can be said that each artist expresses the phenomenon of immigration strongly in the pictures even though they lived in different periods. It is evident that the artists were deeply influenced by individually experiencing migration in the period before 1974. In the work titled "Migrants" of Güner Pir, which is studied in this paper, the impact of migration on every person, regardless of gender, is displayed clearly. While the artist depicts a social demolition here, she presents the deep wounds in the daily life of individuals to the viewer. Here, it is possible to see clearly the effects of the artist's pain and experiences in the war period.

On the other hand, one can mention the concretization of migration and war in a different way by Emel Çizenel's search for contemporary artistic approach. The artist, by using material diversity, can be said to have effectively used the immigration phenomenon in the island from time to time with real materials. For example, in the root mirror work, the use of an original wooden mirror frame indicates that it was concerned to reflect the events in that period. When Emel Samioğlu's works are examined, subtlety and elegance of being a female artist can be noticed easily. In Samioğlu's works, besides the works of other analyzed artists, it can be said that she uses a plastic language that strongly expresses the identity of women. Especially the color choices of the artist are thought to support this finding.

In the works analyzed after 1974, it is known that only Serkan İlseven experienced the incidence of migration. As an individual experiencing the event of migration, this event has left deep traces in his soul. His work "Tanker" depicts his migration in a water truck from the South to the North at the age of nine. Many years later, the artist expressed this event through his art. İlseven's use of red color intensively in his work also refers to the bloody events of that period. The troubled years experienced by the artist remind themselves through a composition of death in his art.

Another post-1974 artist, Mustafa Hastürk, depicts the phenomenon of migration in his works through an abstract approach and metaphor-laden objects. For example, the work of the artist titled "Birds" (Spring, Summer, Autumn, Winter) relates the migration of birds in every season with the migration of Cypriots. Here, the artist establishes a metaphorical relationship between the migration of birds and the migration of people to explain the phenomenon of migration. The colors and tinged expressions used by the artist in his works strongly suggest his expressionist attitude. As an artist who did not experience migration completely, Hastürk takes up the issue in an imaginary way.

Finally, the works of Fatma Miralay, one of the young generation of artists of post-1974 period, focus on migration, war, political conflicts and extinction. The artist grew up with immigration stories and painted these subjects in her works by being influenced by what she saw. The artist, who describes the war in the Closed Maraş area in the region of Famagusta with a plastic language, expresses strongly the traces of bullets and bombs on the buildings. The artist identifies the bullet holes on buildings with wounds in the body of a human being and interprets the holes in buildings using the metaphor of a living person. The monochromatic colors used in the paintings seem to remind the sadness and chaos of that period. Miralay, in her work named Maraş, makes an analogy between buildings and human bodies and presents the feeling of displacement to the viewer using bullet holes and the marks created in human soul.

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