



**THE SYRIAN MUSICIANS IN ISTANBUL: THE  
RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN REPERTOIRE AND STAGE**

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**ABSTRACT**

**This article aims to present some notes and findings about the fieldwork that I conducted in Istanbul with Syrian musicians in 2015. The main questions of the research were the identity of the Syrian musicians and the status of Syrian music and musicians in Istanbul. In this article I will first present some details about the musical institutions in Syria and the problems related to “being a musician” and studying music in the era of Al-Baath party ruling. I will add some notes about the Kurdish musicians in Syria. The second section is about Syrian musicians in Istanbul. I will discuss how far they can communicate among each other and with musicians from Turkey, and what are the messages that they try to spread through their music. For this aim, I analyze some musical activities that took place in Istanbul, such as the concerts of the Syrian community, as well as the relationship with the Turkish music of the Syrian alternative media in Turkey. Then, I discuss whether Turkey is seen as a temporary or permanent station by Syrian musicians. Lastly, I will analyze two musical activities and their repertoire that took place in two different stages to show the diversity of Syrian community in Istanbul.**

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\* Makale Geliş Tarihi: 15.07.2016  
Makale Kabul Tarihi: 09.10.2016

**Keywords:** Syrian refugees, ethnomusicology, musicians, cultural diversity, Istanbul.

## ÖZ

Bu makale, 2015 yılında İstanbul'da Suriyeli müzisyenler üzerine yaptığım saha çalışmasının bulgularını sunmayı amaçlamaktadır. Araştırmanın ana soruları İstanbul'daki Suriyeli müzisyenlerin kimliği ve toplumsal konumu ile Suriye müziğinin konumudur. Bu makalede önce Suriye'deki müzik kurumlarından bahsedecek ve Baas partisi döneminde müzik eğitimi almak ve "müzisyen olmak" konusundaki zorlukları ele alacağım. Suriye'deki Kürt müzisyenlere dair bazı notlar da ekleyeceğim. İkinci kısım İstanbul'daki Suriyeli müzisyenlerle ilgili olacak. Kendi aralarında ve Türk müzisyenlerle ne derece iletişim kurabildikleri ve müzik aracılığıyla ne tür mesajlar iletmek istediklerini tartışacağım. Bu amaçla, Suriyeli müzisyenlerin İstanbul'da gerçekleştirdiği bazı müzik etkinliklerini ve Türkiye'deki alternatif Suriye medyasının Türk müziğiyle kurduğu ilişkiyi inceleyeceğim. Daha sonra, bu müzisyenlerin gözünde Türkiye'nin geçici bir durak mı yoksa kalıcı bir yerleşim yeri olarak mı görüldüğünü ele alacağım. Son olarak, İstanbul'da Suriyeli topluluğun çeşitliliğini göstermek üzere iki farklı sahnede gerçekleşmiş iki müzik etkinliğini ve repertuarlarını inceleyeceğim.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Suriyeli mülteciler, etnomüzikoloji, müzisyenler, kültürel çeşitlilik, İstanbul.

## BACKGROUND

Mohamed Bouazizi, a Tunisian street vendor, set himself on fire on December 17<sup>th</sup> 2010 to protest the insults and harassment of a local police officer (Ryan, 2011). It was the same day that I left Syria for Turkey. After three months - when the fire of Bouazizi reached Egypt, Libya, Yemen, Bahrain and Syria-, I concluded that I had made a good timing as most of my friends were being called to the military service.

The fieldwork of this article is conducted in the framework of my education in musicology department in Istanbul. As an oudist and composer, I had already acquaintances with Syrian musicians in Turkey. During the interviews we talked

not only the musical issues, such as repertoire and tunes, but also political situation in the Arab countries as well as the revolution in Syria. In this article, I will not go into the details of political winds that blew on the Arabian countries. I just want to express that at the core of these uprisings there was an expression of deep-seated resentment at the ageing Arab dictatorships (Manfreda, 2016), and later on it has been transformed with the involvement of external actors that wanted to reshape the area politically (Alzameily, 2013).

In this article I want to present the findings of my fieldwork, which are still in progress. I will try to answer some questions such as: Who is the Syrian musician? What is the status of music and musicians in Syria, and the status of Syrian musicians in Turkey? How is music helping the communication between Syrians and local people in Turkey? What is the role of stage and repertoire in the construction of identity and musical performance in Turkey? Are Syrian musicians planning to stay temporarily or permanently in Turkey?

Last year, precisely from April 6 to May 17, 2015, I did a research on the Syrian musicians in Turkey. I conducted 30 face to face interviews in different cities, such as Istanbul, Izmir, Şanlıurfa and Gaziantep. I also did two interviews with Syrian musicians living in Sweden and Denmark who visited Turkey. Most of the interviewees were the ones who recently arrived, mostly a year ago; predominantly male (only 4 females); and their ages vary mainly between 20 and 30 years.

In my research, the very first question that came to my mind was “who is the Syrian musician? How can one define it?” For instance, according to Noor<sup>2</sup>, who is a 42 years-old musician from As-Suwayda, “If you want to be a musician in Syria, you have to establish good relationships with the government (...) Unfortunately, I can say musicians in Syria are divided into two categories; the first category is a real musician; an unknown musician (that nobody knows him, and if he is known, he is not defined as a musician), and the second one is famous, works like a machine and by a remote control (...) Most of the musicians who took good chance in Syria were like dictators; who were enslaved by the government and at the same time enslave their colleagues.”

In her article “*The Songs of Syrian Revolution, or The Fork in the Throat of the Regime*” Salma Karim states that the image of the musician in Syria was not clear. According to her, even music and musicians did not have an artistic standard, as she suggests “...in the midst of talk about art and the Syrian Revolution, and especially

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<sup>2</sup> All names are pseudonyms in order to protect the anonymity of the interviewees.

music and songs produced by the revolution, it is necessary to remember the music that we used to listen to, before the revolution, and ask ourselves: What do we know about the popular music of our heritage in the areas of Syria?... We were enforced to listen to a specific kind of music....and the Syrian ear was controlled by a sector of people.”<sup>3</sup>

Pire, a Syrian-Kurdish female singer who lives in Sweden, expresses her resentment about the Syrian regime’s denial of Kurdish presence in the country: “it would have been great, if I had heard from a radio broadcasting in Syria ‘*and now we’re going to listen to Jamila in a Kurdish song from Al-Jazeera*<sup>4</sup> popular music’. It would have been enough for me to accept such a regime. [But] Kurdish music was not considered music. There was no real meaning and definition for music and musicians, in general, and not only for Kurds in Syria”.

Chap, a Syrian-Kurdish musician in his fifties, living in Denmark since 2004, says “When I finished my high school in 1980, I went to Damascus; looking for the conservatory. I stayed one week to find it. Finally, I discovered that there is no conservatory in Syria. I thought all countries of the world should have conservatories.”

In Syria, there are just two universities that teach music; the Higher Institute of Music in Damascus and Faculty of Music Education in Homs<sup>5</sup>. The first is a conservatory founded in 1990 by Solhi Al-Wadi; who was, according to Noor, an old friend of Al-Assad family and is teaching students that Eastern/oriental music is not proper, and the best and right music is the Classical Western music. Most of musicians who graduated from this school are basically aristocrats and children of Syrian officials. Noor continues, “I liked to study ney, but Al-Wadi was insisting that I should study clarinet; it just annoyed me and I decided to leave the school.” Martini, a good trumpet player in his twenties, who plays mostly classical eastern music by his western instrument, complains of favoritism in Syria’s only conservatory: “I failed before the jury but the person who entered after me succeeded, even though he played the trumpet in a very bad way!”

On February 7, 2011, on the Al Bayan website<sup>6</sup>, Omar Al-Asaad writes an article in Arabic under the title “*Complaints about the Shackles on Curriculum of High Institute of Music in Damascus*” where he says: “The course of the progress of the

<sup>3</sup> An article published in Arabic <http://al-manshour.org/node/4432s>

<sup>4</sup> North East of Syria, where most of the Kurds of Syria live.

<sup>5</sup> A city in Syria, where the most severe events of Syrian war happened.

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.albayan.ae/five-senses/reconnaissance/2011-02-07-1.1289424 - 07/02/2011>

institute and the nature of the curriculum especially in the department of the Eastern Music received so many complaints although it is the only academy in Syria that produces musicians. The complaints did not only come from the students, but also the masters of music themselves.”

The second place in Syria is the Faculty of Music Education at Al-Baath University in Homs. Feyssal, a 30 years-old guitarist who has been in Turkey for two years, states: “When we complained about the lack of practical lessons in the faculty and that everything is theoretical, the dean said that our mission here is to teach you how to teach music, not how to play music. Teaching to play instruments is not our priority.”

Feyssal adds, “Our dean was not musician. He was an engineer and didn’t know anything about music. I remember when they brought us a bassoon to school, he said, ‘we brought you that big instrument’, he did not even know its name!”

Jonathan Hold Shannon, an American researcher and academician, who has been in Syria for a long time, explains in his book *Among the Jasmine Trees* (Shannon, 2009), that in Aleppo there was a group of people called “*Sammi’a*” whose job was to evaluate voice and music. *Sammi’a* means “good listeners” or “good hearers”, and they contribute to the conservation of original forms of maqams, and thus to preserve the “authenticity”. They have their own students whom they teach specific ways of teaching styles and traditional music.

Berro, percussionist and pianist from Aleppo, learned music when he was 9 years-old and his teacher was *Sabri Moudallal*<sup>7</sup>, who was one of the *Sammi’a* of Aleppo. Berro says, “Syrian regime produced musicians of the authority. There are no real musicians [in Syria]! When I went to Dubai, I saw all our prestigious musicians [i.e. the ones educated by the *Sammi’as*]. They are all abroad. Nobody stayed in Syria.” He gives an example of “*Mustafa Tlass*<sup>8</sup> [who] was behind the fame of a Syrian singer. Tlass had told him, “I’ll support you in everything but when I want you to sing for me, you will come with no hesitation!” And someday that singer had three concerts in USA; before the concerts began, Tlass called the singer to come back to Damascus. The singer came back and lost one and half million Syrian Pounds<sup>9</sup>.” This is a clear example of how authoritarian regime in Syria has also affected the career of musicians.

<sup>7</sup> (1918 – 2006) Syrian chanter, singer and composer. <http://www.turath.org/Articles/Sabri.htm>

<sup>8</sup> He was Syria’s Minister of Defense from 1972 to 2004.

<sup>9</sup> At that time, it was about 30.000 US Dollars.

## 1. MUSIC AS A LANGUAGE OF COMMUNICATION

With the escalation of the armed movements and multiplication of parties (not clear) in the Syrian protests, the number of Syrian refugees got increased, particularly in the countries neighboring to Syria. Turkey took the lion share of the refugees as the number of registered refugees raised to 2,749,140. according to the last updates of the UNHCR on April 11, 2016<sup>10</sup>

Some of the musicians I met were staying in other countries, and they recently moved to Turkey. According to most of them, Turkey is the best destination if you are a musician:

*“When I passed the border and arrived to the Turkish territory, I felt that everything has become different. There were more colors. The air was cleaner and the sky was clearer. This morning at 9 o’clock, the sound of an accordion woke me up. It was a good feeling. I opened the window and asked the little boy to play it again. I recorded it. While in Homs, when I was there, crying and bombing were the only sounds I heard every morning” says Feyssal.*

Another musician, Melm, who has been in Turkey since 2010, pointed out the profusion of musical education in Turkey: “In Syria, we have just one conservatory, while in Turkey, just in Istanbul, there are more than five universities that teach music.”

Others expressed the allure of Turkey as an attractive destination for musicians. Deeb, a singer and oud player graduated from Damascus conservatory, states “It was my dream to come to Turkey. It is the best place to study music, but unfortunately, we came under bad conditions.” Jamoul, a percussionist, says “I had always liked to join *Mısrılı Ahmet’s* classes.”

It is said that music is a universal language. Or, in other words, it is a medium of communication that does not need words, as Issa, an oud player from Rakka says: “Music helped me so much because it is a language that doesn’t need translation. And we can say it is a more sophisticated and elegant tool of expression and communication with people. For example, we formed a musical group with Turkish musicians and has many concerts without knowing each other’s language.”

Another musician, Mukdad also points at the role of music in constructing social ties in the destination country: “Music helped me so much to integrate with

<sup>10</sup> <http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/country.php?id=224>

the Turkish society. It was the language of conversation with the Turkish friends and created spaces for interaction and work.”

Hafez, a female pianist and music teacher about 30 years-old, invited me to meet with her friends in Mosaic Oriental Choir in Istanbul. According to her, it is a choir that aims at enhancing the soul of communication with the Turkish society and showing a good image about Syrians- that not all Syrians are beggars<sup>11</sup>. She added that there should be a place that unites Syria with all its components, and makes them love each other, contrary of what is happening in Syria, as a civil war.

In April 2015, Hafez called me, telling that there is a concert of her friends in Karaköy. We went to the musical event called “*Meşk*”. Two musicians, Jammoul (percussionist mentioned above) and Thabet (qanoon player), played for half an hour. Their repertoire was a mixture of between Arabian traditional music and Turkish pieces of music composed by Göksel Baktagir. After they finished their part, Osman (A Syrian *biziq* player who was graduated from Homs University Musical Education Faculty) and Veysel (a Turkish *erbane*-framed drum-player) performed traditional music which have common Kurdish and Turkish versions (versions is not the right the word here).

Another day in April 2015, after the choir finished its rehearsal, I joined the group at a café in Kurtuluş, a migrant neighborhood in Istanbul. The café is owned by one of the choir’s members, a Syrian businesswoman, who joined the choir to relieve her longing for the homeland by interacting and communicating with other Syrians. When we arrived at the café, there were Turkish guys playing qanoon and guitar. The woman manages the café with her husband and another friend who is a musician. They say “We have so many Turkish friends, they come here and play music. The communication is difficult with language so we communicate with music.” Here we can find another example of how music facilitates and enriches people’s communication with each other.

Alusi, a 20 years-old member of the choir, suggests: “In Syria, my relationship with music was limited to listening but when I came to Istanbul I made so many Turkish friends, and began learning to play guitar. Now I play and compose with my Turkish friends.”

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<sup>11</sup> According to Hafez, Turks know Syrians as trouble-makers and beggars that ask for food and money in Istanbul streets.

With the increase in the number of the Syrian refugees in Turkey, the community continues to grow and produces a lot of activities under many organizations. While I was surfing the internet I saw an ad about a concert of the Syrian clarinetist Kinan Azmeh and the Syrian vocalist Dima Orsho in a place called Babylon in Istanbul. These two musicians who are well-known in Syria, have recently settled in the USA. It was announced that the income of the concert will go to an organization called Syrian Cultural House in Istanbul. On May 1<sup>st</sup>, 2015, I went to the concert in order to meet somebody from the organization to learn about the cultural activities of Syrians living in Istanbul. But unfortunately I could not reach anybody. I then attended the concert, where the audience was comprised of both Syrian and Turkish people as well as some Westerners.. Azmeh made comments on the events in Syria and the role of *his* music: “After one year of the Syrian Revolution, after one year of silence, I made this piece *Every Morning is a Sad Morning*. I felt that my music may make difference.” According to most of the musicians that I interviewed, what took place in Syria at the beginning was a revolution, however later on it turned into a civilian and sectarian war.

Issa, an oud player in Gaziantep works at a radio station called *Rozana*<sup>12</sup>, which is an alternative media channel that broadcasts about the cultural and social aspects of Syrian community in Turkey. Issa presents a program called *Oud Rozana*, and each week he hosts one of the Syrian musicians. On February 8, 2015 he hosted Wassim Mukdad, an oud player whom I contacted through my research. During the radio show, Mukdad says to Issa, “When we first came from Syria to Turkey, we had the obstacle of language (...) The best way was to play music together – with the Turks. I went to music centers and got musician friends: *Pınar* (sings and plays erbane) and *Serkan* (plays saz). Then I was introduced to *Onur Aydın* who suggested us to make an ensemble and we formed *Khayal Ensemble* [in Antep] without communicating with language, but just through music” And after this sentence, Mukdad and Issa played together Abdul Qadir Meraghi’s “*Amed Nesîm-i Subh-u Dem*”, a music from Ottoman era. This is a good example that the musicians coming from Syria are beginning to get acquainted with Turkish music.

On April 11, 2015, in the same radio show, Issa hosts Bashar Ismael, a Syrian oud player and composer from Kobani, who used to stay in Gaziantep before leaving for Germany. Ismael made a comparison of two countries from musicians’ perspective: “I couldn’t do anything in Syria because there was a tyranny which imposes a kind of music for legs [for dancing] we were obliged to think about food,

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<sup>12</sup> <http://rozana.fm/>



about feeding ourselves. I didn't have any means as a musician, while here in Turkey, despite of the [material] needs, I feel I am freer and thus I compose."

## 2. TURKEY AS A TEMPORARY STATION FOR THE SYRIAN MUSICIANS?

On 27 March 2015, M. Murat Erdoğan in an article published on *Aljazeera* website, entitled *Türkiye'deki Suriyeliler (Syrians in Turkey)* (which is at the same time the title of his book) wrote "willy-nilly, Syrian refugees will make important effects on the economic, political and social situation of Turkey for decades or even centuries."<sup>13</sup> In the same article the writer continues: "Now, there is 1,800,000 registered Syrian in Turkey. If the war ends, at least 1,200,000 of them will stay in Turkey permanently."

Most of the musicians I met before until 2015 were fond of Turkey, its atmosphere, culture as well as the Turkish musicians, but they were afraid of their future in Turkey. They told that they do not have any guarantee here. One of my questions was "If the situation in Syria lasts, will you stay in Turkey or leave to another place?" Just four of the interviewees replied, "It's permanent", but the others were between "I am afraid it will be permanent" and "It's temporary". Deeb says, "I love Turkey and my dream is to learn Turkish oud style, but I don't know Turkish language and I don't know anybody here. I am afraid of not being able to earn my livelihood. I need to work but what and how? Today, I took my oud and went to *Istiklal Street* in Taksim and I was going to play in the street and sing, but I couldn't!" (why he couldn't? explanation?)

Another musician, Zaidan says, "I like Turkey and I will stay in Turkey but there is still a fear. There is no guarantee. Despite that music breaks the barrier of communication, there is fear among the Turkish people about the future of the Syrians in the country."

The issue of "Syrians" has become one of the major debates in Turkey in the last two years, especially in social media. Most of them are pejorative jokes and complaint about Syrians. Several Turkish social media users suggest that "the guests (Syrians) became as the owner of the house." On July 9, 2014, a Facebook account belonging to a Turkish person posted: "Now I was walking in the street, some Syrians asked me for my ID and when I told them it is not with me. They told me

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.aljazeera.com.tr/gorus/turkiyedeki-suriyeliler>

how do you walk without an ID in this country. They hit me.”<sup>14</sup> Another example, a video clip uploaded by a Turkish guy saying, “In the past, wherever I looked, I saw you [who is you? Turkish people?]; but now everywhere I see Syrians.”<sup>15</sup>

Noor expresses his confused feelings and worries about staying in Turkey: “It was a dream from childhood to come and live in Turkey. Turkish people is good and we like each other- even our facial features are similar. Some Turks hate Syrians but all Syrians are not bad and we shouldn’t forget that Syrians came under pressure. Unfortunately, I came under these conditions. I got shocked when I saw the huge number of Syrians, and everybody is afraid, worried about the situation and doesn’t know how tomorrow will be. Homeless people don’t have money to buy bread and sleep in the parks. There are political parties that say when they come to power, they will send all Syrians back; people fear. So, I want to go to Europe, as everybody else does.”

Dara, a guitarist whom I interviewed in Izmir, says “I work from morning to night and when I come home I don’t have time to play guitar. I look for one more hour to sleep. I left music in Turkey. I want to go to Europe but I don’t have money.” Actually about six months later he left for Germany.

### 3. BETWEEN TEMPORARY AND PERMANENT: STAYING OR LEAVING

On the contrary of what is written in an article of *Hürriyet* newspaper (to be mentioned later) and the report of UNHCR, I believe that the number of Syrian people who stay in Turkey in general and in Istanbul in particular, is not that high: First, only 5 out of the 30 musicians that I met in 2015 are still in Turkey. Most of them left for Europe and especially Germany. Second, most Syrian people, who are registered in UNHCR, pass through Turkey to leave for Europe. Third, in 2015, most of family members, relatives and acquaintances that I know left Turkey for Europe, including thousands of families like mine.

In sum, among 30 Syrian musicians that I met during this research, only five of them stayed in Turkey. Among them only two people are still actively performing music: Mukdad and Mheidi. The former stays in Gaziantep and the latter in Urfa,

<sup>14</sup> [https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?id=195562977275141&story\\_fbid=320485384782899](https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?id=195562977275141&story_fbid=320485384782899)

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1ObL48w9LPM>

occasionally they come to Istanbul. Their last concert that I attended during my research<sup>16</sup> took place in Kadıköy, on December 19, 2015.

Below, I want to present my observations of two musical events that took place in Istanbul; one in Kadıköy and the other in Fatih. These two examples represent both the musical and social diversity within Syrian community in Turkey.

#### 4. TWO STAGES

##### **Arthere Istanbul (Kadıköy): The performance of *Saba Barada***

The first example that I will present is the concert that took place on December 19, 2015 at Arthere, an artists' venue in Kadıköy<sup>17</sup>. The Syrian musical group called Saba Barada is described on Facebook as such:

*“Saba Barada was formed in 2014 by Syrian musicians who fled their country and took shelter in Turkey. Since then, they have performed in Istanbul, Gaziantep and Antakya. Band members Hareth Mheddi (Vocals and Oud), Wassim Mukdad (Oud) and Maher Kat (Percussions) play classical Arabic songs and music from their heritage since they come from various cultural backgrounds in Syria but they also play their own compositions. These songs talk of hope emerging from sorrow and of life trying to defeat death. Their music has a wide appeal regardless of the audience, whether Syrian, Turkish or international.”*<sup>18</sup>

The event began at 20:00 o'clock. Audience was of three categories; Syrians, Turks, and foreigners from other countries. The latter consisted of mostly young Erasmus students. the location was a café and as the number of chairs was very limited, most of the audience was standing. The atmosphere was very liberal and modern (what do you mean by that?). Four old aged European people were sitting in the back smiling to everyone entering the café.

Getting inspired by Christensen's article called “*Music and Migration: Kurds in Berlin*” (Christensen, 2010), I started observing people and trying to analyze the repertoire. The concert lasted about 70 minutes. They played 10 pieces: 8 new songs composed by Mheddi and Mukdad; one instrumental piece was composed by both of them consisting of Syrian Euphrates region melodies, and another one was a traditional Arabic instrumental piece.

<sup>16</sup> While revising this article on August 2016, I learned that these two musicians also had left Turkey for Europe.

<sup>17</sup> [www.athereistanbul.com](http://www.athereistanbul.com)

<sup>18</sup> It is the original quotation from their Facebook page.

The lyrics of new songs were mostly about the ongoing situation in Syria. I could see it apparently in two pieces, one of them titled as “either you are a terrorist, or an atheist, or an agent”; the other one “Oh citizen! How do you want to be killed?”. They show that there are more and newer factors for people to kill each other. It shows that the two camps, i.e. the insurgents and the regime that existed at the beginning have been multiplied as the war is dragging on. The proliferation of warring camps is also an indicator of the intervention of external actors.

Mheidi was playing a melody on his oud; Mukdad was playing bass tunes and harmony on the other oud; and Kat was playing percussion instruments such as tef, bendir and hand drum. Most of their own compositions were about the events of Syria; martyrs, terrorism, the way people die in Syria. Mukdad and Mheidi consider themselves as musicians of the revolution; they believe that what is nowadays going on in Syria is something different from what people protested in the beginning of the events five years ago. It means that they are against the Syrian regime, against Islamic organizations, against Western interference and even against the opposition constructed under the protection of Turkish government.

From this point of view, we can say that it is an opposite stream of Syrians who stay in Fatih; opposite of the conservative segment of the Syrian refugee community.

### **Pages Café (Fatih): The performance of a traditional ensemble**

On December 13<sup>th</sup>, 2015, *Hürriyet* newspaper published an article which is titled, “*Istanbul’da Kültürüyle, Sanatıyla ve Restoranıyla Suriye Mahallesi*” which means, *Syrian Quarter in Istanbul with its Culture, Art and Restaurants*.<sup>19</sup> The article talks about Fatih district in Istanbul, a place which is known with its large Syrian population, with their bookstores, restaurants, and even radio broadcastings and cultural activities.

After reading the article, I researched the musicians mentioned in the article, who are said to be performing in Pages Cafe in Fatih. I got introduced to Osama Badawe, an oud player who came to Istanbul three months before the interview. On 26th December, 2015 I attended their musical evening.

Using again Christensen’s method of observation, I first took notes on the venue. The café is located in a three-story old wooden building. Unlike its

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<sup>19</sup> Written by Zeynep Bilgehan and İpek Yezdani.

traditional Ottoman house façade, its interior is decorated in a modern style: a western style café at the ground floor which serves *espresso* instead of Turkish coffee; bookshelves on the basement and upper floor. The bookstore is actually located in a conservative neighborhood; however, Kariye museum and the souvenirs shops around transform the vicinity into a more international space.

During the performance, most of the audience were Syrians, with some women wearing hijab and some men wearing formal suits. At 17:03 o'clock the ensemble began the performance. Osama played oud, Hazem played qanoon, Mohammad played ney and Nashar, the vocalist, played percussion. All of them were from Aleppo city in Syria. Based on their accent, I could notice that most of the audience were also from Aleppo.

The concert ended at 20:12 o'clock. There was neither new songs nor their own compositions. Most of the repertoire was comprised of Aleppo traditional music. Even though the musical evening was repeated every Saturday, the number of audience was greater than the ones in Kadıköy.

After the concert, I talked with Osama. He mentioned his intention to stay in Istanbul and his will to study music. He expressed me that every week they had the same big number of attendants. Another thing that attracted my attention was his words: He said that he didnt want to play classical Arabic songs but he wants to play Turkish technique and style of oud (didn't get this part, he wants to play the Arabic songs with Turkish technique or just Turkish songs?).

## 5. COMPARATIVE CONCLUSIONS

Certainly Fatih and Kadıköy present two different stages with different cultures. Fatih is known in Istanbul as a place for conservative people; same as people of Aleppo who are known as a conservative community among Syrians. The concentration of Syrians in Fatih especially from Aleppo city creates a kind of cultural enclave in this district. In that sense, Fatih seems to be the district which shows the possibility of permanent settlement of Syrian population in Istanbul. The performance at Pages Café exhibits the Syrian audience's and musicians' desire to preserve the essence of their culture as an indicator of their permanent settlement in Turkey.

However, Kadıköy, in particular Arthere is a much more liberal and cosmopolitan stage. The musicians in Kadıköy did not play classical Arabic songs

but new compositions. Besides the audience was much more heterogeneous with the presence of foreigners/westerners and Turkish citizens.

Exactly like the evolution of the war in Syria, it is very difficult to predict what the situation of Syrian musicians in Turkey will be. Yet, what is clear at the moment is that most of them, if not all, want to leave. Even some of them who said during the interviews that they wanted to stay are currently in Europe. Paradoxically, a few of them who were willing to leave are still here. Syrian musicians like the Syrians in general live in a stage of instability and incertitude. This in itself can be considered as a temporary conclusion for an exile which seems to be long-lasting.

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