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From silence into song: Affective horizons and nostalgic dwelling among Syrian musicians in Istanbul.

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Abstract

What roles might music play in how Syrian migrants in Turkey navigate new socio-economic, political, moral and affective terrains? How might music serve as a source of comfort and nostalgic remembrance in conditions of displacement, or even as a touchstone for contestation over collective memory and the meanings of belonging? This article explores the contradictions of lived experience among Syrian migrant musicians in Istanbul. Based on ethnographic research Istanbul since 2015, this article analyzes the growing Syrian musical culture in Istanbul, focusing on shifts in the relationship of Syrians to their urban environment, changes in their understanding of future horizons (afaq), and how this produces new forms of affective engagement both with their homeland and with their new home. Focus on a single artist reveals the contours of more significant shifts occurring among Syrians in Turkey more generally.

Keywords

Syria, Migration, Music, Affect, Nostalgia

Introduction: From Silence to Song

In 2015 I caught up with my friend Abu Karim, whom I had known from my earlier field research in Syria in the 1990s. Abu Karim had once managed and performed in a well-known ensemble in Aleppo that had toured globally, but with the onset of the Syrian revolution in 2011, and the blockade and bombing of Aleppo in 2012, the situation in the city deteriorated significantly and I lost contact with him. I feared the worst.

To my delight in late 2014 I received a friend request from him on Facebook from his new home in Istanbul. The

following summer I traveled to visit him. We met near the Eminönü harbor near the Golden Horn and walked around the old market area. He recounted his migration story as we strolled. His house in Aleppo, located near the radio station and perched strategically on a promontory overlooking the Old City, was severely damaged from attacks by both rebel and government forces in 2013. After fleeing his home and living for a few months with relatives elsewhere in the city, he decided to migrate with his family to Istanbul. The route was arduous and required that they pass numerous checkpoints, then traverse rugged terrain on foot to the Turkish

border. “What normally would take us an hour or maybe an hour and a half took us over 13!” he told me. “It was one of the most difficult times of my life. You cannot imagine (matatsawwar!)” [Indeed I could not.] From the border they took a series of taxi and bus rides to Gaziantep, thence to Istanbul, where they joined relatives who’d made the journey previously.

Later we went to his home in the Sultangazi neighborhood about an hour and a half from Eminönü. We settled on his sofa, and once the obligatory coffee was served, he sang a few songs. He first warmed up with a *layali* (improvising a melody to the words *yalayl, ya ‘ayn/ Oh night, O eye*) before launching into a *mawwal* (a colloquial poem set to an improvised melody) about someone who had come home after a long absence. When he finished he wept a little. His youngest son, who had been standing in the doorway to the room, reacted with surprise. “This is the first time Baba has sung in our home!” he said. I was surprised. By that time they had been in Istanbul for over a year, were a family with many vocalists and musicians among them, and he yet had not sung once in that time. “Laysh? Why?” I asked. Abu Karim shrugged his shoulders, looked down at his hands in his lap, and exhaled. “Ya Abu Nadim,” he said to me, using my Arabic honorific. “It’s too painful for us. I haven’t felt moved to sing since leaving Aleppo.” He admitted to occasionally listening occasionally to the Egyptian diva Umm Kulthum on YouTube when the mood struck, but that was about it. The son joined in to say, “We feel sadness (*huzn*) when we hear the music on the TV or Internet, so we turn it off. It’s too painful (*fi ‘alam*) to listen.” This sentiment was echoed by his other children and by others who came by later that evening. Many worked long hours to survive and claimed not to have the time or the emotional energy to listen to Arab music after a long day. They were too absorbed with the news or with maintaining contact

with family and friends in Syria via social media. Pain (*‘alam*) and sadness (*huzn*) were not only important markers of their affective condition in Istanbul in those early months, but also affective states that stymied or indeed silenced their musicality.

However, by 2016 things had begun to shift for Abu Karim. One evening I was sitting at home in New York when I received a message from him. It was a video from an Arabic-language television show in Turkey that featured an interview with him about Arab music. Later that year he was interviewed again on the same show and was asked to sing, and he obliged with a *layali* and *qaşida* (a classical ode set to music). In the coming months, we would share YouTube videos of well-known and lesser-known artists from Syria and Egypt commenting on the music and vocal styles using the familiar responses of the Arab *tarab* culture: *Ya Salam!Allah!Ya ‘Ayni!* and so on. It seemed as if Abu Karim was getting his musical ears back. When I visited the following summer (2017), he had begun to prepare Ramadan events of Islamic song (*inshaddini*) with a Turkish counterpart. We went to the Turkish artist’s studio in Üsküdar, and when the man performed a moving improvisation on the *ney*, Abu Karim gave me knowing looks, then when it was done told him in broken Turkish that it made him feel *hüzün* - using that multivalent Turkish affective term for melancholia and nostalgic engagement (linked to the Arabic *huzn* but, as we will explore below, with very different connotations).

Thus, over the course of a year and a half, Abu Karim went from a (mainly self-imposed) silence to singing, not only at home but on television and soon in public. His evident newly-rediscovered pleasure in singing marked a turn away from silence - and silencing - to the joyful and yet melancholic sounds of song. It also marked a move from an absence of affective engagement with Istanbul, expressed as

a condition of pain and sadness (*huzn*), to a more nostalgic attachment to place, expressed via the Turkish word *hüzün*. His movement from silence to song, from *huzn* to *hüzün*, can be understood, I argue, as a recontextualization of the affective discourses of Aleppo in Istanbul that corresponds with a transformation in the relationship of Syrian migrants to the city. The turn from *huzn* to *hüzün* marks not only an affective and linguistic shift but an ontological shift in the relationship of Syrians like Abu Karim to their new environments.

In this essay I analyze Abu Karim's movement back to song as a vehicle for understanding broader transformations in the lifeways of Syrian migrant musicians in Istanbul. I ask: What roles might music play in how Syrians like Abu Karim navigate new socio-economic, political, moral and affective terrains in Istanbul? How might music serve as a source of comfort and nostalgic remembrance in conditions of displacement, or even as a touchstone for contestation over collective memory and the meanings of belonging? In attempting to answer these and related questions, I begin by outlining the conflict that generated so many millions of forced migrants from Syria, then review the musical culture of Aleppo and its reinterpretation in Istanbul. Based on a close reading of Abu Karim's experiences and those around him, I turn to an analysis of the growing Syrian musical culture in Istanbul, paying special attention to shifts in their relationships to the urban environment, changes in their understanding of future horizons (*afaq*), and how this produces new forms of affective engagement both with their homeland and with their new home. Focus on a single artist reveals the contours of more significant shifts occurring among Syrians in Turkey more generally.

Background: Homeland Insecurity

In March 2011, following the Arab Spring

uprisings in Tunisia, Egypt, Yemen, and Libya, the Syrian people began their own revolution against a longstanding authoritarian regime. Although the uprisings began as peaceful demonstrations, they were met by the heavy-handed and even barbaric responses of the Syrian regime. Faced with increasingly violent repression of dissent the protests became increasingly violent themselves, with armed militias forming and eventually coalescing into the various opposition groups. The consequences of these developments for the social life and physical infrastructure of the nation have been catastrophic, with over 500,000 Syrians killed, and over 11 million displaced internally and into camps and cities in neighboring countries - some 50% of the pre-war population of 23 million. Nearly 4 million now reside in Turkey, which has been a primary staging ground for massive migration to Europe. In addition to the conflict's enormous human toll, many urban areas in Syria have suffered from severe damage, including large swaths of the historic city of Aleppo as a result of intensive bombing raids by Syrian and Russian forces; the remnants of its once proud population were left with little access to running water, food, and electricity.

Prior to the war, musical performance was a powerful medium in Syria for the expression of deeply felt sentiments about home and served as an important context for the creation and experience of forms of cultural intimacy. Though closely tied to the broader Ottoman-Arab musical system, music in Syria accentuated such concepts as *tarab* (a heightened sense of emotion often translated as "musical rapture") and *hanin* (a form of deep longing akin to nostalgia) were central to the experience of music in Syria; together they promoted a "tarab culture" (Racy 2004) in which musicians and skilled audiences would negotiate what it could mean to be a modern Syrian in times of rapid socio-cultural and political-

economic transformations (Shannon 2006).

As a result of the revolution and its ongoing aftermath, the core of Syrian musical and social life has shifted both within Syria, from rebel-controlled areas to regime-controlled sectors (mainly to the capital, Damascus, and Latakia, on the Mediterranean coast), and from Syria to other countries, including Lebanon, Jordan, Egypt, Tunisia, and Turkey, but also France, Germany, the UK, Holland, Sweden, and even across the Americas. These movements raise numerous questions: As the musicians shift terrain, how do the core elements of their musical culture transform? Because tarab and other affective terms in the urban musical lexicon of Syria can be understood as vehicles for the reproduction of social relationships of intimacy (Shannon 2006), what happens when these social relations are rent, and the music reverberates in new settings? Can there be homes for tarab and new Syrian tarab cultures outside of Syria?

Music Cultures in Exile

In what follows I explore how the affective lexicon of Syrian music assumes new valences in Istanbul, allowing Syrians there to engage in a nostalgic remembrance of a lost and even at times imagined homeland, as well as to come to terms with life in a new one. The interrelationships among music, affect, and nostalgia have long been staples of ethnomusicological and anthropological scholarship. Numerous scholars have demonstrated the important role of music in negotiating transnational identities in conditions of displacement and forced migration (Aksoy 2014, Baily 1999, Reyes 1999). Migrants not only adapt to new situations but recreate and transform the contexts into which they are inserted by larger structural forces (Malkki 1995, Peteet 2005, Sanford 2006). In such situations, communities employ various strategies for cultural survival and revival (Impey 2006, Pettan and Titon 2019).

Given its powerful links to communal memory formation (Bithell 2006, 2015, Shelemay 2006, 2011), “musicking” (Small 1998) serves as an important locus for understanding how communities adapt to new circumstances, develop new understandings of history, revive older traditions, and reimagine themselves. In the face of dislocation, artists and others may cultivate their musical repertoires as means of securing a connection to home, and as a result effect the preservation and or revival of the music (Hill & Bithell 2014).

In doing so, these artists call attention to how their musical practices assist in their home-making and place-making moves, ones that are deeply embedded in affective discourses concerning home. Recent work on music and affect offers important insights into how musical cultures encode and construct forms of belonging that sometimes reaffirm but more often than not often challenge nationalist ideologies (Gill 2017, Gray 2013, Kapchan 2008, Stokes 2010). Acts of musical performance become conduits for channeling and challenging ideologies and practices of place-making, memorialization, nostalgia, and forms of subjectivity. Moreover, they also engage with forms and practices of nostalgia (Boym 2001, 2007) that are themselves embedded in specific understandings of temporality and historical awareness.

Of course, Syrian musicians in Istanbul understand “home” in a variety of ways, some contradictory and often dependent on age, musical background, and individual personality. In what follows I explore their musical forms of home and place-making through a focus on a particular artist from Aleppo. His conceptualization of home in Istanbul, and how he began to perform this musically, can, I suggest, be made more legible through attention to changing understandings of future horizons (afaq).

The Musicians

With the increase in Syrian migration to Turkey has come a concomitant rise in the number of Syrian musicians in the major cities. Istanbul has a large and vibrant Syrian musical scene with several ensembles performing both on the street and in a variety of commercial contexts. They range in age from about 20 to 65 years of age, with most being in their mid to late 20s. Abu Karim is in his early 60s and hails from a mercantile family in Aleppo with modest roots. All of the street performers are men, reinstating in Istanbul a gendered division of labor found in the homeland. The few Syrian women vocalists I met in Istanbul who were trained in traditional music were unwilling to perform either on the street or in most public venues because of cultural values that would make such performance unacceptable for them; some did participate in all female choirs or in recording projects. Most Syrians live far from the city center in working-class neighborhoods such as Sultangazi (where Abu Karim lives), often in apartments with extended families of over a dozen individuals. A handful live closer to the city center or in middle-class neighborhoods on the European side of the city such as Aksaray, Fındıkzade, Fatih. They often share apartments with other young men, reside with their families, or, less frequently, live alone.

Like Abu Karim, the majority of Syrian musicians arrived in Istanbul from Aleppo beginning in the summer of 2014, when the Syrian regime began a long blockade of Aleppo and over a period of many months dropped barrel bombs indiscriminately on their city. Others arrived since 2016 from Damascus (often via Beirut), Homs, Idlib, and elsewhere in Syria, when conditions were such that they felt they could find better opportunities or what several described as more open horizons (afaq) than in their homeland - especially economic horizons. For Istanbul is a city of

work for a population that describes itself as “shaghil”- working. Many Syrians find employment in the numerous textile and shoe factories that have sprouted in the working-class neighborhoods of Istanbul. Of the nearly 4 million Syrians in Turkey, fewer than 4% reside in camps, and most of those in Istanbul are covered by the Turkish state’s Temporary Protection Regime, which grants Syrians identification cards (kimlik) and other documents that allow access to schools, employment, medical care, and other forms of assistance; over 50,000 have already been naturalized as Turkish citizens, with plans for up to 300,000 more (al-Jablawi 2018).

The typical street ensemble mirrors the traditional Arabian takht to include ‘ud, violin, percussion, vocals, often qanun and guitar. They typically perform on or near Istiklal Caddesi, the pedestrian road through downtown Beyoğlu on the European side of the city that is a major venue for street performers. They also sometimes perform in Taksim Square or beneath the Galata Tower toward the bottom end of Istiklal Caddesi. These same groups often find employment on Bosphorus boat cruises, especially during holidays, and at weddings. Others perform as soloists or in smaller ensembles in restaurants and cafes around the city. Several younger musicians have begun performing with Turkish artists but on the whole the Syrians remain among themselves, and even musicians from Aleppo will tend to perform only with other Aleppans, reinstating in Istanbul preferences (and biases) from the homeland.

Only a small number of the most experienced Syrian musicians perform on the street or in the other commercial outlets. Most Syrian street performers tend to be young (in their 20s or early 30s) and less experienced; many were not in fact musicians in Syria and had little if any formal training prior to their arrival in Istanbul and took up music

as a means to earn a living. Many older Syrian artists who do not perform on the streetclaim, like Abu Karim, not to have the emotional energy to perform, but also do not feel the direct financial incentive to do so, having arrived in Istanbul with savings and relying on family networks to ensure financial stability. Others echoed Abu Karim and claimed that to perform on the street would be akin to begging, and while he did not judge others for doing so, he preferred to stay at home rather than perform in environments that he felt would compromise his dignity; another older singer from Aleppo said he would never perform on the street, even if he needed the money. It was not dignified to do so. Interestingly, many of the younger street performers also expressed this sentiment and would not actively solicit funds from street audiences (though they were pleased to passively accept donations).

In addition, the silence of older artists in Istanbul was also a product of their virtual silencing, for in addition to the perceived moral opprobrium of street performance, they faced significant challenges in the new context of Istanbul. Whereas many younger Syrian musicians gained fluency in Turkish relatively quickly and have since found additional employment in agencies, hotels, and other establishments where their linguistic skills can be put to work, older Syrians face challenges in gaining fluency in the Turkish language. They also expressed to me a lack of social integration due to the broad dispersal of Syrians in a variety of Istanbul's neighborhood, discrimination by some Turks, distrust of other Syrians, and an overbearing sense of loss. These factors conspired to silence them in their new home. There were few opportunities for older Syrians to make use of their musical skills to earn a living or provide entertainment for their countrymen in the initial months following their arrival in Istanbul. However, by 2016 some had begun to offer private instruction at home

or in small schools or institutes that they founded to serve the growing needs of the Syrian community for musical education.

Belonging and Longing through Music

Many Syrians I interviewed, including some musicians, claimed that they did not often or even ever listen to music at home; this marked a change from Syria, where music could be heard around the day in most homes. I already mentioned Abu Karim's musical silence in 2015. His hesitation to listen to music was mainly affective - it was "too sad" for him to do so - rather than technological (like almost all the Syrians I met, he had a smartphone and a laptop with which he could listen to music). Many argued that they were too busy with work and then too exhausted upon returning home to actively listen to anything other than the news, or the occasional Umm Kulthum song. They sometimes tuned in on a day off, or when in a public setting like a café. The former Pages Bookstore Café, in the Edirnekapı neighborhood, was until its closure in 2017 a de facto cultural center for many Syrians, and both in the bookstore and its small garden Syrians would gather to listen to music, both recorded and, on many Saturday evenings, live.

During this period of relative silence or silencing, an important factor in how many Syrians I interviewed related sonically to their new homeland was how they understood their future and what they saw as their horizons (afaq). "Horizons" was a commonly heard word among Syrians discussing their lives in Istanbul and the possibility of seeking asylum in Europe or America; they felt as if their horizons in Syria were closed, those in Istanbul somewhat more open, but (despite lack of knowledge) that Europe or America would offer much wider horizons for opportunity. A young oud player suggested that he and his family would apply for asylum in Canada, because there they would have open horizons, compared to Turkey. Older

ones felt as if Europe also offered better horizons for their children. Many expressed to me the sentiment that their horizons in Turkey were limited (*mahduda*), closed (*mughliqa*), or narrow (*daiqa*).

The spatial-temporal dimension of their experiences – how they saw their past, present, and future horizons in Istanbul, Syria, or elsewhere— offers important insights into how they imagine and recreate home in conditions of displacement. Many Syrians, when asked, said they would return to their homes in Syria as soon as the conflict ended. However, their responses often changed in response to their understanding of their horizons. For example, in 2015, Abu Karim said he'd return "*bukra*" (tomorrow) if the conflict stopped. However, by 2017 (a few months after the Syrian regime had reestablished control over the city) I found that he had put his home in Aleppo up for sale; though damaged beyond repair, the property remained valuable, and he felt he could get a good price for it. "I thought you wanted return to Aleppo?" I asked. "Well, yes, we all would, but even though the war seems to have stopped, there will be revenge killings for years and there's no work. So we'll stay. Maybe someday my children will return." I later asked his young sons if they would go back, and both said it would be difficult: there are no jobs, the infrastructure was significantly destroyed, but at least in Istanbul they had regular if not well-paid employment. Not coincidentally, at this time Abu Karim began exploring collaborations with other Syrian (more precisely, Aleppan) and Turkish singers for concerts of religious song. This reflected not only his growing comfort in Istanbul (economic and cultural) but also his resignation to staying there for the long term because his home and world in Aleppo was lost. That resignation, however, was in part the impetus for him to resume a musical life in exile. It marked the beginning of his move from silence back to song.

For younger Syrian musicians, the prospects of a continued migration to Europe also dried up in 2016 with the EU-Turkey accord restricting immigration. However, I was curious to note a few cases of Syrian musician who had returned from Europe, after enduring often perilous journeys by boat and on foot, and where several had obtained coveted asylum status. When I asked Jaber, a guitar player who had returned after almost 2 years in Germany why he came back to Istanbul, he said (in English) it was because he felt "more free" in Istanbul. Why? According to him, the culture, food, architecture, and social relations in Istanbul were much more similar to what he'd known in Syria than what he encountered in Germany. A young oud player also returned from Germany, where he had been settled in a remote town and felt alienated from his homeland and from the host society with which he felt he had little in common. Like many Syrians who left Turkey, he felt *hanin* (longing) for Istanbul in ways that mirrored how they described Syria when I had first met them in Istanbul. Their short stay in Turkey initially was understood mainly in terms of narrower horizons: survival for a time, then a return home or escape to greener pastures in Europe. Today, over eight years into the conflict, these horizons have shifted. Turkey, despite its political vagaries, is now their home, and Europe remains an uncertain possibility, especially for older Syrians. As a result of these regional political-economic shifts, these Syrians reorient themselves to life in Turkey.

Over the course of my research, and as time has passed, I noticed how some families I visited at home listened more to Arab and especially Syrian music than before. This reflects, I believe, a shift toward acceptance of their displacement and a more operational use of music as an affective tool for momentary recreations

of a lost homeland. It could also reflect headline fatigue, as in the early months of their displacement much of their time was spent monitoring news feeds and maintaining contact with families via social media. At the same time, their lives in Turkey have become more stable, partly in response to Turkish government initiatives aimed at regularizing the situation of Syrians in Turkey, even including granting citizenship to some, and partly due to greater fluency in Turkish, and greater integration into the numerous Syrian communities the city. Even Abu Karim, once reticent to sing because it was too painful, had already sung on an Arabic-language news program in Istanbul and was gearing up to resume performing on a limited scale. It is also interesting that when I first met up with him in Istanbul in 2015, I invited him to visit the Galata Mevlevi Museum (Galata Mevlevihanesi) since he had taken me to “Sufi” inspired mosques in Aleppo 20 years earlier. He went along, but reluctantly for he claimed that Sufism was “bid’a” - an unauthorized innovation, and foreign to Islam. This was in line with more conservative views of Sufism circulating in Turkey and around the Arab world. However, by 2017 not only did I find him listening what might be called “Sufi music” at home but he was also preparing to collaborate on a concert of “Sufi” songs with Turkish and Arab-American artists, inspired by the mawlawiyya/mevlevi rite (mainly for tourist consumption, I should note). He even shared a video of himself singing a religious song (tawshih) accompanied by a percussionist.

He also began, like several older Syrians in Istanbul, to speak of tarab, that special emotional state of rapture and enchantment that is a key concept in the musical aesthetics of Syria but which had been missing in their early years in Istanbul. In our online exchange of video recordings of Arab music, and in our listening sessions together, Abu Karim

evinced a clear movement back to his former musical self, using the familiar lexicon of the Aleppantarabculture in his responses. While sad and remorseful about the ongoing violence in his homeland, and faced with the near certainty that he will never return home, Abu Karim nonetheless had transitioned away from silence. His move back to song and its broader affective range marked an important shift in his understanding of Istanbul as a new and possibly permanent home - a home for emotional, affective attachment, for the experience of tarab, indeed a second Halab (Aleppo). In this affective economy, the imperial center and the province switch roles, with a movement from Aleppo being a “little Istanbul” to Istanbul being a “little Aleppo” (and in the context of the emergence of multiple “Little Syria” neighborhoods in Istanbul, this is not far from reality). This switch is captured by a common proverb in Aleppo which has assumed greater importance in Istanbul: “If Istanbul were to be destroyed, Aleppo would rebuild it” (in hadamat Istanbul, halab rahta‘mirha). It speaks both to the “Halabo-centric” worldview of Istanbul’s Aleppan residents, but also to their new claims to Istanbul as a home, a new Aleppo, in a sense theirs.

Music, Historicity, and Nostalgic Dwelling in Little Aleppo

By reinvesting Istanbul with the affective registers of Aleppo, Syrians like Abu Karim are enacting what Amanda Lagerkvist (2013) calls “nostalgic dwelling.” Like Lagerkvist’s subjects, many Syrians look back longingly to their homeland, investing the past with the grandeur of a Golden Age often via reified representations of Syria as a land of tolerance, plenty, and harmony (kanithilweh, bas halarahitkullshi, “It was beautiful but now everything’s gone,” was a familiar turn of phrase). In her important writings on nostalgia in European contexts, Svetlana Boym (2001) refers to this desire to regain the past as “restorative

nostalgia.” This form of nostalgia is closely allied to nationalist projects and can be seen in moves to restore what was lost, for example in conflict, through acts of memorialization that aim to instantiate a future based on a selective reading of the past. She contrasts this with “reflective nostalgia,” a more meditative rumination on the passage of time rather than a quest to regain what was lost. “Restorative nostalgia,” she argues, “evokes national past and future; reflective nostalgia is more about individual and cultural memory” in the present (2001, 49). It does not, unlike restorative nostalgia, aim “to rebuild the mythical place called home” (2001, 50).

Over the course of the nearly three years during which time I conducted research with Syrians in Istanbul, I noticed a shift away from a more restorative nostalgic discourse - of a desire to return and rebuild homes and regain a “lost paradise” - to a more reflective, clear-eyed view of the limitations of their homeland, its internal contradictions, and the near impossibility of recovering remnants of that vision given the ongoing conflict. Not only Abu Karim but a broader swatch of Syrians (musician and others) relinquished the idea of - the hope for - a return home. At the same time, they made investments of time, money, and affective labor in making a home in, and of, Istanbul: learning Turkish, finding steady employment, starting families, earning university degrees, even gaining citizenship.

The move from restorative to reflective orientations toward home and loss was often articulated in terms of reorientations of their future horizons (*afaq*). With their turn from restorative to toward reflective nostalgia, and toward the type of meditative, mournful yet pragmatic “nostalgic dwelling” (Lagerkvist 2013) that it entails, Syrians like Abu Karim talked about future horizons that were less oriented to a glorious past, or even

to an equally utopian future, but toward uncertain yet realistic if more limited plans in Turkey. Their horizons were constricted by the realities of a reflective orientation to the past and future. While never ruling out entirely a return to Syria, they acknowledged the current impasse, the unlikelihood that older Syrians would have the resources to rebuild lives or that younger Syrians would willingly relinquish the relative freedoms they enjoy Turkey to commit to uncertain futures back “home.” In a way, their discourse of horizons mapped neatly onto what François Hartog (2015) calls a “presentist” understanding of history. That is, rather than being guided by utopian visions of the past and future (what Hartog calls classical and modern “regimes of historicity”), these Syrians understood their past as increasingly inaccessible, their future as no longer reassuring. In a global moment of accelerated cultural flows (and, one might add, increasing anxieties and despair), the present is experienced as simultaneously an emancipation from and a walling off, an enclosure, from the forces of history. In this presentist enclosure, the past can only be consumed as a unreturnable loss, and the future looms as dark, indeterminate. But just as Boym suggests that the move from restorative to reflective nostalgia is also the movement from mythology to narrative, from national stories to personal stories of past, present, and future (2001, 50), so this movement for Syrians like Abu Karim marked a transition from silence to song. The pain remains, but rather than silencing, it is a necessary condition for the return to song.

This resonates very nicely with the discourse of *hüzün* explored so eloquently by Orhan Pamuk (2005) in his memoir of a fading Ottoman Istanbul, and by Denise Gill in her work (2017) on the trope of melancholia and loss in Turkish classical music today. Derived from the Arabic *huzn* (sadness), *hüzün* encompasses a broader affective domain,

evoking sorrow, grief, and melancholy (Gill 2017, 13). For Pamuk, *hüzün* evokes a feeling of alienation from the past, but also ironically a sought-after and hopeful way of approaching life characteristic of urban (and urbane) Istanbulites. For Pamuk, *hüzün* constitutes “a state of mind that is ultimately as life-affirming as it is negating” so that “the failure to experience *hüzün* ... leads [one] to feel it” (2005, p. 82). For Gill’s musicians, inspired by Sufi ontologies, *hüzün* is a collective spiritual anguish, an alienation from the divine that promotes a shared mood of darkness among artists eager to maintain a to-them dying (even dead) tradition. But as with Pamuk, it is also a desired state. For this reason, a common greeting among these musicians is, *Allah derdini arttırsın* (“May god increase your pain”; Gill 2017, 1), suggesting that the pain of alienation (from God, from the past) is not merely another nostalgic discourse of modernity but rather a productive and necessary condition for the performance of Turkish classical music today. The notion that “all is finished” (*hepsi bitirdi*) inspires not a turn from practice, but rather a commitment to an affective community and musical tradition that they work hard to maintain. In other words, for these musicians *hüzün*, as an expression of reflective nostalgia, is a *sine qua non* for Sufi-inspired music-making and storytelling.

It was telling, then, that in that afternoon visit at the workshop in Üsküdar mentioned above, Abu Karim used the Turkish word *hüzün* to discuss his feelings after the ney improvisation by the Turkish artist (who is affiliated with the same larger universe of musicians analyzed by Gill). This moment marked a transition from the Arabic *huzn* toward the Turkish *hüzün*, from an affective impasse to an affective license to create, via a musical act that grounded both artist and the informal audience in a charged space of memory and belonging (a musical *atölye* in a conservative neighborhood). It

is these spaces and the everyday practices that inform and inhabit them, or to borrow the language of affect theory, circulate in them (Stewart 2007), that I explore in the larger project on which this work is based. For senses of home are created through small gestures, choice words, and (often) melancholic sounds.

On one hand, we might interpret Abu Karim’s use of “*hüzün*” as simply been his attempt to translate the Arabic *huzn* (sadness) in the context of a conversation with a Turkish interlocutor. On the other, I also think it captures the sense of loss and philosophical pain that Gill explored with Turkish classical musicians; it also resonates with the broader national register of sentiment explored by Stokes (2010) in the context of Turkish popular music since the 1950s. For Abu Karim and for many other older Aleppans, their city is irretrievably gone, their traditions dispersed. Like Gill’s musicians, these Syrians engage in a new affective discourse of longing and loss - of melancholia - that Arabic words such as *huzn*, *ghurba* (homesickness), and *hanin* (longing) attempt to capture, but which find greater resonance for them in the Turkish *hüzün*. Abu Karim’s turn to song marks a shift in his horizons and an acceptance they he will never going back, that Aleppo is “*rahit*” (gone, analogous to the Turkish *bitirdi*). His adoption of the Turkish word marked not only a greatly fluency in the language, but an accommodation to the city, a re-appropriation of the extensive connotations of an Arabic-derived term to express a new relationship of belonging. As with Gill’s musicians, it was Abu Karim’s experience of *hüzün* that enabled his return to song.

Conclusions: Sounding Home

In this essay I hope to have shed light on the exigencies of life in Istanbul for migrant Syrian musicians. Through analysis of how one Syrian musician in Istanbul transitioned from a state of silence into a regained

state of song, I argue that music-making in contexts of displacement needs to be understood in relationship to performers' and audiences' understandings of home, which is to say, their temporal-spatial orientations both to Syria and to Turkey. That Abu Karim was able to find his voice again is also, I suggest, a story of how many Syrian artists in Istanbul have come to invest the city with their own affective regimes, drawing on Arab terms such as tarab and haninbut moving toward an adoption of elements of the Turkish affective register, including the important term *hüzün*. The movement from *huznto hüzün*, from silence to song, reflects a broader transformation of Aleppan musicians' engagement with their past, their understandings of future horizons, and their concepts of home. As they move into a heavily overdetermined affective sphere explored on the local level by Gill (2017), and on the national level by Stokes (2010), they come to reinvest Istanbul with the affective language of Aleppo, finding tarab in conditions displacement. At the same time they also begin to reimagine their new home through the affective registers of Istanbul - sensing and creating as they do a new Aleppo, but with a melancholic twist. For the vast cosmopolitan megalopolis in this affective engagement becomes not only a stage for the performance of forms of nostalgia, but at the same time a new Aleppo. Attention to musical practices can help illuminate these transformations in worldview and, at the same time, the affinities of worldview and place can illuminate musical practices.

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