Apricots from Damascus

"Cities, like dreams, are made of desires and fears, even if the thread of their discourse is secret, their rules are absurd, their perspectives deceitful, and everything conceals something else."

Italo Calvino, Invisible Cities

The last movie of Kiarostami's "Koker Trilogy" Through the Olive Trees, produced in 1994, focuses on the impact of the 1990 Iran Earthquake on the daily lives of the affected villagers. The leading character of the movie Hüseyin, a construction worker, is in love with Tahire. His proposals are constantly turned down on the grounds that he is uneducated and does not own a house. On the night of an ordinary day in which his insistent proposals keep being turned down, an earthquake hits the village tumbling everything down. In the movie intertwining reality with fiction, Hüseyin and Tahire have to work on the same movie set (Kiarostami frequently works with unprofessional actors and actresses and writes his scripts after getting to know them). In the famous road sequence in which Hüseyin talks with the director, he says that his lack of a house was thrown into his face so many times that his very sadness might have led to the earthquake. After the earthquake Tahire does not have a house any more nor does the rest of the village. Now Hüseyin thinks that everybody is all equal.

When I went back one evening to Van, the city where I grew up, after the earthquake, all I did was to try to find my sister and her family. They had been living in a decently comfortable apartment downtown, but everything changed suddenly with the earthquake. Now they were living in a small and dim tent on the coast of Lake Van with tens of strangers. I cannot forget that night we spent in the tent under heavy rain. A month later, they took refuge in a container and spent the rest of the year here including the whole winter. They had to send away the children to İzmir to my mother's house because they could not endure the living conditions in the container. However, this did not really protect them from dealing with many physical and psychological problems for months. Disasters such as earthquakes and wars equate the lives of everyone in the negative sense. Having lost their house, their belongings, and the worst of all, their dreams about the future, millions of people share the same destiny. Syrians who had to leave their countries after the war are now dispersed over many countries.

In this essay, I will talk about a specific group among those immigrants whom we tend the code as Arabs or Syrians and reduce them to their desperate existence on the streets: Syrian artists.
Mohammad Zaza (Riyadh, 1987), of Kurdish origin, had grown up in Saudi Arabia and moved to Syria at the age of 18. Zaza came to İstanbul one and a half year ago and now lives in an apartment in Saraylevler. The day I went to his atelier was really cold, and his heating system was not working. Zaza had set up a stove in the middle of his atelier and piled a tack of firewood before the wall. When I asked about what changed the most in his paintings after moving to İstanbul, his response was “colors”. He told me that he was fascinated by the light coming through the clouds constantly moving in the sky and the subsequently changing colors, and that he found İstanbul quite inspiring. Nowadays Zaza is preparing for his upcoming solo exhibition in İstanbul.

Toufic: First of all, what this process motivated myself through art. I am feeling the way I am. I am at a level. This is what happens when I look back coming from there after I left there. "Can I present what I myself have?" An impression about everything we used both positive and negative consequences and the language problems are something of the day everything is up to the artist war made everything more transparent and my family because of the warfare.

Zaza: As I was working on a text, I got stuck with the Arabic word “hawa” which means “razed to the ground”, and it provoked and inspired me. Later I kept going on with my work, but my mind kept revolving around this word. As I turned back to my text, I was hearing the “music” of this word that goes beyond its literal meaning. This made me rethink the notion of poetry, identity and names. Then over time I have come to believe more strongly that this word was inert and that it was opposed to the idea of change altogether. And now... I am painting. “Love is still growing, but the humanity could not yet see it.”
Toufic Hamidi (Aleppo, 1988) came to Istanbul in March, 2014. His family still lives in Aleppo, but Toufic found a flat for himself in Aynaliçeşme. Toufic had been studying lithography and was still a student when the war broke out. He came to Istanbul immediately after graduating and still lives here.

"Selam" | Syrian artist Mohammad Zaza (documentary EN:subtitles / belgesel TR:altıazlı)

means to me is my constant discovery of my country and the images time and its aftermath on a personal look back at my country and the images. At the same time, when I see what the spirit of the city one moves to examples I can mention. But at the end and his or her personal effort. After all, it and real. I know more about myself and its daily details.
Maher Abdo (Idlib, 1984) first studied sculpture and then drama. He worked as an artist to painting and sculpture. He had stayed in Egypt for a while after the war broke out and his family migrated to Hatay. I visited him at his atelier on the basement floor of a building. In our conversation he underlined the significance of “place” and pointed out that it formed an atelier. In our conversation he underlined the significance of “place” and pointed out that these faces of deprivation increasingly resemble each other, leaving. His eyes were full of life and he was hopeful about Istanbul. Maher no longer planned to move to Munich after getting his residence permit and is nowaday...
I worked as a set and stage designer for movies and TV for some time but later turned back to teaching and worked for a movie project there before coming to Istanbul. Maher’s at a well-preserved building in Kurtuluş. He was so happy that he eventually had pointed that those who were displaced gets deprived of an important part of their lives over time. He thrust into my hands a jar of honey with ginger as I was looking for the best place to live. He lives in a small town called Sulzbach-Rosenberg in southern Germany. He is working on his German.

Maher: I moved to Egypt after leaving Syria but I did not stay there for long. This is because I could not get a hold of other Syrian artists living around the Egypt border. I could not get their support. Then I came here and as a matter of fact, the conditions here has been much better both in terms of human relations and the atmosphere in the streets. From my perspective the problem is that the war in Syria is not yet over. There is a great ambiguity and mystery about what the future is going to be like.
I first met with Arabic culture when I was learning Turkish for the first time. I was learning to read and write in the same time. All I was learning was merely by rote, according to the established rules for artists. But it wasn't until I was raising and lowering my voice and emphasizing certain parts of my speech that I realized. My closest family friend was an Arabic family from Van. They could speak Turkish very well and we enjoyed conversations. My mother brought to our kids the Arabic dishes she had learned from our Arabic friends and we used to know a lot of Arabic phrases. Now I understand that travelling with my father a certain merchant ethics. He used to take care of the Mevlid I cannot forget. My father would take customers for dinner and ask my mother to cook. Sometimes we would sometimes get upset with these sudden guest. People at the dinner table would share language. Now I understand that there was a certain merchant ethics. He used to take care of their religion and ethnicity.

When I set to prepare an issue focusing on the Arabic, I decided how and where we would get together. Without a second thought was to meet around the dinner table. Gathering people around the same dinner table was an idea I suppose everybody enjoyed it. Thinking about dining together with these five artists who lived with the risk of finding themselves in Istanbul. The musical tone of Arabic was breaking our conversation into pieces.
Learning to read Quran during my primary school years and to read Quran in Arabic at the same time. I had to read it with emotion, that is, to read with emotion by exaggerating certain sounds when needed. Incidentally, my father, who was selling fabrics for a living, who had moved to Istanbul well, but they would prefer Arabic for daily kitchen different spices and many traditional meals. My father had a lot of merchant neighborhood. He sometimes invite his Iranian, Arabic, Israeli neighbors to our house and cook something special for them. My mother always prepared a special meal for them. She also loved meeting new people and how to communicate despite the lack of a common language all round Anatolia as a merchant earned a lot of money. New people regardless of ethnicity, we had to eat with the participants. My immediate solution was to eat at the atelier in Osmanbey. It was a reflex that I inherited from my father, and he more about it later I felt even more justified. We were dispersed all over Istanbul and totally new conditions overnight, because it was not possible to get involved with the artist circles in order to make the ice between us. We were trying not to talk about the war, with its grave reality, was ripping apart our life.
Naser Nassan Agha (Idlib, 1961) lives in Beirut and has two children. He represents a different group of artists, all of whom belong to the 80's. In contrast to the older generation, his works tend to focus on the recent past. Naser employs his own approach in his works. He finds the urban tissue of Beirut exciting and he has been avoiding historical references in his work, a while ago, and he is planning to do so in the future.

Naser: "For how long are you going to commit to this art form?"

Naser: What needs to be done now is to prioritize the establishment of communication before politics and to emphasize on the need for a free press. The war and its social consequences predate the war and its social consequences predate the war. It is through art that we can bring people together. As a small group of friends, we are trying to come together and have an exhibition showcasing the beauties of Beirut. The majority of these people are no longer friends. Our dream is still living on the street. What I want was a little bit of warmth.
My dear friend Pinar

Im in Germany now

You are in the heart

to put up with us, the Syrians?”

art as an honest and honorable way of it as a means of bringing people together. nt people from leading a decent life. The es event the most basic human rights. We, inue art despite all the difficulties. We even f the Syrian culture and history. However, ing and we are waiting here as a couple of red sidewalks of cold cities. In fact, all we
For all the artists, Istanbul, Damascus, and Aleppo all resemble one another
that they are not unfamiliar with the architectural elements and the urban
Istanbul. The oriental, unplanned development under the influence of commun
and the process of modernization in the 20th century are common charac
oriental centers of culture and commerce such as Istanbul, Baghdad, Dam
Cairo. Residential areas organized around mosques and public areas such
bazaar, bedesten, and hammam are only some of the common historical
between them. The artists indicated that the social life in Istanbul resembled
in Syria very much and that they felt home when shopping, ordering food, or wa
streets although they could not speak Turkish.

Bilal Aliriza, who shot a documentary
similarity between the cities made it
difficulty integrating themselves into
communicate only with one another.

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It is clear that the Syrian artists, remarked that this is easier for the artists but they have
the Istanbul art community when they

getting more diverse demographically as it gets closer to the sky and turns into
cement. Syrians in Istanbul are scattered around various neighborhoods. Liriza noted, the artists are employing a similar kind of center-periphery pattern to that in Syria. Those living in the periphery prefer uptown neighborhoods like Nisantasi; the rich prefer Nisantasi; the lower-middle class prefers Aksaray, Yusufpasa, Ulk, and Vefa; and the lowest class prefers neighborhoods like Ikitelli. The same pattern also holds for artists. For instance, Mohammad Zaza lives in Taksim, while san Agha lives in Beylikdüzü. What happens in the Anatolian cities is quite
different, in the absence of a class based distinction, Syrians living in concentrate around certain neighborhoods. In these cities the refugees face
eater resistance compared to Istanbul, and this social pressure forces them to
to one another.
Like Za'at said, despite the houses tumbling down on us, love is still growing. Translated by: Douna Sheet.

demonstrations and realize its true essence? have been increasingly approaching only from the perspective of the cultural diversity it is used to have. Given that the region is at a crucial juncture, Istanbul, which is still a safe center, is bound to host all the refugees and help them reconstruct their lives. After the war, this is almost impossible for anyone, even those who have lost everything. However, in the shadow of despair, Gaza was destroyed, and Damascus is almost destroyed, and Aleppo has not yet fully recovered. Aleppo was rebuilt after a Saudi Arabadan Egyptian to Lebanon to Syria to Jordan to go and live in Jerusalem. It is almost impossible for anyone to travel. It is almost impossible for anyone to travel. The cause and outcome of the Arab Israeli conflict. People's freedom of movement and the Middle East relations among the Middle Eastern countries. Istanbul has become almost the cultural centers of the East, Istanbul has become almost the cultural centers of the world.