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# Precarity of refugees: the case of Basmane-İzmir, Turkey

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**ABSTRACT**

Over the last decade, the precarity of refugees and temporary migrants and its associated ambiguities is an increasing focus of scholarly inquiry and policy debate. In particular, the Syrian conflict since 2011 has led to dramatic refugee crises especially in terms of the number of people displaced into neighbouring countries, including Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan and Iraq, with Turkey hosting the largest refugee population in the world.

Within Turkey, Syrian refugees are concentrated in camps, border towns, major cities and particular urban neighbourhoods. The Basmane neighbourhood, an old inner city quarter of İzmir, Turkey, is a special case, and we directly observe and detail various dimensions of the precarity of Syrian immigrants there at the apex of the refugee flow, and assess how temporary migration affected İzmir's permanent residents. Focusing on physical and social transformations in Basmane, we concentrate on the intra-relationships among place, refugees, and locals and seek to contribute to the debate of how (un)settled situations of refugees produce differential pathways for adaptation and experiences of precarity. The research indicates that socio-spatial dynamics in Basmane contributes to the adaptation of refugees and affects their precarity as the hub for temporary immigrants in İzmir.

**KEYWORDS**

Syrian refugees; precarity; tactics of belonging; adaptation; Basmane

## Introduction

The Syrian civil war that commenced in 2011 spiralled into a massive humanitarian crisis and resulted in the largest refugee exodus of this century. As of September 2019, approximately 5.6 million Syrian refugees were registered in Egypt, Lebanon, Iraq, Jordan and Turkey (UNHCR 2019a). United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR 2019b) reports that a further 6.2 million people are displaced in Syria, the largest number of internally displaced in any country of the world. From the onset, Turkey established an 'open-door policy', welcoming Syrian refugees under the assumption that they would return after the war. By 2015, Turkey had risen to the second largest contributor to humanitarian relief in the world (Global Humanitarian Assistance Report 2016). However, in October 2015, the Turkish government decided to close its border with

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Syria, except for seriously injured Syrian asylum seekers, and subsequently (January 2016) introduced visa requirements for Syrians arriving from third countries. Turkey now shelters the largest number of Syrian refugees of any country in the world (UNHCR 2019a), an (un)settled population of over 3.6 million people. Among this population, 98 per cent is dispersed in high concentrations in border cities of the south and southeast provinces of Turkey as well as in major metropolitan areas (e.g. Istanbul shelters 550,000 refugees, while İzmir gives refuge to 147,000 Syrians (UNCHR 2019c)). In late 2019, approximately 2% remain in refugee camps. (Multeciler 2019).

Given that many Syrians in Turkey qualify as 'protracted refugees' (according to Crisp's [2003] definition as refugees who have lived in exile for more than 5 years), society in general has to now grapple with the transition from needs-based (charity) to rights-based service provision; encompassing more demanding challenges of welfare and inclusion within a host community (Mackreath and Sagnic 2017). In Turkey, several cities and towns, especially on the west coast, shelter those who hitherto intended to cross the border predominantly into the European Union (EU), via proximate Greek islands. These coastal places became especially important as transient sites. One of these major cities, İzmir and its coastal hinterland (including Çeşme, Foça, Karaburun, Ayvalık, Kuşadası, Bodrum), has received much media attention (e.g. Hubbard 2015) as a hub for refugees in transit, but the conditions of those who remained are understudied.

Shedding light on the physical and social adaptation of refugees, we uncover diverse and disparate human pathways. Combined, the presence of refugees has been a catalyst for neighbourhood change, co-producing an ethnic enclave of sorts. Basmane, an old inner-city quarter of İzmir, may be an extreme example of an area's transformation, involving co-existence of diverse trajectories, enmeshing subjects and objects and peoples encounter with one another. Ilcan, Rygiel, and Baban (2018) suggest three forms of precarity in terms of refugees: precarity of status, precarity of space and precarity of movement. In terms of the refugees in Basmane, there is a precarity of status due to withholding of formal protection embodied in citizenship rights, so refugees become precarious sojourners forced to rely on an unclear and ambivalent regime of human rights, generally in the form of international conventions, highly abstract from their everyday realities. Precarity also encompasses socio-spatial dimensions in Basmane in the sense that the spaces of refugees are given meaning through the precarious experience of everyday living. There is also a precarity of movement whereby refugees respond to their predicament through both organising with NGOs and/or self-organising to campaign for their rights while others yearn for a physical move to the EU in the hope of better protections but after the 2016 agreement between the EU and Turkey, have to contend with their stay in Turkey.

Our research approach follows in the tradition of Mazurana, Jacobsen, and Gale (2013) with an assessment of refugees in urban places in post-conflict situations from below as opposed to most of the literature (Banki 2013; Basok et al. 2015; Castillo 2016) that focuses either on the national/international policy management arena and/or on camps and border zones (Baban, Ilcan, and Rygiel 2017). Focusing on the neighbourhood scale, we unearth new networks among marginalised spaces and note a precarious social reordering (Chacko and Price 2020). We use participant observation, extensive site reconnaissance of the urban built environment and repeat site visits, and draw on the grey literature, brochures and websites of various civil society organisations to

document the evolving dimensions of precarity especially after the EU-Turkey agreement on March 2016.

Our paper proceeds in five sections. Following the introduction, we situate the refugee influx into the city in terms of precarity (Waite 2009; Manjikian 2010; Banki 2014) and combine this with theoretical insights from Michael De Certeau (1984) on everyday tactics as practices of the subordinate population, which enable them to have a sense of belonging, juxtaposed against the strategies of the powerful (Lobo, 201X). Our third section sketches the national context of evolution of Turkey's emergency response to Syrian refugees; the fourth section presents a finer grained neighbourhood case study of Basmane, İzmir. In the case study, we focus on the physical and social transformation of Basmane, a historic inner-city, low-income migrant area of İzmir that gained worldwide notoriety (Hubbard 2015) during the peak of humanitarian crisis when refugees desired to cross the Aegean Sea to reach the EU borders. We examine everyday practices and tactics of belonging with illustrations from the cultural realm of inclusion mediated in cooperation with civic organisations and Turkish citizens. In conclusion, we discuss the findings from the case study within the conceptual framework of precarity in terms of the socio-spatial context of Basmane.

## Precarity and tactics of belonging of refugees

Scholars (e.g. Purcell 2002; Bauder 2016) have raised ethical questions about the urban habitation of refugees, which includes (among other rights) a right to access and use of physical and social space in the city. Such a lens throws light on how refugees contribute to the production of the space of daily life and how the temporariness of their political condition is reflected against the permanence of the built urban environment and its citizenry (Chacko and Price 2020). To survive in this state of uncertainty, refugees appropriate various spaces such as parks, meeting places, streets and neighbourhoods (Melara et al. 2013). They self-organise to adapt to their new environments, and engage with/in tactics to gain a sense of belonging. For example, geographic clustering enables a sense of familiarity in an unfamiliar environment (Thompson 2016). These result in a moment and a site that engenders both connectedness and social inclusion as well as various resistances (Manjikian 2010; Banki 2014; Thompson and Grant 2015). (Un) settled moments can also alternate between tactics of concentrating and/or dispersing in different times and in particular places (Grant and Thompson 2015; Levine-Rasky 2016). We explain the tactics of Syrians in Izmir to create a sense of belonging and their efforts at making a living to exemplify various realms of precarity from a socio-spatial perspective. We are especially interested in the notion of precarity in terms of migration/movement and urban space.

The contemporary roots of the term precarity date back to the 1960s, and the term was employed to understand conditions of labourers, related to insecurity and uncertainty related to the rise of post-fordism (Kasmir 2018; Waite 2009). First coined in France by Bourdieu (1963), precarity distinguished casual workers (*the precarite*) from permanent workers. The term has been extensively employed and debated in Europe and entered the English academic domain at the turn of the twenty-first century when insecurity (as opposed to employment) became the defining feature of many societies. Waite (2009, 426) defines '*precarity' as referring to life worlds characterised by uncertainty and insecurity*

*that are either thought to originate from a generalised societal malaise, or as a result of particular experiences derived from neo-liberal labour markets*. Waite (2009) emphasises that precarity refers to a condition of life and/or mobilisation among based on precarious experiences. The term is associated with the absence of comfort, predictability, material or psychological welfare and is related to temporality, uncertainty, ambiguity, insecurity, risk, and vulnerability (Ilcan, Rygiel, and Baban 2018; Waite 2009). People who experience those situations could be labourers, students, migrants, or refugees. Standing (2011) posits that the *precariat* constitute a new form of social class.

Different forms and degrees of precarity exist and the situational context can vary internationally in time and space. An emerging scholarship on Syrian refugees in Turkey (Senses 2016; Baban, Ilcan, and Rygiel 2017; Ilcan, Rygiel, and Baban 2018) applies the term to explain several dimensions of precarity. We build on this literature and contribute to the spatial and scalar dimensions of precarity of Syrian refugees in Basmane, and introduce an urban perspective to the conditions and processes of mobilisation and habitation of refugees.

Research on migrants and precarity also emphasises the dynamic unforeseen, uncertain and insecure contexts (Waite 2009; Hodge 2015; Baban, Ilcan, and Rygiel 2017; Gavanas and Calzada 2017; Ilcan, Rygiel, and Baban 2018). Refugees have to navigate their place in the city, their social rights, and access to humanitarian assistance and protection and urban services. Leaving home for unfamiliar locations in search for a better security also entails different uncertainty, risk and new ambiguities, often inserting refugees into an in-between situation, between home and new home-making. This context portends a backdrop of precarity and the structural inequities that the 'wounded' find themselves located within and the proactive ways in which they negotiate and engage in home-making. As Ilcan, Rygiel, and Baban (2018) claim, the condition of precarity is not stable and is subject to constant changes due to the policies, practices and actors that produce and govern precarity.

As noted earlier, the precarity of Syrian refugees in Turkey defines their partial but contested residency rights, their rights to work, but also frequent engagement with informal economies, their heavy dependence on state and civic organisations for assistance (Baban, Ilcan, and Rygiel, 2017), language barriers, and their haphazard involvement in place-making in neglected spaces like downgraded historic neighbourhoods (Melara et al. 2013). This in-betweenness is deeply connected to social and spatial contexts (Manjikian 2010; Thompson 2016), is negotiated in particular places and is heavily contingent on unofficial arrangements (Banki 2013). Participation and engagement within specific social networks can minimise some of the effects of precarity, and it can also open up possibilities for proactive mobilisation to respond to conditions.

The people without power, such as refugees, have to strategise ways to navigate their insecure environments and reduce uncertainties. De Certeau (1984) makes a critical distinction between the strategies of the powerful and the tactics of the powerless to reveal the dynamics of power and coalitions that emerge in instances such as refugees' attempts to make homes in host societies. A tactic is defined as 'a calculated action determined by the absence of a proper locus: it has no spaces of autonomy and is characterised by decision-making with the context of spaces dominated by others' (De Certeau 1984, 37). Rather than situating tactics within the interstices of securitised space of the governmental and the organised camps for refugees, studies employing De Certeau's framework


**Figure 1.** Location of Basmane and nearby historic environment (Source: Google Maps 2019).

show that the city viewed from above – mapped, planned, produced – differs from the city experienced on the streets, where refugees walk through unplanned paths, appropriate spaces, and use time in unplanned and unforeseen ways (Grant and Thompson 2015). It is the everyday city life and areas where the Syrian refugees are concentrated such as Basmane that we focus as a case study in this paper (see Figure 1).

Refugees employ tactics to decrease the negative side effects of precarity and to establish a life, to settle, to make a living in a new and unfamiliar environment where they try to make a living away from home. These tactics are explained in detail in the Basmane section from a socio-spatial perspective.

## Turkey's emergency response to Syrian refugees

By 2016, Turkey hosted over 3.6 million Syrian refugees, of which 98% inhabited urban centres; thus urban adaptation is paramount for these massive flows of people. The western cities in Turkey were initially perceived as transit locations by refugees who wished to reach the EU borders (UNHCR 2016). During 2015 and 2016, approximately 550,000 Syrians entered Europe via the sea route from Turkey to Greece (International Organisation for Migration (IOM) 2017). However, in March 2016, the EU and Turkey concluded a Joint Action Plan to control this migrant inflow and to remove incentives to seek irregular routes to the EU. This EU-Turkey accord announced that all new irregular migrants crossing from Turkey to the Greek islands would be returned to Turkey, and it also included a one-for-one refugee return, meaning that for every Syrian refugee returned to Turkey, another Syrian would be resettled in the EU (Baban, Ilcan, and Rygiel, 2017). In addition, Turkey would receive financial compensation (a 3 billion Euros allocation to be supplemented with an additional 3 billion Euros up to the end of 2018), visa-free travel would be introduced, and forward progress would be made in its EU membership negotiations (İçduygu and Şimşek 2016). This agreement affected the

Syrian population in İzmir, which began to seek ways of settling in the city instead of crossing borders.

Officially, the Turkish government recognises Syrian refugees not as asylum seekers but as 'guests' hosted by Turkey and under a 'temporary protection' regime (Akgündüz, Berg, and Hassink, 2015; Heck and Hess, 2017). According to Akgündüz, Berg, and Hassink (2015, 4), this designation has several important implications: they cannot apply for asylum in a third country, hindering opportunities to participate in further international migration, while with their 'guest status', they can be internally relocated by the Turkish government. In general, the government takes a service-based humanitarian approach for Syrian refugees. Syrian refugees can benefit from free basic health care, education, and social assistance, but researchers (Yıldız and Uzgören 2016; Baban, Ilcan, and Rygiel, 2017; Mackreath and Sagnic 2017) highlight major obstacles to accessing these services in practice.

Initially, the local population in different cities in Turkey had a positive attitude, helping Syrian 'wounded guests' obtain shelter, medical attention, food, and clothing, but perceptions began to shift as some 'guests' showed no signs of wanting to leave (Kirişçi 2014). As the population of Syrian refugees rose, urban life became more challenging in terms of housing, wages, and the capacity of existing physical infrastructure (ORSAM 2015). While tolerance among the hosts has, for the most part, prevailed, fears about an anti-Syrian reaction remain, practices of exclusion are becoming embedded, and the employment of Syrians at below minimum wage engenders hostility from Turkish workers who find themselves replaced by cheaper labour (Kirişçi 2014). According to Demir (2015, 7) the majority of Turkish people (81.7%) strongly disapprove granting citizenship to refugees, and only 'one-in-five' believes that refugees can integrate. On the positive side, the number of criminal cases directly involving refugees is very low, and although integration problems between locals and refugees exist, grassroots organisations engage Syrians, contributing to a social peace (ORSAM 2015).

The national temporary protection regime necessitates that to access social services, Syrians must register with the Turkish government's Disaster and Emergency Management Agency (AFAD) in their city of residence to receive an identity card, *kimlik* (in Turkish) (Baban, Ilcan, and Rygiel, 2017). Some Syrians view this card as geographically restricting, as it is location specific; to relocate within Turkey, they must inform the authorities in advance, cancel their current kimlik, and subsequently re-register in the new location (UNHCR 2017). The system might present delays or challenges in receiving a new kimlik, so aid workers and civil society organisations provide for basic needs in such cases. Largely because of the perceived mobility restrictions, Syrians feel the precariousness of their situation and are hesitant to register in cities, especially in coastal cities like İzmir, where there may be a small possibility of crossing EU borders at some future time (Baban, Ilcan, and Rygiel, 2017). Many, therefore, live on the edge.

Given the scale and scope of the refugee challenge in Turkey, international humanitarian organisations are conspicuously absent. The total number of international organisations actively working with Syrians in Turkey numbered only 42 in 2015 (Mackreath and Sagnic 2017). Consequently, civil society and Turkish individuals become hugely important in facilitating local inclusion. Civil society space in Turkey is occupied by organisations that depend on international funders and organisations that rely on access to funding through the government, private donors, and faith-based organisations.

Kuzmanovic (2016) emphasises that civil society is in a nascent state of development in Turkey and suffers from a lack of visibility, making it harder for Syrians to locate assistance. Faith-based civic organisations are known not to advertise well, not wanting to draw too much attention to their accomplishments and thereby operating in accordance with Islamic humility (Mackreath and Sagnic 2017). However, an assessment at the sub-city area level creates a window into civil society organisations that engage with new culturally mediated spaces, particularly with regard to inclusion; this is similar to what Michele Lobo found in her work with refugees in Darwin, Australia (Lobo, 201X).

## Case study: Basmane and Syrian refugees

İzmir, a port city, is the third most populous city of Turkey, with a population of 4.3 million (Turkish Statistical Institute (TUIK) 2017). Since the 1980s, the city has received internal migrants, and it also has been a destination for international migrants from Afghanistan and Iraq, as well as Asia and Africa. The city's population diversity plays an influential role in attracting Syrian refugees, often arriving via migration chains of relatives and friends.

Syrians are found in a patchwork pattern across İzmir, encompassing differences in socio-economic background, gender, age, religion, access to familial or other support networks, health, aptitude for integration, and level of engagement with civil society. Some of the wealthy have retreated into private spaces, and less wealthy population have dispersed away from the central areas of the city after finding a place in the informal economy (Karadağ 2015). As Belanger and Saracoglu (2018)'s findings also suggest, Syrian refugees are dispersed around İzmir where they can find job opportunities in centrally located districts such as Basmane and Kadifekale, and relatively more peripheral locations of Çimentepe, Buca, and Yeşildere (Figure 2) (Yıldız and Uzgören 2016).

İzmir has been immersed in refugee flows in three ways. First, it served as a major transit point for those making their way across the Mediterranean Sea from coastal towns such as Ayvalık, Çeşme, Kuşadası, and Bodrum to reach the Greek islands of Chios (7 km from Çeşme), Lesvos (10 km from Ayvalık), Samos (2 km from Kuşadası), and Kos (5 km from Bodrum). Basmane Train Station plays a major role in connecting these places to the south-eastern region of Turkey via İzmir. Second, it is a hub for those wanting to settle and, third, it is a base for those needing to spend an intermediate period to accumulate enough funds to finance an onward journey (Yıldız and Uzgören 2016) and/or a possible future return for a few. Yıldız and Uzgören (2016) reported 74,000 registered Syrians in İzmir in 2015, the registered population rose to 98,000 in 2017 (Erdoğan 2017) and currently the official population has exceeded well above 146,000 people (Multeciler 2019). İzmir's urban life, therefore, exhibits multiple realities of acceptance, adaptation, and estrangement, for both refugees and residents, but certain alliances can foster pathways of agency and engagement, as opposed to reproducing patterns of marginalisation and exclusion.

Despite İzmir functioning as a migrant hub, tourist destination, and, arguably, one of the most politically liberal cities in Turkey, Syrians experience alienation and otherness. Child labour, informal work, low wages or non-remuneration for work, discrimination in wages and de-qualification of professional experiences, accompanied by abject conditions of shelter, health, education and other social services as well as general discrimination exist (Senses 2016; Ilcan, Rygiel and Baban 2018; Saracoglu and Belanger 2018).


**Figure 2.** Major locations of Syrians in central İzmir (Source: Google Maps 2019).

Negative opinions frame the refugee population as potential social risk generators, as job-takers in the informal economy due to their willingness to work for lower wages without social protection, and as an economic burden on the state. Some İzmirians complain that particular central city neighbourhoods became overcrowded since the Syrians arrived, and rents increased five-fold, because Syrians cover exploitative rents by overcrowding and sharing floor space (Karadağ 2015).

The İzmir municipality walks a fine line among humanitarian relief, non-interference, and control but leaves much of the engagement with Syrians to civil society. For example, responding to the pressure of civil society organisations for better refugee infrastructure, the municipality installed temporary public toilets around parts of the city, but at the same time they attempted to close off access to various parks at certain times (e.g. Kültürpark to Syrians) to prevent people sleeping there (Karşıyakahaber 2015). Importantly, the İzmir municipality does not want to alienate voters by spending large sums of money on refugees, and authorities also want to protect the image of the city as a tourist destination. On the other hand, the recently elected mayor has also declared that the Syrian refugees are the guests of the city and until there is a more permanent solution at the national level, the people of İzmir need to show hospitality to these guests (İlkses Gazetesi 2019).

Despite the precarity of their situation due to the lack of status, employment, limited access to resources, and circumscribed mobility, refugees have engaged in proactive

tactics to settle, to belong and integrate into the physical and social context of the city as discussed below.

### *Tactics of belonging through the built environment*

Basmane is one of the oldest areas in İzmir that has been accommodating migrants, refugees and new-comers through the ages. Wissink, Düvell, and van Eerdewijk (2013) define it as a transit migration hub located in the heart of the city, surrounded by public space, archaeological sites, affordable spaces and job opportunities in various sectors such as textiles, wedding and fashion industries, leather and electronics, which are clustered in and around Basmane. The main street, Anafartalar Street (1800 m long), is mainly a pedestrian street, extending from Basmane Train Station to Konak Square. The street connects the district with the Kemeraltı Historic Bazaar, seaside and Konak Square, hence providing an important connection between the train station and the city's commercial and tourist areas. Konak Square, a landmark historic public square redesigned in 2002 is particularly important since it is possible to see many Syrians relaxing there or selling items on adjoining streets. Furthermore, Hatuniye Square and the mosque located along Anafartalar Street also act as social networking sites for Syrians. Being located between the two important transportation hubs of Konak Square and Basmane Train Station, and surrounded by areas offering job opportunities, affordable living and public space,, Basmane's built environment offers refugees many short-term and long-term possibilities to adapt and make a living. Furthermore, the central park of Izmir, Kültürpark, is located just 5 min' walk away from Basmane, which hosted many immigrants during the immigrant influx in 2015. We observed many Syrians sleeping rough in the park and temporarily camping there when they first arrived in Basmane.

As well as location, the scale of Basmane offers possibilities to integrate the tactics of belonging. Basmane's main roads have an enclosing effect as does its topography, since one of the city's edges is bordered by a hill, Kadifekale. Small-scale ground floor premises in the area increase the visibility of products and services from the street and contribute to accessibility and a sense of belonging. Here, store fronts displaying Arabic signs contribute to the image of the area as a 'Syrian Enclave' or 'Little Syria'.

Historically, Basmane was a multi-ethnic area with residential neighbourhoods, mosques, churches and synagogues. This multicultural diversity is still visible within the historic built environment. Kortejo, a special building typology, consists of private rooms built along a corridor overlooking a central courtyard, with common spaces like a kitchen and bathroom. These Kortejos were designed to accommodate the Jewish population that migrated from Spain in the 15th century, and are unique to Basmane (Beşikçi, 2016). Several Kortejos spread across Basmane are used as affordable hotels or textile ateliers. However, the manager of one of the Kortejo hotels recently stated that they are no longer accepting refugees.

Traces of past historical importance are evident in the built form and spatial layout, whether the buildings are abandoned or maintained and renovated. A large number of buildings fell into disuse and are in various states of disrepair, often due to their old age. Many structures are over 100 years old and require extensive and expensive repairs (beyond neglect and wear and tear, humidity, roofing issues, deficient sanitary infrastructure, electrical issues, and occasionally structural issues are often involved). The area's

twenty-first-century reputation (prior to the Syrian influxes) stemmed from its marginalised low-income population and their associated social and employment challenges, diminishing the area's attractiveness to locals and tourists alike. Decades of sheltering internal migrants from south-eastern Turkey has resulted in the area being associated with 'outsiders', in spite of its local historical significance. Many İzmirians avoid Basmane for safety reasons because of the negative image, which has also led many long-standing residents to move to more stable neighbourhoods. In addition, investors have tended to overlook Basmane. As the city expanded and new areas emerged, Basmane became a deteriorating inner city location. We argue that as well as the importance of location and scale, its deteriorated built environment with abandoned empty spaces is one of the factors contributing to the precarious situation of refugees here.

Nevertheless, the area contains many historic İzmir houses, many of which have been transformed into hotels and museums and for a while these were vibrant establishments. Among the important buildings is Uşakizade Mansion, belonging to the family of Latife Uşşaki, wife of Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, the founder of the Republic of Turkey. Until quite recently, this building had been used as a hotel (Sadıkbey Hotel) but is now abandoned. Other classic hotels in the area include Cihan Palas (The Emniyet Hotel) on Anafartalar Street, one of the oldest buildings, which was in the heart of the entertainment area during the early twentieth century (Figure 3). Today, its ground floor functions as a café where Syrians also visit, but the upper floors have fallen into disuse.

The Basmane area has had recent adaptive reuse projects. For example, an old İzmir house functioned in 2014 as İzmir Women's Museum, the first of its kind in Turkey, and another old house was converted into the Radio and Democracy Museum. The most important adaptive reuse project was an entire street of hotels. This 'Hotel Street' was renovated in the early 2000s, during which the exterior building façades and infrastructure were renovated (Kayın 2004). This street initiative won the Urban Transformation Award in 2005 from the Union of Historical Towns (Figure 4).

Beginning in 2011, these affordable hotels began accommodating the first wave of Syrian refugees. Hotels offered transit individuals floor space for around US$10 per night. In addition, Basmane's abandoned houses provided a temporary shelter to refugees. This episode of warehousing transit individuals was not foreseen, and even rundown, unsafe buildings became occupied and accidents and fires were recorded.

**Figure 3.** Historic Basmane: Uşakizade Mansion and Cihan Palas Hotel.

**Figure 4.** Hotel Street in the beginning of 2000s after renovation (Source: Kayın 2010).

The refugee influx into disused buildings and affordable hotels was to be a temporary phenomenon, and their presence in the district illustrated the untapped potential for reuse, repurposing, and rediscovery of past glories. At its peak, the intensive presence of Syrian refugees in the area led to a new phase of urban downgrading (Figure 5) (Melera et al. 2013). Worried about the rapid deterioration and overuse of premises, hotel managers who were interviewed revealed that, after 2015, establishments along Hotel Street and in Basmane in general were no longer willing to accommodate Syrian refugees.

The aftermath of the EU-Turkey accord witnessed a different spatial imprint on Basmane. After the large Syrian outflows to other İzmir locations from early 2016 onwards, Basmane became a Syrian 'home' instead of 'pit-stop', and the ancillary economy changed accordingly (Özerim and Crawley 2016). As Syrians settled in the area, quieter streets housed many refugees, and the hotel district transitioned to a different user group. A form of entrepreneurship by young and highly educated people emerged, providing affordable accommodation to cater to a new clientele (i.e. backpackers, researchers, and tourists). Stylish, modern, and eclectic boutique hotels, such as the Lotus Garden Hostel, a uniquely renovated 1939 wooden

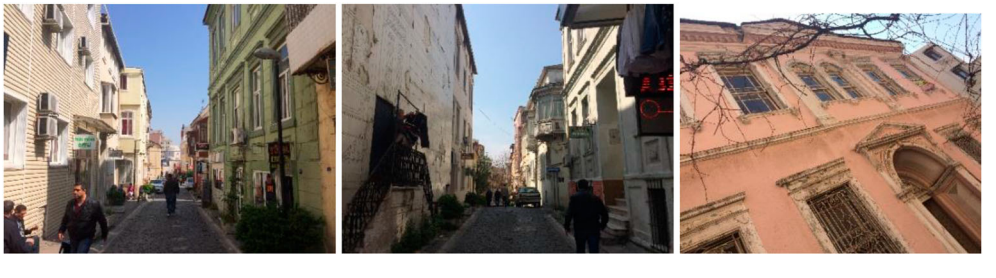


**Figure 5.** Hotel Street in 2017.

building, came into being. TripAdvisor (2017) rates this establishment among the top five budget accommodations in İzmir, and Basmane may be on its way to becoming a trendy, affordable place for budget-conscious visitors.

The area now demonstrates novel and interesting place-making through the merging of diverse populations in buildings from different periods. Syrians have become more embedded in the fabric of the neighbourhood's streets and economy. A good example of this everyday place-making is 1297 Street, where Syrians mix with a population from south-eastern Turkey; children play on the streets, and women sit outside on the steps and chat with their neighbours (Figure 6). The vibrancy of the streets is considered a positive factor by locals, tourists, and investors. Nevertheless, there is a need to protect Basmane's historical houses as important examples of architecture from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and there is a concern that trendy developments and capital influxes could convert many buildings with little regard for historical preservation. Poor past record-keeping and a culture of enabling irregular conversions need to be curbed.

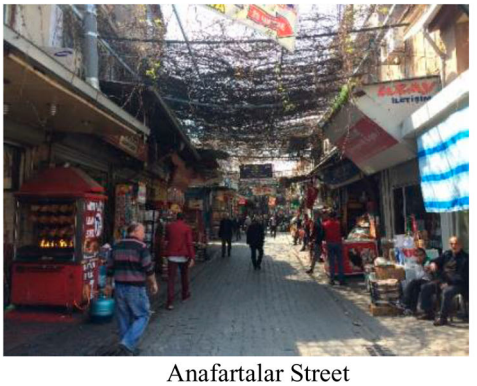
Since the first influx of refugees, a large shadow economy (Schneider and Enste 2013) and a space of difference formed around Basmane. During the peak of the illegal passages across the Aegean Sea, the district served as a principal point for people-smuggling operations. This illegal economy was centred around the vicinity of the Çorakkapı Mosque area (Özerim and Crawley 2016), the nearby coffee houses, Anafartalar Street and Hatuniye Square (Figure 7). It was very common to see shops selling life jackets and necessary supplies for the journey across the Aegean. Basmane had clearly demarcated focal points within the shadow economy. We recently observed that those shops still sell life-jackets and related infrastructure.

During the peak of the refugee crisis, refugees made their way in a 'daily crush' along the thoroughfares to be transported to Greece, paying US$1000 per person to cross the Aegean Sea (Weise 2016). During 'intended short stays', Basmane restaurants functioned as local food stops for the transit refugees that craved home-cooked meals; middlemen and


**Figure 6.** 1297 Street and some of the houses that Syrians and population from South-eastern Turkey live.


Çorakkapı Mosque


Altınpark Coffee House


Anafartalar Street

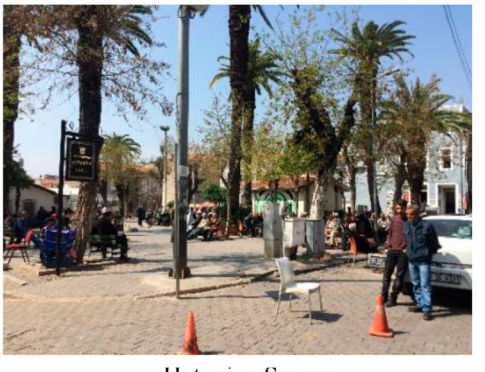

Hatuniye Square

**Figure 7.** Places of social interaction and network in Basmane.

their touts funnelled refugees into cafés and meeting spots to conclude deals; shops along Anafartalar Street or Fevzipaşa Boulevard sold life-vests, and money exchange shops converted funds into Euros.

After the EU-Turkey deal, Basmane also experienced outflows of Syrians to other areas of the city closer to jobs, and the function and perceptions of Basmane inhabitants changed accordingly. Some Basmane streets had high concentrations of Syrian refugees who wanted to settle in the area, and the vicinity of Anafartalar Street has matured into a node of Syrians, developing into a 'Little Syria'. Several restaurants specialise in Syrian cuisine and almost all retail establishments now display bilingual Turkish and Arabic signboards. Anafartalar Street has a daily life centred around Syrians with retrofitted affordable accommodations, cafés, small food stores, phone card shops, barber shops, bakeries specialising in Syrian desserts, and markets and stalls that extend to the sidewalks and streets, impeding vehicular and pedestrian flows. Typically, signage on shop windows is either in Arabic or in both Arabic and Turkish. Anafartalar Street is always busy, and its ivy canopy gives a feeling of enclosure and security (Figure 8). This economy that was formed in and around Basmane eased the adaptation of Syrians. They work, use the services provided and in some cases they own and manage these places (Izmir Büyükşehir Belediyesi Akdeniz Akademisi 2018). The Basmane area has transitioned into more normalised functions, serving as the central node for (un)settled Syrians' daily retail and social networking activities as these residents become more embedded into the fabric of the neighbourhood's streets and economy.


**Figure 8.** Local Shops along Anafartalar Street.

The physical characteristics of built environment, such as centrality, location, adaptability, locality, historic built heritage, image, affordability, proximity, public spaces, scale are the factors that has positively contributed to the adaptation of Syrians by providing opportunities and space to integrate their tactics of belonging together with their social support networks and solidarity mechanisms, which are explained in the next section.

### *Tactics of belonging through the social environment*

Mackreath and Sagnic (2017) report that Syrians are shunning host organisations, and retreating into highly dependent networks based on hometown and religious and ethnic communities, which might be expected as precarity becomes an enduring condition and as cultural organisations have a limited appeal. In addition, there is a distinct social space online (examples include Facebook groups in Arabic and Turkish such as Syrians in İzmir and Syrian Community in İzmir, translated from Arabic), which is very important for information sharing and emotional support, including information on how to engage with formal NGOs. These informal networks act within the sphere of the household and can facilitate civil society, especially by operating to some extent as prerequisites for refugee NGOs (office-based or neighbourhood outreach), which otherwise would have to invest resources continually in establishing contact with Syrian refugees (Tan 2016). Those who can afford to access this social space are the better off, younger, and technologically savvy refugees (Tan 2016). Crowdfunding campaigns to support Syrians stuck in İzmir also raise money to assist refugees (e.g. a YouCaring campaign in early 2017 raised almost US$2500 (YouCaring 2017)). Marginalised groups appear to have the greatest level of insecurity and far fewer means to become self-securing; they are heavily

dependent on outreach help. Tan (2016, 84) notes that many Syrian refugees have no contact with any organisation and rely on self-help, family, and kinship networks.

In terms of the national social context, the government grants Syrians rights to access social services, and Syrian children are awarded identical rights with local counterparts, including the right to a free education in a local school. When Syrian children do attend school, many experience language-related problems. The Society of Syrians in İzmir, the City Governorship, the Directorate for National Education, and NGOs made a combined attempt to open a school with Arabic instruction; however, this endeavour collapsed at the last minute (Karadağ 2015). Beyond education, there are well-documented issues with regard to Syrians accessing social services. Karadağ (2015) notes that even when Syrians can access hospitals, there are some problems related to their Arabic identity cards, which cannot be understood by the local hospital staff. Thus, language is a major barrier in all environments of social life.

Everyday realities mean that Syrians have to be proactive in strategising for daily survival, and many focus on the immediate home environment, their social networks, and civil society to survive. Often, marginalised Syrian families cannot afford school uniforms and transportation costs (Baban, Ilcan, and Rygiel, 2017), and consequently they are forced to obtain employment for themselves and/or their children (some parents have health and/or disability issues as a consequence of war) in nearby textile factories and in informal work settings. While the government provides some health care and access to education, civil society organisations play a major role in the care of Syrians at the neighbourhood level.

The non-profit, non-governmental organisations landscape is nascent in Turkey, particularly with regard to those that work on behalf of Syrian refugees. Government data show a 22% rise in the number of organisations registered (from 4824 in 2011 to 6203 in 2016), but the data do not indicate their roles and relationships with the state, on whether they received funding, or on their primary focus (Mackreath and Sagnic 2017). Some civil society organisations have added a Syrian relief component, but there is a smaller subset of organisations that focus exclusively on Syrian-related issues. In Turkey's Syrian non-profit arena, the majority of organisations engage in the collection and distribution of donated clothing and food. Syrians are in need of basic support as most have exhausted their savings in exiting perilous situations in Syria and in securing a rental space. During the course of our fieldwork, we identified three additional non-profit organisations that have been very active in the Basmane area: Halkların Köprüsü Derneği, İzmir Müzisyenler Derneği, and ReVi Family. These organisations have been instrumental in supporting Syrian refugees achieve some degree of social cohesion and have focussed their Syrian engagement around a cultural space. We outline each of these groups in turn.

First, Halkların Köprüsü Derneği (The Association of Solidarity/The Bridge of the People) aims to promote peace and equality among the different groups in Turkey, and its efforts have now been extended to Syrians. The rise of İzmir as a migration hub compelled the organisation to focus on bridging refugee inclusion (Halkların Köprüsü Derneği 2017). In İzmir, the group initially concentrated on basic relief, but more recently, its focus has switched to specialised programming. Arts, food, and cultural programming are common, and the organisation also helps bridge the gap between Turks and refugees with disabilities. An example of programming offered in 2017 is 'One Woman One

Story Nights', whereby Syrian food is prepared by men and served to groups of 11–30 women, and the speaker(s), with the assistance of a translator, talk about their pre-war lives in Syria and the difficulties of living as a refugee. The core idea is to empower refugees to speak for themselves in their own words and to create a listening forum where locals can also learn first-hand about the everyday lives of fellow urbanites (Halkların Köprüsü Derneği 2017).

Second, İzmir Müzisyenler Derneği (Association of İzmir Musicians, 2017) participates in cultural and artistic relief for refugees. The group is known for its community event called 'Yeryüzü Sofraları', which is a big dinner open to everybody prepared with donations and efforts of volunteers. This initiative paves the way toward integrating different groups and promotes positive feelings among Syrian families (İlkses Gazetesi 2015). The Association of İzmir Musicians and Halkların Köprüsü Derneği also organise solidarity concerts and collect and distribute basic necessities (e.g. supplies, books, toys, clothes, winter boots, coats, shoes, blankets, floor mattresses and quilts).

Third, the ReVi Family organisation is a group of international and local volunteers in İzmir aiming to help the refugees with sustainable work opportunities and solutions by identifying the family's interests and skills and by engaging them in appropriate employment. It started to work in İzmir in early 2016 and already has provided assistance to more than 400 Syrian families in Basmane in rebuilding their lives. In addition, ReVi operates two kindergartens that serve approximately 120 children. To better serve these students, the organisation hired five Arabic speaking Syrian-trained teachers from the community. The group also provides assistance to older children to pursue a formal education, runs empowerment programs and provides employment opportunities for adults (e.g. knitting schemes where different types of clothing are handmade and retailed in their store as well as online). On Sundays, ReVi also visits one family for a Syrian dinner, and on these occasions a sum of money is paid by the participants for the meal cooked by a ReVi family (ReVi Family Organisation 2017).

After 8 years of living with precarity, Syrians are developing their own civil society in Turkey, adding a new component to the identity of civil society in Turkey, which has possible implications for the future Syrian presence in the country (Mackreath and Sagnic 2017). Cultural exchange, learning from each other, contributing to the economy as productive labourers and making the most of an opportunity to reuse existing rundown historic edifices can all be seen as evidence of refugees as change agents. Although their full potential is not yet realised, we argue that the influx of Syrian refugees increases awareness of Basmane, not only for the media, international humanitarian relief organisations, and academia, but also for İzmirians who did not know the area prior to the influxes. Nowadays, its historic potential is acknowledged more so than in the recent past, and Basmane's reputation as a historic and important neighbourhood is being rekindled, reinterpreted, and reestablished.

## Conclusion

This paper explains how Basmane's built and social environment accommodated the temporary and permanent needs of refugees. The analysis sheds some light on a set of fluid dynamics to illustrate the lived and experienced reality of Basmane from the perspectives of refugees who are caught in a web in which they lack permanent legal status, experience

circumscribed livelihoods in their temporary place of refuge, and are unable to return home (Hyndman and Giles 2017).

As Chacko and Price (2020) argue, various spatial scales ranging from architectural to urban are influential on minimising the impact of precarity. In Basmane, not only spatial, but also social dimensions tactics helped to reduce the impact of precarity of refugees. Basok et al (2015) named these tactics as 'self-making' and 'techniques of the self'. Relying on civil society and their own networks, Syrians engage in urban adaptation processes at the neighbourhood level (Ilcan, Rygiel and Baban 2018). For some, attending musical events, hosting dinners and engaging with local members of civil society are important opportunities to build social ties in İzmir. Importantly, at a more macro level, their everyday practices and tactics to create a sense of belonging play a role in yet another physical and social transformation of Basmane. İzmir, a city of cosmopolitan character throughout the ages, has welcomed many migrants and refugees. The influx of Syrian refugees adds another layer of diversity. This group is, for the most part, a transitory group due to factors relating to local and central governments. Thus an understanding of precarity is especially relevant during the period of their extended refugee status.

With few opportunities in a war-ravaged Syria, many refugees started to settle in Basmane and the surrounding areas, participate in the informal economy, make efforts to learn Turkish, access social services, and engage with civic society organisations. İzmir's residents are now grappling with the notion that this precarious group with a distinct culture and language are making claims on space, state, and civil society. İzmirians were initially welcoming to the short-stay 'guests', but as the flows swelled and areas such as Basmane were engulfed by outsiders, locals felt more estranged from parts of their city, especially its public spaces. This Basmane perception, however, is beginning to change as 'Little Syria' begins to function as an immigrant enclave. There are many unanswered questions about Syrians' transition from precarity and about their longer-term settlement. Will the existing Syrian-dominated area in Basmane continue to be consolidated as 'Little Syria'? Will other clearly demarcated Syrian enclaves form, or will Syrians diffuse into more private space and mixed neighbourhoods? Will return migration to Syria commence once the war is over? Moving deeper into protracted refugee status and possibly to other forms of 'belonging' will lead to further changes of selfhood of Syrian refugees in Turkey.

In conclusion, our case study shows the importance of developing longer- and mid-term rights and frameworks, rather than short-term needs-based rights (generally the international norm). Understanding the precarity of the refugees and their needs and tactics to belong involve their participation in the remaking of places, the rediscovery of downgraded neighbourhoods, and claims on space and on services. Such outcomes are important not only to Syrians in Turkey but to refugees in similar situations in many other parts of the world, such as Zimbabweans in South Africa, Somalis in Kenya, Romani in Canada, Africans in China, Burmese in Thailand, and Venezuelans in Colombia.

Indeed, many other segments of Turkish society also experience precarity even though Syrian refugees presently represent a quintessential form of precarity; we acknowledge similarities in precarity (but to different degrees in terms of space and mobility, labour and general insecurity) might allow for new and more broad-based struggles against precarity to emerge and new forms of collective organisation. Recognising that opportunities for inclusion, cultural exchanges, and adaptation and often resistance, are located in city

neighbourhoods, we call for more research on different types of urban environments and the variegated ways that Syrian refugees participate in adaptation, engage with locals, and transform cultural realms, neighbourhoods, work, and educational environments in the process.

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