

Research Article

## SPACES IN FLUX: DOCUMENTING MIGRATION, BELONGING, AND SOCIO-SPATIAL TRANSFORMATION IN BASMA[HA]NE, IZMIR

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Received: 18.12.2023, Received in Revised Form: 20.12.2023, Accepted: 24.01.2024, Available Online: 29.01.2024

### Keywords

Migration;  
Homemaking;  
Spatial  
(Re)productions;  
Sense of  
Belonging;  
Basmane

**Abstract** Basmane is one of the oldest settlement areas in İzmir, which has been welcoming diverse internal and international migrant populations throughout its urban history, thus having become closely associated with the notion of “outsiders”. This paper recognizes Basmane as an urban space shaped by a multifaceted history of migration, where each migrant's experience contributes to interconnected socio-spatial, socio-cultural, and socio-economic layers, prompting the need for novel spatial interpretations. In this fashion, the study acknowledges migration as a transformative socio-spatial force, and seeks to explore how migrants contribute to the spatial fabric in regenerating a sense of home in the area. To achieve this aim, this paper focuses on three individual cases: (a) a courtyard/home, (b) a hotel/*cortijo*, and (c) a public park. Each case provides the study with a particular insight concerning the spatial practices of a different migrant profile addressing different spatio-temporal layers of the area, simultaneously converging in the present moment. The study draws on field research that involves semi-structured interviews conducted with relevant actors in the area. Building on these narratives and employing a moderate participant observation approach, the study supports the assertion that spaces of migration cannot be investigated without taking into consideration the agency of migrants. Moreover, it elucidates how migrants grapple, even in the most challenging socio-spatial scenarios, with establishing a sense of place, revealing their struggles (and at times, failures) in maintaining such endeavors, and exposing the most fragile connections they form with the spaces they inhabit.

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## Introduction

Basmane<sup>1</sup> stands as one of Izmir's oldest settlement areas which has been welcoming migrants, refugees, and newcomers spanning many centuries. Historically, Basmane was a multi-ethnic region complete with residential districts and a diverse array of religious structures, traces of which are still embedded in the built environment today. During the Ottoman era, Basmane played a pivotal role in housing Muslim, Jewish and Orthodox Christian communities, though the non-Muslim populations dramatically diminished following the end of the Independence War and the great fire of Izmir in 1922 (Belge, 2012; Kayın, 2010; Ürük & Pınar, 2013 in Işıklı, 2021, p.191). Basmane's tradition of welcoming a diverse array of internal and international migrants and displaced populations persists, a testament to its enduring urban history.

The influx of rural-to-urban migrants from Eastern and Southeastern Anatolia that commenced in the 1950s set in motion the transformation of Basmane into a deprived inner-city area (Kayın, 2010; Tekeli, 2017). Following the substantial domestic migration, Basmane witnessed the arrival of irregular migrants hailing from different parts of the world such as Afghanistan, Iraq, and several sub-Saharan African countries (Kaya, 2020; Oner, Durmaz-Drinkwater, & Grant, 2021). This crowded and diversified migrant population has led to Basmane being closely associated with "outsiders" and stigmatized as a "degenerate" urban space despite its historic significance and its location at the heart of Izmir city center (Saraçoğlu and Bélanger, 2021).

In 2011, the initial wave of Syrian asylum seekers, forcibly displaced by the Syrian civil war, arrived in this milieu, followed by a continuous influx in the subsequent years. This Syrian migrant flow put the area on the world map as a prominent transit hub between Syria and Europe (Güngördü, 2021; Oner et al, 2021; Yıldız & Uzgören, 2016; Yıldız, 2021). Presently, Basmane remains a destination for a variety of new migrant groups, including Russian and Ukrainian nationals escaping the conflicts in their homelands (Intv.1, 2023), as well as Afghan individuals seeking refuge from the Taliban regime (evrensel.net, 2019) (Figure 1).

Considering its rich history of migration, as briefly outlined above, this study views Basmane as an urban space where migration-related socio-spatial phenomena have accumulated over time, ultimately shaping it into a distinct space of migration. Each migrant's journey through Basmane contributes to the intricate web of socio-spatial, socio-cultural, and socio-economic layers in the area, prompting the need for new spatial interpretations. This paper recognizes migration as a transformative socio-spatial tool and inspires to examine the spatial practices of migrants. Specifically, it delves into their efforts to regenerate home in a so-called

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<sup>1</sup> Basmane (initially *Basma-hane*) traces its etymology to the 18th-century Ottoman Empire period when the printing-based textile (*basma* in Turkish) industry was established and developed in the area (Sürgevil, 2011 in Işıklı, 2021, p.191). The Turkish word *hane*, of Persian origin (<https://www.etimolojiturkce.com/kelime/hane>, last access: 19.01.2024), on the other hand, signifies a 'house' or 'household', invoking both physical and emotional associations with the concept of home.

“degenerate” and alienated urban space—what is more, within an alienating host community—and their struggles, and sometimes failures, in doing so.

In the refugee and migration literature, concepts such as ambivalence, precarity, vulnerability, and insecurity are frequently encountered (e.g., the context of Syrian migrants in Turkey: Baban, Ilcan, & Rygiel, 2017; Chacko & Price, 2021; Ilcan, Rygiel, & Baban, 2018; Oner et al, 2020; Waite, 2009, etc). Conversely, the notion of home is often closely associated with security, familiarity, nurture, belonging, and shelter (Blunt & Dowling, 2006; Massey, 1992; Crowell & Dreyfus, 1993; Tuan, 2004, etc). When the concepts of 'migration' and 'home' come together, and especially when the migrant has to regenerate their home in the place of migration, these seemingly opposing concepts intertwine, leading to new spatial inquiries. Chambers (1994) expresses this situation: “The experience of migration, exile and diaspora reveals that the simple equation between identity and place, self and home, is an illusion that is as precarious as it is reassuring” (1994, p.9).

Emerges from within these contradictions is the home of the migrant, who leaves us in uncertainty about whether they are a powerless victim or a socio-spatial actor with agency. Batuman (2021) strikingly argues that “the spaces and the spatiality of [forced] migration” (p.328) cannot be investigated without taking into consideration the migrant agency: “[...] Failure to do so leads to the acceptance of the term ‘refugee’ as an identity marker without addressing the problematic connotations it embodies. Refugee identity at once essentializes and contributes to the othering of those labeled as such, as well as falsely homogenizing the dislocated individuals and groups” (Batuman, 2021, p. 328).

In this study, we endeavor to avoid the misconception pointed out by Batuman (2021), and explore how migrants employ their agency in the urban landscape of Basmane, a tapestry woven with centuries of migration waves. We aim to understand this phenomenon by examining three cases encountered in different historical neighborhoods of Basmane: (a) A courtyard/home in Pazaryeri Neighborhood, (b) Manisa Akhisar Hotel/*Cortijo* in Kurtuluş Neighborhood, and (c) the Agora Park in Yeni Neighborhood (Figure 2). Each case is chosen particularly to offer the study a unique perspective, addressing various spatio-temporal layers of the area, simultaneously converging in the present moment. The selection of the cases is based on varying levels of publicness, changing resident migrant profiles, and different practices in establishing place attachment and a sense of belonging. Furthermore, each case, in one way or another, touches upon the historical layers of Basmane's built environment. Hence, the study not only investigates how migrant users inhabit these spaces and engage in spatial practices but also emphasizes the socio-spatial and socio-temporal connections between these historical layers and the specific cases under examination.

The reason for selecting the first case, the courtyard/home from Pazaryeri Neighborhood, lies in the dense population of Syrian migrants, who currently constitute the most prominent international migrant community in the area (Karakaya Ayalp & Yangin Kiremit, 2021). The discovery of this case, which provides insights into the spatial practices of this specific migrant group, is coincidental, sparked by the authors' attention to the neighboring *İplikçi Dede* Tomb.

Indeed, it is possible to find many other residences in the neighborhood occupied by Syrian migrants. However, factors motivating the authors to select this particular case include: (a) their curiosity about the spatial relationship between the case and a neglected historical layer dating back to the early 18th century in Basmane, and (b) the ease with which they can secure permission from the residents of the chosen dwelling for their research.

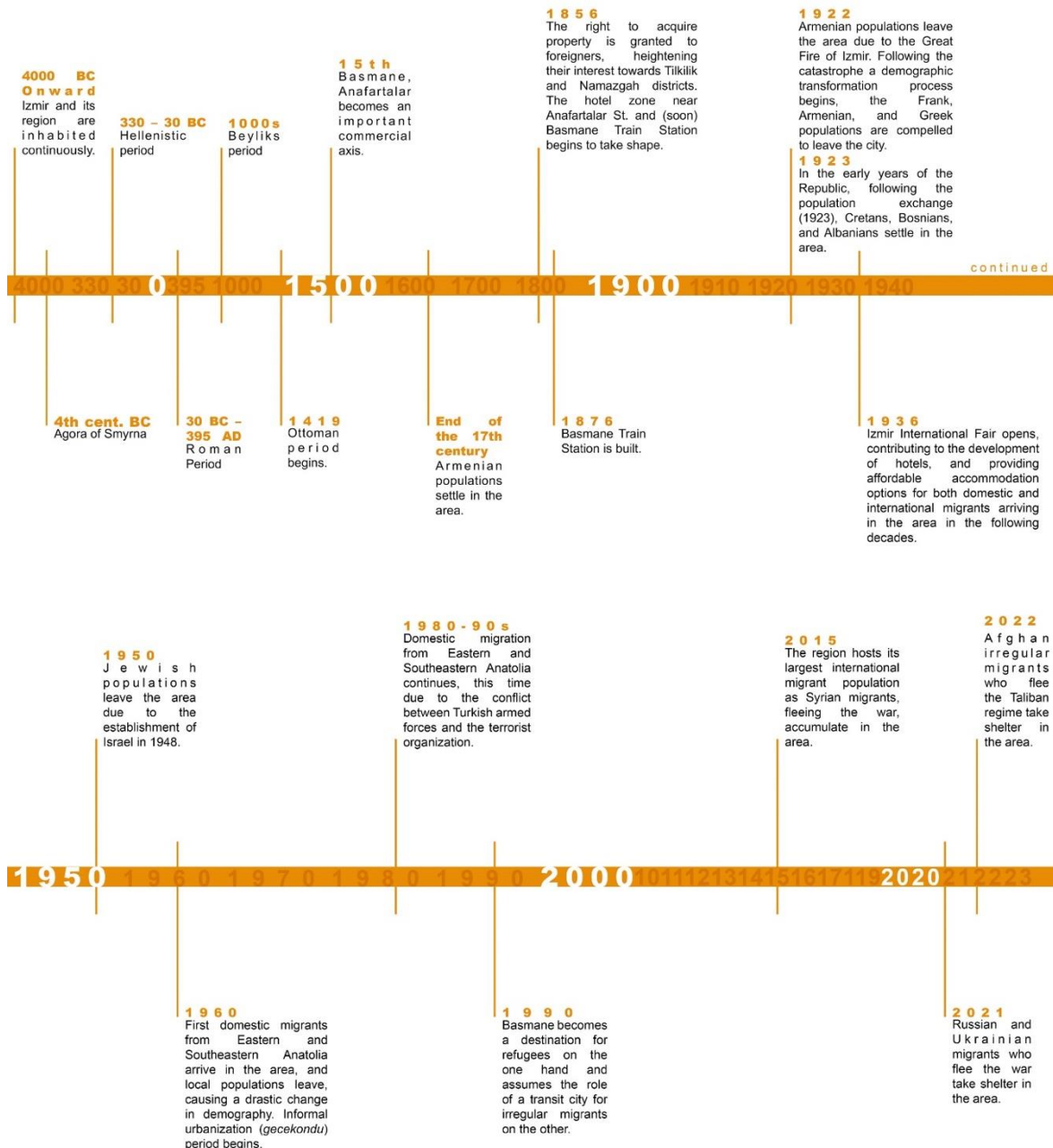


Figure 1. Migration and settlement history of Basmane (timeline prepared by the authors based on: Belge, 2012; Işıklı, 2021; Perşembe & Özgür Gönç, 2018; Yorulmaz, 2022; Intv.1; 14; 15, 2023; graphic work by Author 2).



Figure 2. Case studies of the paper: (a) Courtyard/Home in Pazaryeri Neighborhood, (b) Manisa Akhisar Hotel/Cortijo in Kurtuluş Neighborhood, (c) Agora Park in Yeni Neighborhood. (Basmane map produced by Author 2 using Mapbox base map; photos from Author 1's archive, 2023).

The choice of the second case, Manisa Akhisar Hotel/*Cortijo*, is attributed to: (a) the significance of *cortijos* as a building typology, representing one of the most important migration spaces in the built environment history of Basmane, (b) Manisa Akhisar Hotel's being one of the few remaining *cortijo* structures in the region, and (c) its continued use as migrant accommodation. As for the selection reasons for the third case, Agora Park: (a) it functions as a space of coexistence where a diverse range of migrants in terms of age and origin can be observed, and (b) it stands out as a rare public space with these qualities where individuals, particularly Syrian migrant women, choose to socialize in the area.

The study employs qualitative field research, primarily through field observation conducted in the Basmane area from March to July 2023. In addition to field observation, the paper

leverages data gathered from (a) pertinent literature reviews and (b) 15 semi-structured interviews (referenced as Intv.1, 2, 3, etc. throughout the paper) involving various stakeholders, users, and key informants in the area. Among these participants are Syrian and domestic migrants, hotel managers, academics, and volunteers from non-governmental organizations. Together, these sources serve as key elements of the study, facilitating a comprehensive exploration of the Basmane area.<sup>2</sup>

### ***Courtyard/Home in Pazaryeri Neighborhood***

The first case examined within the context of this study constitutes the dwelling of a Syrian migrant family in Pazaryeri Neighborhood (the precise location of this case shall remain undisclosed in this paper, owing to privacy considerations). The case can be considered exceptional even for the Syrian migrant community, which is known for having significantly poor housing conditions in the region.



Figure 3. a) (left, corresponds to View 1 on Figure 5). Street view with İplikçi İsmail Dede Tomb cemetery entrance. b) (right, corresponds to View 2 on Figure 6). Courtyard entrance. (Author 1's archive, 2023).

The architectural components of the dwelling comprise a group of severely neglected historical and makeshift structures around a spatially modest courtyard, situated within the borders of a former abandoned religious landmark, *İplikçi İsmail Dede Tomb*, dating back to the early 18th

<sup>2</sup> The field visits and interviews conducted from June 28 to July 9, 2023, are part of the context of the Architectural Association (AA) Visiting School "In Other Latitudes: Migration in the Mediterranean", where the corresponding author participated as a guest speaker.

century (circa) (Daş, 2012). The family has been living there as tenants for over a decade. The stone-framed, round-arched entrance opening of *İplikçi İsmail Dede* Tomb, providing access to a small cemetery (Figure 3a), is what led the authors to discover this otherwise secluded dwelling location. During our initial field visit, as we observe the tombstones in the cemetery, a resident of one of the old apartment buildings across the narrow street greets us. She promptly begins sharing information about the alleged looting attempt of the cemetery by the Syrian family living right behind, indicating the area behind the southern side of the high wall encircling the cemetery. As she claims, "The Syrians living there dug these graves, causing a lot of damage to this place" (Intv.2, 2023).

In the area, due to the quite prevalent issue of discrimination against the Syrian migrant community (Bélanger & Saraçoğlu, 2020; Oner et al, 2021; Saraçoğlu & Bélanger, 2019), we are accustomed to hearing such statements from local residents. At this point, it is necessary to question the meaning of 'local' within the Basmane context, as we learn that the woman who interact with us migrated from Mardin to Izmir decades ago. Nonetheless, her remarks capture our attention, and following a brief investigation, we manage to locate the entrance leading to the aforementioned courtyard. Fortunately, we get the opportunity to converse with the younger daughter of the household (Intv.5), who kindly grants us permission to enter and explore the dwelling.

Access to the courtyard/home is possible through a metal entrance door opening at street level, followed by ascending approximately 15 steps (Figure 3b). With this door closed, it is impossible to perceive the courtyard space from the street level. This situation imparts to this case the most private and secluded nature within the scope of this study.

When one reaches the courtyard level, hanging laundry can be seen, along with a pine tree and some greenery (Figure 4). Following that, surrounding the courtyard, a series of highly neglected structures<sup>3</sup>, some of which are historical (including the *İplikçi İsmail Dede* Tomb structure), draw attention. Today, the tomb structure serves as an inert storage space for the Syrian family (Figure 5b). The other structures surrounding the courtyard consist of makeshift single-story buildings. The house where the Syrian family resides is a part of these jerry-built structures (Figure 5a).

The authors have the opportunity to visit the location of this case twice (on March 10, 2023, and July 4, 2023). Based on the information gathered during these visits, it is realized that there were other individuals interested in this location in the past, but none of them went through the trouble of seeking permission to enter the courtyard, i.e., the private domestic space of the Syrian family's home. Intv.5 (2023) emphasizes this fact multiple times, underlining that the authors are the only visitors who ask for permission to enter the premise and take photographs of their house. Hence, it becomes evident that the private nature of this case, which serves as the home of the Syrian family and appears highly isolated from the

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<sup>3</sup> According to Daş (2012), it is not possible to determine whether these structures, some of which are now in ruins, belonged to a *zawiya*/dervish lodge/*dargah* organization. According to information from local residents, the tomb structure was converted into a residential unit in the 1970s (Daş, 2012, p.65).

outside, is quite fragile. It is noted that the Syrian family has not expressed any opposition to intruders, yet they appear to be apprehensive about it:

They don't ask us at all. They just come in directly. They take pictures of everything and wander around as they please. Then they leave. We don't say anything. What can we say? No one has asked us if they can enter besides you, to be honest (Intv.5, 2023).



Figure 4. (corresponds to View 3 on Figure 6). General view from courtyard. (Author 1's archive, 2023).



Figure 5. a) Syrian migrant family living space entrance (corresponds to View 4 on Figure 6).  
b) Storage spaces used by Syrian migrant family (corresponds to View 5 on Figure 6).  
(Author 1's archive, 2023).



As Saraçoğlu & Bélanger (2021) also claim, the reason they refrain from utilizing their agency in such matters stems from their effort to lead their lives “without drawing attention” in an environment where they already do not feel accepted.

During both visits, the authors receive exceptionally warm and hospitable treatment. However, they only spend time in the courtyard, and offerings such as tea and snacks are provided there as well; the authors are not invited inside. During the visits, the mother of the Syrian family remains inside the house and does not express any interest in the authors. Through these observations, it becomes evident that the spaces the family considers highly private are the interior spaces of the premise. The layout of these interiors is sketched based on the statements provided by the family (Intv.5; 6, 2023) (Figure 6).

On the other hand, Intv.5 (2023) shares an interesting piece of information about the interior usage of their home:

Our living room is spacious, so my dad sometimes rents it out to Syrians who want to host weddings or events. They have fun inside. I think our courtyard would be the most suitable place for this; it's even more spacious and open. They could play music here and have fun until morning.

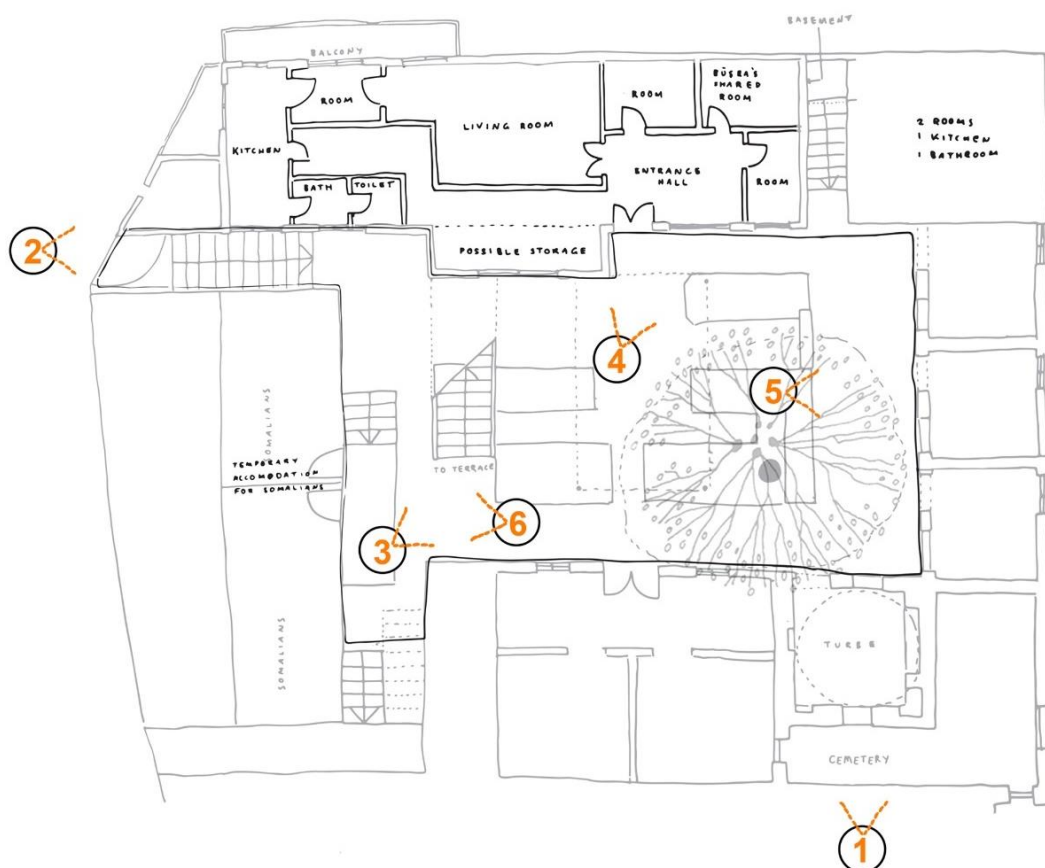


Figure 6. Courtyard plan (not to scale) (produced within the scope of AAVS “In Other Latitudes” Visiting School, July 2023, edited by Author 2).

The aforementioned 'wedding' ceremony in this context is not explicitly clear as to whether it is a religious ceremony, a celebration with music, or a combination of both. It is noteworthy that the family transforms their habitus for a fee for other Syrian couples who lack the necessary space in their houses and cannot afford to book a venue. In this way, the family willingly acknowledges this privilege they extend to their fellow countrymen (*memleketli*), even if it involves payment, and is temporarily willing to compromise the privacy of their home. In addition to financial reasons, another factor enabling this situation could be the Syrian migrant community's desire to come together on such occasions. These joyous events, bringing them together in their new homes, contribute to strengthening their sense of belonging to the place.

Amid these spatial adaptations for communal celebrations, the family's transformations extend beyond the interiors of their home to the courtyard, reflecting a multifaceted engagement with their living environment. The family's spatial rearrangements regarding the utilization of the courtyard include removing the central fountain pool by breaking it, trimming, and caring for the pine tree, constructing a pergola to provide shade and planting vines, growing roses and various vegetables in the limited soil area (by the mother), and using the open space for drying laundry. Additionally, there are two sets of stairs leading from the courtyard level to a terrace; this terrace is an open space where the eldest brother of the family keeps his exercise equipment (Intv.6, 2023). The remaining jerry-built single-story structures are used by the Syrian family as storage spaces (Figure 5b).

On the right side of the main entrance to the courtyard, there is another single-story, symmetrical-façaded structure (featuring a total of two doors, two regular-sized windows, and four small square windows on its front elevation, which most likely indicates the presence of two individual living spaces inside). Intv.5 and 6 (2023) report that this structure accommodates some Somali migrants on a daily basis, suggesting a transient arrangement where people come and go frequently (Figure 7). The constant change of residents here is a source of discomfort for the Syrian family. As Intv.6 (2023) states: "It's unclear when and who comes in and out; every day, different people stay here. We don't know them, and we have no interaction with any of them whatsoever. We don't like it, and it's not safe."

It is clear that the Syrian family have developed a sense of belonging and ownership towards the entire courtyard area, and that they dominate the usage of it, thus, they are not pleased with sharing this space with others. During our last visit, it is observed that some of the mentioned Somali migrants enter and exit their homes and engage in conversations among themselves. There appears to be very limited social interaction between these individuals and the Syrian family.

The insights from this case should be contextualized within the socio-spatial layers prevalent in the spatiality of migration in Basmane, a recurring theme in the historical built environment of the area: It is such an area where domestic migrants, who migrated from Southeastern Anatolia decades ago, coexist with more recently arrived international migrant groups, a phenomenon that can be observed throughout Basmane. These diverse migrant communities, even through the smallest of gestures, attach new meanings to their surroundings and

regenerate a sense of identity and belonging. Between formality and informality, permanence and temporariness, home and homelessness, and identity and anonymity, they find ways to (co)exist without major social friction even when they are not very willing to do so.



Figure 7. Somali migrants' living unit (Author 1's archive, 2023).

### ***Manisa Akhisar Hotel/Cortijo in Kurtuluş Neighborhood***

The second case of the study, Manisa Akhisar Hotel, is a hotel and an old *cortijo* building in Kurtuluş Neighborhood. It is located on Anafartalar Street, the most prominent commercial axis in the area. To the west, it's adjacent to the Çankaya multi-story car park, and to the south, lies the ancient Agora of Smyrna (Figure 8). Given the structure's socio-spatial identity as a *cortijo*, which will be explained below, and the history of guests and the owners<sup>4</sup>, it can confidently be asserted that Manisa Akhisar Hotel is a semi-private space of migration.

*Cortijos* first emerged in the Jewish quarter in the Basmene area as a communal housing typology that accommodated low-income Jewish populations. These structures were constructed by Sephardic Jews who were forcibly migrated from Spain and Portugal to the Ottoman Empire in the 15th century. *Cortijos* served as an affordable housing solution to fulfill their requirements for concealment and community togetherness (Kiray, 2004).

The term *cortijo* originates from the Latin word *curtis*, which means courtyard, reflecting the central role of the courtyard in these structures (Nehama, 1977, p.313 cited in Temür, 2022). *Cortijos* typically comprise individual living units and shared spaces organized around a central

<sup>4</sup> The last managers of the hotel were Salih and Nejat Acar, with Salih being the son-in-law of a migrant from Cyprus who purchased the *cortijo* from an elderly lady and transformed it into a hotel in 1922, naming it Manisa-Akhisar (Uşaklılar, 2016).

courtyard, characterized by an inward-facing architectural layout that emphasizes the necessity of residing together while maintaining separation from the surrounding neighborhood. They are remarkable examples of spaces of migration in Basmane, of which only a few survived to this day in the form of textile ateliers and affordable hostels (Güngördü, 2021; Oner et al., 2020; Yücel, 2016), one of which is Manisa Akhisar Hotel.

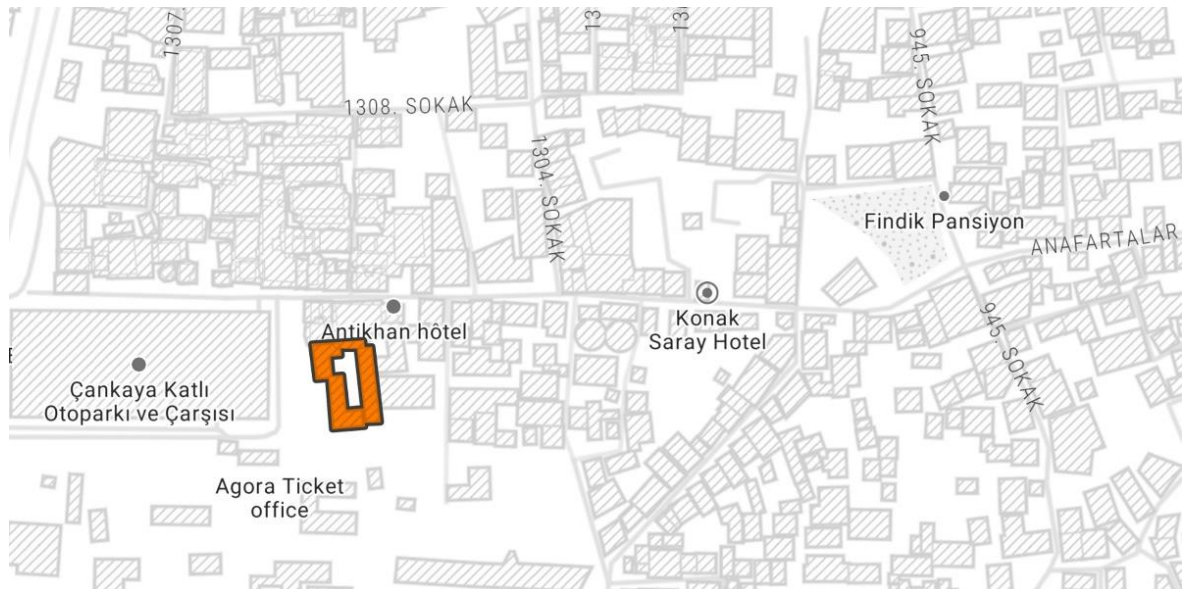


Figure 8. Manisa Akhisar Hotel/*Cortijo* in Kurtuluş Neighborhood (Map produced by Author 2 using Mapbox base map).

Manisa Akhisar Hotel stands as one of the rare surviving *cortijo* structures in the area today. Accessing the building is an intriguing experience, as it involves navigating through an exceedingly narrow passage from Anafartalar Street (Figure 9b). Remarkably, this entrance, despite its location on Basmane's busiest street, goes largely unnoticed by the casual observer. Upon passing through this discreet entrance, visitors are greeted by a reception area that opens into a courtyard. The courtyard is enclosed by four building wings, each housing residential units (Figure 9a).

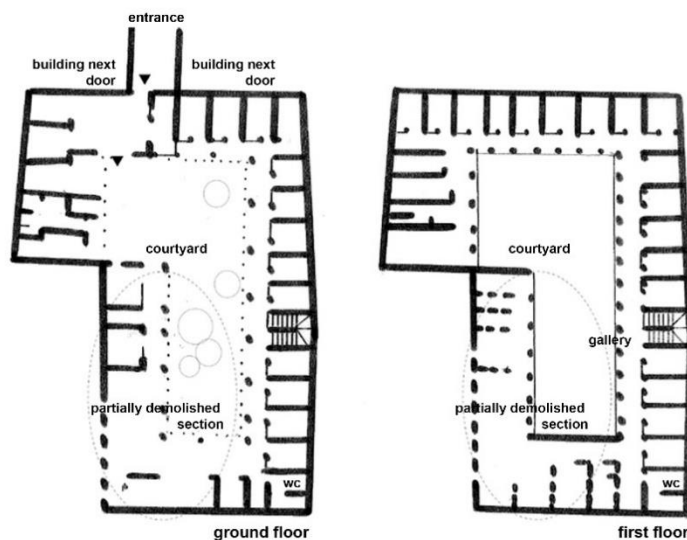


Figure 9. a) Manisa Akhisar Hotel/*Cortijo* Ground and First Floor Plans (not to scale) (Yucel, 2016, p.250). b) Manisa Akhisar Hotel/*Cortijo* entrance (Author 1's archive, 2023).



Figure 10. Manisa Akhisar Hotel courtyard general view (Author 1's archive, 2023).



Figure 11. Views from Manisa Akhisar Hotel (Author 1's archive, 2023).

Access to the upper-level rooms is via a common staircase connected to the courtyard. These rooms are notably compact and serve limited purposes. In some cases, residents opt to sleep outside the rooms, a practice reminiscent of the 19th century when *cortijos* housed a densely populated Jewish migrant community (Temür, 2022, p.69).

The authors paid their first visit to Manisa Akhisar Hotel on March 10, 2023. Upon entering the courtyard, silence prevails despite the exceptionally warm and sunny weather. Apart from the housekeeper, there is no one around, and she continuously warns us not to get too close to the entrance doors of the rooms facing the courtyard: "Don't approach the doors, girl. Someone

might come out, say something; all the rooms are occupied, the inhabitants are resting at the moment” (Intv.9, 2023). Along the long eastern side of the courtyard, laundry hangs. Despite the hotel accommodating numerous guests, the only indications of life are hanging laundry, glimpses of knick-knacks through bare windows, and a few old doorless lockers holding shoes and a modest amount of clothing (Figure 10 & 11).

The place is more of a retreat than a hotel. Despite being in the heart of the city, it somehow hosts its guests away from all the urban commotion and tumult. The hotel seems to have *stretched*, much like its guests, as if it has stood still in time. Following the migration of the Jewish communities from Turkey, particularly in the years after the establishment of Israel in 1948, the new occupants of the *cortijos* become low-income Turkish citizens, mostly domestic migrants (Moreno & Karkason, 2023). This situation has contributed to the continued association of *cortijo* spaces with migration and urban poverty.

The authors are unable to interview the residents of Manisa Akhisar Hotel. The brief interviews conducted for this case are limited to the two hotel managers and the housekeeping lady (Intv.7; 8; 9, 2023). Nonetheless, Manisa Akhisar Hotel has been accommodating individuals known to have stayed there for many years, up until very recently. Some of these individuals have even been featured in documentaries (see *Bir Avlu Bir Kent* [Secret Garden of the City] by Canan Altınbulak, 2010, and *Basmane Otelde Yaşam* by Onur Tasalı, 2019).

One of the hotel residents, Cemal, shares insights into his life at Manisa Akhisar Hotel in the short video *Beş Asırlık Yedigâr: Manisa-Akhisar Oteli / Cemal Yıldırım Daldal* (Iamekân, 2016):

I have one sister and three brothers. They are all married, living in Karşıyaka. I come and stay here by myself. They tell me, 'Come, stay with us,' but I get bored there. They are all married with families... So I have been staying alone in this room for 3-4 years. My head is clear and I'm comfortable here. In the morning, I lock the door and head to work, and in the evening, I return and unlock my room. [...] In the evening, everyone (residents of the hotel, *the author's note*) retreats to their rooms, has their meal, makes some tea. Except for me, everyone drinks alcohol here, spending their time like that. Four or five people have passed away here, all due to alcohol. [...] What can you expect? Life's hanging by a thread.

Although the residents of Manisa Akhisar Hotel have weak connections with the rest of society, they are strongly attached to the hotel space where they have spent their years, even breaking ties with their own families. Yucel (2016), in her study “Minority heterotopias: the *cortijos* of Izmir,” claims as follows: “Sometimes they talked about living in jail, being removed from society but also stating that at this hotel, which was their home now, they felt accepted” (p.250). Yucel (2016) describes *cortijos* as heterotopias, as conceptualized by Foucault (1967). She calls them ‘minority heterotopias’:

[...] While these first [Sephardi] residents lived in a heterotopia of crisis, the case of the current residents brought *cortijos* closer to a heterotopia of deviation. They too were in a state of economic crisis, with their socio-economic standing bordering on

homelessness. But they also deviated from the norm with their complete break with the familial ties, troubles with the law and current state of idleness, whether it was by choice or otherwise (2016, p.250).

Presently, Manisa Akhisar Hotel is closed and not accepting guests. Based on the information provided by the hotel's management during our visit, it is likely due to licensing issues (Int.7; 8, 2023).

### ***Agora Park in Yeni Neighborhood***

The third and final case of the study, Agora Park, is a public park and children's playground located in Yeni Neighborhood in the Basmane area. The location of the Agora Park is significant due to its opposite neighbor, which is the Agora of Smyrna from the 4th century BC, one of the preeminent historical and archaeological sites in Izmir (Belge, 2012, izmir.ktb.gov.tr, whc.unesco.org, 2023). Apart from the ancient Agora of Smyrna, the park is surrounded by Namazgah Neighborhood to the north, Yeni Neighborhood to the south, the historical, now restored Namazgah Bathhouse and Inn buildings to the east, and a high school building to the west. It is also very close to the main road, Eşref Paşa Boulevard (Figure 12). The park sits in a moderately large parcel and encompasses various greenery and tree elements.

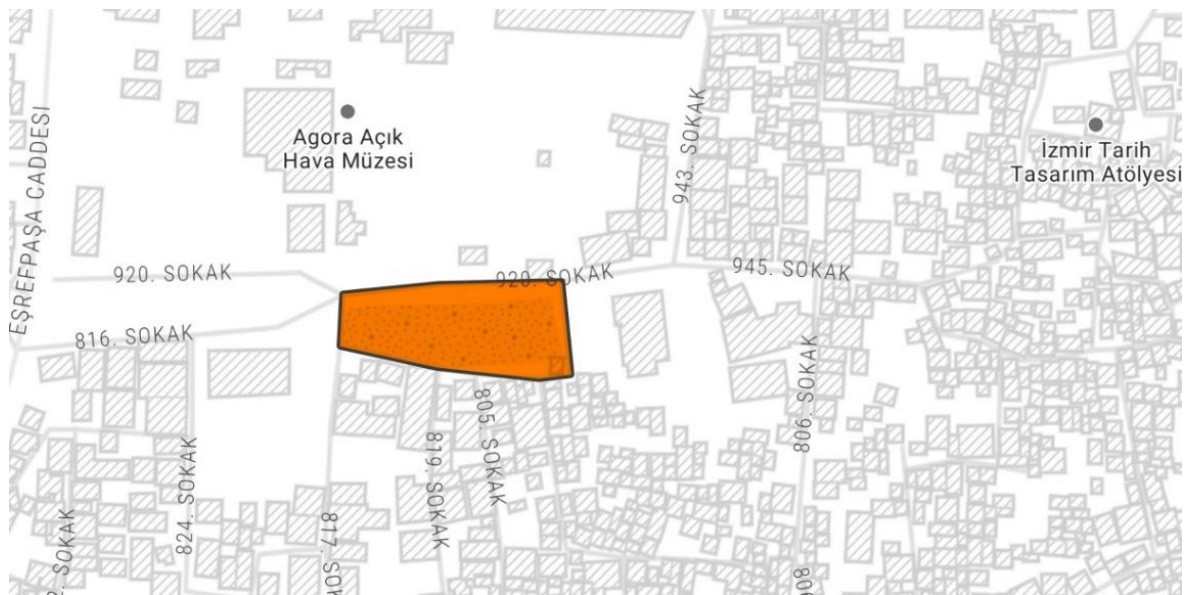


Figure 12. Agora Park in Yeni Neighborhood (Map produced by Author 2 using Mapbox base map).

Situated in such a central location in the area where parks and recreational spaces are scarce, Agora Park stands as a prominent public space regularly visited by both local Basmane residents and members of migrant communities. For a brief period in 2019, the park was known for having hosted a certain number of Afghan refugees who fled the Taliban regime (evrensel.net, 2019; Omaklılar and Aktaş, 2019) (Figure 13).

Unlike other public spaces in the area, where the presence of female residents, especially among the Syrian migrant population, is rare (Saraçoğlu & Bélanger, 2019, 2021), Agora Park

is predominantly frequented by women and their children. Additionally, a noticeable number of migrants from the sub-Saharan African countries can be observed spending time in front of the shops adjacent to the park, benefiting from the shade provided by the trees.



Figure 13. Afghan refugees taking shelter in Agora Park.  
(Photo: Evrensel/Dilek Omaklılar, evrensel.net).



Figure 14. Children and their mothers socializing in Agora Park (Author 1's archive).

The playground section of the park accommodates children from all the neighboring communities (Figure 14). According to the field observations, among the users of the park, Turkish national and Syrian children, along with their mothers, take the lead. It is noticed that women from these two groups are acquainted with one another but often avoid social



interaction. Women position themselves on seating units adjacent to the playground or on the sidewalk, observing their children's play. Concerning the children, there is no visible social distinction based on ethnic group or nationality; they play together. During our field visits, children who speak Turkish come near us occasionally and make comments such as “They don't speak Turkish, let me call their sibling” (Int.12; 13, 2023), regarding the younger Syrian children who are present in the playground. These types of remarks indicate that despite the migrant population's significant heterogeneity, there remains a sense of familiarity within the community.

In addition to providing a secure urban public space for children to play, interact, and enjoy fresh air, Agora Park serves as a meeting and socialization spot for Syrian mothers. Through this public space, they have the chance to gather with fellow Syrian women in their neighborhoods, engaging in casual conversations while simultaneously supervising their children as they play safely with their peers. This rare opportunity provides them with a sense of comfort in the public realm, in contrast to the alienation and discrimination they often encounter as migrants in Basmane. The Agora Park becomes a means for Syrian migrant women to rebuild a sense of belonging towards the area, thereby regenerating a piece of home within the oftentimes challenging host community.

### **Concluding Remarks**

The study aspired to provide a small-scale contribution to comprehend how migrants employ their agency in order to regenerate their sense of belonging through spatial practices and how they relate to both the space and the historic context of Basmane. It aimed not only to document the functional efforts of migrants in this regard but also to highlight their struggles and failures stemming from the vulnerability of their situations.

Basmane, acknowledged in refugee and migration literature as a transit hub, has transformed into a destination for (re)settlement, playing a pivotal role in migrants' home-establishment processes, encompassing both its push and pull factors. Deemed 'degenerate,' “insecure, chaotic, full of criminals and illicit activities” (Saraçoğlu & Belanger, 2021, p.470) not only by the rest of the city but also by some of the migrants residing in the area, it constitutes an alienated urban environment for its residents. In the face of such a challenging socio-spatial scenario, the study highlighted migrants' endeavors to establish a sense of place and cultivate a sense of belonging to the area through three case studies. Each case offers the study a unique perspective on the spatial practices of diverse migrant profiles, addressing various spatio-temporal layers of the area, all converging simultaneously in the present moment (Table 1).

The first case, the courtyard/home, which has been home to a Syrian family for more than a decade, also serves as temporary accommodation for another international migrant group. The case not only displays, on a neighborhood scale, the modes of coexistence and tolerance among domestic and international migrant groups, navigating the realms of formality and spontaneity, stability and transience, residence and rootlessness, as well as recognition and

obscurity, but also exposes the fragility of migrants' home privacy. The case also serves as a compelling example of the homemaking practices of migrants within constrained physical conditions. The courtyard/home is a place where, in some instances, the agency of the migrant is asserted, resulting in the creation of hybrid socio-cultural spaces. In other cases, however, this agency is rendered useless, and the migrant resigns to their fate, feeling somewhat *out of place*.

The second case, Manisa Akhisar Hotel, on the other hand, has been home to many domestic migrants for decades, representing a continuation of communal life practices rooted in the Sephardic Jewish tradition dating back centuries. While appearing as just a hotel from the outside, Manisa Akhisar Hotel functions as an 'other space' for its residents, a substitute for the homes they have lost or opted not to retain due to various reasons. The hotel residents choose to manifest their agencies in much more subtle ways, mostly through seclusion and idleness. Nevertheless, this case undeniably stands out as one of the migrant spaces in Basmane that best illustrates the centuries-old migration history of the area.

Finally, the third case, Agora Park, plays an important role for various migrant groups, functioning as a gathering and socialization area. The park and the children's playground serve as a means of rebuilding a sense of belonging towards the area. Here, we can observe that vulnerable groups, such as Syrian migrant women who have limited participation in social life and visibility in public spaces, activate their agencies to watch over their children playing and engage in socialization with other migrant women, choosing to be visible in this space due to a heightened sense of safety and security. It is crucial to highlight that the park occasionally serves as a shelter space for irregular international migrants as well.

Table 1. A summary of the cases of the study (prepared by the authors).

	Name	Location (Nbhd.)	Publicness level	Resident migrant profile	Association with historic components of Basmane	Current usage status
(a)	Courtyard /Home	Pazaryeri	Private	International (Syrian, Somali)	adjacent to <i>İplikçi İsmail Dede Tomb</i> (early 18 <sup>th</sup> cent. circa), derelict tomb structure reused as storage space by Syrian migrants	In use
(b)	Manisa Akhisar Hotel / <i>Cortijo</i>	Kurtuluş	Semi-private	Historically: Sephardic Jews  Second half of the 20 <sup>th</sup> cent. onwards: Domestic migrants	The hotel itself is an old <i>cortijo</i> building (allegedly 500 years old, Source: Uşaklılar, 2016), turned into a hotel in 1922.	Not in use
(c)	Agora Park	Yeni	Public	International + domestic	adjacent to the Agora of Smyrna (4 <sup>th</sup> cent. BC), visual connection	In use

In conclusion, this study constitutes a documentation effort of three cases from three different historical neighborhoods of Basmane, focusing on the utilization of migrant agency in spatial (re)productions and the establishment of a sense of community and belonging. This documentation work explores the migration spaces of Sephardic Jews, crucial contributors to

the area's migration history over centuries, as well as domestic migrants from Eastern and Southeastern Anatolia, and international migrant groups like Syrians and Somalis. The focus is on understanding how these groups inhabit these spaces and, through their spatial practices, transform them into places of meaning and belonging. Simultaneously, the study exhibits the associations of its cases with historical layers of the area, extending across different centuries. Thus, this study chronicles the socio-spatial transformation of Basmane, bringing forward three migration spaces where the historical and contemporary intersect, with hopes of making a unique contribution to the literature on migration and space.

### **Declaration**

The authors declare that they utilized the services of ChatGPT (OpenAI GPT-3.5) solely for translation and paraphrasing purposes in the creation of this paper. The authors take full responsibility for the content and any modifications made during this process.

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