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PANEL TK2  
**Non-Muslims in the Ottoman Empire  
and Turkey**

**Historical Memory of an Ottoman-Turkish  
Neighbourhood In İstanbul**

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**ABSTRACT**

This article focuses on a historical neighborhood in İstanbul; departing from the Ottoman-Turkish concept of mahalle (neighborhood) and its transformation, it endeavors to discuss how local residents react to socio-cultural changes that came along the urban revitalization in İstanbul accelerated in the last ten years. This study departs from a field work that has been conducted in Rasimpaşa in Kadıköy, located at the Asian part of İstanbul. In Rasimpaşa there is an ongoing process of revitalization, which started in 2010 with the partnership of Kadıköy Municipality and ÇEKÜL (the Foundation for the Protection and Promotion of the Environment and Cultural Heritage). The revitalization seems to have an impact on Rasimpaşa, a district that constitutes a good example for comparing the old and new mahalle traditions. The old mahalle culture is represented by the Ottoman buildings and memory traces of non-Muslim communities and the new mahalle culture is represented by the migrant families, who came to İstanbul from Anatolian cities and who got localized here since the 1950's. Moreover, currently Rasimpaşa accommodates newcomers such as university students, international visitors, Erasmus students, upper middle-class artists, musicians, travelers. The question of the study has a simple focus: How the local people narrate the old mahalle and the memory of the non-Muslim communities and how do they compare it to the new version of mahalle.

**Keywords:** Mahalle, Ottoman Turkish urbanization, Memory, Neighborhood Studies, Non-Muslims in Turkey

## 1. Introduction

The Turkish- Ottoman tradition of *mahalle* was a social and physical unit, designed as the main functional core of urban life. It follows from this design that the inhabitants of the neighborhood are physically and socially connected. Physically it was the smallest settlement unit including the sacred places (i. e mosque, church or synagogue) primary school, fountain (when there was no infrastructure for water), convenient stores, and coffee/tea houses, Turkish bath, playgrounds (parks). In the Ottoman tradition there are many ways how *mahalle* is named. Some *mahalle* were named after the Ottoman Pasha (i.e Rasimpaşa, Piyale Paşa) who endowed their capital for building up the urban infrastructure which made possible via the Waqf system under Islamic law, some are named after an influential religious sheik or leader, some are named after a poet, or a government official 'some are named after the previous place of the replaced community (Ergenç, 1980).

Etymologically the term *mahalle* derives from the Arabic root of *hall* (*halel* and *hulul*) meaning "to inhibit, to locate, to settle"; hence the word *mahalle* is used in contemporary Turkish derives its meaning from the word *mahal* that means location, region, and place (Küçükaşçı & Yel, 2003). It is the physical intimacy and shared space that weaves the social fabric into the urban cosmos. Actually, *mahalle* is the microcosm of urban life in the Ottoman Turkish tradition. Therefore, the *mahalle* bonds were considered as integral part of a social order, which have been formed by *long duree* relationships. Primarily a community life was experienced in *mahalle* along the family bonds (Ergenç 1984, p.69). Hence, mahalle in the old sense is not only a physical place to live together or side by side, but it is also an economic unit. The studies on mahalle show that in the Ottoman Empire, cities were based upon neighborhoods and were responsible for satisfying the basic needs, hence the neighborhood administration was at the center of local and central management with its duties and functions (Behar 2003; Alver 2013 ; Cansever 2016)

*Mahalle* was also an ethical universe that connects the locals through ties akin to family bonds. That means there are some common values and norms that the community observes. So, this community ethos was considered as the core of the urban social order. Some historical studies on Ottoman urban culture and public administration suggest that it is *mahalle* that characterizes values such as solidarity and security on a micro scale (Alver, 2013, pp.222-223). Nevertheless, it simultaneously creates a discourse of surveillance and control mechanism as well as social, moral and administrative control over people (Cansever, 2016, p.121; Alver, 2013, p.222). Historically speaking, The Ottoman-Turkish mahalle tradition was mainly formed around the religious community centers. Hence people in the neighborhood were relating to each other by "praying under the same roof" (Ergenç, 1984, p. 69). Being both a

socio-cultural and moral space gives the urban character to *mahalle* that has been easily transformed into administrative units in a political sense (Uğur, 2015, pp. 295-298). Hence in this article it can be argued that the Ottoman *mahalle* can be seen as a liminal space that stands between public and private sphere, hence it is greater than family and smaller than the city.

## 2. Remarks on Ottoman - Turkish Urban History of İstanbul

It is beyond the scope of this paper to present a comprehensive and diffusive account on the urban history of İstanbul. One can argue that classical studies on Ottoman İstanbul depict the city as an Islamic city; very much characterized by the religious rules and regulations (Inalcık, 1990: 14-15). The sacred principles of the Sharia, *halal* (lawful) and *haram* (prohibited) govern all human activities in society, the more so in an urban environment. Islamic law regulates not only issues related to ritual, social conduct, but also food, residential planning and environment. For instance, due to the ban on alcoholic drinks and pork, non-Muslim stores are required to keep their stores outside of the Muslim districts. The city was divided in to two main zones: The residential and commercial. In the commercial zone, religious identity did not interfere with the daily routine, and Muslims and non-Muslims are merged in residential areas the districts are designed along the religious lines. Every religious community occupied a designated area in the residential *mahalle* and had its own worship household and cemetery. As Inalcık states in his work (1990: 14) Ottoman *mahalle* planned around a religious center such as *masjid*, church, or synagogue. Greeks, Armenians, Jews or Karaites had each their separate areas. The urban space is organized along the segregation of the Muslim areas from the non-Muslim ones. Hence the residential *mahalle* was the space in which the Muslim community and the other religious communities lived, in their separate districts, their private lives. Government representatives rarely showed themselves in these areas. The *kethkuda* and imam, elected by the *mahalle* approved by the *Qadı* (local magistrate) responsible for the public affairs.

According to studies on Ottoman modernization and urban history of İstanbul, the urban and architectural history of İstanbul goes hand in hand with the modernization movements and specially architecture and urban planning are the two key areas where this political history can be most clearly traced and analyzed (Gül, 2017). Sultan Abdülhamid II who is famous with his autocratic rule paradoxically supported the practitioners of art nouveau styles, intense modernization, infrastructure development and the first examples of "national" architectural style also marked the age. With the Turkish republican modernization and the shifting of the capital from İstanbul to Ankara, İstanbul was associated with the old system and the symbol of a degraded Ottoman identity. During the passage from one party rule to multiparty system migration and development marked the future urban

policies. Especially the era of Adnan Menderes' conservative Democrat Party, frequently emphasized that Istanbul to its traditional glory days. Paradoxically, the DP administration demolished the traditional historical buildings to build wide boulevards and squares. It is obvious that traditional neighborhoods got their share from the abovementioned transformation by losing their traditional profiles. According to studies on the non-Muslim communities, there has been a rise in the exclusionary or assimilatory attitudes after the foundation of the Republic that target non-Muslim communities. For instance, the riots against the Non-Muslims of Turkey: 6/7 September 1955 mark that although the Turkish Republic guaranteed the autonomy of minorities within the framework of international law, in everyday life, belongingness to the dominant Turkish ethnic identity formed the basis of the state's identity policy. The intention of these practices was to accelerate the processes of nation-state formation, modernisation and westernization (Güven 2012).

In the last 20 years Istanbul has become a global centre of attraction, and along this rise, its historical urban sites have been witnessing the long "urban revitalization and gentrification" processes. The emerging literature on "neoliberal policies and its impact on city planning" suggest that urban space in Turkey entered a new phase during the last decades due to the Act on the "Renewal and Re-use of Deteriorated Historic Building Stock" enacted in 2005 (Act No. 5366) which endows local authorities with new powers to intervene and regenerate historic neighborhoods. It happens where market forces by themselves do not suffice or do not act quick enough to gentrify and transform these settlements (Dinçer, 2011; Uysal, 2015, Enlil, 2011; Tansel, 2019; Lovering & Türkmen, 2011)

As it is noted in the literature the revitalization processes are differentiating from the classic gentrification processes where the former take a more community-oriented approach to economic and demographic shifts, and it is more likely to see new businesses in revitalized neighborhoods instead of simply new homeowners. By the mid-2000s, Istanbul was not only 'the hottest destination for property investors in Turkey'; it was the "treasure" of the Middle East for real estate companies and property investors (Wolf, 2005). When the historical phases of gentrification and the revitalization of Istanbul are examined, the first examples can be seen in Arnavutköy, Ortaköy and Kuzguncuk neighborhoods by the Bosphorus line beginning from 1980s. In 1990 and afterwards, this transformation continued in Cihangir, Galata, Tarlabası and Asmalımescit neighborhoods of Beyoğlu. Majority of these settlements that have to confront the gentrification are, in fact, characterized by the Ottoman multi-cultural communities in the past. (Behar, 2003; Coşkun, & Yalçın, 2007).

### **3. The Context of Rasimpaşa**

It is remarkable that in this settlements when “revitalization” projects run by private sectors, it is common to observe a change in the social structure of the neighborhood , in most cases the local people with low income end up leaving their neighborhoods as a result of change of value (Şahin 2013). This seems to be a transition from a communitarian life which is based on both spatial connectedness and historical roots towards the individualistic life which is based on mobility and cosmopolitanism. Academic studies suggest that the example of Rasimpaşa stands out among other renewal projects that are run by private sectors (Şahin, 2013). In the Rasimpaşa urban renewal project, Kadıköy Municipality and NGO based initiatives named as (CEKUL) worked together and they both aimed at creating a slow but steady change in the *mahalle* through participatory development and it seem to be a positive example built upon a participatory model. In Rasimpaşa the municipality supported the foundation of the architectural design atelier that is named as Tasarım Atölyesi Kadıköy (TAK<sup>1</sup>) ; which is a platform that welcomes citizens, designers, volunteers, students and supporters building national and international collaborations to produce ideas and practices for public good. It is an independent organization; it organizes programs and projects based on volunteering and collaborative work of a variety of designers from different disciplines.

In Rasimpaşa, there is an apparent cosmopolitan heritage of the old *mahalle* culture. As one can see at the first glance the remarkable historical buildings belong to three different religions; Rasimpaşa Mosque, Agios Georgios Eastern Orthodox church and Hemdat Israel Synagogue. Each of these religious buildings have a historical and cultural role hence they complete the narrative of Ottoman cosmopolitan *mahalle* culture. Here it should be noted that the so-called Ottoman cosmopolitanism is put in question by many scholars (İnalçık 1990; Işın 2008; Boyar 2010) since the İslamic and religious categorizations were demarcating the communities rather than building a harmonious co-existence.

Many of the historical apartments of the old Rasimpasa are in fact the apartments once constructed for the lodging of German and Italian personnel during the construction of Haydarpaşa Train Station. Haydarpaşa Train Station was constructed in 1909 by the Anatolian Railway (CFOA) as the western terminus of the Baghdad and Hedjaz railways, has become a symbol of Istanbul and Turkey and is famous throughout the Middle East (Atılğan, 2017).The urban texture in Rasimpaşa is dense, formed by approximately multi storey apartments. The spatial structure of the district (slopes and elevations) has huge contribution in this density; their backyards and empty areas in between apartment blocks and this forms a multi-sectional neighborhood texture; the historical brick apartments are decorated with frontage embellishments and are influenced by *Art Nouveau*. Reinforced

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<sup>1</sup> <http://takortak.org/what-is-tak.html>

buildings in the neighborhood are constructed between the years 1950 - 1970. The famous apartment buildings Valprede, Menase and Kehribarji were built by non-muslim communities between 1905 and 1908 (Atılgan, 2017). Due to the historical value Rasimpaşa has benefited from the privilege of being a “protected area” and therefore this area is suitable for revitalization rather than rebuilding or gentrification. Today these apartments are still standing and being home to working class families who came from Eastern part of Turkey. In this context Rasimpaşa, having grown especially by internal migration (from Bingöl, Konya and Blacksea Region) and low-income group has concentrated here until the 1990s (Türkmen, 2015).

As a result of the revitalization processes, new cultural middle class (artists, gallery owners, art directors and journalists, Erasmus students and university lecturers, etc.) preferred this region as their residence. Some of these newcomers also started their own business (as cafe, art studios, craftwork shops). In this way the upper middle class also joined in the *mahalle*’s population, which was composed of working class and lower middle class before. Considering its central location (geographical proximity to the Ferry docks, Marmaray, Metro, Metrobus lines), historical value and the rent scale, Rasimpaşa became an attractive spot for international visitors.

According to the data provided by the Turkish Statistical Institute (Türkiye İstatistik Kurumu -TUIK 2017), the population of the Rasimpaşa neighborhood is 14,016 (6671 male and 7345 female). Municipality’s official discourse emphasizes that the vitalization project conducted by Çekül Foundation and Kadıköy Municipality (2010-2013) gives weight to “neighborhood belonging” and looks out for revitalization in order to protect the present inheritance without interfering into the living habits of the residents (Municipality Social Service, 2020).

However, as revitalizing has its own dynamic of change and challenge, Rasimpaşa also has its share from these challenges. Moreover, these challenges can be perceived negatively or positively depending on the perspective.

#### **4. The Field Work on Rasimpaşa**

The field work that was conducted in Rasimpaşa in 2018 lasted for 6 months and it focused on reactions by the local people mainly the traditional shopkeepers (Total 40 people, 30 male 10 female) who lived here more than 30 years. The exemplary/sample discourses quoted here will be coded as numbers to keep confidentiality (i.e Interviewee 1, grocery shop owner). Appendix 1. shows see the enumerated list of interviewees and their professions. The semi-structured in-depth interviews concentrate on following questions. 1) Who were the past residents of mahalle? 2)What characteristics do people recall on the old mahalle life? 3) How would they compare it to the new mahalle?

First question addresses the historical meaning and past experiences which would make out the memories regarding the non-Muslim communities, second question addresses their way of narrating the past, the third question addresses the comparative approach of the residents regarding the old and new mahalle. Regarding the first question majority of the interviewees answered that "Armenians, Greeks and Jews were living together with Turks" in their mahalle; moreover they defined the concept of *mahalle* with the following words: "Being tight-knit", "collective life", "Muslims and non-Muslims together" which indicates that here seems to be a clear nostalgia and longing for the past life. Regarding the third question the majority of the interviewees are pessimistic and negative with respect to the loss of old *mahalle* culture, although few of them think that the "new cosmopolitan image" of the mahalle with artists, students and travelers will be good for the future internationalization of the mahalle.

#### **4.1 Those Were the Days: Mahalle as Big Family**

As far as the history of mahalle is concerned the word "nostalgia" is inescapable for its residents. When it is asked "how was life back then" many of the interviewees underline the presence of non-Muslim communities. Even though there are different religions communities standing side by side in the same mahalle, cooperation among different cultures are especially highlighted by the interviewees. When they recall the traditional characteristics of *mahalle*, the following words recur: "tea and chat at the doorsteps", "not locking doors at night", "helping each other in childcare", "everyone knowing everyone", "mutual family visits in the evenings", "uniting of Muslims and non-Muslims during funerals and religious holidays", "morning salutations", "security", "watching out each other".

These expressions emphasize mutual social awareness and transparency. According to one interviewee (1), when "500 people share grief of a single person also, 500 people share the joy of a single person, this is "*mahalle*". It is the place where "all become one". This emphasis of unity, such as "becoming one big family when necessary" is the basic theme of nostalgia regarding the *mahalle* life. An interviewee (2) says: "If my neighbor next door is not going to heal my wound then, for what good is he/she here".

Hence from the perspective of the locals, sharing grief and joy brings forth a kind of "neighborhood as a moral universe" where common values and expectations are set and cultivated. Referring to the old times, %90 of the interviewees mentioned 'community responsibility' and 'respect for others needs'. For example, when non-Muslim shopkeepers who made the first sale of the day in the morning usually send their second customer to the nearest Muslim shopkeeper that have not yet made the first sale. Similar communal responsibility is apparent in cooperative action in childcare. When the interviewees recall their childhood memories, they recall playing in the street all day long and eating lunch in each other's tables.

While responding to the question about the comparison between old and new mahalle, %100 of the interviewees underlined the dramatic decrease of non-Muslim population (Greek, Armenian and Jewish) who were the integral part of the mahalle and who made a special contribution to the spirit of solidarity. All interviewees feel nostalgic about the “old lifestyle”. Especially, solidarity in times of funerals, rituals and religious holidays are still a reminiscence longed for nowadays by Rasimpaşa people:

"We did not attend the daily religious ceremonies, but we did go to the funerals. Whole neighborhood attended the funeral of Solomon and Dr. Vita at the synagogue. But why is the door of the synagogue closed today? Because they feel not secure" (K. F).  
“There were attacks, there is no security of life; doors were closed when they attacked (Synagogue) ceremonies... I must confess that we are a bit barbarian" (interviewee 3).

Here it should be noted that the interviewees (2) and (3) refer to the three terrorist attacks in İstanbul on Neve Shalom Synagogue in 1986, 1992 and 2003. That is an important point that these attacks and political situations make people insecure and distant from each other today.

Interviewee (1) tells that "the church bell used to ring every day. It does not today... there was Monsieur Yanni; he owned a five-store shop, a draper, and he was loved by everyone. He continues and says `During the “Cyprus Peace Operation” in 1974 Yanni was afraid sold everything and disappeared ”.

The operation mentioned by (interviewee 1) here refers to the Turkish military operation on Cyprus that was launched on 20 July 1974, following the Cypriot coup d'état on 15 July 1974. This event had a serious impact on Turkish Greek relations (Stavrou, 2011, p.130). As one can easily follow, the high politics on the international level had its consequences on the micro politics as well as in *mahalle* level. Though today these non-Muslim neighbors are remembered with nostalgia it would be too naive to think about that the Turkish citizens of this *mahalle* was immune to the effervescent nationalism at that time. There could also be some local cause for the insecurity of people like Mr. Yanni. When asked, %100 of the interviewees underline the positive side of the intercommunal relations as one can see in the following expressions:

"We learned Greek while living with them, we used to say "Kalispera". (R.D) "When they go Church on Sunday times were like a parade. Unfortunately they are gone and the tradition is dead." (Interviewee1)



"We played in the garden of Synagogue; we had Orthodox neighbors; their garden was well trimmed, I saw aquarium fish for the first time in their garden." (M.K) "The doors were always open, our neighbor would bring *gavurdağı* salad and my mom would send them deep fried pastry." "They celebrated Easter and gave us cases of eggs. They were decent people". (Interviewee 2)

"Our Jewish neighbor had a fridge. I used to sell water down in Kadıköy, and they were helping me making ice so that I can keep the water cold." (Interviewee 4)

"We had Armenian neighbors, everyone was saluting each other; in the afternoon they will bake *çatal* pie and my mom will bake *puf böreği* then they will drink tea on the doorsteps" (Interviewee 5)

The local memories of Rasimpasa residents bear many characteristics like the people of other historical neighborhoods (i.e Kuzguncuk, Teşvikiye) who had preserved the same Ottoman cosmopolitanism for some time after the foundation of the Turkish Republic in 1923. Academic research on these historical mahalle culture suggest that in the mindset urban middle class there has been a strong emphasis on the lost "cosmopolitan" Istanbul (Neyzi, 2009; Mills, 2004). However this attitude is transforming rapidly with new immigrations and Istanbul's new silhouette after the 2000's: "Portrait of an ideal but lost city, where diverse but urban communities live in peace, is featured in many cultural artifacts such as autobiography, documentary, TV series, novels and cinema" (Mills, 2004, ss.367-394). According to Neyzi (2009) the epitome of sympathy displayed by the urban middle class towards non-Muslim minorities (or their ghosts in the city) lies within the class and cultural alliance formed against recent migrants who came from the countryside. Urban middle class, today identifying themselves with the minorities fictionalized as "old Istanbulites" ', is composed of Muslims bourgeoisie that gained their current position with the opportunities of the Republic. Moreover Ergün's study on gentrification projects in Istanbul state that common characteristics of the regions gentrified were the areas where the non-Muslim minorities used to live. (Ergün, 2006, pp.28). Therefore, it can be argued that the locals of Rasimpaşa harbor a similar nostalgia that Neyzi and Mills have mentioned.

#### 4.2 New Mahalle Today: “Open to the World but Closed to Neighbors”

As it was mentioned before, with the revitalization process and settling of the new middle class that comprises artists, journalists, foreign and local students, Rasimpaşa’s profile has changed; the most important triggering event was the "Yeldeğirmeni Neighborhood Vitalization Project" conducted with the partnership of ÇEKÜL Foundation and Kadıköy Municipality since 2010. In this context for example, MURAL-IST being the first event in Turkey for painting building facades has brought an utterly different ambiance to the spatial appearance of the neighborhood. The Yeldeğirmeni Wall Art Festival was held within the scope of "Yeldeğirmeni Neighborhood Vitalization Project", and the neighborhood became an attraction center for both local and international artists. Mural festival was a good example in observing how global trends and courses were represented locally (Mimarizm, 2018). Similarly, another dynamism transforming the neighborhood is the geometrical increase in socialization areas (Artist workshops, event venues, Yeldeğirmeni Art Center, Design Studio Kadıköy and generally cafés with the concept of "Italian style"). Especially cafés offering work space and wi-fi have become a socialization area preferred by students and young people who work from home. The %10 of the interviewees state that newcomers brought a new joy to the neighborhood and say that, "the newcomers adapted to us, and we did not adapt to them". The %90 of the interviewees are unhappy with the newcomers. For them it is mainly the issue of “internationalization” and “unfamiliarity” of the newcomers that caused the disturbance and negative perception.

In regard to rent scale in Rasimpaşa, five years ago it was possible to find a room and apartment at a reasonable price for a student budget, however in five years TRY/square meter of real estates increased to 104.5% - (Zingat, 2019). This increase has attracted many real estate investors to the region. Some investors restored old apartments and turned them into international youth hostels which has attractive prices for moderate budgets. Moreover the global accommodation networks such as Airbnb contributed to the branding of Rasimpaşa as an international spot for young travellers. (Uzgören & Türkün, 154-170). Some of the interviewees express their disapproval of the constant flow of people in the mahalle, highlighting that security and peace of the mahalle is disturbed. Most of the complaints of the residents underline the following words: “degeneration”, “alcohol consumption on the streets”, “littering”, “not saluting”, “not knowing each other”, “cosmopolitan life”, “insecurity” and “immoral manners.

As interviewee (5) says:

"Ground floors of the apartments turned into cafés or art studios, it is fine to have such places but if they arouse chaos, if the sidewalks are occupied, if there is no respect for each other, if

people throw their cigarettes on the streets then we will not tolerate this. The rents of shops have increased by 90%. They come and open workshop ateliers, artists do sculptures, sell them at a high price, hence they can pay high rents. Putting the money issues aside, these artist groups don't mix in the mahalle. They live where they work, inside their atelier, use the art studio it as lodging; there are even rooms which are rented by the day. They call it private life, what the heck is that?" (Interviewee 5).

Another interviewee (6) says : “

What happens to our mahalle when families go away? If 15 students are living in a home, then there is no social touch with the neighbours. Not acting like a *komşu* (neighbor) will terminate the *mahalle*, families are not making visits to each other, we used to gather in one's house every evening, we would eat popcorn, there was no TV, and everyone would sleep around 10:30 pm. You can see this old lifestyle nowadays only in small towns of Anatolia" (Interviewee 6).

The selected discourses above show the negative sentiments that seem to be rising between the old and new Rasimpaşa people. Thereby, lifestyle differences between them constitute problems such as who should adapt to whom? As it can be traced from the expressions such as " they adapted with us, not vice versa" or "we won't be a mahalle anymore if no one knows each other" indicate that the local people feel that their mahalle life is at stake.

As the interviewee (7) says:

"In the 1970s non-Muslims were the majority, they would thank you when they gave you money, laundry was dried in back balconies, now they call the cleaning lady and she cleans the house. The cultural mosaic has shattered, spiritual richness has gone; People used to know each other, now no one will be aware if you have a funeral, no one will send them traditional food. Half of the neighborhood used to go for the prayers, but now no one does" (Interviewee 7).

In this context one can see that the diversification and mobility of people in terms of class, lifestyle, nationality, causes unrest among the locals and interviewee (5) said that:

This "liberal cosmopolitan lifestyle" and so called "democracy" is not good for the mahalle: "Democracy is like an oversize shirt that does not fit us; there must be a bit of fear besides love; freedom, democracy, aimlessness are a bit over the top of us. In the past, evil was rare but now the good is rare. Insensitivity towards neighbours will bring the end of mahalle; there is no faith, no trust. We were really poor back then; I would like to go back to those old days because we overcame poverty but overpowered by wealth" (Interviewee 5).

Though there is a negative tendency towards the newcomers and the new profile of the mahalle, there are also positive responses regarding the internationalization of the people of mahalle. Erasmus students, artists who come from different countries using Airbnb links and global housing networks produce the "good guests" of mahalle. As interviewee (8) and (9) say:

"We got more cosmopolitan. For example yesterday, a Peruvian and Danish got acquainted in my shop. Marmaray (train) also had an impact, the number of student housing has increased. We do not complain about them. We get acquainted here. There are artists, doing workshops; they invite us. The other day, an one of these artists guys distributed flour halva (*un helvası*) and told that his mother had passed away. They gave it to every shop here, it means that they are mixing in to us, not vice versa" (interviewee 8).

"There are artists in the neighborhood. We got acquainted with Erasmus students. They are influenced by our mahalle life. They speak Turkish, we are surprised by it. We are happy with it". (Interviewee 9)

#### 4.3 Wither Mahalle?

Real estate companies make the projection that Rasimpaşa, transforming gradually in the last five years, will be a rising star for the young urban alternative lifestyle. Socio-economically, it is in category (A). Category A means that the 36.5% of the population has a university diploma and the ratio of 15-44 age range in the general population is 57.3%. The future projections made by the real estate database services (i.e Zingat, Endeksa, Yuvako) suggest that Kadıköy and Rasimpaşa are rising like the formerly revitalized neighbourhoods of İstanbul such as Beyoğlu and Cihangir.

It can be clearly seen in the discourses of the interviewees that Rasimpaşa would resemble Beyoğlu and Cihangir in the near future. Beyoğlu and Cihangir represent the examples of formerly revitalized regions that were mostly populated by cosmopolitan upper middle class intellectuals and artists today. This indicates that mahalle in the old sense is replaced by a more individualistic, urban and cosmopolitan lifestyle. While groceries and repair shops transform into cafés, hostels, and art studios, young, unmarried profile will populate the mahalle, hence a new Rasimpaşa -with its new problems- will be born.

Regarding the future problems interviewees conveyed issues such as lack of familiarity, intimacy, security. Moreover the %90 of the interviewees express the opinion which suggests that the technological tools deprive physical communication and sense of collectivity. Attaching importance to individualism and virtual communication, most of the young people are connected to social life via mobile phones and tables. An important detail emphasized by the interviewees is that newcomers of the neighborhood are "open to the globe but careless to their neighbors".

The most significant indicator is the café culture, which made a huge change in the social life of the neighborhood. As expressed by interviewee (8) "being neighbors in traditional sense is not properly experienced by the young generation; why should we go to those expensive coffee houses and pay for it while we can have a cup of coffee with our neighbor?" This sentence is a clear indication that locals have hard time to conceive the mindset of the new middle class who go to a cafe to work or socialize. Once upon a time, neighbors in the Rasimpaşa "mahalle" used to sit on chairs at the doorsteps, sharing tea and home made pastries but now, this has moved indoors in apartment buildings and transformed into "making evening visits at home". Nowadays, a brand new format has developed with the cafés opened at every corner. Mahalle's social area has gained a heterogeneous and cosmopolitan characteristic.

## **5. Conclusion**

This article attempted to approach the mahalle culture as a concept that is inherited from Ottoman Empire and it tried to analyze how the old mahalle is recalled today in Rasimpaşa and how would local people compare the old and new mahalle. It seems that mahalle as a term is coined with the past co-existence of the Muslima and non-Muslim communities. Locals refer

to old mahalle as a “big family” but the new mahalle as a “foreign land” populated by isolated individuals who come from all over the world. In the words of the locals the newcomers are “open to globe but close to neighbor”. In the eyes of the locals, the newcomers (upper middle class profile and “foreigners” coming via global networks) make the traditional mahalle culture more vulnerable. Hence, the changes coming along the revitalization caused discomfort, insecurity and estrangement. As 90% of the interviewees expressed their discontent, only 10% of the interviewees see it from a positive lense. Those who take it positively are in the opinion that their “mahalle” stands as a place for global encounters and it is good for future. Within this frame, mahalle can be considered as liminal space not only by being family and urban community but also by means of interaction between old and new, new synthesis and possible hybridizations .

From the negative side which represents the %90 of the interviewees the recent transformations will end the mahalle in the old sense as they know, as a transparent, social and physical unity as well as a moral universe. As it can be observed due to the changes in this mahalle, the traditional family life is decreasing, steady communitarian life is decaying, instead global mobility and human flow is increasing, international housing market is rising, working hours and and lifestyle of the young generations are changing.

Regarding the first level, further field studies are needed to compare different models and experiences to view the phenomenon from local level. In the context of conserving the cultural heritage, the social impact evaluations and field work gain special importance since the local reactions can be taken into account for constructing a sustainable revitalization process without causing any negative reaction in the local community. Although the interviewees mention about the non-muslim communities such as Christian or Jewish neighbors who significantly differ from the Muslim faith, they do not narrate their differences as an exclusive one. However it seems to be the case that the interviewees tend to develop a thicker concept of the “strangeness” towards the newcomers (upper middle class and international visitors) compared to the non-muslim communities in the past.

Connecting first and the second level it is crucial to rethink whether the locals longing for the past is a mere nostalgia, fuelled by selective memories of the harmonious good old days with the non-Muslim neighbours or could it correspond to a conservative communitarian call against the “ruthless cosmopolitanism” that pay reference to the idealization of the family and neo-conservative moral ground that can be found in religious communities. Moreover regarding the third level described above, the indicators of the real estate market shows that Kadıköy and Rasimpaşa is an attractive investment for the newcomers as well as foreign internationals (Zingat 2020). If this region continues to be an appealing place for investment, this means that revitalization of mahalle has to absorb more cosmopolitan encounters than before.

Hence the discussion over mahalle paves the way for further sociological debate over new urban belongings, new encounters and new understanding of shared social and physical spaces. Borrowing an analysis by the prominent sociologists Urry one can argue that the modern urban identifications deconstruct the classical meaning of settlement and identification processes (Urry, 1999, s.288). Hence, the modern urban identity has completely reversed the traditional identification processes. In one respect, existence of new public locations, such as cafés, hostels, where people experience a specific sense of privacy within the public space transforms the spatial experience i.e. juxtaposition of people in a café, or a specific corner in the neighborhood turning out to be a hangout place for residents as well as for the tourists. All of these in urban scale seems to serve to the development of atomic identities that are extraordinary as expressed in different kinds of urban belongings. Therefore, Rasimpaşa and other revitalizations projects can be discussed further as samples that produce multiple kinds of belongings and multilayered social experiences for the new and old Istanbulites.

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### Appendix 1.

40 interviews for this study are conducted in 2018-2019, June- January in Rasimpaşa, Kadıköy 9 of them are quoted in this article. The profile of the quoted interviewees are listed below:

Number code of the Interviewee	Profession	Date of Interview
Interviewee (1)	Grocery shop owner	22.06. 2018
Interviewee (2)	Stationary shop owner	30.07.2018

Interviewee (3)	Community house manager (Mahalle evi yöneticisi)	19.08.2018
Interviewee (4)	Electronic device-repair shop	22.09.2018
Interviewee (5)	Photostudio /Photographer	12.10.2018
Interviewee (6)	Boutique owner	08.09.2018
Interviewee (7)	Traditional Tea house manager	27.11.2018
Interviewee (8)	Tailor	12.01.2019
Interviewee (9)	Stationary shop owner	16.01.2019