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Constanze Letsch

TERRITORIAL STIGMATISATION

Urban Renewal and Displacement
in a Central Istanbul Neighbourhood



[transcript] Culture and Social Practice

Constanze Letsch
Territorial Stigmatisation

To the people of Tarlabası

Constanze Letsch is a journalist and researcher. She did her doctorate at Europa-Universität Viadrina in Frankfurt/Oder. The cultural anthropologist lived in Turkey for more than eleven years and was the Turkey correspondent for the Guardian and Observer between 2011 and 2016. Since then, she has worked as a reporter for the German Press Agency dpa and as a consultant for Human Rights Watch. Her work focuses on Turkey, public health, and food justice.

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Introduction

Barber Halil Usta¹ loved his shop and entertained very strong and longstanding ties in his neighbourhood. Originally from the city of Kayseri in Central Anatolia, Halil obtained his Usta certificate in 1977, but had worked in the profession since 1969, and always in the central Istanbul neighbourhood of Tarlabaşı. While the gradual decline of the area over the years had led to him losing many of his former customers, a phenomenon that accelerated with the Tarlabaşı renewal project, he preferred to spend most of his time in his small shop in Tree Street. When he was not in his shop he could be found in the Kurdish-owned teahouse down the street, where he indulged his one guilty pleasure: playing cards with his friends from the neighbourhood. However, Halil Usta did not live in Tarlabaşı. He had moved to a *site*² in the middle class neighbourhood in Bostancı, a district on the Asian side of Istanbul where he lived with his wife. While he often lauded his “modern apartment” and the area he lived in as “clean and quiet” and “good for a family to live in”, he admitted that he barely knew any of his neighbours by name, something he did miss in comparison to Tarlabaşı. He was proud that he had put both his children through good schools and university with the help of his shop, and that they both worked in respected white-collar jobs: his daughter at a big international bank and his son as a lawyer.

The Usta had an excellent reputation as a barber and was famed for his “close shaves and smooth hands”. A number of patrons, those who had moved away from the neighbourhood but did not want to miss out on Halil Usta’s grooming and the local gossip, came from other parts of the city to enjoy his services. In short, Halil Usta was both very respected and very well integrated in Tarlabaşı, and yet, or so he told me on several occasions, he had preferred not to disclose the location of his small business at the parent-teacher meetings in the school of his children in Bostancı. He had feared the “bad reputation” that Tarlabaşı generally had amongst Istanbul residents, and the subsequent im-

1 In Turkey, the honorific “Usta” [Master] is used for craftsmen and artisans who have reached the highest level of competence and craftsmanship. It is used with the bearer’s first name and used to address a master craftsman as a sign of respect in daily interactions. In the traditional Turkish apprenticeship system, the title is awarded at the discretion of an apprentice’s mentor, who is an Usta himself, and not tied to an independent exam, as is the case for example in Germany. I will refer to all master craftsmen as Usta, as I did in every daily interaction with them during my fieldwork.

2 A group of apartment buildings often managed like a gated community.

pact it might have had on how teachers and fellow students would treat his children. This worry did not disappear as they went on to university, and later on started their professional lives. In front of their friends and colleagues, Halil Usta always remained rather vague, and preferred to say that he had a barber shop in Beyoğlu, the larger administrative district to which Tarlabası also belongs. In the end he simply stated that he was retired, which was factually true, and did not work anymore at all, a white lie that was meant to foreclose all further questions.

When the Beyoğlu Municipality officially announced the Tarlabası renewal project in 2008, Halil Usta was torn. He believed that the neighbourhood was in dire need of an upgrade, and that the government as he knew it would likely do what was best for inhabitants. He also voiced the opinion that in fact, Tarlabası residents had only themselves to blame for the bad state of the area, and, since they were largely squatters anyway, they should not complain about looming evictions. However, as the project progressed, Halil Usta felt increasingly uneasy. Neighbours and friends he had known for decades started to leave, making him feel “like an orphan”. His already lagging business trickled to a halt. His landlord insisted on full rent while locked in a court case over the sales price of his property with project stakeholders. As a tenant, Halil Usta had no right to any compensation despite his progressing income loss. He felt increasingly unseen and unheard. Despite initial promises by the municipality, the project made his life, and that of many of his neighbours, not better, but worse. However, Halil Usta never engaged in any kind of organised resistance against the demolition of his neighbourhood. He did not join the Tarlabası Solidarity Association³ that had been founded with the aim to help residents. Despite his lack of engagement, Halil Usta regularly challenged the negative narrative and the stigmatising discourse about Tarlabası. In conversations, he would underline what he thought was good about his neighbourhood and should be preserved. Halil Usta clearly valued Tarlabası, his life and his position there very much – so why did he go to such lengths to obscure this significant aspect of his life, his accomplishments, his social world, from others? What were the consequences Halil Usta was trying to avoid by distancing himself from Tarlabası? Why did he feel the need to blame his neighbours, many of whom he had an excellent and deep relationship with, for the bad state of the neighbourhood? And how to explain his ambivalent stance towards the renewal project? The simplest answer is this: Tarlabası suffered, and still suffers, from a bad reputation.

In this book I interrogate these questions further. True, Tarlabası *does* have a bad reputation, but there are micro-social processes and macro-political dynamics involved that structure the way that neighbourhood reputation sticks to particular residents in particular ways. These processes and dynamics also structure the diversity of tactics meant to manage or negotiate social life in a deeply stigmatised neighbourhood. This place-based stigma also has a profound impact on solidarity ties and trust networks, and therefore impacts the way a community is able – or not – to organise around collective action and resistance. Importantly, the various attempts to challenge the bad reputation of Tarlabası

3 The “Tarlabası Association of Property Owners and Tenants for Progress and Solidarity”, founded in 2008. I will expand on the association, further referred to as “Tarlabası Association” or “Solidarity Association”, in a later chapter of the book.

deserve attention, as they can provide insight into how residents tried to oppose the negative frame the renewal project trapped their neighbourhood in.

Aims

Building on Loïc Wacquant's theory of territorial stigmatisation, I focus on the questions of how territorial stigmatisation was produced, and how it was exploited by project stakeholders during the state-led renewal project in the central Istanbul neighbourhood of Tarlabası. However, I do not only explore the manufacture of place-based stigma in the dominant discourse, by the municipality and the media. I also analyse how residents in a low-income neighbourhood reacted to this stigmatisation, how they managed and occasionally opposed it through everyday practices. While Wacquant did not dedicate much of his writing to how territorial stigma might be contested, research has shown that residents use a variety of strategic responses to appropriate, reject, ignore, or rescript spatial taints. Furthermore, opposition against stigma can also be found in the way residents express belonging. Paul Kirkness and Andreas Tijé-Dra point out that "the fact that some people are capable of feeling place attachments to areas that are deemed to be threatening by anybody outside the neighbourhood is an important step towards the negation of the power of stigma" (Kirkness and Tijé-Dra 2017a: 3). This, too, is a phenomenon that I will explore. I want to assess the scope and methods of territorial stigmatisation in Tarlabası and examine if Wacquant's theoretical understanding of the concept applies in the context of this central Istanbul neighbourhood. Furthermore, I want to investigate how territorial stigmatisation impacted residents in the run-up to and during evictions for the renewal project.

The internalisation of stigma in Tarlabası was by no means uniform and did not manifest itself as evenly as Wacquant suggests. While a number of people expressed negative opinions and ambivalence towards their area of residence, very few thought that it was all bad. The internalisation was also not consistent: people who would harshly criticise the neighbourhood and their neighbours one day, defended both on another, depending on the context and the audience. Furthermore, taking into account recent research on intersectionality, this work aims to fill a gap in the research on how the experience of stigma in a low-income neighbourhood in Turkey heavily depended on the socio-demographic and gender identity of residents. People who were part of a strong solidarity or trust network, such as Kurds, with awareness of and/or connection to longstanding organised political resistance in Turkey, managed stigma in a different way than those who could not fall back on the experience of a political struggle. My fieldwork suggests a more interactionist understanding of stigma than Wacquant applies in his work on urban marginality, a thought on which I would like to elaborate.

In the context of Tarlabası and the renewal project, I understand territorial stigmatisation to "include a wide range of subjective experiences, namely, incidents in which respondents experienced disrespect and their dignity, honor, relative status, or sense of self was challenged" (Lamont et al. 2016: 6). This was the case when residents were treated rudely by municipal representatives or employees of the private developer GAP

*Inşaat*⁴, when crucial information was withheld from them, when they were excluded from decisions that would deeply impact their lives, when they and their neighbours received poor services, when they were the victim of threats or violence— sometimes symbolic, sometimes physical—and when they were stereotyped as criminal, destitute, uneducated or dangerous. Stigmatisation in Tarlabası was always also an “assault on worth” (ibid: 7). Imogen Tyler and Tom Slater (2018: 727) show that “stigmatisation is intimately linked with neoliberal governance’, that is with attempts to manage and/or change the behaviour of populations through deliberate stigma strategies which inculcate humiliation and shame” The symbolic stigmatisation that people in Tarlabası faced justified and facilitated material marginalisation. During the planning and the execution of the renewal project, stigma became more entrenched. It was an integral part of the promotional material published by the municipality and the developer, a tool to legitimise and disregard residents as well as their concerns and their rights. For residents, reacting and opposing this project meant to an important extent interacting, challenging, managing, and deflecting this stigma. This work fills particular gaps in the literature on territorial stigma by focussing on the impact of spatial stigma not only during the planning phase of a large state-led urban renewal project, but during its execution and the evictions.

Territorial stigmatisation

What do we mean when we talk about a neighbourhood’s “bad reputation”? In his extensive body of work on urban marginality, Loïc Wacquant describes territorial stigmatisation as the profound stigma that attaches to a geographical location, to a physical place, the proverbial stain on a map often portrayed as the “bad part” of a town, neighbourhood, or any other location generally assumed to be “dangerous”, “dirty”, “sketchy”, or simply “unsavoury” (Wacquant 2007). Wacquant forged the concept of territorial stigmatisation based on a methodological comparison between an American “black ghetto” of Chicago’s South Side with a French working-class *banlieue* in the Paris periphery (Wacquant 2008). His theoretical framework draws upon the seminal sociological work of Erving Goffman and Pierre Bourdieu, by adding “place” to both Goffman’s three categories of stigma⁵ and to Bourdieu’s theory of symbolic power.⁶ This makes it possible to better dissect and understand how urban marginality affects individuals as well as communities, and how it

4 GAP *Inşaat* is a subsidiary of Çalık Holding, a company with close ties to the AKP government.

5 Goffman distinguishes three different ways, all three of them described in relation to what is considered “normal”, in which individuals can become first “discredited”, and then “disqualified” from society: “abominations of the body” (e.g. disability), “blemishes of individual character” (e.g. addiction, homosexuality, unemployment, imprisonment), and “tribal stigma of race, nation and religion” that can be handed down through lineages and taint several generations and family members through symbolic guilt by association. For all three forms of social stigma, Goffman attests “an undesired differentness from what we had anticipated” that results in the stigmatized being ostracised and discriminated against by “those who do not depart negatively from the particular expectations” of society, those that generally have access to political, economic and social capital and power (Goffman 1963: 3–4).

6 Bourdieu’s notion of “symbolic power” is useful in considering the actual social processes through which stigma attaches to social actors. In that sense, symbolic power is the capability to construct

is produced and used by those who exercise power against those who submit to it, as well as how and by whom stigma and marginalisation are reproduced and perpetuated. Wacquant identifies a location-related and pervasive form of discrimination he links to a “blemish of place” (Wacquant 2007: 67), a stain attached to “isolated and bounded territories increasingly perceived by both outsiders and insiders as social purgatories, leprous Badlands at the heart of the postindustrial metropolis where only the refuse of society would accept to dwell” (ibid).

The idea of a “topography of disrepute” (Wacquant et al. 2014: 1273), is not a novel concept. Poor, derelict urban areas have attracted writers, researchers, and a both worried and titillated urban elite for more than a century, when, with the onset of industrialisation and rapid urbanisation, the idea of debauched, criminal and destitute slums began to take hold (ibid).⁷ However, Wacquant, Pereira and Slater (2014: 1273–1275) point out that contemporary areas of spatial stigma differ from the description of these earlier slums in at least five ways: Firstly, territorial stigma has become “partially” independent from the stigma of class, ethnicity, “questionable” morality, street crime and degraded housing stock, thus both superseding and transcending negative stereotypes typically used to describe these attributes. This means that the taint associated with a certain neighbourhood has gained enough traction to exert its own real and devastating effects, attaching its own powerful stigma to people associated with it via stereotyping and a negative discourse, independently of and in addition to other types of discrimination. Secondly, the negative image attached to a stigmatised borough of the post-industrial metropolis is no longer only upheld amongst members of the social and cultural elites, but amongst the general populace and residents of the tainted neighbourhood as well. It has become so all-pervasive, that in some cases, stigmatised neighbourhoods have become synonymous with urban hellholes in international marketing and pop culture.⁸ Thirdly, the stigmatised districts of today are being portrayed as places of disorder, chaos, and utter disintegration, whereas the working-class districts of the past were depicted as a “powerful and hierarchized counter-society” (ibid: 1274), where the so-called “criminal underworld” was a highly organised club with a strict pecking order, and where the working class successfully set up organised labour struggles, unions, and stringent political representation. The fourth difference is a “racialisation” of stigmatised districts through selective attention or fictive projection. This often happens via sensationalist reports of crime and violent incidents in the media that frame cultural differences as divergent from, or even hostile to, the dominant national norm and as dangerous, “branding” residents “as outcasts” (ibid: 1274). The mainstream media have regularly described clashes between the police and residents in French banlieues or British boroughs as “race riots” using martial and colonial language (Tyler 2013). More recently, several German media outlets claimed that “failed integration of migrants” and “cultural differences” were to blame for attacks on ambulances and firefighters on New Year’s Eve in Berlin-Neukölln.

reality and to turn representations into unassailable social truths, whether or not the prescribed characteristics of that ‘truth’ correspond with reality (Bourdieu 1991).

7 See for example Friedrich Engels’ *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, or the works of English writers Charles Dickens, Henry Mayhew, or Arthur Morrison.

8 Wacquant, Slater and Pereira name The Bronx as one such example.

And lastly, the relationship of non-residents with the stigmatised neighbourhoods of today is one of largely negative emotions, of unambiguous revulsion and fear in opposition to times past, when the cultural and social elite made them “playgrounds for excitement, mysterious sites of social voyeurism, moral transgression, sexual fantasy, and artistic inspiration (ibid: 1275).” In Victorian London, “slumming” was a popular pastime of local urban elites who would take tours in destitute neighbourhoods in East London (Koven 2004). A phenomenon that is difficult to imagine now. This change cultivates and glorifies a punitive state approach to urban marginality, embodied by a zero-tolerance attitude, the so-called “broken windows theory” (Wilson and Kelling: 1982) of policing, corrective reactions, and efforts to “cleanse”, “punish”, and “restore order” in stigmatised neighbourhoods (see also Clear 2007; Wacquant 2009b; Beckett and Herbert 2011; Camp and Heatherton 2016; Müller 2016; Vitale 2017). One memorable example are the words of French politician and then interior minister Nicolas Sarkozy who, after violent clashes in the Parisian housing project Quatre Mille, said that he wanted to “clean out the scum” by using “a high-powered sandblaster” (Wacquant et al. 2014: 6) This change of policy makers’ attitudes towards low-income neighbourhoods ran parallel to the change in attitude to poverty in general, to the switch from the “war on poverty” to the “war on welfare” (Katz 1989).

Wacquant (2008: 169) argues that territorial stigmatisation is “arguably the single most protrusive feature of the lived experience of those trapped in these sulphurous zones.” He describes a symbolic defamation of place reinforced from “below” through social interactions in daily life and the effects of stigma management, and from “above” in the form of symbolical power through stigmatising representations in sensationalist media coverage, in political and public discourse. Such reinforcement makes the socially and politically constructed blemish permanent and unshakable, whether or not a tainted area is really dangerous or “spoiled” (Wacquant 2007: 68). In the same way, works of fiction such as literature, films, TV shows, or online content contribute to a collective imagination of certain ‘dangerous’ areas and produce a public common-sense “knowledge” about certain neighbourhoods, even if those consuming such works of fiction in fact know little or nothing about the places that are being depicted. It follows that the stigma that is being attached to certain neighbourhoods, and sometimes entire cities, turn these places into “no-go zones” and areas to be derided, avoided, and looked down upon; also worth noting is the way this transcends the stigmatisers, the stigmatised, and all individuals who come in contact with an urban place so tainted. Wacquant (2007: 68) underlines that it does not matter if an area is “in fact dilapidated and dangerous, and their population composed essentially of poor people, minorities and foreigners” and that “the prejudicial belief that they are suffices to set off socially noxious consequences.” Another important finding in Wacquant’s (ibid: 5) research is that territorial stigma, by extension, also attaches to the people who occupy that space or are in any other way affiliated with it, such as Halil Usta and his barber shop: a location-based ‘guilt-by-association’. He argues that residents of such stigmatised places are “tagged with [...] an ‘undesired differentness’ whose ‘discrediting effect is very extensive’”, a fact that Halil Usta was clearly aware of when he decided to withhold the address of a business he was otherwise very proud of.

Territorial stigma, therefore, has a profound impact on the people who live in a stigmatised area. The negative individual and personal consequences that flow from such stigma, sometimes subsumed under the insufficient term of “address discrimination”, can include limited access to employment, discrimination in schools and differential treatment by the police, by the court system, and in other public offices, such as welfare services (Sernhede 2011; McKenzie 2012). A social worker at the *Tarlabası Toplum Merkezi* [Tarlabası Community Centre] told journalists that residents struggle with prospective employers, for example, whose “faces change when they hear that [applicants] live in Tarlabası” (Açıköz 2007). The specifics of how territorial stigma is justified in public discourse varies from context to context, and the ‘reasons’ particular neighbourhoods come to be stigmatised are also historical and context-specific. Territorial stigmatisation is not a static quality, but an ongoing process of continuous symbolic defilement in need of constant nourishment, work, and renewal (Horgan 2018).

Exploiting stigma

While territorial stigma has material effects on the people it attaches to, it is also “put to work” as a tool, to be used judicially and extrajudicially. Powerful actors, such as state representatives (Sakızlıoğlu and Uitermark 2014; Kornberg 2016; Paton et al. 2016; Yardımcı 2020), private businesses (Kudla and Courey 2019), the media (Devereux et al. 2011; Hancock and Mooney 2013; Kearns et al. 2013; Liu and Blomley 2013; Arthurson et al. 2014; Sisson and Maginn 2018; Butler 2020), or think tanks (Hancock and Mooney 2013; Slater 2014, 2018; Sisson 2020) put this tool to use as they reproduce relations of domination and subservience in capitalist societies. In her study of social abjection in neoliberal Great Britain, Imogen Tyler (Tyler 2013: 8) has shown that “stigmatisation [is] a form of governance which legitimizes the reproduction and entrenchment of inequalities and injustices”. This offers profitable business opportunities to a variety of agents, such as eviction agencies, the news media, or social impact bonds (Sisson, 2020: 5). Kirsteen Paton (Paton 2018: 921) writes that stigma functions as a “soft power” which is integral to governing” and “central to moral and economic class projects”. Therefore, stigma is activated to “shame those who do not or cannot become more productive neoliberal consumer citizens” (ibid: 923). Graham Scambler (2018) even speaks of weaponization of stigma in the neoliberal era.

Alistair Sisson (2020: 5) underlines that territorial stigmatisation has been exploited “to obfuscate the structural causes and conditions of poverty and inequality, making poverty, marginality and deprivation seen and treated as the responsibility of the poor, marginalised, and deprived themselves, or the spaces they are purportedly concentrated within” (see also Dikeç 2002; Kipfer and Petrunia 2009; Slater and Anderson 2012; Hancock and Mooney 2013; Loyd and Bonds 2018, Tyler and Slater 2018). In other words, stigma “veils over a whole host of more fundamental cultural, political and economic questions regarding the distribution of distress in society” (Tyler and Slater 2018: 723). Behind such smoke screens, territorial stigmatisation provides powerful actors, such as the state, with the opportunity to enforce discriminatory housing laws, banking policies and to provide unequal access to public services which in turn propagates the

disenfranchisement of people and the seizure of private property (Wacquant 2008; Loyd and Bonds 2018; Tyler and Slater 2018; Sisson 2020).

A considerable part of the literature focuses on the role of territorial stigmatisation in justifying and legitimising the displacement and dispossession through urban renewal projects, gentrification, and redevelopment, as well as punitive policy measures and urban reforms (Arthurson 2004; Kipfer and Petrunia 2009; Gray and Mooney 2011; Slater and Anderson 2012; Kallin and Slater 2014; Sakızlıoğlu and Uitermark 2014; Schultz Larsen 2014; van Gent et al. 2017; Horgan 2018; Paton 2018; Sisson and Maginn 2018; Slater 2018; Yardımcı 2020; Rivas-Alonso 2021). Portraying a disadvantaged area as “a lost cause”, as “bad”, “criminal”, “rotten” or “derelict”, as “destroyed”, even “dead” is a “*consequential* categorisation” (Sisson 2020: 5, emphasis in original), as it grants an excellent cover for brutal state policies, such as increased surveillance and policing, or summary evictions and the demolition of an entire neighbourhood (Tyler 2013; Kallin and Slater 2014; Sakızlıoğlu and Uitermark 2014; Sisson 2020). A similarly negative framing of a wealthy urban area or business district, for example as a haven for money laundering or tax evasion, would not result in similar measures (Sisson 2020).

When it comes to poor neighbourhoods such discourse helps authorities and developers to self-portray as rescuers in a time of urgent need (Kallin and Slater 2014). At the same time, it also determines how resistance is shaped from the inside and seen from the outside, since opposition to policies depicted as “helpful” by the authorities is easier to frame as obstructive to positive change.

Managing / responding to territorial stigma

A large and growing body of literature focusing on territorial stigmatisation has investigated the experiences and behavioural responses of residents who live in tainted areas. Wacquant (2007, 2008) describes how residents of a stigmatised place accept and internalise the stigma associated with their neighbourhood, leading to resignation, feelings of shame, guilt, and self-loathing. Residents use a range of tactics to dissociate themselves from the tainted location, most notably “lateral denigration” and “mutual distancing” (Wacquant 2009a: 116). Some might exit the stigmatised neighbourhood as soon as they are able to. (ibid; Jensen and Christensen, 2012: 75). They might, as Halil Usta did, hide their address, or avoid having relatives and friends from outside their neighbourhood visit their home (Palmer et al. 2004; Warr 2005b; Wacquant 2007). Residents might also accept the stigmatising narratives about their neighbourhood and isolate themselves, retreating into the privacy of their homes (Warr 2005b; Wacquant 2007; Blokland 2008). In order to distance themselves from identity categories perceived to be of low symbolic value, residents might also deflect the stigma away from themselves and onto a “faceless, demonized other” (Wacquant 2007: 68; see also Palmer et al. 2004; Jensen and Christensen 2012; Eksner 2013; Contreras 2017; Cuny 2018; Verdouw and Flanagan 2019; Sisson 2020; Smets and Kusenbach 2020).

There are macro-social consequences to this, too. Territorial stigmatisation erodes solidarity ties and trust networks, therefore compromising the capacity and motivation of a community to organise around collective action. This might result in breaking down

possible organised – and unorganised resistance (Derville 1997; Arthurson 2004; Holloway and Mulherin 2004; Ruggiero 2007; Beach and Sernhede 2011; Duin et al. 2011; Glasze et al. 2012; Slater and Anderson 2012; Arthurson et al. 2014; Sakızlıoğlu and Uitermark 2014). It is disempowering (Wassenberg, 2004; Warr, 2005a, 2005b). Spatial stigma can also make non-resident solidarity less likely. Outsiders might shy away from rallying around a stigmatised neighbourhood deemed “unworthy” of any support. For example, during my fieldwork I encountered local activists involved in anti-gentrification and anti-eviction struggles who said that Tarlaşaşı was “full of criminals and drug dealers” who “deserved being cleared out”.

Neighbourhood social cohesion suffers as a consequence of territorial stigmatisation, especially when the focus of public discussions centres on societal morality and progress on the one hand, and less overt social engineering and development programmes on the other, as has been the case for Tarlaşaşı. Alistair Sisson (2020: 7) underlines that territorial stigma “is deployed to legitimate status quo inequalities and injustices and novel interventions that reproduce, entrench, or intensify them [and] to manage populations and their behaviour”. Another consequence of this internalisation relates to how residents of stigmatised neighbourhoods react to experiences of institutionalised discrimination and disenfranchisement that often co-occur with territorial stigmatisation. “Once a place is publicly labelled as a ‘lawless zone’ or ‘outlaw estate’, outside the common norm, it is easy for the authorities to justify special measures, deviating from both law and custom, which can have the effect – if not the intention – of destabilizing and further marginalizing their occupants, subjecting them to the dictates of the deregulated labour market, and rendering them invisible or driving them out of a coveted space” (Wacquant 2007: 69).

Residents that have internalised the stigma associated with their neighbourhood sometimes view such experiences of inequality as a natural consequence, a rational reality for them to face simply for living in a ‘bad’ place. “[The] physical disrepair and institutional dilapidation of the neighbourhood cannot but generate an abiding *sense of social inferiority* by communicating to its residents that they are second- or third-class citizens undeserving of the attention of city officials and of the care of its agencies” (Wacquant 2010: 217). However, various studies suggest that residents do not always internalise and submit to the stigma, and that responses exist on a continuum and can vary greatly. Wacquant has been widely criticised for disregarding the agency of marginalised communities (Pattillo 2009; Gilbert 2010; Jensen and Christensen 2012; Kirkness 2014; Geiselhart 2017; Sisson 2020) and the various ways in which residents reject and oppose stigmatising narratives of their places of residence (Garbin and Millington 2012; Jensen and Christensen 2012; Kirkness 2014; Kirkness and Tijé-Dra 2017a; Cairns 2018; Nayak 2019; Verdouw and Flanagan 2019; Sisson 2020).⁹

Residents might express ambivalence toward their stigmatised neighbourhood (Jensen and Christensen 2012; Garbin and Millington 2012; August 2014; Kirkness 2014; Cairns 2018; Jensen et al. 2021), and a number of studies have shown that residents oppose stigma through expressing a deep sense of belonging and community, and through showing pride in their neighbourhood (Jensen and Christensen 2012; McKenzie 2012;

9 Sisson (2020) points out that a similar argument can be made regarding Goffman.

Slater and Anderson 2012; Kirkness 2014; Slater 2017; Cairns 2018). Others have focused on residents' efforts to resist spatial disrepute through symbolic struggles, including image management via community media (Dean and Hastings, 2000; Hastings and Dean, 2003; Hastings, 2004; Wassenberg, 2004; Jacobs et al., 2011) or other forms of counternarratives to the stigmatising frame (Kirkness and Tijé-Dra 2017b; Maestri 2017; Cairns 2018; Cuny 2018; Horgan 2018; Junnilainen 2020). A number of studies demonstrates physical struggles over territorial stigmatisation, such as the use of artwork (Garbin and Millington 2012), the construction of various community facilities (Maestri 2017), solidary squatting movements that foster deep attachment to place and provide new narratives (Maestri 2017; Queirós and Pereira 2018; Sisson 2020). Last but not least, scholars have pointed to the importance of everyday social relations and actions through which dominant practices and representations are being resisted in stigmatised urban areas (Garbin and Millington 2012; Mckenzie 2012; Kirkness 2014; Nayak 2019). Sisson (2020: 14) underlines that "resistance often occurs while people are busy doing other things". Recently, a number of scholars have also criticised the presentation of territorial stigma as a generalised experience for all residents of a tainted area and called for an intersectional approach to analysing stigma management, drawing attention to the fact that the lived experience of territorial stigma intersects with residents racial, classed or gender identities (Contreras 2017; Cairns 2018; Pinkster et al 2020).

Territorial stigmatisation in Turkey

A considerable amount of research has been published on territorial stigma, on how it is produced, how it is exploited by powerful agents, and how residents of stigmatised areas manage, internalise, or resist the spatial disrepute. However, most of this literature focuses on stigmatised neighbourhoods in cities in North America and Europe. A relatively small amount of research has explored this issue in cities of the Global South. These studies have focused on the production and consequences of territorial stigmatisation in Brazilian *favelas* (Caldeira 2000; Araújo and da Costa 2017; Kolling 2019), stigma deflection in an Argentine slum (Auyero 1999), on stigma management and counternarratives to stigma in Bangladesh (Fattah and Walters, 2020), a deconstruction of territorial stigma in Botswana (Geiselhart 2017), place attachment in poor quarters in Shanghai, China (Zhang 2017), and the exploitation of territorial stigma in India (Ghertner 2008, 2010).

In Turkey, recent studies of territorial stigmatisation have explored state-led territorial stigmatisation as a form of governmentality in a restive Ankara neighbourhood (Yardımcı, 2020), and image-making as preparation for state-led urban renewal and gentrification in an Istanbul *gecekondu* area (Rivas-Alonso, 2021). A notable part of previous research into territorial stigmatisation has focused on the political and societal attitude shift towards *gecekondu*¹⁰ areas. This shift coincided with the neoliberalisation

10 Originally, *gecekondu* refers to informal housing built on the peripheries of large cities by rural migrants starting in the 1950s. The term can literally be translated as "landed overnight". It has since undergone significant reanalysis and critique (Pérouse 2004; Erman 2013).

of the country that began in the 1980s and intensified following the Turkish financial crisis in 2001 and the Justice and Development Party's [*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi* – AKP] rise to power in 2002 (Erman 2001; Esen 2005; Yardımcı 2020; Rivas-Alonso 2021). *Gecekondu* housing had long been tolerated as a social protection mechanism, and as what sociologist Tim Dorlach (2019) calls “social policy by other means”. Tahire Erman (2001: 985) states that initially, during the 1950s and 1960s, *gecekondu* dwellers were represented as the “rural Other”, expected to be assimilated “into the modern urban society”. With the onset of the 1970s, under the influence of Western intellectual thought and international leftist movements sympathetic to marginalised groups and the poor, the *gecekondu* population was seen as “the disadvantaged Other” (ibid: 986). Following the violent military coup of September 12, 1980, and the installation of a right-wing government in 1983, Turkey opened up to Western foreign investment and pursued neoliberal economic policies. From this point onward, *gecekondu* residents were increasingly framed as the undesirable urban poor, as having undeservedly enriched themselves with squatted property, and as culturally inferior and unfit to assimilate into modern city life (Erman 2001; Lanz 2005). Finally, in the late 1990s, public discourse became even more punitive, and *gecekondu* dwellers were framed as “invaders” (Yardımcı, 2020), as dangerously different, “the threatening Other(s)” (Erman 2001: 988–989; Rivas-Alonso 2021: 99–100). The terms *varoş*¹¹ [slum] and *varoşlu* [slum dweller] appeared, initially mostly in the media, to describe disadvantaged and squatter neighbourhoods in Turkey, and were later adopted into dominant societal discourse (Erman 2001: 996; Yardımcı 2020: 1523). The focus shifted towards concentrated urban marginality, linked to moral panics about the “culture of degeneracy” associated with the urban poor and the neighbourhoods they lived in (Bartu-Candan and Kolloğlu 2008; Gönen and Yonucu 2012; Yardımcı 2020). This discourse became more entrenched with the election victory of the AKP in 2002. From then on, *gecekondu* areas and disadvantaged, often dilapidated inner-city neighbourhoods were increasingly described as an obstacle to making cities attractive for (predominantly foreign) capital and investment, to which large urban renewal projects were presented as a remedy (Bartu-Candan and Kolloğlu 2008; Kuyucu and Ünsal 2010; Ünsal 2013; Sakızlıoğlu 2014b; Demiralp 2016; Ay 2019; Yardımcı 2020; Rivas-Alonso 2021). These neighbourhoods were central to the AKP’s economic strategy to fully integrate as much urban land as possible into the neoliberal real estate market. As a result, informal housing was criminalised, portrayed as “the sole responsible [agencies] of irregular urbanisation” (Ünsal 2013: 83), and informal neighbourhoods stigmatised as areas of concentrated crime and terrorism.

Scholars researching territorial stigmatisation have underlined the importance of the state in activating, (re)producing, perpetuating, and exploiting spatial disrepute in order to capitalise on land and real estate, and push through contested urban transformation projects to the detriment of a poor, marginalised population (Kallin and Slater

11 Hungarian in origin, the term *varoş* initially referred to neighbourhoods outside the city walls but was later used to describe any neighbourhood on the spatial or symbolic periphery of a city. In Turkish, the word carries strong negative meaning and refers to the unruly, violent, anti-state and criminal underclass (Erman 2001: 996).

2014). Öznur Yardımcı, in her study of state-led territorial stigmatisation in Dikmen Valley, an informal settlement on the outskirts of the Turkish capital Ankara, underlines the importance of exploring the state not only as an extension of the capitalist market, but also as an important actor pursuing political interests in framing a certain neighbourhood as “bad” and in need of renewal, thereby reasserting state power and authority. She writes that local and national representatives of the state “...use stigma in urban settings to pathologise political dissidence and enhance the desire to comply with official policies in a way that makes the (housing) rights dependent upon meeting the ‘appropriate’ patterns and norms defined by the state. Consequently, stigmatisation enables the state to legitimise itself as the main authority to define who is worthy of benefit from the prosperity promised by urban transformation, which in turn shrinks citizen power” (Yardımcı 2020: 1526).

The AKP government enacted sweeping reforms in regard to informal housing, and as a result, access to squatter housing declined considerably, as did political and public acceptance of it. In 2004, a Turkish Penal Code reform criminalised the construction of squatter housing and made it punishable by a prison term of up to five years (Republic of Turkey Law 5327, 2004). At the same time, the legal facilitation of new urban renewal projects led to the demolition of existing *gecekondu* settlements (Kuyucu and Ünsal 2010; Dorlach 2019, Yardımcı 2020). These legal and administrative changes in urban policy were accompanied by a stigmatisation campaign against squatting. Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, then prime minister of Turkey, made *gecekondu* housing a central topic of his policies. He referred to informal housing areas as “tumours that have surrounded our cities” and claimed that their population “undeservedly occupied the land without the right to live there” (Yardımcı, 2020: 1526). He later called the banning of *gecekondu* construction and squatting a “revolution” (Dorlach, 2019: 279), and demanded that squatter housing should not be tolerated and “mercilessly demolished” (NTV, 2004).

Chapter outline

Chapter one, “Looking for Resistance in All the Wrong Places”, is concerned with the methodology used for this book. The chapter explores the reasons why my research focus shifted from everyday resistance against the renewal project towards territorial stigmatisation and stigma management in the neighbourhood. Furthermore, the chapter describes the methods used during fieldwork, elaborates on the concept of engaged ethnography, and considers the reasons why I was always more than an outside observer. It also pulls apart difficulties of access and positionality.

Chapter two, “Waking the poisoned princess”, describes the history of the stigmatisation of the neighbourhood. Providing a brief history of Tarlabaşı, this chapter then shows how the municipal district of Beyoğlu, and in extension Tarlabaşı, have been framed and stigmatised in the past, and how that informs the current image of the neighbourhood. This is followed by an empirical analysis of how territorial stigmatisation was driven in contemporary Tarlabaşı and in the dominant discourse. I focus in particular on the state as one of the main actors invested in the urban renewal plans. The chapter will further examine the various ways in which state actors fed, maintained, and exploited the terri-

torial stigma to justify and legitimise the contentious redevelopment. Finally, the chapter will explore how stigma made certain neighbourhood aspects, and certain types of residents who fit certain “problem profiles” hyper-visible, while at the same time erasing actual Tarlaşa residents from the scene and the narrative.

Chapter three, “Judging Books by Their Covers”, traces a detailed history of the renewal project and the drastic changes it underwent through a close text-object analysis of two different project catalogues published over the course of five years. An analysis of the changes to these promotional materials draws attention to the fact that the renewal project was constantly changing and shifting, both in how it presented itself to residents and outsiders, and in terms of how project agents engaged with Tarlaşa residents. This happened in ways that were not publicised and involved state agents reneging on promises made very publicly at the beginning of the project. The chapter will also provide an exploration of the immediate context and history of the project, with a careful eye to how the status of the project changed, how a shift in potential investor profiles affected the relationship between project actors and residents, the way that these actors exploited existing stigmatisation, and if, or how, they took potential opposition to the project into account. Such a close text-object analysis will provide an anchor for the historical, economic, and social context in which the renewal project developed over time, as well as for the history of the project itself.

Chapter four, “Experiencing Stigma in Tarlaşa”, expands on the experiences of Tarlaşa residents regarding territorial stigma in their neighbourhood, with a focus on how stigma played out during the execution of the renewal project and in the run-up to evictions. The different negative stereotypes connected to place-stigma in Tarlaşa were not experienced equally by all residents. A more detailed analysis of how different residents perceived and interpreted their marginalisation and discrimination shows that these experiences depended on residents’ social, ethnic and gender identity. This analysis builds on the definition of the “ordinary iconic profiles” discussed in chapter two.

Chapter five, “Belonging”, rebukes Loïc Wacquant’s claim that residents of a stigmatised area will disengage and distance themselves from their neighbourhood, or that they will seek to exit it as soon as they are able. In Tarlaşa, many residents expressed a profound sense of belonging to their neighbourhood for a wide variety of reasons. With the help of the thick ethnographic description of different nodes in the interlinked neighbourhood structure, this chapter will highlight the workings and the importance of networks of socio-economic interdependence in a “traditional” Turkish neighbourhood, the *mahalle*.

Chapter six, “Have You Heard”, explores different forms and functions of rumour during the run-up to evictions and demolitions, and shows how rumour was linked to territorial stigmatisation in Tarlaşa. The municipality’s strategy of actively withholding or confusing reliable information had profound legal impacts and material consequences for residents who had to base most of their decisions about how to navigate the project timeline on unverifiable hearsay. Furthermore, this chapter will consider how different experiences of the various communities and interest groups within Tarlaşa led to different conclusions about the reliability and accuracy of rumours, which in turn put considerable strain on neighbourhood cohesion and solidarity. At the same time, rumours were also a discursive tactic residents used to question and oppose both the nega-

tive narrative framing Tarlabası and the renewal project itself. The argument of this chapter is that these rumours, and the massive amount of interpretative labour that went into their assessment and interpretation, were part of peoples' tactics to cope with the material consequences of stigma.

Chapter seven, "In the Eye of the Beholder", argues that territorial stigma functions as a prefabricated lens that skewers outsider interpretations of residents' presentations of self and of their physical surroundings toward more negative interpretations. People have to work harder, therefore, to try and rectify negative narratives through various tactics. Rather than as opposition to territorial stigma, these individual attempts at impression management and at successfully performing respectability can be read as individual residents' tactics to preserve a sense of themselves as good, as decent, and as worthy of respect. The chapter will demonstrate that the urgency of successfully performing respectability is gendered in a particular way, and that the stakes were not the same for all residents.

Chapter eight, "Giving in to Stigma", examines how the territorial stigma in Tarlabası was internalised by residents, and how they attempted to deflect this stigma onto other individuals and marginalised communities, blaming them for the bad reputation of the neighbourhood. The most important question is not if internalisation and lateral denigration happened, but *how* it happened, and why. The chapter explores fissures and fault lines of denigration against the backdrop of a broader political context in Turkey, shows how ethnic Turkish residents weaponised nostalgia as a means of stigma management, and introduces the concept of "Turkness" as a position of structural privilege.

Chapter nine, "Speaking Back", demonstrates different ways through which Tarlabası residents tried to make themselves seen and heard against this effort to invisibilise them and their experiences in the run-up to evictions. This chapter will show what verbal impudence under the threat of eviction looked like, and how such "backtalk" accomplished two key things: it gave voice and form to residents' humiliations, their anger, and their attempt to circulate a counternarrative to the stigmatising discourse that targeted their neighbourhood and themselves, but it also opened cracks in the façade of project stakeholders' pretence that the stigma was the "objective", "natural" state of Tarlabası, rather than what it was—a fabricated prejudicial lens that itself required enormous amounts of work to build, maintain, and renew.

Chapter one: Looking for Resistance in all the Wrong Places

This book is based on two and a half years of fieldwork in the central Istanbul neighbourhood of Tarlabaşı, succeeded by follow-up interviews and observations spaced over another three years. For this study, I examined how the residents of a low-income inner-city area managed the intense stigmatisation of their neighbourhood as part of a contentious urban renewal project inaugurated by state actors and executed by a private developer with the legal and logistical support of the authorities. The focus of my research is not on the organised, grassroots resistance of neighbourhood groups and civil society initiatives that have been thoroughly analysed elsewhere (Ünsal and Kuyucu 2010; Ünsal 2013; Sakızlıoğlu 2014a). Instead, and drawing on James Scott's (1985, 1990) concept of hidden transcripts, or ideas concealed in everyday discourse and culture as tactics of resistance, I concentrate on everyday practices of stigma management and contestation employed to counter the discourse used to justify the destruction of solidarity networks and the displacement of hundreds of families from affordable housing in downtown Istanbul (see also Wacquant 2007).

While I have been interested in informal social struggles for a long time, the topic of stigmatisation crept unbidden into my fieldwork. The initial plan had been to merely focus on opposition in the form of unorganised protest and on everyday resistance tactics against the planned evictions. However, it quickly became impossible to ignore the important role of territorial stigmatisation used to the advantage and profit of the state and its project partners. Tropes frequently used by politicians, the media, the developer *GAP İnşaat*, and other powerful stakeholders often referred explicitly to the neighbourhood as “dirty”, “uncivilised”, “criminal”, and “immoral”. Based on existing stereotypical images of Tarlabaşı, these phrases defined public discourse and how Tarlabaşı was perceived by outsiders. They therefore determined how a mainstream Turkish public judged the idea of a “renewal” of the neighbourhood. However, as Wacquant has noted, such territorial stigmatisation affects not only the public image of a certain place, but also strongly influences how residents see themselves and how they position themselves vis-a-vis their neighbourhood and their neighbours. Territorial stigma can have a detrimental impact

on local solidarity ties and networks, and therefore, as I soon came to realise in my own fieldwork, on attempts of collective and individual resistance.

The concept of stigmatisation also helped to break up the binary discourse of an idealised joint resistance as opposed to the idea of residents as victims of structural oppression and discrimination without any agency of their own. Instead, it overcomes these narratives and leaves room for a perspective that is grounded in action theory and a theory of everyday practices.

Staring at stigma

When I began to look at (a part of) Tarlabaşı through an ethnographic lens in 2010, the neighbourhood was already familiar to me. As a journalist, I reported on the Tarlabaşı urban renewal project shortly after its announcement in 2008. In early 2009, I moved to the neighbourhood, a few streets over from the designated renewal zone.¹ This was how the issue of pending urban renewal and the negative discourse surrounding the neighbourhood became part of my daily life before I thought about ethnographic research. The discussions and problems surrounding the many contentious redevelopment plans of Istanbul, a cornerstone of AKP urban and economic policy, had interested me for a long time, and I closely followed and reported on planned renewal projects in other historical neighbourhoods, like the traditional trading district of Mahmutpaşa, where hundreds of artisans and owners of small businesses were threatened by involuntary displacement. The bulldozers never arrived, but the predominantly Romani neighbourhood of Sulukule was demolished and around 3,400 people lost their homes and their livelihoods. In both cases it was marginalised groups and the urban poor who were to make place for “better, more modern, and improved buildings”.

During my first years in Istanbul, I did not research the intense stigmatisation of Tarlabaşı, but I was certainly very aware of it. Even before I moved there, friends and colleagues warned me not to venture across Tarlabaşı Boulevard “into” Tarlabaşı, verbally marking the area in that part of Beyoğlu as a “no-go zone” with well-defined borders. At almost each of my weekly visits to the Sunday vegetable market held in Tarlabaşı I was told to keep a close eye on my bags and hold on to my belongings, and not to take more cash with me than I was planning to spend. From colleagues who lived in or very near Tarlabaşı I heard anecdotes of how they chose to, in one case, accompany their visitors to the nearest bus station on Tarlabaşı Boulevard carrying a large kitchen knife, or, in another, send them home before nightfall. Taxi drivers sometimes refused to drive through Tarlabaşı or warned to lock all the doors from the inside of the car. Comments on the perceived criminality of the neighbourhood were a given. After moving to Tarlabaşı myself,

1 This did not mean that our *mahalle* was not touched by the demolitions. While pressure on rents increased due to the fact that living space was suddenly much scarcer in the entire neighbourhood, some shops, such as a local bakery, had to eventually shut down due to a lack of customers. The project was a frequent topic of conversation amongst Tarlabaşı who lived outside the renewal zone, partly because of the construction noise, the expectation of higher rents or profits, and the fear that crime might increase due to the growing number of ruined houses close by.

I often caught myself “managing” the stigma of living in a neighbourhood considered to be dangerous, and unsuitable for a German middle class woman and journalist paid in foreign currency.² Depending on whom I spoke to, I would disclose the fact that I lived in Tarlabası, or merely say that I lived “in Beyoğlu”, the greater administrative district that Tarlabası belongs to and that also included upscale neighbourhoods such as Cihangir, where many well-earning foreigners have chosen to rent homes.

Weekly Tarlabası market



Photo by Jonathan Lewis

When I first told my friend Koray that I was going to do fieldwork in my neighbourhood, he handed me a copy of the Turkish novel *Ağır Roman* and told me that this was the book I had to read in order to understand Tarlabası.³ I did. While the book did add considerable colour to my growing Turkish vocabulary, it did not help me understand Tarlabası. However, Koray’s suggestion that I should read it in order to gain insight into the daily life there gave me a clearer idea of what others thought of the neighbourhood, and how the wide success of a work of fiction had contributed to how the stigma of the neighbourhood had been shaped. The Tarlabası of *Ağır Roman* is a neighbourhood of brothels,

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- 2 The question of how much money one earns and spends on rent is common and not considered rude in Turkey. Since people assumed that I earned quite well by Turkish standards, the idea of living in a neighbourhood like Tarlabası was possibly thought of as me being cheap. On the other hand, many fellow Tarlabası residents thought it was “stupid” of me to pay the amount of rent I did.
 - 3 *Ağır Roman*, a novel written by Turkish author Metin Kaçan, caused considerable uproar in the literary community of Turkey when it was first published in 1990. The book is written in harsh slang not easily accessible to a non-native speaker. It is grim, outrageous and violent in ways no other literary accounts of the lives of the urban poor in Istanbul had been until then (see Köksal 2005: 311).

petty criminals, and knife-wielding thugs, of foul language, murder, drugs, and rape. The book turned a poor inner-city neighbourhood into a wildly exotic Other, a place stranger than fiction filled with characters one seems to know intimately, even though one has never set foot there. This creates a faux familiarity; the reader feels that they have gained factual insight into a world they, in fact, do not know at all. *Ağır Roman* now haunts the neighbourhood that inspired it. When discussing the concept of territorial stigmatisation and its applicability to the neighbourhood of Tarlabası during the PhD colloquium in Berlin, a fellow student familiar with Istanbul and Turkey nodded knowingly at descriptions of my friends' negative reactions to my living there and said: "Of course everyone thinks badly of Tarlabası. That's the *Ağır Roman* effect."

During a visit to the fraud unit of the Istanbul police criminal investigation department in an unrelated matter, a casual conversation with one officer quickly turned towards my work and my living situation. When he learned that I lived in Tarlabası, he expressed visible shock and concern. How could, he argued, a sensible woman lack such judgement? Did I not know what kind of neighbourhood Tarlabası was? Sensing that his intervention was not sufficient, he then summoned the entire fraud unit. Five officers crowded around me, insisting to give me detailed housing advice for other districts in the city, a session during which the first officer told his colleagues: "She lives in Tarlabası, don't you know a place somewhere else? What about Kadıköy, or maybe Şişli?" When I told him that I did not really consider moving to either district, I was politely informed that, due to the "dangerous" and "unsavoury" nature of my current place of residency, I could not be choosy, and it would be better to live "anywhere else, really". In the end they gave me the mobile phone numbers of their colleagues who patrolled in Tarlabası, with the first officer urging me to make use of them in the case of need (which in his eyes was not a matter of "if", but of "when").

However, the alarming accounts about Tarlabası did not fit my experience of daily life in the neighbourhood. During my eight years living there (and during the three years before that, when I regularly frequented the neighbourhood to visit friends or the weekly market), I did not encounter the violent crime, the dangerous criminals, and the general unsafety I had heard so much about.⁴

In fact, I felt quite safe walking through my neighbourhood late at night, because contrary to more gentrified areas of Beyoğlu, corner shops [*bakkal*], small eateries and other businesses were open until well past midnight, and during the warmer months it was quite common for residents to congregate in front of their buildings to drink tea and chat with their neighbours. The vegetable market, described to me as a veritable den of pickpockets and thieves, was a place I loved to frequent, because I was familiar with most of the vendors, and in eleven years I never had any problems with pickpockets except once, when a group of boys unsuccessfully tried to snatch my wallet from me – something that might arguably happen in any place of the city, or most cities, visited by crowds and especially tourists. I knew that many of my neighbours were, in one way or another, involved in the informal or underground economy of the city: recycling, sex

4 Once, an apparently drunk man shot a bullet through my living room window late at night, which I only discovered the next morning. The *bakkal* (cornershop owner) at the end of the street had witnessed this happening, and it seemed quite clear that it had been an accident.

work, brand piracy, small-scale drug dealing, online scamming or gambling. One neighbour who lived across the street from me was involved in a criminal group [*çete*] that specialised in pickpocketing, car robbery, housebreaking and mugging. He often engaged me in friendly conversations, invited me for tea, and, since he was a Kurd originally from Diyarbakır, took great interest in my journalistic reporting from the predominantly Kurdish southeast of the country.⁵ I do not mean to minimise the violence and the crime that happened or originated in Tarlaabaşı. However, I wish to underline that I never experienced any of the problems I was constantly warned about. When friends got burgled or robbed in Cihangir, or other “more respected” neighbourhoods in Istanbul, their accounts of these events were seldom accompanied by the sighed “well, what did you expect in that neighbourhood” as they would have been if they had happened in Tarlaabaşı.

Despite the general discomfort with the neighbourhood in the media, in public discourse and amongst my friends, it took me much longer to recognise the link between the profound stigmatisation of Tarlaabaşı, the planned urban renewal project, and the different tactics for challenging it. As an enthusiastic Istanbul resident and someone incensed by the glaring social injustice inherent in much of the rapidly occurring urban changes promoted by state forces and private investors, I was, sometimes unthinkingly and somewhat naively, opposed to all radical change to the city’s fabric, which is doubtlessly why I expected resistance to be straight-forward and coherent. My own subjective reading, intimately linked to my political allegiances and sympathies, led me to assume that people threatened with losing their homes, their workplaces, and their social networks due to urban renewal would – of course! – put up visible, and possibly collective, resistance. My commitment to social justice led me to align myself with defiance, and to feel strong sympathy for protest, which obviously coloured the lens through which I initially looked at (and for) resistance tactics in Tarlaabaşı. This is also why, in order to gain access to and get to know the renewal zone and its residents, I first sought out the help of a volunteer activist who tried to rally people to fight against the plans of the municipality and *GAP İnşaat*.

I first met Erdal Aybek when I reported on the Tarlaabaşı renewal project in 2008. An urban activist who had cut his teeth in the Berlin squatters’ movement in the 1980s, Erdal volunteered in the newly founded Association for Solidarity with Tarlaabaşı Property Owners and Renters where he manned an improvised information office on Tarlaabaşı Boulevard. In addition to that, he helped assemble and manage a considerable archive of documents on the ongoing project and kept various folders containing copies of all title deeds, publicly available plans and court documents in his office. During his office hours, every afternoon on weekdays, residents and other interested parties, such as researchers, activists and journalists like me, had the opportunity to come and ask for advice and information about the renewal project. Residents’ questions generally concerned municipal letters and other correspondence with the authorities, issues related to title deeds and legal procedures, as well as inquiries about the advancements made by

5 I am maybe naive/too optimistic in thinking that being a neighbour and someone people talked to in some way protected me. For example, the apartment below mine, frequently rented out to foreigners and wealthier Turkish students, was burgled several times. Maybe I had just been lucky, or the steel door at my apartment had managed to keep burglars out.

both the project stakeholders and the lawyers employed by the solidarity association. I spoke to Erdal on several occasions as a journalist and as an ethnographer. When I told him about my research idea on resistance tactics, he offered to introduce me to some of the residents affected by the planned demolitions, assuring me that all of them would express nothing but open disdain and defiance. I had been sure that he was right.

As a Kurd, a former Tarlabası resident and someone who was both well-informed and approachable, he was popular and respected, and I had the immediate impression that people trusted him with his task and their queries. Walking through the streets with him it was easy to come into contact with residents. It was also clear that he wanted me to understand the importance and the strength of local neighbourliness and solidarity ties, that, in his eyes, were not negatively impacted by the neighbourhood's ethnic and religious diversity, and the many trans* residents and sex workers living and working there. He showed me an informal trans* brothel close to his office and introduced me to some of the sex workers there. Erdal made sure I noticed that the trans* women⁶ frequented an all-male teahouse next to the brothel because he really wanted to prove to me how harmonically diverse the neighbourhood was. Gesturing towards the many full laundry lines shared by neighbours on opposite sides of the same street, Erdal insisted that these laundry drying lines clearly demonstrated that there was a tight-knit community in Tarlabası and proof that the municipality's claim to the contrary was false and wilful misinformation. And indeed, one argument defending the renewal project that I heard several times was that Tarlabası was a neighbourhood of people in transit, and therefore there was no community that could be destroyed. Another – quite outlandish – argument, one that I will discuss in detail in a later chapter, was that Tarlabası was “empty”.

Erdal was very invested in convincing me that in Tarlabası “everyone got along fine”. In his eyes, this tangible harmony was one of the main arguments that the project needed to be stopped and the neighbourhood to be preserved. Similarly, newspaper articles and columns critical of the renewal project described Tarlabası as a place where “Turks, Kurds, Christians, Transvestites, Roma and African migrants” lived happily side by side. Some non-resident activists used the argument of the co-existence of the Kurdish, Roma, foreign migrant and the trans* community in Tarlabası to appeal to a romantic (and romanticised) idea of neighbourhood unity that had been destroyed almost everywhere else in Istanbul and that would be lost with the evictions. People invested in defending the image of Tarlabası against the negative discourse of the municipality also argued that strong neighbourhood ties between diverse groups of people were an important enough reason that the neighbourhood be preserved, and evictions be stopped. Some blamed conflict and violence that did happen along ethnic, religious and gender lines on the interference of the municipality and the developer. One prominent opposition activist and member of the Istanbul Chamber of Architects (TMMOB) argued that transphobia had been non-existent until the start of the project discussions and had been brought to the neighbourhood by the divisive renewal project.

These were views that I easily identified with, and in the beginning, I was smitten by what at first glance looked and felt like a tight neighbourhood community. It was also

6 All trans* persons I met in Tarlabası self-identified as women. Throughout this book I use the gender that trans* persons who spoke to me self-identified as.

one of the main reasons that at the beginning of my ethnographic research, which I had begun in order to understand the underlying dynamics of everyday resistance in a way that my journalistic work could not, I was secretly looking for a political struggle, for joint protest and strong solidarity ties between all affected residents. After all, they were all “in it” together! This is why I expected that their apparent togetherness, their seemingly unproblematic sharing of spaces and laundry lines, would clearly be reflected in their resistance and their defence of the endangered neighbourhood.

Therefore, it came as a (somewhat nasty) surprise when I heard that some Tarlaabaşı locals were not only willing to have their houses demolished but were excited to be promised a flat in a “modern” high-rise apartment building at the outer edges of the city in exchange, happy to leave their old homes behind. I was bewildered when I heard residents cheering for the government-led “clean-up” of the neighbourhood. And even more so, I was shocked to witness Tarlaabaşı residents berate *each other*, blaming their (variously Kurdish, Roma, trans*, Arab, or black) neighbours for the state of the quarter and its bad reputation, that, in their eyes, had brought urban renewal to Tarlaabaşı in the first place.

It came as an even bigger surprise that some of those actively involved in organised resistance denigrated Tarlaabaşı and the neighbourhood’s inhabitants, such as the president of the Association for Solidarity with Tarlaabaşı Property Owners and Renters, a businessman originally from the Black Sea region who owned several buildings but did not live in Tarlaabaşı. I met him for the first time in 2009 for a newspaper interview, and several times after that during protests, at the courthouse, or in the association’s office on Tarlaabaşı Boulevard. He was, most importantly due to his impressive real estate portfolio, invested in demanding higher compensation for property owners, but he had very little love for the neighbourhood itself. He warned me not to walk around Tarlaabaşı on my own, because someone might rob, or even kill me. He also told me, somewhat disgustedly, that he would never want to live in Tarlaabaşı himself. I wondered why the man who was the public face of organised grassroots resistance against the planned renewal project talked this negatively about the neighbourhood he defended. Did he not, by toeing the state’s discursive line, endanger the success of the association’s resistance? And if he really disliked Tarlaabaşı that much, why had he not opted for an individual court case, but instead chosen to be the spokesperson of the association and therefore the most visible representative for the neighbourhood?

The lack of resistance that I had expected as well as continuously shifting statements and conflicting narratives initially made it difficult for me to anchor my research and come to a conclusion. In fact, I was afraid that I had not found anything of note and that, after years of fieldwork, I was still empty-handed. Failing to find collective, coherent resistance, I was afraid that I had not found any resistance at all. However, while editing hundreds of pages of transcriptions, going through media reports on the project and analysing the state discourse— the press statements, the media interviews, the general comments and marketing material jointly published by the Beyoğlu Municipality and *GAP İnşaat*— the dominant role of stigmatisation became more apparent. More importantly, I noticed how this stigmatisation did not only shape the way that state and investors framed Tarlaabaşı, but that it had also seeped into the speech and conduct of targeted residents, which in turn influenced the way they defended their

neighbourhood and each other. Loïc Wacquant (2007: 68) describes how residents of a stigmatised place internalise the stigma associated with their neighbourhood, leading to feelings of shame, guilt, and self-loathing. He distinguishes a range of defence tactics that inhabitants use to dissociate themselves both from the tainted location, and the stigma attached to it, a split from the neighbourhood and their neighbours, a distancing from identity categories perceived to be of low symbolic value that others have defined as “disidentification” (Jensen and Christensen 2012: 75). As discussed earlier, this break-up of trust networks in the neighbourhood makes organised resistance against powerful actors much more difficult. It became clear to me that in order to understand the nuances of local resistance against the urban renewal project I had to refocus on the way that actors invested in its completion framed the neighbourhood, and on how residents positioned themselves vis-a-vis this stigmatising discourse.

Positionality

When conducting research in a familiar setting, the ethnographer faces the challenge of too little distance between the ethnographic field and one’s own experience(s) in it. When researching topics centred around social injustice, as I did in Tarlabası, one might be drawn to the argumentation and the point of view of the people one studies, and identify with their cause. As Phillippe Bourgois (1995: 13) has noted in relation to his work on crack dealers in East Harlem, “we become intimately involved with the people we study”. When the research is conducted in a context of struggle for social justice and rights, the ethnographer is presented with the added challenge not to idealise this endeavour. Above I have explained how my own subjective reading influenced what I expected to see, how I assumed resistance to play out, and how my own position determined not only the kind of information that protagonists like Erdal Aybek or the association president gave me, but also what aspects they did not immediately tell me about. My position affected what Tarlabası residents disclosed to me, the white middle class woman from Germany researching (and looking for) resistance as part of a doctoral thesis, and the politically interested journalist with a strong interest in human rights and equality. When Erdal Aybek, who had lived in Berlin and been engaged in political activism, praised the diversity in Tarlabası and told me how people stood and would stand together against displacement despite their differences, he told this story to me, an eager interlocutor who expressed admiration for his squatter’s past and who was keen to find the sort of solidary resistance Erdal was describing to me. He was likely equally aware that I, a Western journalist, had access to publicity and media channels that might further his cause fighting for the neighbourhood. It is likely that he did not disclose his past political activism in Berlin to Tarlabası residents he was representing, but rather stress his credentials as a former Tarlabası local to them. This is not to imply that what Erdal told me was false, or “less authentic”, than what he told others. However, it is important to remember that there are many narratives that overlap, exist side by side, or even contradict each other. By now it has long been agreed that ethnography is always influenced by the researcher’s own position, and that there is not one person that can ever convey one full truth. Ethnographic truths, as James Clifford (1986: 7) reminds us, are based on exclusions and trans-

lations of “the reality of others”. They are “inherently *partial*” (ibid, emphasis in original), a play on words that underlines the fact that all ethnographic texts are both biased and incomplete. They are always “systems, or economies, of truth” (ibid). One’s race, gender, sexuality, and social position influence what kind of information one receives, and what kind of knowledge is produced. Knowledge is always situated, and postmodern anthropology recognises the partiality and interestedness of any researcher’s account of social settings. The observer is always already part of the study. There is no longer “an authentic or comprehensively true image of social and cultural groups, no singular language of protest and revindication, but rather partial, shifting, and clashing representations, each with its own paradoxes and erasures” (Warren 2006: 214).

Furthermore, in a complex neighbourhood such as Tarlabaşı, and no matter how familiar I was with my field, it would be naive to claim that I had “full access” to it. Being close to some members of a community will often preclude the researcher from being accepted by others. That was the case in Tarlabaşı as well. While I tried to cast as wide a net as possible in the beginning, people saw with whom I spoke and whose homes I regularly visited. From that, they were able to draw conclusions about my views and sympathies. Finally, and although the research was driven by what people told me, this thesis is very much a text written by me: it was me who made the final decision if and how these interactions would be quoted here.

Engaged anthropology

During my fieldwork, I did not only observe, I took sides. I agreed with the many people in the neighbourhood who thought that what was happening was deeply unjust. I agreed that Tarlabaşı should not be demolished, and the people be able to stay if they wanted. From this arises the question of my stance towards my subject, my “neutrality”.

Ethical issues relating to politics, moral responsibility and advocacy have been raised by anthropologists since the early twentieth century (Sanford 2006: 3). The discussion around neutrality vs. advocacy in anthropology is not a recent one either and has been going on for decades (Bourgois 1990; Kirsch 2002b; Sanford and Angel-Ajani 2006; De León 2015; Schiffauer 2015). Drawing on the work of Stuart Kirsch, Victoria Sanford (2006: 4) argues that advocacy for the community one studies is in fact the “logical extension of the commitment to reciprocity that underlies the practice of anthropology”, as the researcher has an obligation to that community. Feminist anthropologist Shannon Speed (2006) defends the importance of explicit activist engagement as part of the research process. She argues that, if the rights of protagonists of ethnographic research are being violated, it would be ethically indefensible to benefit from them through the gaining of information without any commitment to their future wellbeing. Daniel M. Goldstein (2012: 36) goes further and demonstrates that “[a]ctivist anthropology is not only an ethical responsibility for many ethnographers of contemporary society. Instead, it may be the only kind of anthropology possible in the twenty-first century, involving a commitment by its practitioners that is essential if the discipline is to have a future as a viable producer of knowledge about the human experience.”

Werner Schiffauer (2015: 38) argues that the engaged anthropologist practices observant participation, instead of participant observation. He writes that research is done in order to develop the project one investigates, and to change its underlying structures. This means that subjectivity gains more importance than in “classic” ethnography. Texts that are the result of such engaged anthropological fieldwork put much greater emphasis on respect: interlocutors and informants have to be able to recognise their own self-image, their identity, and their self-perception in the documents that are produced. Engaged ethnography calls for “radical understanding”: this means that any employment of explanatory models that imply the possibility of false consciousness, such as psychoanalysis or Marxism, are ruled out (*ibid*: 40).

Due to my persona as a researcher and my expressed interest in resistance and the preservation of the neighbourhood, people approached me with questions about the various options open to them, about examples of urban renewal in the German context, and about the legal procedures at the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg to which several residents wanted to take their cases. Whenever possible, I passed these questions on to lawyers and other experts or tried to discover where to find relevant information. In the same way, I shared my findings with human rights activists, researchers and journalists whenever it was possible to do so without violating the wishes, privacy, or the safety of residents. I facilitated contacts between activists and the Tarlaşaşı community. In four cases I introduced human rights researchers of an international organisation who were preparing detailed reports about trans* rights and the right to housing to people in the neighbourhood. I also helped residents when they did have to move, carried boxes, assisted with cleaning or brought food. I often expressed my dismay about the project and the pending evictions to Tarlaşaşı residents and made no secret about my dislike for the urban policies of the AKP municipality. Without any doubt I have repeatedly asked leading questions when speaking to Tarlaşaşı residents about their experience of the project and the pending evictions. And finally, I also tried to provide emotional support.

Shannon Speed (2006: 185–186) notes that it might well be impossible to conduct ethnographic research in some social settings, especially those riddled by conflict and political polarisation, without demonstrating political commitment. I was careful not to risk the trust of Tarlaşaşı residents by engaging project stakeholders – the project office was located across from the project zone on Tarlaşaşı Boulevard, and it would have been impossible to enter the building without being seen by residents and shop owners. My interest was not in the representation of “both sides” of the project, but in understanding and, within my limited means, assisting a vulnerable community threatened by destruction. I fully agree that the engaged ethnographer’s position “may mandate engagement and advocacy on our part, rather than a scholarly, neutral stance. The notions of right and wrong can be invoked not only in relation to the truth, but also with regard to the cause of social justice” (Kirsch 2002b: 193).

Methods

In order to understand the way that the state discourse and stigmatisation influenced and shaped everyday tactics of resistance, I relied on participant-observation ethnographic techniques that are better suited than structured interviews and exclusively quantitative methodologies to observe the daily life of people, especially those on society's margins for whom statistics and random sample neighbourhood surveys cannot provide an accurate picture (Bourgois 1995: 12–13). This method requires the ethnographer to disregard the rules of positivist research to become “intimately involved” with the field and the studied community (*ibid.*: 13).

Ethnography manages to capture the ambivalence of human behaviour, the contradictions, and discontinuities of social actions. In Tarlaşaşı, people told me that they did not want to leave, that they would resist evictions, that they wanted to do “all it takes” not to be displaced from their homes, only to cheerfully tell me some weeks later that they had moved into new houses and were very happy there. Intentions to resist were expressed differently amongst different people, depending on political circumstances and context. No quantitative survey, no matter how detailed, would have been able to capture these sentiments.

Clifford Geertz (1973: 27) sees the importance of specific circumstantial ethnographic findings in the way they lend actuality to main concepts of social science. Small facts aim to yield large conclusions. Ethnography and interpretive anthropology, he writes, is located “between setting down the meaning particular social actions have for the actors whose actions they are, and stating, as explicitly as we can manage, what the knowledge thus attained demonstrates about the society in which it is found and, beyond that, about social life as such.” In looking at the ways residents of a poor Istanbul neighbourhood managed and challenged state-led urban renewal and the accompanying effects of territorial stigmatisation, and how both affected their everyday life, I aim to open a wider field of observation into how massive urban changes in neoliberal cities affect the lives of the urban poor and the marginalised. Without falling back onto reductionist theses, I want to try and understand why resistance occurs, or why it does not.

Wanting to get a “thick impression” of how Tarlaşaşı residents resisted the stigmatising language and the dominant discourse about their neighbourhood and the renewal project, I aimed to establish long-term relationships based on trust with the people there. Over the course of two and a half years, I spent hundreds of hours in the streets, in workplaces, and in people's homes. I regularly digitally recorded their life histories, their interactions, and conversations. At the beginning of my fieldwork, I invested a lot of time into “being seen” in the neighbourhood and into becoming more familiar with the people who lived and worked in the Tarlaşaşı renewal area, into gaining people's trust and gaining their permission to follow them around and record their conversations.⁷ It was equally, if not more, crucial that community members knew who I was and what I was doing in Tarlaşaşı. At that point, residents had witnessed several “expert committees”

7 I used a digital recorder as often as possible, but in many situations, either because they were spontaneous, difficult to record or because people did not allow me to record their voices, I exclusively used field notes and a field diary.

wander through the neighbourhood to gather information in the name of the developing company or the municipality, and I wanted to make sure that nobody suspected me of being part of such an interest group. Another reason that it took a relatively long time for me to start my actual fieldwork was the fact that people were wary of journalists, photographers, and random observers who came to Tarlaşa looking for (and reproducing) clichéd representations of inner-urban poverty and crime that further reinforced stereotypes about the neighbourhood and the different minority communities who lived and worked there. This initially led to a certain hesitation (and a number of sarcastic comments) regarding my research intentions. Another reason why I limited my fieldwork almost entirely to participant observation and unstructured interviews spaced over many months is that I did not want to impose and add to the stress of pending displacement by insisting on conversations. It was important that people could decide for themselves on what level and for how long they wanted to interact with me.

During the first three months of my research, I met several people who either lived or worked in Tarlaşa, and who went on to introduce me to other local residents. My research snowballed from there. While it was relatively easy to make first contact with shopkeepers, artisans and other small business owners, it was more difficult to meet women who did not work outside their homes and who, especially during the colder months, did not spend much time on the street. I owe it to chance encounters, and, most importantly, to the trust these women decided to extend towards me, that I was allowed into their homes, daily activities, and conversations.

I do not speak or understand Kurdish, which is why I was not able to have meaningful conversations with older Kurdish women who did not speak Turkish.⁸ This means that I only learned about these women's experiences dealing with stigmatisation and pending displacement through the "filter" of family members who translated for me. I did not always ask for translations during ongoing conversations in Kurdish, since I did not want to impose my curiosity. This means that much of my notes on these situations are confined to descriptions and brief summaries of what was said by Turkish-speaking bystanders.

As a privileged, foreign woman I was granted a certain leeway in entering and spending time in predominantly male spaces, such as most workplaces and the three teahouses [*kıraathane*] I regularly frequented.⁹ In some cases I was first introduced to these spaces by a male friend or a local gatekeeper, but I was never denied access to places where only men worked and socialised. In the same way I was lucky to be allowed access to trans* spaces in Tarlaşa because Müge, a trans* sex worker I befriended early in my fieldwork, introduced me to her friend and colleague Gülay and other trans* women in Tarlaşa.

8 By "Kurdish" I refer to Kurmanji Kurdish, which was the predominant language spoken by ethnic Kurds who lived and worked in Tarlaşa. Kurdish men and women under 40 usually spoke Turkish. When I say "meaningful", I mean verbal interactions and an exchange of information beyond very basic communication, such as invitations to eat etc.

9 An important example here is the barbershop where I spent many hours. The barbershop caters uniquely to male customers of all ages, and women do not usually spend time there. In the case of Hakan's teahouse on Bird Street, I was not the only woman spending time there, as it was patronised by Müge, Gülay, and a varying number of their trans* women colleagues.

They invited me to their homes and to places they frequented, such as hairdressers catering to a trans* clientele. These hairdressers' shops, many of which line both sides of Tarlabası Boulevard, are backstage areas. They are spaces where trans* sex workers did the work to turn themselves into beautiful-enough women marketable to male customers – work that must remain invisible to their intended audience and was therefore a very exclusive, very private insider activity. It was there where I, having been granted a seat off the side, was able to witness candid conversations about sex work and trans* issues in Istanbul.

Over time, I became friends with many people from the community I had set out to study. During the many months spent with Tarlabası residents I attended family celebrations and reunions, and took part in engagement parties, weddings, and several *iftar* dinners, the traditional breaking of the fast during the month of Ramadan. I also interviewed family members and friends from outside the neighbourhood, accompanied homeowners to court dates, to walks and chores in the surrounding Beyoğlu area, or to business-related visits with colleagues and traders in other parts of Istanbul. Whenever possible I was present during evictions or when people moved their homes out of Tarlabası. This was not easy to plan. First of all, evictions would not always take place on the dates and times stated in eviction notices, if there had been any. Furthermore, people going through the very stressful event of (threatened or actual) eviction naturally did not think of notifying me while this was happening. In several cases, it was possible to observe people moving out on dates they had set for themselves.

In a handful of cases, I stayed in touch with residents after their relocation and visited them in their new homes. The conversations and interviews I conducted were almost exclusively in Turkish and are presented in this thesis in their translated English form, with some expressions and words left in their original language for effect, or when they provide additional information or meaning. Because people sometimes digress, tell complicated stories out of order, or repeat themselves, I have edited some of the material that I first translated in order to preserve the narrative flow and to avoid repetition. I used these edits carefully and sparingly. The editing of interviews sometimes included combining separate interviews with the same person into one narrative. Sometimes I added missing words or deleted redundant sections from conversations to preserve the narrative flow. (For comments on the editing of ethnographic interviews see Bourgois 1995; De León 2015). In all except a few cases I used pseudonyms, changed some personal details, and camouflaged street addresses to protect people's identities and their personal privacy. This is not easy as some shops can be identified from professions and location alone. The political situation in Turkey has changed massively since the beginning of my fieldwork, and people who initially agreed to appear under their real names might now face consequences for what they told me.

In order to understand the legal underpinnings and the process of the project, I interviewed several outside experts such as lawyers, architects, and members of the Istanbul Chamber of Architects (TMMOB) as well as of the Board of Listed Monuments and Buildings. I also spoke to what could be called 'activist experts', professionals involved in lobbying against the renewal project, many of whom were lawyers, architects, scholars, human rights defenders, and urban planners. Some of them doubled as representatives of civil initiatives which supported other grassroots movements and communities in danger of

eviction (and were later very active during the Gezi protests of 2013). I collected and read many legal documents such as title deeds, eviction notices, indictments, court protocols, and expert reports ordered by the courts dealing with the appeals against the project. Reviewing these documents was necessary in order to understand the language used by the authorities to explain and justify the renewal project, and a useful source for the analysis of the state discourse. Wanting to gain a more complete overview of the neighbourhood's development, its history, and the way earlier renewal projects were framed by the authorities and received by residents, I undertook extensive research of the newspaper and map archives in the TMMOB library.

During the many months of my fieldwork, I observed numerous public and semi-public interactions between the corporate lawyers working for the developer *GAP İnşaat*, the police, public order officers [*zabıta*] and local residents. I witnessed countless discussions and disputes on the street, as well as a number of evictions. In such situations, I was careful not to endanger or compromise residents in the eyes of project stakeholders. I never accompanied residents to negotiation talks with the municipality and *GAP İnşaat*, for fear that my presence would have a negative impact on residents' already fragile and often very precarious situations. However, many residents shared accounts of these interactions with me afterwards.

I never spoke directly to municipal or any other state officials, nor did I engage in conversation with employees or subcontractors of *GAP İnşaat*. This was partly due to the fact that my activist-researcher and reporter persona made attempts to contact official sources difficult.¹⁰ At the same time and as I have stated earlier, my research focus was not on the state's defence of the project, and I was able to analyse the state discourse using text sources that were available to me, such as interviews with state officials in the media or their presentations at press conferences. The marketing material for the renewal project produced in cooperation between the Beyoğlu Municipality and *GAP İnşaat* provided further valuable insight into the official framing of both the renewal project and the neighbourhood itself. I further scoured several newspapers and media outlets for their take on Tarlaabaşı in general and the project in particular. An in-depth media analysis was outside my capacity and the scope of this thesis, but I undertook a search of the online archives of seven national newspapers and TV stations for mentions of Tarlaabaşı and the Tarlaabaşı renewal project between the years 2004 and 2018: *Sabah*, *Milliyet*, *Hürriyet*, *Radikal*, *CNN Türk*, *Habertürk* and *NTV*.¹¹ Since the vast majority of the mainstream

10 In Turkey, it is not easy for foreign reporters to reach officials for (meaningful) comment. It is just as, if not more so, difficult to reach spokespeople for private companies, especially if they are involved in contentious projects. As the Turkey correspondent for the *Guardian*, these attempts became even more difficult. Besides that, neither the municipality nor *GAP İnşaat* were happy with me going around the neighbourhood every day to talk to people, and after a while their employees recognised me. I did try to contact both *GAP İnşaat* and the municipality for comments but did not insist when I was rejected – on the one hand because my focus was on residents. On the other hand, I found it very important to not lose the trust of residents by appearing to try too hard to be accepted by their opponents.

11 During my archival research and due to the ongoing and worsening crackdown on press freedom by the Turkish government at the time and through to the present, several media outlets I had relied on were shut down. In some cases, their online archives were deleted, making previous

Turkish media during this period (and through the present) reflected the positions and interests of the ruling AK party, the utility of such sources was in establishing the state's preferred narrative about the project. In order to gather additional background information on the progress of the project and organised resistance, I looked at the media coverage by outlets considered oppositional, such as the online news platform *Bianet*, the leftist daily *Birgün* and the now defunct independent broadcaster *IMC-TV*.

In order to get a broader idea about the range and extent of the stigmatisation of Tarlaşaşı in the wider population, I looked at social media entries on Twitter and Facebook, at YouTube videos, entries in popular online forums and dictionaries such as *Eksisözlük.com* and the comment sections of online content dealing with Tarlaşaşı. Again, a complete media and discourse analysis of that material was outside my capacity and the scope of this work, but this overview helped me get a better idea about how people saw and judged Tarlaşaşı.

Politics of representation

As mentioned above, Tarlaşaşı and its residents have long suffered from stigmatising and discriminatory representations that framed the neighbourhood as immoral, criminal and dirty. I consequently worried that the descriptions and life stories in this thesis would reinforce this image and further stereotype the urban poor in Istanbul. Many of the municipality's arguments for the urban renewal project centred on these stereotypes, as I aim to show in the following chapters, and I was worried that I might bolster the state discourse. However, ethnographies of marginalised communities face the challenge of aiming to counter moralistic biases toward these groups without sanitising the social misery, the violence, and the discrimination they witness.

The ethnographic method of participant observation requires researchers to be physically present and emphatically engaged with the people they study over a long period of time. This might lead ethnographers to censor unflattering or deviant behaviour as they usually want to portray the culture or the people they chose to observe in a positive light. However, Philippe Bourgois (1995) warns that minimising negative, violent, and destructive aspects of life in poor inner-city districts makes the ethnographer complicitous with oppression.

This is not the only reason that I wanted to present the bigotry, the violence, and the abuse as I witnessed them or as they were narrated to me. Omitting intra-neighbour-

coverage of Tarlaşaşı inaccessible to me. These include the Gülen-affiliated outlets *Cihan News Agency*, *Zaman*, *Today's Zaman*, *Samanyolu TV*, or the leftist *IMC TV*. The liberal-leftist paper *Radikal* which had extensively covered urban renewal issues in Turkey, halted production and made online searches of their archives very time-consuming and challenging. Media outlets that changed hands and subsequently became more "government-friendly", partly purged their online archives for some content, possibly because it was considered too critical of the ruling AKP, making a complete search of their archives impossible. This was the case for the newspapers *Sabah*, *Hürriyet* and *Milliyet*. Some of the older coverage I was able to access via the TMMOB media archives and the help of journalist Rifat Doğan who had assembled various news pieces and legal documents pertaining to urban renewal projects in Tarlaşaşı over time.

hood conflict and suffering would not only result in a false picture of Tarlabaşı, but make it impossible to understand the frequent contradictions, the often puzzling lack of solidarity, and the way people in the community dealt with the stigmatisation in the face of displacement. To illustrate my argument, I would like to give two examples: One was the chicken döner restaurant on Tree Street run by an ethnic Turkish Alevi¹² couple originally from Sivas. They sold inexpensive chicken döner sandwiches and refreshments and were popular with people working in neighbouring businesses who did not live nearby and with children who passed the restaurant on their way to and from school. I often went to their restaurant for a cup of *ayran*, a chat, and the occasional sandwich. Across from their eatery was a second-hand furniture shop [*eskiçi*] run by Maher, a Kurdish man from the province of Siirt who lived in a flat above his shop with his family. On most days the furniture spilled out into the street, with Maher sitting in one of the chairs or couches, conversing with neighbours and passers-by. Whenever I came to visit him, often after or before popping in at the chicken döner restaurant, he would offer me food. I usually suggested getting two sandwiches for both of us, which he regularly declined. His reasons became more explicit as time went by, with him telling me that the food at his neighbours' place was "dirty" and that "one should never eat the food of those people". I first assumed that Maher simply did not get along with owners Seray and Ekin, that he had maybe had some dispute and was therefore not on speaking terms with them. It took me a while to understand that he did not want to eat anything from their restaurant because they were Alevi. His refusal to eat anything they had made or touched was very common bigotry against Alevi people in Turkey. The realisation that Maher, who openly criticised the AKP government, who opposed the project and who presented himself as a supporter of the Kurdish left and social justice, discriminated against his Alevi neighbours came as a shock to me. Not only because I liked Maher, and because I was disappointed to learn about his bigotry, but also because it did not "fit" my initial, wishful, impression of Tarlabaşı as a place where intra-neighbourhood solidarity networks were organised into clearly discernible frontlines of those who were threatened with displacement against those who threatened to displace them, cancelling out all other rifts.

Another such example was the aforementioned small teahouse on Bird Street, located right next to the informal brothel where I met Müge and her trans* colleagues. Our chats, initially only exchanges of small pleasantries on the street, soon became regular meetings in the teahouse, a somewhat crummy hole-in-the-wall run by a Turkish man called Hakan. The teahouse was frequented almost exclusively by male regulars, such as local shopkeepers, artisans, workers, municipal cleaners, and the trans* women from the brothel next door. The sex workers made use of the teahouse to keep warm, to reapply their make-up, to have tea or to play a game of cards with other patrons. There were preciously few places in Istanbul (that I knew of) where trans* women and non-

12 Adherents to Alevism follow the mystical Alevi Islamic teachings of Haji Bektash Veli, who is supposed to have taught the teachings of Ali and the Twelve Imams. However, Alevis differ considerably from Shi'a communities in other countries in their practice and interpretation of Islam, as well as from the Sunni Muslim majority in Turkey. Alevis constitute the largest religious minority in Turkey and have been subject to extreme violence and discrimination.

trans* residents entertained such friendly ties, let alone played cards together. Hakan's teahouse felt like a noteworthy exception to several rigid social norms.

Several months after I had met Müge for the first time she told me that much of the sociability I witnessed in the teahouse was only an act, a "theatre performance". She told me that the trans* women had wrested the right to run the brothel on Bird Street from the men using physical violence. Müge recounted how Hakan and several others had blocked the entrance to the brothel and threatened potential customers, which Müge and some of her friends had answered with "a good beating". This skirmish, in Müge's words, "turned them all into lambs". And as time went on, I saw a different side of Hakan who began to let his transphobia show. When he talked to me in his teahouse without Müge or any of her trans* colleagues present, he dropped the affectionate monikers and dismissively referred to them as "these people" [*bunlar*], or even "faggots" [*ibneler*]. Again, I was disabused of the idea of Tarlabası residents sticking together as one "group of victims" in the face of imminent displacement and the injustice of the planned renewal. This led to a worry of how to represent the neighbourhood without stigmatising it further. I had been so convinced that the description of Tarlabası as a besieged, but tightly knit community that found strength in its diversity was true. It was the image I had not only been looking for, but also the description that I had until then communicated to outsiders, like fellow journalists or researchers. Just as Erdal had told me, I told others that Tarlabası was a place where different people stood together to defend their right to housing. This is why I was conflicted and worried on how to best describe the friction and the discord I saw. Was it better to omit the hostile behaviour of Tarlabası residents towards their neighbours in order not to present them in a bad light to outsiders? Would these descriptions not hinder, rather than clear up, the topic I had set out to study – resistance?

However, the more I started to focus on stigmatisation and stigma management as resistance, these fault lines could not be overlooked. Just as the state discourse on Tarlabası exploited them in order to garner support for the demolitions, resistance and solidarity inside the renewal zone hinged on conflict and prejudice. In order to understand how territorial stigmatisation impacted the people in Tarlabası, I had to understand the negative dynamics, the bigotry and the many intra-neighbourhood discriminations that shaped the community.

Chapter two: Waking the Poisoned Princess

When Canadian journalist and Istanbul resident Nick Ashdown had his mobile phone stolen and his mobile phone locator put the device somewhere in Tarlabası, Ashdown took to Twitter to rally the help of fellow Tweepers. “Anyone in tight with this neighbourhood of Tarlabası? It’s likely where my stolen phone is,” he wrote, both in English and Turkish. The many replies to his seemingly innocuous question ranged from concern to open mockery. “You still have your kidneys, right? Check them,” one person tweeted, and another: “Even if it was an iPhone 20, nobody would dare to try.” Others reverted to images to get the point across. A photograph of Sylvester Stallone as the movie character Rambo, holding a blazing machine gun, was captioned with: “There is only one man who would dare to go there.” One Tweet, “Even John Wick can’t get his phone from Tarlabası”, in reference to a series of action movies featuring a retired killer-to-rent out for revenge, went viral. The thread itself became so popular that several Turkish news websites featured listicle pieces on Ashdown’s Twitter request. It is unclear if the hapless journalist got his phone back.

Why is this social media interaction important? It is unlikely that the Tweet would have gotten as much attention had the mobile phone locator turned up the device in another Istanbul neighbourhood. The Twitter exchanges and online comments show that people think they “know” how dangerous Tarlabası is, and the tweets assume this shared knowledge as a given. This is also why the joking comments on the journalist’s request work: the question if anyone can help getting a stolen mobile phone back from Tarlabası is ridiculous only because the insiders to the joke “know” about the neighbourhood’s terrible reputation, and those that do not are mocked as clueless.

It is worth pausing to underline the degree to which the stigma attached to Tarlabası is pervasive knowledge, and as such, constitutes a social ‘truth’ so public that not only insiders or invested state actors were aware of it. One of the most puzzling experiences in that regard was with a family of Iraqi Christians from the city of Mosul I had befriended and who lived in the nearby neighbourhood of Kurtuluş. They had fled from Iraq to Turkey via the land route in 2010, after living conditions in their hometown had become untenable due to continuous sectarian violence and war. They told me about attacks on their church back at home in Iraq, about abductions and killings in the streets that had become commonplace. One evening I was sitting in their living room with the

(widowed) mother, her three teenage daughters and her one son, then seventeen, a male cousin in his early twenties and two of his friends from church who were about the same age. Communication was not easy, but the teenage children spoke some English, and the rest we filled in with gestures and mimics. The question of where I lived in Istanbul came up, and when I replied “Tarlabaşı”, the room fell silent in seeming horror. The mother looked at me and made a cut-throat gesture with one finger, trying to illustrate how dangerous the neighbourhood was known to be even amongst them, refugees from Mosul who had lived in Istanbul for a little bit longer than a year.

The discursive manufacture of Tarlabaşı as a place of marginality makes use of various negative stereotypes that have accumulated and been attributed to the neighbourhood over time, such as sexual deviance, criminality, immorality, abject poverty, un-Turkishness – negative tropes that have all fed heavily into how Tarlabaşı is imagined and represented. It matters little if these representations, such as the described level of dilapidation, crime, or deviance indeed exist, or to what degree (Wacquant 2007: 68). Stereotypical language employed in the media, by politicians, and other powerful actors fuel the stigmatisation process and shape how a place is perceived and talked about on different levels of social discourse. The “hardening of public opinion into consent” (Tyler 2013: 211) builds on the accumulation and repetition of speech during the everyday “conversations between neighbours, discussion at street-corners or in the pub, rumour, gossip, speculation, ‘inside dope’, debate between members of the family at home, expressions of opinions and views at private meetings” (Hall et al. 1978: 129). Imogen Tyler (2013: 211) argues that to today’s definition of “the street” we have to add “the informal technologies of social media such as blogs, wall posts, text messages and tweets” that all contribute to the general agreement on the particular characteristics of a place – its reputation. When hundreds of Twitter users joke to each other about the danger of trying to retrieve a stolen mobile phone from Tarlabaşı, saying that that the victim should be glad not to have lost his kidneys as well and that only an-armed-to-the-teeth comic book Rambo could even contemplate entering the neighbourhood, they contribute to the hardening into common-sense consensus of Tarlabaşı’s bad reputation, therefore feeding and perpetuating the existing stigma. The authorities and the media did not have to invent the image of Tarlabaşı as a criminal no-go zone but could draw on an archive of “known” taints in relation with the inner-city neighbourhood, because Tarlabaşı has long suffered from a bad reputation that, as the anecdote of the friends from Mosul shows, reaches beyond municipal and national borders.

In what follows, I want to focus particularly on the role of state actors in producing the stigma of the district and using it in order to justify the contentious Tarlabaşı project. How is territorial stigma (re)activated in the official narrative surrounding urban renewal? Wacquant (2010: 215) underlines the “role of the state as a stratifying and classifying agency that wields a dominant influence on the social and symbolic order of the city.” It is therefore important to scrutinise public policies, public discourse and various forms of official communication framing the Tarlabaşı renewal project in order to understand how symbolic politics were enacted and used by the local municipality and the state. This helps not only to explain how such a massive urban intervention and the displacement of a large number of people was justified by powerful actors but pro-

vides a better understanding into the way residents managed and countered the imposed stigma, and therefore their tactics of resistance against the urban renewal project itself.

I first want to give a brief overview on the history of Tarlaşaşı, as the way the neighbourhood has been stigmatised can only be understood in light of particular political and socio-demographic developments there. I would like to show how stereotypical representations have been used to frame Tarlaşaşı as “Other”, and how these stereotypes have helped to build the district’s bad reputation. After analysing the concepts of state-led urban renewal and the importance and role of symbolic politics in such urban projects, I would like to give a brief overview over how territorial stigma was exploited by state actors in Tarlaşaşı. Taking into account the historical events that built a bad reputation, this chapter argues that the stigmatisation process links up several place-related and people-related attributes. Firstly, I want to look at the spatial aspect of the stigmatisation: Tarlaşaşı came to fall into physical disrepair due to a mixture of urban planning, discriminatory nationalist Turkish state policies, and neglect. Located in the centre of rapidly gentrifying Beyoğlu, Tarlaşaşı came increasingly to be seen as a stain on the district, while the surrounding neighbourhood was aggressively branded and marketed as part of neoliberal urban policies of the AKP municipality.

Secondly, I want to analyse the process of stigmatisation related to the composition of the local population, which from the early 1990s onwards saw a gradual shift from Turkish to Kurdish dominance in the neighbourhood due to increased numbers of people forcibly displaced from the predominantly Kurdish southeast of the country. In an aggressively nostalgic discourse, these Kurdish newcomers were actively disparaged by contrasting their supposedly “un-urban” behaviour with the “civility” of the neighbourhood’s former residents, the non-Muslim community of mainly Greeks and Armenians. The fact that the latter had been displaced from Tarlaşaşı by discriminatory Turkish state policies was ignored. In the same vein the increased presence and visibility of a trans* community, many members of which worked in the informal sex economy, further bolstered the stigmatisation of the neighbourhood as marginal and deviant.

Thirdly, the dilapidated state of the district, accelerated by structural inequalities and neglect, became associated with a predisposition to certain deviant and criminal practices of its inhabitants. Rationalised as essential to the culture and behaviours of Kurdish migrants, of trans* persons, of migrants from African countries, or of the Romani population and explained against the backdrop of a physically dilapidated neighbourhood – the so-called “broken windows” theory – practices of petty and organised crime provided a final justification for moral panics that reinforced territorial stigma.

Fourth, I want to look at how the official narrative erased current Tarlaşaşı residents from the neighbourhood, creating a quasi-colonialist “terra nullius” that could ostensibly be shaped, developed and populated at the will of the developer-colonisers who claimed that demolitions would take place on a quasi tabula rasa.

Taken together, this stigmatising discourse imagined – and created – Tarlaşaşı as a place where physical decay, neoliberal refusal, and ethnic and gender identities different from the Turkish (state discourse) mainstream led to the framing of the district as a place that needed to be “cleansed”.

While a growing body of literature on the effects and consequences of territorial stigmatisation has been produced in the past years (Wassenberg 2004; Warr 2005a, 2005b;

Pearce 2012; Wacquant et al. 2014; Contreras 2017; Maestri 2017; Nédélec 2017; Queirós and Pereira 2018), scholars have criticised the lack of research that traces how territorial stigmatisation is produced. Researchers have called for the analysis of the various processes and techniques of labelling, stereotyping and “othering” that accompany the discrimination and loss of status (Link and Phelan 2001; See Hastings 2004; Pearce 2012; Slater 2015). Tom Slater (2015: 3) underlines the importance to deconstruct and scrutinise the “symbolic defamation of particular urban places” in order to understand not only urban poverty and marginality, but also how powerful actors rely upon the production, reproduction, activation and reactivation of stigmatising discourse to frame and corroborate their policies, to the detriment of the urban poor. Michael Keith (2005: 62) asks “to consider carefully both the vocabulary and the lens through which the spatial is made visible”, as [t]he manner in which [certain neighbourhoods] are described consequently becomes central to a debate about their future” (ibid: 56). One question is, therefore, how do politicians, developers, intellectuals, and the media produce stigma, and to what future effect? How much work goes into the stigmatisation of a certain place, and, in the case of Tarlabası, how far does stigma reach back in history? The following chapter demonstrates that the stigmatisation process that bolsters the taint of Tarlabası today began much earlier and still feeds into the negative image of the district. What was the process through which Beyoğlu, an Istanbul district settled in the 16th century, came to be stigmatised and how does it continue to be? How do earlier forms of stigma feed into the image of the neighbourhood today? In short, how is today’s territorial stigmatisation maintained, reproduced, and reactivated? In this the stigmatisation process for Tarlabası – and wider Beyoğlu – is interestingly different from the ethnographic examples that appear in the bulk of scholarly work on territorial stigmatisation and their focus on social housing estates of Western metropolises and on informal settlements in Asia and on the periphery of Latin American cities (Auyero 1999; Atkinson and Jacobs 2010; Devereux et al. 2011; Duin et al. 2011; Gray and Mooney 2011; Jensen and Christensen 2012; Birdsall-Jones 2013; Liu and Blomley 2013; Kallin and Slater 2014; Kirkness 2014; Slater 2015).

Brief history of a stigmatised neighbourhood

What follows is a historical contextualization of developments in Tarlabası and their later stigmatisation, in order to better assess continuity and change regarding the role of stigmatising representations in the perception of the neighbourhood. After all, Tarlabası has been closely linked to crime, dilapidation and sexual deviance since at least since the 19th century in the shared local imagination and memory.

In her analysis on the stigmatisation, and general perception, of Las Vegas as a “deviant” city of gambling, sexual promiscuity, and organised crime, Pascale Nédélec (2017: 11) identifies specific, seemingly abnormal historical events and their subsequent representations as the source of place-based stigmatisation, turning one particular occurrence during a particular period in time into a certain location’s essential and inescapable feature: “One historical ‘anecdote’ is gradually transformed into the main commonly known aspect of an urban area, dominating everything else.”

It is indisputable that changing historical, political, and social contexts have to be considered when analysing a deep spatial taint later (re)activated by state actors and the media. Imogen Tyler and Tom Slater (2018: 729), in their work on stigmatisation as a social process shaped by unequal relations of power, underline the importance of embedding processes of stigmatisation into a historical context and urge to analyse stigma *against* the backdrop of that context, an aspect of taint that is often neglected. Wacquant (2008) underlines that “blemishes of place” are not historically de-contextualised. In his analyses of spatially tainted spaces such as the Black American ghetto and the French working-class *banlieue*, he shows that the spatial aspect in these marginalised zones overlaps with people-centred stigmatisation that use long-conceived stereotypes and negative images of social identities.

Tarlabaşı is situated in the centre of the municipal district of Beyoğlu, to the north-west of the main pedestrian thoroughfare of Istiklal Avenue and was the quarter of the lower middle and working classes during the 19th and early 20th centuries, inhabited predominantly by artisans of the Greek, Armenian, and Jewish communities. For decades, Tarlabaşı was the main production centre of wooden furniture and leather goods in the city. However, the district was not only known for fine furniture and handmade shoes. Among the many images associated with Beyoğlu, and therefore Tarlabaşı, one prevalent, and indeed dominant, image is that of infraction and depravity. Historians trace this reputation of Beyoğlu back to the conquest of Istanbul in the 15th century when the area quickly gained notoriety for its excessive nightlife. In the cultural memory of Turkey, Beyoğlu has always been the neighbourhood most associated with a diverse and transgressive entertainment economy.¹ The proliferation of brothels and the rapid expansion of the sex trade in the central Beyoğlu of the 19th century played a major role in framing Tarlabaşı as a centre of vice and debauchery. While sex for money was on offer elsewhere in the city, efforts by the authorities to police and control sex workers focused almost entirely on this district, which contributed to the image of Beyoğlu as *the red-light district* of the Ottoman capital (Özbek 2010). In 1884, this perception was “made official” when the authorities issued the first state brothel license to houses on Abanoz Street in Tarlabaşı, outlawing the opening of brothels in any other location in Istanbul.

Following the foundation of the Republic of Turkey in 1923, discriminatory Turkish state policies aimed at forming a Turkified national bourgeoisie led to profound socio-demographic changes in the neighbourhood (Mutluer 2011a: 82). The imposition of the Wealth Tax [*varlık vergisi*] in 1942, predominantly targeting non-Muslim citizens, the state-orchestrated pogroms against minorities on the sixth and seventh of September 1955 and the deportation of Greeks in relation to the Cyprus crisis in 1964 all but emptied the neighbourhood of its Greek residents. The void created by their displacement was quickly filled by rural migrants from Anatolia in the 1950s and 1960s, who bought,

1 It is important to underline that taverns and coffeehouses flourished all over the city, both due to the fact that non-Muslim settlements (tavern keepers were generally non-Muslims, though their patrons not necessarily) existed elsewhere and because janissaries received an important part of their pay through taxes levelled on such establishments. Eyüp, today a place known for its piety and a main destination for Muslim pilgrims and religious tourism, used to have a reputation as a place of depravity, but this is barely known today.

rented, or informally occupied the properties involuntarily vacated by their former owners.

In the early years of accelerating rural-to-urban migration, Tarlabası mainly attracted transitory migrants, often single men in search of work or young couples who would move on to other districts as soon as they could afford to. The large number of abandoned buildings made housing cheaply available for newcomers. The neighbourhood's central location facilitated access to the job market in the low-paid service and informal sectors nearby. The first migrants came from the Black Sea and Marmara regions, as well as from Central and East Anatolia (Sakızlıoğlu 2014b: 170). Important demographic and socio-cultural changes brought about by the arrival of large numbers of rural migrants in Istanbul were framed by dominant elites as the city's "ruralisation" (Maessen 2017: 52). This implied that the "peasants", who had overrun the city to the detriment of the "real Istanbulites", had replaced an imagined high-brow urban culture by low-brow rural ways of life that were ill adjusted to the way of life in a metropolis (Lanz 2005; Maessen 2017). In the late 1980s and, to a larger extent, in the 1990s, a second wave of Anatolian migrants arrived in Tarlabası, with the majority coming from the country's predominantly Kurdish southeast. The political and violent conflict between the Turkish security forces and the armed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) had displaced hundreds of thousands, their villages often burned down completely as part of the scorched earth policy of the Turkish state (Yeğen 1996; Kirişçi 1998; Van Bruinessen 1998; Ayata and Yüksekler 2005; Çelik 2005).

Recycling business



Photo by Jonathan Lewis

People displaced by the rapid, and sometimes violent, gentrification in other parts of Beyoğlu and central Istanbul, such as trans* sex workers and semi-legal recycling work-

ers who collect recyclable materials with a hand-pulled kart and require inner-city storage room, also found their way into Tarlaabaşı in those years, as did groups of transitory migrants and refugees from African countries, as well as from Iraq and later on, Syria. Relegated to a second-class district largely ignored by the municipal authorities and deprived of public services, the status of Tarlaabaşı as a refuge for marginalised groups became even more entrenched. Many of the buildings' new inhabitants lacked the financial means to maintain them, and as Beyoğlu steadily lost its importance as the city's main business centre, ceding this title to newly built office districts elsewhere, the neighbourhood fell increasingly into disrepair.

In 1986, newly elected Istanbul mayor Bedrettin Dalan of the centre-right Motherland Party [*Anavatan Partisi* – ANAVATAN, formerly ANAP] initiated the widening of the central Tarlaabaşı Boulevard into a six-lane inner-city highway, a controversial construction project that resulted in the illegal demolition of more than 360 listed buildings, largely due to the municipal administration's opinion that residential neighbourhoods associated with non-Muslim and non-Turkish minorities were not worthy of preservation (Çelik 1994: 84, Maessen 2017: 55). This massive urban transformation project, likened to the radical urban restructuring of Paris under Baron Haussmann, drew a physical boundary between Tarlaabaşı and neighbouring, more affluent parts of Beyoğlu, where state-led urban regeneration and gentrification efforts started to take hold in the 1990s, throwing the difference between the districts on both sides of the boulevard into even sharper relief.

Complex property structures contributed to the deterioration of the housing stock in Tarlaabaşı. Fragmented ownership or unknown titleholders impeded on necessary repair works. Following the designation of parts of Beyoğlu, including all of Tarlaabaşı, as an urban conservation area by the Cultural Heritage Preservation Board in 1993, official permissions required even for small renovations of listed buildings further complicated matters (Sakızlıoğlu, 2014a: 167). Owners also often received only a small rental income from their properties, making them hesitant to undertake improvements on their buildings (ibid).

However, another reason for the visible decay was neglect by municipal and state authorities. While Tarlaabaşı is connected to the municipal gas, water, and electricity grids, the infrastructure is old and the maintenance sporadic, leading to frequent malfunctions and failures. While this is true for other parts of Istanbul, and certainly for other parts of (gentrified) Beyoğlu, the combination of a general lack of service and the state of the streets in Tarlaabaşı throw such infrastructural failures into starker relief.

In addition to the visibly neglected building stock, Tarlaabaşı suffered and suffers from severe poverty, in part due to the influx of Kurdish migrants forced from their homes in the 1990s (ibid: 173). More than 60 percent of the neighbourhood's residents lived below the poverty line, and a further 15 percent were estimated to earn less than is necessary to feed themselves and their families (ibid: 173–174). Around 90 percent of residents inside the renewal zone had applied for the so-called "poverty document" [*muhtaçlık, or fakirlik belgesi*] in order to be able to receive cash benefits, aid for healthcare and education, and other social assistance from government bodies (ibid). Access to gainful employment was difficult, and those that did work held precarious, low-paid jobs, often at walking distance from their homes (ibid).

(Creating) A place a part

It is difficult to pinpoint the “seemingly abnormal moment” (Nédélec 2017: 11) in history that marked Tarlabaşı as bad, and there is no single event that condemned the neighbourhood to a reputation of infamy. A complete analysis of past media coverage and a more detailed discourse analysis of how the neighbourhood was spoken about is beyond the scope of this research. However, in order to understand how and why powerful actors were able to frame Tarlabaşı as bad, it is useful to have an idea of the repertoire of stigmatisation they were drawing from.

In the media, in policy discourses, in fictional accounts and documentaries, Tarlabaşı has variously been described as “dark” [*karanlık*], “cursed” [*lanetli*], “a shame” [*rezalet*], a “stepchild” [*üvey evladı*], “Istanbul’s backyard” [*Istanbul’un arka yüzü*], or “Istanbul’s invisible centre” [*Istanbul’un görünmez merkezi*], words that depict the neighbourhood as dangerous, as a place apart untethered from the rest of the city and associated with shame, ill-defined fear, a lack of belonging, and void of any value. A major daily newspaper described Tarlabaşı as a neighbourhood “known as one of the most insecure places in Istanbul and [...] inhabited by drug dealers and illegal migrants”, matter-of-factly and without any further context or explanations, as if these descriptors were neutral and sufficient (Hürriyet Daily News 2014). In general, media reports on the neighbourhood focus on crime, sex work, and unsafe housing using scandalising and sensationalist language while omitting all background or possible reasons for structural inequalities. A number of studies have shown that media attention to stigmatised neighbourhoods almost invariably amplify negative stereotypes (Warr 2005a, 2005b; Arthurson et al. 2012).

Paul Kirkness and Andreas Tijé-Dra (2017a: 1) draw attention to the way in which the description of certain urban areas as “no-go zones” delineates discursive and geographical boundaries between those that live in them, and those outside them, with “potent material consequences for those living within designated high-crime neighbourhoods”. The stigma attached to Tarlabaşı created invisible – but internalised – borders that went up around the neighbourhood, discursively untethering it from the rest of Beyoğlu, and city as a whole. Historian Enno Maessen (2017: 58) underlines the importance of imagined and physical spatial borders, such as Tarlabaşı Boulevard, in the construction of the neighbourhood stigma. Sociologist Nil Mutluer (2011b: 74), writing about her fieldwork in Tarlabaşı, ties the border that separated an imagined, dangerous Tarlabaşı from its surroundings to her being asked by friends and colleagues how she dared to “enter” Tarlabaşı. The use of the verb “to enter” [*girmek*] instead of “to go” [*gitmek*] is very important, as it expresses the passage from one area into another. She writes: “One does not just go to Tarlabaşı, but rather ‘enters’ it.” Then Beyoğlu mayor Ahmet Misbah Demircan, too, described Tarlabaşı as a place that “you could not enter” (Akşam, 2014).

Stigmatisation also hinges on stereotyped and discriminatory descriptions of marginal groups whose “taint” feeds into the stigma of their neighbourhood. The criminalisation and “othering” of urban outcasts is, as Nir Cohen (2013: 116) points out, “unsurprisingly immanent to the stigmatization process.” The vilified and ostracised crowd commonly associated with Tarlabaşı – the urban poor, the trans* community, the Kurdish migrants, or the Romani residents – have long been depicted as a group of dangerous deviants, perpetrators of crime, and symbols of lawlessness and urban crises

which threaten the moral order. These moral panics are articulated through stereotyped imagery and discriminatory speech, painting these groups as dangerous outsiders, as corrupters, as the undeserving poor, as separatist traitors. This narrative casts Kurdish men as potential “terrorists”, trans* sex workers as “a danger to family values”, “violent”, and “unhinged”, Romani residents as “potential criminals”, and migrants from various African countries as “drug dealers”. These are all ideologically driven essentialisms that conceal structural inequalities, and the complex subjectivities of those that are targeted.

These links between disparaged places, groups of marginalised people, and certain practices perceived as deviant are all socially constructed and products of “discourses of vilification [that] proliferate and agglomerate about them, ‘from below’, in the ordinary interactions of daily life, as well as ‘from above’, in the journalistic, political and bureaucratic (and even scientific) fields” (Wacquant 2007: 67). Territorial stigmatisation is therefore superimposed on already existing taints associated with poverty as well as with ethnic and gender identity – all aspects project stakeholders made use of when they framed the neighbourhood as abject.

Branding Beyoğlu, framing Tarlabası

The start of the more symbolic “fall-out” of Tarlabası and the rest of Beyoğlu can roughly be tied to the neoliberal turn following the military coup of September 12, 1980, that had a profound impact on the socio-demographic and economic fabric in Turkish cities. As manufacturing and industry moved out of urban centres to be replaced by finance and services, central and municipal Turkish governments turned to city marketing and urban branding in order to attract more investments and capital and to enhance the image of Turkish cities internationally. In 1982, the government passed the Act on the Promotion of Tourism, which included the declaration of certain urban spaces as “tourism and business centres” and allowed for the bypassing of planning and building regulations in favour of high-rise office buildings and luxury hotels in Istanbul. By 1994, 40 such centres had been designated by the authorities, leading to the rapid transformation – and gentrification – of the inner city (Enlil 2011: 15). In Beyoğlu, these changes led to a gradual makeover that included the displacement of traditional retail businesses by international chains and low-income residents by more affluent gentrifiers. However, Tarlabası remained excluded from this development, partly because the construction of Tarlabası Boulevard had created a physical boundary. The neighbourhood remained separate from the (re)development of the adjacent districts and continued to offer housing and workspaces for those that were increasingly excluded from other parts of the city centre.

Following the 2004 election of AKP mayor Demircan, an entrepreneur who had cut his teeth in the tourism industry, he embarked on an aggressive urban branding campaign that aimed to turn Beyoğlu into a “trademark district” [*marka ilçe*] (Beyoğlu Gazetesi 2006). He wanted to turn Beyoğlu into a place where “investments were continuously increasing” and that “people competed to be a part of” (Sarı 2007). The neighbourhood was to be associated with the same brand value as a “German car” or a “French perfume” (Temizkan, 2012).

In cooperation with the private sector, his administration created several marketing campaigns centred on public services, such as street cleaning and street lighting. These branding offensives included a line of uniforms for municipal workers that were designed by well-known Turkish fashion designer Cemil İpekçi as part of the effort to establish a new “corporate identity” for the district (Ulueren, 2006). Demircan wanted to re-invent Beyoğlu as a carefully curated “work of art” (Ay, 2005), a neighbourhood of pretty façades and clean streets that would appeal to foreign visitors, potential affluent residents and investors (Ercan, 2005). Any development, any incident, and any situation that stood in the way of tourism growth were to be avoided at any cost (Temizkan, 2012).

Nostalgia

“There was a time when Beyoğlu smelled of sesame and perfume, now it smells of *lahmacun*.² During my childhood there was the expression: ‘to go out to Beyoğlu.’ It was an event to go out to Beyoğlu. Our father had new suits made, got a shave, and we would go to Beyoğlu in our most elegant, well-kept clothes...If Beyoğlu should be returned to its old state one could take precautions such as closing it for traffic and demolitions in Tarlabaşı.” – *Sadri Alışık, Turkish actor* (Kaptan, 1994: 40)

State and private market actors employed aggressive nostalgia as part of the effort to market Istanbul and, more specifically, Beyoğlu as a brand. Nostalgic images and the whitewashing of violent historic events were part and parcel of the strategy the Beyoğlu Municipality used to polish the image of the district, and, subsequently, frame Tarlabaşı as a pathological space. Therefore, it is quite useful to briefly examine nostalgia in the Istanbul context.

Following the traumatic military coup of September 12, 1980, the Turkish public started to rediscover Istanbul’s – largely imagined – “cosmopolitan” past. By the 1990s the nostalgia of “cosmopolitan” Istanbul in general, and of 19th-century Beyoğlu specifically, had become the topic of numerous literary, scholarly, and cinematic works (Eldhem 2013: 225).³ TV shows referencing a nostalgic Golden Age that celebrated strong neighbourly ties between urban dwellers of different religions and different ethnicities became popular (Mills 2010). This nostalgia was instrumentalised by the municipality, real estate owners, developers, and local businesses, who all saw in it an opportunity to re-invent the image of Beyoğlu, a neighbourhood that suffered from a bad reputation due to its transgressive nightlife and a visible deterioration in its housing stock. In order to restore the district to an investment opportunity, it was rebranded as the metropolitan heart of Istanbul that simply needed a clean-up to shine again.

2 *Lahmacun* is a flat piece of dough topped with minced meat, onion, tomato, garlic and other vegetables. In the collective conscience it is often associated with rural migrants and arabesk culture (Öncü 2007).

3 This development coincides with an emerging minority rights activism spurred by the Kurdish rights movement, leading to an increase in research and publications into topics related to minority history in Turkey (see Mills 2010: 19).

Unlike former ANAP Istanbul mayor Bedrettin Dalan, who had dismissed objections against the demolition of listed buildings in Tarlabaşı on the grounds that they were not relevant to Turkish national history, later municipal governments saw the heritage of non-Muslim communities as an important opportunity for urban marketing strategies. The nostalgia of an idealised, imagined Beyoğlu was used to drive urban development and gentrification of the area. Museums, shops, and cultural venues in the area were increasingly renamed “in explicit reference to the district’s former social and topographic nomenclature” (Eldem 2013: 225–226). The main İstiklal Avenue was pedestrianised and furnished with an old-fashioned tramway deliberately reminiscent of 19th-century Pera, and the municipal administration invited international cultural events, such as theatre, classical music, film, and jazz festivals in order to further the area’s image as the centre of a revitalised “cosmopolitan” Istanbul (Enlil 2011: 21). Historian Edhem Eldem (2013) underlines that the non-Muslim population, so emphatically celebrated in as an integral part of this nostalgic image of Istanbul, had by then decreased to a mere one percent of the city’s total population. Reasons for the absence of Greek, Armenian, or Jewish urban communities never featured in the many marketing campaigns that had started to shape the image of Beyoğlu.

Exploiting the bad reputation of Tarlabaşı

When the municipal authorities introduced their plans to demolish and renew Tarlabaşı, the project was framed as the necessary improvement of an untenable and unliveable situation. When talking about his regeneration plans to the press, mayor Demircan regularly used stigmatising language. He variously described the neighbourhood as “rotten”, as “useless”, and a “lost case” (Anadolu Ajansı, 2015). The discursive manufacture of Tarlabaşı as a place of marginality makes use of various negative stereotypes that have accumulated and been attributed to the neighbourhood over time, such as sexual deviance, criminality, immorality, poverty, un-Turkishness, negative tropes that have all fed heavily into how Tarlabaşı is imagined and represented. The authorities and the media did not have to invent the image of Tarlabaşı as a criminal no-go zone but could draw on an archive of “known” taints in relation with the inner-city neighbourhood.

As the urban renewal in Tarlabaşı plan is a state-led project, the role of state actors deserves attention. Hamish Kallin and Tom Slater (2014), in their work on the state-sponsored urban transformation project in the Edinburgh suburb of Craigmillar, have shown that the state’s role in exploiting stigma to justify renewal is highly contradictory, as state discourse and policies first create the taint they then purport to “fix”. In what follows I will examine the different layers of stigma that municipal authorities and the national government reactivated, strengthened and exploited in order to (re)produce a stigmatised place in need of demolition and renewal. I explore the meaning of state-led urban renewal and state-sanctioned stigmatisation, before proceeding to analyse how the state was not only complicit, but active in stigmatising Tarlabaşı.

Within the extensive scholarship on gentrification, it is generally accepted that different forms of gentrification and large-scale urban transformation are closely related to actions of the state (Hackworth and Smith 2002; Smith 2002; Slater 2004; Uitermark et

al. 2007; Kuyucu and Ünsal 2010; Kallin and Slater 2014; Sakızlıoğlu and Uitermark 2014; Sakızlıoğlu 2014a, 2014b; Paton 2018; Yardımcı 2020; Rivas-Alonso 2021). Local authorities enter into alliances with transnational capital, commodifying land for more affluent users, whereby the state provides the conditions and legal framework that attract, prompt, and enable private market reinvestment. More recently, scholars have insisted that the massive scale of contemporary urban redevelopment, targeting entire neighbourhoods, towns, and villages, require the intervention of municipal and central governments who have the power to expropriate land for development (Paton and Cooper 2016; Aalbers 2019). This suggests a new set of norms and rules for the state and its institutions that are qualitatively different from the “classic”, relatively slow-paced processes of gentrification undertaken by individuals and “pioneer gentrifiers” originally discussed by sociologist Ruth Glass (1964) and others (see Smith 1979; Lees et al. 2008).

In Turkey, the role of the state in urban transformation processes underwent a fundamental change in the early 2000s with the election of the AKP in 2002, and their adoption of neoliberal market capitalism. This neoliberal shift led to a number of strongly market- and profit-oriented urban policy reforms and urban renewal laws that gave municipalities and government institutions sweeping powers over urban transformation, expropriation, re/development, and licensing of urban land.

Whereas earlier forms of state intervention in urban transformation consisted of legalising informal *gecekondu* settlements, often for electoral gains, the AKP turned to large-scale urban renewal and the demolition of entire neighbourhoods as a potential solution for uncontrolled, rapid urbanisation. Urban transformation and massive urban construction projects became the major reinvestment strategy of the Turkish state (Islam and Sakızlıoğlu 2015). These renewal plans did not only target *gecekondu* settlements, but also inner-city areas that were to be transformed into neighbourhoods for the middle and upper classes, in line with national and local politicians’ aspirations to market Turkish metropolises as competitive “world cities” Ünal 2013).

After winning the national elections and an important number of municipal governments in two years later, the AKP was able to reform urban transformation legislation and implement top-down urban renewal policies via public-private and public-public partnerships (Islam and Sakızlıoğlu 2015: 251). In 2005, Beyoğlu mayor Ahmet Misbah Demircan announced plans to redevelop Tarlabası on the orders of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan who, Demircan later told reporters, told him to “get the Tarlabası job done” and make urban renewal there a priority (Öztürk, 2012). Backed by the prime minister, a municipal commission immediately drafted a bill aiming to overcome legal obstacles in the way of such a large-scale renewal project in the centre of Istanbul. The law, passed in the same year under the name of “Law on Conservation by Renewal and Use by Revitalisation of Deteriorated Historical and Cultural Immovable Property”, or Law No. 5366 (Republic of Turkey Law 5366, 2005), invested municipal governments with far-reaching powers and rights pertaining to the administration, acquisition, and expropriation of land to be slated for urban renewal, while failing to secure the rights of property owners and tenants.⁴ Law

4 The law was criticised by local trade chambers, scholars, lawyers, and activists for violating property rights, housing rights, and existing preservation laws (see Islam and Sakızlıoğlu 2015: 250–251; Atalay 2018; Yapıcı 2018).

No. 5366, also known as the “Tarlabaşı Law”, set the framework for subsequent state-led, large-scale urban transformation projects in Turkey by erasing legal barriers of private property and preservation laws and cutting short otherwise lengthy bureaucratic procedures. Furthermore, the law fails to protect residents’ rights and guarantee their access to decision-making processes. As “the only mechanism for participation, [the law] provides for meetings to be held by the local administration with property owners and/or local residents to inform them about the targets and implementation of the projects” (Sakızlıoğlu 2014a: 155).

The role of the Turkish state in framing and undertaking large-scale urban transformation projects such as the one in Tarlabaşı cannot be overstated. To a large extent it was the fact that one single party, the AKP, controlled the central government, different levels of local administrations, as well as various state institutions that made the rapid implementation of neoliberal urban policies possible. Moreover, as Islam and Sakızlıoğlu (2015: 259) point out, in “countries like Turkey, where the authoritarian state’s practices are embedded in the tradition of making politics, the state’s involvement in contemporary urban processes may be more violent and harsh” than in countries with a stronger democratic background. They also note that preparations for the urban renewal project had started even before the contested Renewal Law passed through parliament, suggesting that the Beyoğlu mayor had no doubts that the necessary legislation would be approved by the central government. Reminiscing about the beginnings of the Tarlabaşı project, mayor Demircan said that prime minister Erdoğan, whom he considered an “older brother” and a “role model” since childhood, had assured him of “any necessary support”, including legislations and political weight in Ankara, to “solve the Tarlabaşı problem” (Posta 2007).

Symbolic politics and state-led stigmatisation

Scholars of various forms of gentrification generally agree that symbolic politics – the struggle over who gets to speak and with what impact – are at the core of how urban transformation processes are framed and experienced by different actors. In recent years, there has been a growing body of literature showing that symbolic politics are an integral part of the struggle over gentrification, displacement and how urban transformation is experienced by local residents (Sakızlıoğlu 2014a; Kallin and Slater 2014; Paton 2014; Safransky 2014; Sakızlıoğlu and Uitermark 2014; Pinkster et al. 2020; Yardımcı 2020; Rivas-Alonso 2021). In their comparative research on the symbolic politics that frame urban renewal projects in Istanbul and Amsterdam, Bahar Sakızlıoğlu and Justus Uitermark (2014: 1370) have found that symbolic politics play a crucial role in the possible success or the failure of resistance against displacement. They underline that this is especially true for “gentrification that is supported legally, logistically, discursively and financially by the state.”

For Pierre Bourdieu (1991: 166), symbolic power is “a power of constructing reality”, the power of “making people see and believe, of confirming or transforming the vision of the world, and thereby, action on the world and thus the world itself” (ibid: 170). The state, and any institution or state representative, Bourdieu writes, hold the “the monopoly of

legitimate symbolic violence”, which makes official naming “a symbolic act of imposition which has on its side all the strength of the collective, of the consensus, of common sense” (ibid: 239). Naming and identifying certain attributes, when done by state agents, is performative, lending them the power to create, categorise, and assign certain properties to the social world, in short, to impose “state forms of classification” (Bourdieu et al. 1994: 13). An official description of an area as “problematic” is thus not a “neutral” attribute, but both indictment and verdict. It is “*consequential* categorisation” (Sisson 2020: 5, emphasis in original). Sakızlıoğlu and Uitermark (2014: 1371) argue that the characterisation of a neighbourhood as “dilapidated”, “a problem neighbourhood”, “unsafe”, or “dangerous”, when done by the state, does not only feed into the territorial stigmatisation of the place in question, but creates facts. Therefore, when the state labels a place as “criminal”, it does not describe attributes of a certain area, but it “decrees it a crime zone”. When a government declares an urban district a “renewal area” by law, it rules that the neighbourhood requires change for the better and that its current state is untenable and needs to be adjusted to dominant – elite – expectations and standards. Resistance to state-decreed urban transformation can in turn be framed as wilful obstruction to benevolent, state-decreed progress and betterment, or indeed criminalised as an infraction of the law.

Around the time of the Tarlabaşı project announcement and immediately afterwards, politicians, municipal officials and other powerful stakeholders reactivated an intense stigma around Tarlabaşı in order to garner support for the renewal plans and to justify administrative measures considered harsh, or even illegal, by many critics. I will take a close look at how these state-led processes of stigmatisation played out, how they were reflected in official discourse, the media, and public opinion. How and in what ways did the state mobilise and use its symbolic power to go ahead with a highly contested urban renewal project that threatened to displace a large number of people from an inner-city neighbourhood in Istanbul? What problematic aspects of Tarlabaşı were targeted, and how? And in what ways were residents affected by the way that the authorities talked – or did not talk – about them? State discourse frames the discussion about an urban renewal project in including certain aspects, such as references to crime, dilapidated housing, or the lack of large-scale capital reinvestment, and ignores others, such as displacement, structural poverty, or the lack of public services. I further want to show how Tarlabaşı, and the neighbourhood’s residents were stigmatised not only through what was said about them and the place they inhabited, but also through what was *not* said, creating what I would like to call an “erasure through stigma”.

Place: Stigmatisation of Tarlabaşı as a dilapidated neighbourhood

“Every Istanbul and Beyoğlu resident who walked past [Tarlabaşı] thought: ‘What a shame’. They also said: ‘Nothing will ever come of this place, this is a hopeless case’. All of Beyoğlu was blamed for this hopelessness. Nobody went to [Tarlabaşı]. Now we are healing the poisoned princess. Tarlabaşı is a precious princess, but she was poisoned. It is hard work to make her respectable again. But once we have, we will have gained a princess.” (Star 2012)

“Around 2004, everyone living in Beyoğlu was wondering what was to become of this Tarlabası. It looked much worse back then. There was no lighting, it was like a nightmare, it was dark. Even when going through it by car, the dilapidated buildings on the right would make you shiver.” – *Ahmet Misbah Demircan* (Habertürk 2014)

Tarlabası did and does suffer from real structural problems. The visible disrepair and the physical decay of the housing stock are partly due to the relatively high vacancy rate in the district. The news media regularly report on the dangers of dilapidated buildings in the neighbourhood, and houses have collapsed due to decades of neglect. The tactics of “managed dilapidation” and “planned abandonment”, including semi-legal and illegal ploys by developers, landlords, and the authorities who are trying to make a neighbourhood look more run-down and force people to leave have been extensively researched in other cities (Metzger 2000, Aalbers 2006). Beyoğlu mayor Ahmet Misbah Demircan justified the invasive renewal project by describing Tarlabası as “an area of total dilapidation” (Yeni Şafak 2013) and “a demolition zone” (Yeni Akit 2014). Demircan and other powerful actors invested in the project, including a nominally independent expert committee of academics who prepared a report for court case brought by the Istanbul Chamber of Architects (TMMOB) in an effort to stop the demolitions, referred to Tarlabası as “abandoned” and “empty” (Erenman et al. 2008: 7–8). I want to return to the problematic notion of this alleged “emptiness” and discursive erasure at the end of this section.

Tarlabası 2009



Photo by Jonathan Lewis

Historical and structural reasons for the notable disrepair in the neighbourhood were seldom, if at all, mentioned by stakeholders. Problems were simply “pointed out”. The somewhat accusatory silence when it came to reasons insinuated that current residents were to blame for the issues that the renewal project was going to “fix”. Demolitions and

renewal were posited as the only possible “rescue plan”, and other possible solutions were never considered.

In the same way, few non-residents were aware that several Tarlabaşı house owners had been fined for renovation works they had undertaken on their buildings, even if these efforts had aimed to repair fundamental and potentially dangerous problems, such as a leaking roof or rusty balcony rails. Since the entire neighbourhood had been declared an urban conservation area in 1993, all repair, renovation and construction work had to be approved by the Cultural Heritage Preservation Board first. Association members complained that this regulation prevented them from putting even one nail into the wall, which of course stood in striking contrast from a project that was going to raze the entire neighbourhood to the ground.⁵

Tarlabaşı residents, most of them tenants, also complained about the unwillingness of homeowners to look after their property, especially if they did not own buildings or apartments themselves. Barber Halil Usta regularly accused the house owners opposite his shop of being “too lazy to apply even a lick of paint” on the façade of their building, therefore adding to the “bad, run-down look” of his street.

The various ways in which the authorities structurally neglected Tarlabaşı only added to the neighbourhood being perceived as a “lost case”. For example, garbage collection was not as reliable as in other parts of Beyoğlu – where AKP mayor Demircan had launched high-profile, branded cleaning campaigns – which made the neighbourhood look uncared for and “dirty”. However, the fact that garbage trucks did not drive through Tarlabaşı as often as they did through neighbouring districts was not known to outsiders.

After the start of evictions in 2011, garbage was not collected anymore at all in several parts of Tarlabaşı, leading to piles of refuse rotting in the streets. The steadily growing heaps of debris began to attract pests and, especially during the warm summer months, emitted a terrible stench. This led to concerns about public health, with residents especially worried about the mosquitoes and the possible harm to their children playing in the streets. Evicted buildings which had been bought by the municipality that was now legally responsible for them, were turned into impromptu garbage dumps. Many residents began to suspect that this was not an oversight, but wilful neglect by the authorities, both in order to force people to leave and to feed into an image of progressive decay that was sure to garner support for the planned “clean-up” of Tarlabaşı. However, the continuous silence on the matter in official narratives and the overwhelming majority of the media shifted the blame for the dirt and the disorder, as in the case of the run-down housing stock, to residents again. This frame certainly helped to keep criticism away from the Beyoğlu Municipality which was in fact responsible for the scheduling and the dispatch of garbage trucks and cleaning teams, as well as for the upkeep of the empty properties now in their care.

5 One person I met was fined around 6,000 Turkish Lira for wanting to fix a leaking roof. This rule has not always been consistently applied, and several house owners have undertaken repair and replacement works without having been fined, which likely added to the impression that house owners who did not were to blame for the state of the buildings in the neighbourhood.

Neither did the municipality prevent the massive looting of timber, doors, windows, and metal from pipes and stabilising structures from abandoned buildings. Most looters were Tarlabası residents from outside the renewal zone who hoped to sell recycled materials such as copper and other metals. Sometimes parting tenants and former house owners took out floors, stairs and railings as well as other wooden materials in order to use it for heating their new homes. Others, as I will explain in more detail in chapter nine, did not want to leave materials they had bought and paid for to the municipality out of principle. But the removal of these materials and structures led to the collapse, or partial collapse, of several buildings – by extreme chance nobody was ever killed or seriously injured – and to a rapid, and very visible, further decay of the neighbourhood. Despite these evident dangers the municipality did not prevent looting for a very long time, partly to discourage squatters to move into abandoned buildings⁶, but it also fed into the useful narrative of Tarlabası as a “lost case”, and, as mayor Demircan had called the neighbourhood, “a poisoned princess”. Residents described the appearance of Tarlabası after 2011 as a “war zone”.

Image

“Tarlabası, that throughout history has been the ‘in’ neighbourhood of Beyoğlu, will throw off its current appearance and become a liveable place again.” – *Ahmet Misbah Demircan* (Yapi.com.tr 2015)

After the word of a possible renewal project was out, Tarlabası was increasingly framed as a blemish on the meticulously curated map of Beyoğlu and as an obstacle to the successful branding and marketing of the district. It did not fit in. In the eyes of the municipal authorities, the visibly unruly neighbourhood threatened the appeal of the Beyoğlu they envisioned. Worse still, it was *contagious*. On several occasions mayor Demircan warned of infection and death when talking about Tarlabası, arguing that “the disease” might get worse and spread to the “healthy parts of Beyoğlu” (Yapi.com.tr 2010) if left unattended. Apparently, the “poisoned princess” was threatening to leak venom all over the Istanbul map. Demircan described Tarlabası repeatedly in terms of medical pathology, variously calling the neighbourhood a “bleeding wound” (Boran and Akçığı 2006), “gangrene” (Yapi.com.tr 2010), “braindead” (Öztürk 2012), and the “most illness-riddled place in Beyoğlu” (Tabak 2013). For him, “Tarlabası was closer to death than to life” and needed to be saved via “surgery” (Öztürk, 2012): “We had to do something about Tarlabası. Because if Beyoğlu is a body, that body was partly in pain, and it would have been impossible to cure this body without relieving that pain” (Solmaz, 2012).

Mixed medical metaphors notwithstanding, the renewal of Tarlabası was framed as a way to modernise the neighbourhood, to “civilise” it, to, as anthropologist Daniel Goldstein (2016: 78) puts it, “eradicate the taint of backwardness.” When asked about the need

6 In some cases, very poor families, such as refugees from Syria who did not have any other options, still moved into these gutted buildings where they lived under appalling and dangerous conditions, without windows, electricity, or running water.

for urban renewal, Demircan maintained that Tarlabası, with most of its buildings constructed in the late 19th century, was a child of its time, but did not meet “contemporary requirements”: in his opinion the neighbourhood lacked the necessary street width to accommodate cars, the buildings stood too close together, and the layout of the flats and houses was too small to accommodate the needs of the “modern urban dweller”, namely enough room to fit amenities such as refrigerators, dishwashers and other white goods. Defending the need for renewal, the municipality maintained that the neighbourhood lay “abandoned” because residents had been unable to park cars and because the living spaces had been too small to allow for a modern urban lifestyle. The neighbourhood therefore lacked all economic value in its current state (Gebetaş, 2006). Demircan took on a revanchist tone when he spoke about Tarlabası. In his words, it was “an area in the heart of Istanbul, one of the world’s most beautiful cities, that [had] lost its aesthetic qualities” (Star 2012) and that needed to be “brought back” to its former glory and “returned to societal values” – socially conservative, nostalgic and conformist ideas of what an urban district was supposed to be and to represent (Yeni Şafak 2013).

This aggressive sentimentality, a variation of what Svetlana Boym (2007) calls “restorative nostalgia”, the historically blind and often revanchist attempt to re-create an imagined lost past, was the core narrative of Demircan’s urban branding campaign. In interviews and marketing material, Beyoğlu was portrayed – and sold – as a district of religious tolerance and harmonious ethnic diversity, as a place where “you can see all cultures, all languages, all religions, a geography where people can live their differences freely, without pressure from anyone” (Zorba 2012). However, these slogans did not refer to the multi-ethnic and multi-religious neighbourhood that Tarlabası actually was. It also did not mirror the idealised idea of the neighbourhood that activists described to defend Tarlabası. Instead, they advertised an imagined past that specifically excluded current residents who were accused of “polluting” the carefully curated picture that the municipality marketers tried to promote. This was the weaponization of nostalgia.

Besides whitewashing Turkey’s violent past and the forced displacement of the non-Muslim minority populations from Beyoğlu, this narrative ignored the fact that the neighbourhood has always been a place where the lower middle classes and the urban poor lived, and where various “outcasts” have found refuge. Historian Méropi Anastassiadou (2012: 300) writes that the community that formed around the 19th-century Greek-Orthodox Agios Konstantinos and Eleni Church on Kalyoncu Kulluk Street in Tarlabası developed into Beyoğlu’s poorest and most densely populated parish. Due to the cheap rents, the neighbourhood attracted migrants from various corners of the Ottoman Empire as well as a number of refugees uprooted by the then ongoing upheavals in Thrace. Contemporary witnesses, such as French teacher Bertrand Bareilles (1918: 103–104) who lived in the area of today’s Tarlabası at the turn of the 20th century, described the district as “dirty” and “chaotic”. He also complained about the many drunks in the street who, he wrote, were attracted to the many bars in the neighbourhood.

In line with this instrumentalization of nostalgia, the marketing campaign for the Tarlabası project embraced an idea of the neighbourhood that lacked history but appealed to the longing for an imagined *Belle Époque* in Istanbul (Taksim 360 Office n.d.). One municipality-produced marketing video featured the voiceover of a narrator who celebrates “old” Tarlabası as a “colourful and diverse” place, a district where residents en-

gaged in “warm and heartfelt neighbourly relations”. The narration is illustrated sepia images of middle class-looking young women, as well as buildings and cars that were common in Beyoğlu around the 1950s. “Back then”, the voiceover claims, Tarlabaşı was “peaceful, appealing, and full of life” (Beyoğlu Belediyesi 2013). The implication being that now it is not.

This selective use of history excludes many voices that have contributed to the neighbourhood’s past. More importantly, it renders invisible all politics, all issues of tension and difference, and therefore the painful history of the non-Muslim community. The violence, the discrimination, and the forced displacement from the city have been written out of the narrative (Mills 2010). The marketing campaign for the renewal project aims to tickle sentimentality and turn Beyoğlu history into what Peyton and Dyne (2017: 11) call “pastiche fantasies about the past”. Citing Fredric Jameson, they argue that “whereas modernity used history to tie people into the linear past through notions of progress, civilization and nationalism, the postmodern uses of history are invoked mainly to sell goods and experiences.” (ibid. 2017: 10).

Such aggressive nostalgia commodifies a polished and romantic past version of Tarlabaşı that, according to stakeholders, the project aspires to resurrect. The municipality is framed as the benevolent saviour that will reinstate the glory the neighbourhood is said to be entitled to. This narrative claims that the project will “right the wrongs” that “have been done to Tarlabaşı.” This revanchist discourse of a “stolen”, or “lost” neighbourhood alleges that the current Tarlabaşı, akin to the negative space in a print, delineates everything the neighbourhood allegedly never was in “the good old days”, and everything it should *not* be: poor, Kurdish, trans*. Geographer Neil Smith (1996) uses the term “urban revanchism” for the elite rationale that defines the urban poor living on potentially profitable land as “intruders”. Drawing a parallel between the conservative revanchist movement in late 19th-century France and neoliberal political thought that emerged in the 1990s, Smith argues that neoliberal urban governance is increasingly directed against an imagined “enemy”: the people perceived by the dominant elites as having “stolen” the city from its legitimate owners, namely the middle classes and investors.

The nostalgic narrative put forth by the municipality claimed that Beyoğlu lost its former status to the (lack of) taste, culture, and mores of the rural newcomers, the trans* residents and the urban poor that now “occupy” valuable land and real estate in the inner city.

People: stigmatisation of Tarlabaşı residents

The concentrated presence of such “advanced marginality”, to use Wacquant’s term, significantly added to the stigma that surrounded the neighbourhood. This permitted the municipality to frame the Tarlabaşı renewal project as a “struggle against incivility”, as a fight against the neighbourhood’s current residents who, according to municipal officials, knew neither how to dress nor to behave in the city and therefore did not deserve to live in Tarlabaşı (Sakızlıoğlu and Uitermark 2014: 1374–1375).

This lament of urban elites, the claim that rural Anatolian migrants spoiled the image of “their” modern metropolis, is an overused trope trotted out in urban politics, in

pop culture and around middle and upper class dinner tables. Against the backdrop of neoliberal urban policies, the authorities frequently used it to justify the displacement of the urban poor. At the press conference for the presentation of the Tarlabası 360 project, mayor Demircan struck a similarly revanchist tone. He warned of the “fast migration from various places in our country” to the city centres and the resulting “severe deterioration of our urban culture”. Tarlabası, the mayor deplored, was “taken from our hands” (Emlakdream 2014).

This anxious public discourse and such stigmatising narratives of Tarlabası as a problem place were organised around imagined and stereotyped, generic types of residents that Anouk de Koning and Anick Vollebergh (2019), in their comparative study of two ill-famed urban areas in Amsterdam and Antwerp, proposed to call “ordinary iconic figures.” These figures, tropes such as the “welfare queen”, or “the radicalised Muslim youth”, come to stand for a broader community of actual individuals. They bring together the specific and the abstract, “but they remain tied to categories of ‘ordinary residents’, whom they are taken to represent” (ibid: 393). At the same time these figures are made to stand for a specific urban locality, staged as the scene of highly mediatised dramas “that are at once local and national” (ibid: 391).

In the context of Tarlabası, ordinary iconic figures are everyday characters that index or point to a macropolitical or social problem. At the same time, they are icons or symbols that stand not only for a category of people, but for the physical locality itself. These everyday iconic figures are what link macrosocial and macropolitical problems or threats to Tarlabası as a place. In that sense, a Kurdish man indexes the armed Kurdistan Workers’ Party [*Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê* – PKK] and therefore the existence of a threat to the integrity of the Turkish nation posed by the PKK. The stereotype of the politically engaged, potentially violent Kurdish man came to be an iconic figure associated with residents of Tarlabası and by extension the neighbourhood writ large, making the problem of armed insurrection in eastern Turkey part of the justification for disenfranchising and dispossessing all residents of an Istanbul neighbourhood.

Since there are social reasons that certain types of iconic figures come to stand for certain places, it is worth analysing who the “problem-people profiles” that stand iconically for Tarlabası are. As previously noted, Tarlabası was commonly portrayed as the home of a deviant, un- and anti-Turkish lumpenproletariat. As such the neighbourhood has been the site of anxious public discourses about Turkishness and the integrity of the Turkish nation. However, the more Tarlabası became a physical location of interest (financial or otherwise), the more granular the public imagination of Tarlabası became. Three everyday iconic profiles of Problematic Tarlabası Residents rose to a privileged kind of salience and came to stand in for larger marginalised communities. All three profiles are linked to a perceived threat or problem by their historical and social context. Finally, it is important to ask for ‘whom’ such imagined figures are a problem. What or whom exactly is threatened by these stigmatised profiles?

Kurds

According to a survey conducted in 2008 on behalf of the municipality, 54 percent of Tarlabası residents had migrated to the neighbourhood after 1990, and 52 percent had come

from the predominantly Kurdish regions of the country (Kentsel A.Ş. 2008). Kurdish migrants have been especially stigmatised in Turkey, because in addition to the image as poor “peasants” they were labelled as “criminals” and “terrorists” in nationalist Turkish state discourse, the media, and popular culture. This taint on Kurdish identities reaches back to the early years of the Turkish Republic, when the predominantly Kurdish eastern and south-eastern regions and their inhabitants were referred to as unruly, disloyal, uncivilised, and reactionary (Yeğen 1999: 555).

Portrayed as a dangerous “invasion” by nationalist Turkish politicians and commentators, the Kurdish migrations, and the subsequent rapid socio-demographic changes, have not been well-received amongst the non-Kurdish Istanbul population, mainly due to the fact that Kurds were routinely stigmatised as potential security risks. Kurdish migration was seen as tantamount to an “infiltration” of cities by “terrorists”, and as equivalent to growing insecurity (Pérouse 2010: 173). The most salient stereotype that has come to stand in for Kurdish residents of Tarlaşaşı is that of a dubious (often younger) Kurdish man who sells drugs or is involved in other criminalised activities in order to support the PKK, or who is a member of the PKK.

The fact that the PKK is involved in drug trafficking and deeply intertwined with international organised crime was publicly established in the 1990s through Turkish state propaganda and publicised criminal cases that shed light on criminal networks that helped to fund the PKK. It has since been part of the public understanding of how the organisation operates and a solid component of an anxious public discourse about the criminality of the PKK and their involvement in the international drug trade (Gunter 1998; Marcus 2007; Roth and Sever 2007; Gingeras 2014).

The perceived insecurity is routinely visualised via mediated police raids on Kurdish homes in the search of alleged PKK members. Detentions are made public in an equally sensationalistic manner, while the release from jail of falsely accused suspects, acquittals, or other “false alarms” are rarely reported. In addition to being framed as “dangerous”, Kurdish men are described as being “more patriarchal” than other men in Turkey, as more prone to violence against women and children. So called “honour killings” [*töre cinayetleri*] are often treated as a “Kurdish phenomenon”, which further re-produces and perpetuates the stigmatisation of Kurdish migrants as “uncivilised” (Mutluer 2011a: 95, 139). Stigmatised as “uncultured peasants” who do not know “how to behave” in the city, they are portrayed as outsiders who do not belong (Öncü 2002; Pérouse 2010; Mutluer 2011a: 24). Tarlaşaşı has repeatedly been characterised as a “Kurdish space” by the media and by local and national politicians, and the neighbourhood is largely perceived as such both by Kurdish and non-Kurdish residents.

The pro-Kurdish Peoples’ Democratic Party [*Halkların Demokratik Partisi – HDP*]⁷ had their Istanbul headquarters in Tarlaşaşı, which contributed to the perception of the neighbourhood as a place of concentrated Kurdishness. The location of the party office also meant frequent political protests that often led to a large, and militarised,

7 The name of the party was changed from Peace and Democracy Party [*Barış ve Demokrasi Partisi – BDP*] to HDP in 2014. The BDP was founded after a Turkish court banned the previous party, the Democratic Society Party [*Demokratik Toplum Partisi- DTP*] in 2008 for alleged links to the PKK. All three had their headquarters in the same building on Kalyoncu Kulluk Street in Tarlaşaşı.

police presence and not seldom to the use of excessive police force. These protests, as well as the ensuing violent clashes between protesters and security forces, were regularly framed as “riots” in the media. This added to the collective non-resident impression that Tarlabası was and is a politically dissident area closely linked to anti-Turkish separatism and terrorism.

Erdoğan Bayraktar, then president of the Mass Housing Administration (TOKI)⁸ famously called Tarlabası “the nest of terror, drugs and anti-state activity” (BIA Haber Merkezi 2010a). However, and somewhat curiously, project stakeholders made no public allusions to Kurdishness as a problem and reason for necessary renewal. This was possibly avoided in order not to alienate Kurdish AKP voters in the area. Be that as it may, municipality officials and representatives of the developer *GAP İnşaat* employed a discriminating and anti-Kurdish tone behind closed doors. In private sales negotiation meetings with non-Kurdish Tarlabası property owners, they appealed to anti-Kurdish sentiment and promised to “rid the neighbourhood of terrorism” as a “service” to non-Kurdish residents. In at least one instance I was made aware of by a Turkish colleague, mayor Demircan told a journalist, off the record, that Tarlabası was a “Kurdish republic” and needed to be “cleansed” for that reason. The maintenance and the work that went into framing Tarlabası as a dangerously Kurdish space led to a further solidification of the link between people-based and place-based stigma.

Trans*women / Trans* sex workers

Tarlabası has long been associated with the existence of a visible and transgressive sex work economy. The neighbourhood is widely known as the place “where prostitution [*fuhuş*] takes place” or as a place where “prostitutes [*hayat kadınları*] are”. This narrative is built and maintained by sensationalist accounts of lawlessness, immorality, and scandal that have been circulated to such an extent that this “knowledge”, repeated and perpetuated in the media, political speech, and fictional accounts, has become an “unassailable truth” (Hallgrimsdottir et al. 2006: 267). When Istanbul mayor Bedrettin Dalan announced his plans to demolish more than 370 listed buildings to make way for the new Tarlabası Boulevard in the late 1980s, he claimed that one important reason for this contentious project was his intention to “clean” the Beyoğlu “swamp” from the “nests of prostitution” that had “spread there” (Süsoy 1987: 5). The spectre of a (sexually) deviant and (morally) decayed Tarlabası threatening the “decent” parts of Beyoğlu has more recently been resurrected by a well-known Turkish newspaper columnist who warned his readers that “prostitution and drugs” were creeping up from the ruined neighbourhood to swallow the rest of Beyoğlu, vulnerable to corruption because the renewal project and the entire local economy had stalled (Celal 2016).

The neighbourhood is also known for its relatively large trans* presence: Following subsequent evictions of trans* persons from their homes in other Beyoğlu neighbourhoods, Tarlabası evolved into a space that offered them relative safety. Local solidarity

8 The *Toplu Konut İdaresi Başkanlığı* (TOKI), literally the “Mass Housing Development Administration”, is the public housing agency in the country.

networks amongst trans* sex workers have formed, leading to more visibility and the increasing association of trans* persons with the neighbourhood in the mainstream discourse (Siyah Pembe Üçgen 2012). Tarlabası is frequently labelled a trans* space, and the trans* woman sex worker is another pertinent Tarlabası stereotype. Trans* women who live in Tarlabası are assumed to be sex workers whose customers are predominantly Turkish cis het men. Transgenderism is not a crime under Turkish law. However, it is still viewed as immoral and “unnatural” behaviour in most of society, and Turkey has failed to introduce anti-discrimination legislation that includes gender identity, leading to lenient sentences for perpetrators of hate crimes against trans* individuals and a general culture of impunity (Ercan Sahin et al. 2020). What is more, the AKP government has used legal statutes to control the movement of trans* bodies and punish trans* women for appearing in public space, but these laws do not criminalise transactional sex with trans* sex workers, or the men who pay for sex with trans* women (Human Rights Watch 2008a; Amnesty International 2011b).

In Turkey, the sex economy is regulated and legal according to laws that were originally drawn up in 1930, but sex work is heavily stigmatised and sex workers face marginalisation, discrimination, and physical violence. Brothels are allowed to operate under private ownership if they are licensed by the state, and sex workers have to apply for a permit to work there.⁹ The laws pertaining to the sex work economy only cover cis women¹⁰, which means that trans* sex workers have to work under precarious and dangerous conditions. While *de jure* illegal, the sex work economy in Tarlabası is very visible, and well established. Trans* sex work makes up a significant part of the sex economy in Istanbul but has also long been the focus of national concern and anxiety. Trans* persons and trans* sex work present a threat to Turkish heteronormative masculinity, and in extension, to the integrity and the self-image of the modern Turkish nation. It has been well established that heteronormativity is foundational to the modern nation state (Enloe, 1990; Nagel, 1998). A lot of research and work has been done to critically analyse gendered nationalism and to deconstruct the language through which nationalism reinforces and justifies sexual control and repression, and on how nation-building, heteronormative gender binaries and hegemonic masculinity intersect. Sexuality and sexual behaviour must be policed and kept under control, as “erotic autonomy signals danger to the heterosexual family and the nation [...] and brings with it the potential of undoing the nation entirely” (Alexander 2005: 23). Scholars in Turkey have explored the links between militarism, nationalism and gender in the making of the modern Turkish nation state and have shown that Turkish national identity is constructed around the gendered concept of Turkey as a “military-nation”, naturalising a rigid heteronormativity of Turkish nationalist masculinity (Altınay 2004; Selek 2009).

9 Several local AKP governments have stopped issuing permits to sex workers, which means that no new sex workers can be hired. In some cities, such as the capital Ankara and Bursa, state-licensed brothels have been demolished by court order.

10 The Turkish state defines a cis woman as someone in possession of the state-issued pink ID card. Most trans* and cis male sex workers are in possession of the state-issued blue ID card. Officially defined as “male”, they fall outside the framework of sex work regulations that include licensing, mandatory health checks and social security.

The reputation of Tarlabaşı as an area where many trans* sex workers live and work added to the neighbourhood's stigmatisation, and project stakeholders exploited the ordinary iconic figure of the trans* woman sex worker to rally non-trans* residents to their cause. They were not coy about it. In public meetings between municipal officials and Tarlabaşı residents, these officials promised to “get rid of” the local trans* community in order to “restore order and family values” in the neighbourhood. Clearly, they hoped to exploit existing prejudice against trans* persons to overcome local resistance against the renewal project. In another public meeting with the municipality and the developers of the project, residents were told that, should they agree to the renewal, they would be “freed” of the trans* people who had “taken over” the district.

Trans sex worker preparing for work, Saturday night*



Photo by Jonathan Lewis

These two ordinary iconic profiles threaten the Turkish nationalist self-imagination of the ideal nation state and the ideal Turkish citizen: Kurds who insist on their Kurdishness challenge the definition of Turkey as an ethnically homogeneous nation. Trans* women, and trans* women sex workers who solicit Turkish cishet men, do not only play into moral panics about a threat to conservative family values, but they defy the imagination of Turkey as a (gendered and heteronormative) military-nation.

'Köylüler': rural migrants

A third profile, that of the poor rural migrant who is unable, or unwilling, to assimilate to urban life, equally spoils the Turkish self-image as a modern nation state. It is obvious from the revanchist speeches of the mayor and municipal officials that vague notions of the undeserving urban poor polluting valuable real estate in the inner city of Istanbul

were a part of the stigmatising discourse in the run-up to evictions. However, as an ordinary iconic figure this trope is much more difficult to describe and does not fit into any cohesive category. The stereotype of the rural migrant and *gecekondu* dweller, variously assumed to be backwards, illiterate, un-modern, ignorant and unclean – in short, uncivilised – has been used, often as the target of anxious moral panics over a “hostile invasion” and “downfall” of the city, since the 1950s (Erman 1998; Lanz 2005). However, since the AKP rose to and consolidated power, this vilification began to pivot. After all, it was the former marginalisation of rural migrants that provided an important foundational grievance for the AKP and its predecessor, the Welfare Party [*Refah Partisi* – RP], and rural migrants have long provided the electoral base for the AKP. An analysis of this important and interesting shift lies outside the scope of this work. Suffice it to say that this stereotype influenced the stigmatising narrative about Tarlaşaşı but formed a flexible category that differs from the notion of the ordinary iconic figure I describe here.

It is crucial to underline that the stereotypes of problem people I analyse do not just stand for all residents, but instead they are icons for the place itself. De Koning and Vollebergh (2019: 393) argue that “[i]conic figures [...] can be important political techniques, primarily because they allow people to relate in very personal and affective ways to larger national narratives”; in short, these imagined negative stereotypes are given a physical body that can stand in for what is mostly an existential abstract threat for Turkish citizens. As demonstrated further above, the state-sanctioned and state-driven stigmatisation of Tarlaşaşı meant to garner public approval for a contentious renewal project. This means that there was economic incentive to forge and reinforce the link between the urban area in question and anxious public discourses about existential threats to the integrity of the Turkish nation and national identity. Ordinary iconic figures embody this link, which is why the stereotypical tropes of (criminal) Kurdish men, trans* women (sex workers) and poor people unable or unwilling to assimilate to what was considered modern urban living were given such prominence in the dominant narrative.

Criminalising Tarlaşaşı

A third parameter of the territorial stigmatisation attached to Tarlaşaşı was the perceived high level of crime and criminal activity in the neighbourhood. Closely related to the discursive stigmatisation of migrants, especially those who identified as Kurdish, and to that of trans* sex workers and sex work in general, a perceived high crime rate remained a defining characteristic of the central district, as the anecdote of the stolen mobile phone at the beginning of this chapter has shown. Two types of crime have been associated with Tarlaşaşı: firstly, petty crime, such as pickpocketing, burglary, as well as drug use and small-scale drug dealing, and secondly, organised crime that centred on drug trafficking and gambling. Furthermore, the well-known and visible existence of illegal and informal activities such as unregistered sex work, unregistered textile workshops, the production of accessories used in brand piracy, unauthorised recycling, unregistered mussel kitchens, and unregistered street sellers added to an image of clandestineness and lawlessness in the neighbourhood. This image was further strengthened by sensationalist media coverage of police and *zabıta* raids on these locations and professions, and of illegal incidents in the neighbourhood in general. All of this fed into the

“hardening of public opinion into consent” (Hall et al. 1978: 129) that Tarlabaşı was a den of crime and criminals.¹¹

Tarlabaşı was one of ten Istanbul neighbourhoods listed as an area with high rates of crime and a high concentration of criminals by the police (Sakızlıoğlu 2014a: 177). Police raids and highly mediated police operations were therefore relatively frequent. The water cannon and the armoured police vehicles parked in front of the Tarlabaşı police station on the street corner of Kalyoncu Kulluk Street and Tarlabaşı Boulevard fortified the impression that the neighbourhood was criminal and dangerous. Reminiscent of Wilson and Kelling’s (1982) “broken window” theory that links rising crime rates to deteriorating physical conditions in a neighbourhood¹², mayor Demircan alleged that Tarlabaşı was a security threat because of the many empty buildings in the neighbourhood. He claimed that these ruins facilitated crime by harbouring thieves and therefore threatened the safety and wellbeing of the rest of the city (Ercan 2005). Therefore, “cleaning up” Tarlabaşı would bring down the crime rate in the rest of Beyoğlu and Istanbul, because thieves and pickpockets would not be able to hide in abandoned buildings anymore.¹³

Poverty, unemployment, and other structural reasons for people engaging in theft were never mentioned by policy makers. However, the Beyoğlu Municipality did not hesitate to blame the perceived high crime rate in Tarlabaşı for the lack of investment and a stagnating local economy without providing any data or statistics that would factually uphold that claim. Tarlabaşı was presented as the dangerous place people already “knew” it to be, and criminal behaviour framed as an intrinsic characteristic of the neighbourhood. The approach of authorities and developers to focus on certain “problem places” provided the (unspoken) opportunity to focus on “problem people”: “This area focus – in the context of policy assumptions that seek economic competitiveness – destructurises inequality and puts the onus on the individual as agent of failure” (Kallin and Slater 2014: 1361). Hamish Kallin and Tom Slater point out that this approach further allows focusing on very specific forms of deviance and criminal activity – white collar crimes such as tax evasion, fraud, insider trading or money laundering, criminal activity that is arguably fixed in space and located in the financial and business districts of cities as well as in wealthy neighbourhoods and gated communities, do not lead to the demolition of the glass and steel towers or to their stigmatisation as “problem neighbourhoods” (ibid.: 1362). They write: “The more such a policy approach selectively chooses which areas have ‘failed’, the more distance it takes from any holistic understanding of deprivation. Such

11 Criminal Tarlabaşı and its description as a “problem neighbourhood” has turned into a journalistic cliché and is an often-used trope in media accounts that do not centre on crime at all. One article about the planned demolitions in Tarlabaşı described the district as “Istanbul’s robber’s den” (Kalnoky 2009). A reportage on Syrian refugees calls it “an Istanbul ghetto” (Cox 2016). Even for a simple review of a popular Tarlabaşı restaurant, a foreign journalist makes use of descriptions and vocabulary that conjure up danger and lawlessness (Osterlund 2017).

12 For criticism of the broken window theory, see for example: Camp and Heatherton 2016; Müller 2016; Vitale 2017.

13 Demircan also initiated the initiative “Işıl Işıl Beyoğlu” (Bright Beyoğlu), a vast street lighting project that was to prevent petty crimes by “depriving criminals of places to hide”. In Tarlabaşı, drug dealers would often smash overhanging streetlamps, and the municipality sometimes took weeks, if not months, to repair them.

an approach accepts that there must be something *wrong* with an area of urban marginality, rather than anything wrong with the system of economic distribution, or political control. Such areas are then to be ‘fixed’ by outright demolition and changing the demographics via large-scale displacement” (ibid.).

This is not to say that Tarlaşaşı did not suffer from crime. According to a study undertaken by Ünlü et al. (2000), the overwhelming majority of residents did not perceive Tarlaşaşı as safe. Mapping crime in the neighbourhood, the researchers have shown that criminal behaviour in the neighbourhood amounts mainly to crimes such as theft, pickpocketing and burglary, but some more serious crimes, such as murder, assault, and robbery, as well as gun and drug-related crimes, do occasionally occur.

During the eight years that I lived in Tarlaşaşı, fellow residents and shopkeepers often warned me about pickpockets, told me to hold on to my bag, my camera, or any other valuables, and not to hang around the streets at night. But as other scholars who have done research in Tarlaşaşı have noted, locals also say that criminal activity targets outsiders, and not those who are seen to “belong” (Mutluer 2011a; Sakızlıođlu 2014a). And indeed, when a group of boys once tried to grab my wallet on the Sunday vegetable market and failed, my outrage and that of the salespeople who heard about the episode from me, was directed at the fact that I was, or felt to be, a local, and not at the fact that he had tried to steal from me. After all, pickpockets were perceived to be an irritating, but integral part of the open-air market workforce.

Abandoned building

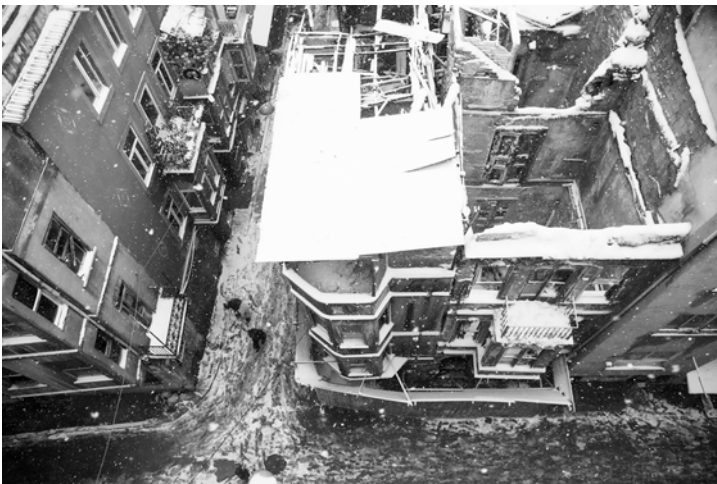


Photo by Jonathan Lewis

What is crucially overlooked in the sensationalist portraits of Tarlaşaşı as a den of criminality and vice are the structural inequalities and the stark contrast between the socio-economic and cultural settings and possibilities in Tarlaşaşı and much wealthier

neighbouring Beyoğlu neighbourhoods. Local social workers underline that illegal and semi-legal activities are often the only way to generate an income among poor residents, and the only way to gain access to things that “they cannot get with their own resources” (Sakızlıoğlu, 2014a: 177). However, this decontextualised narrative that was based on prejudice and cemented territorial stigma facilitated the framing of Tarlabası as a neighbourhood in need of renewal and of residents as undeserving of staying put.

Forced displacement as urban colonialism and erasure

Following this analysis of the stigmatising narrative that framed Tarlabası as pathological, I want to focus on the things that were *not* said, and on what this silence does and implies. I argue that this discursive void amounts to a refusal to recognise a presence and stands in dialectical relation to territorial stigmatisation.

The invisibility of Tarlabası came in multiple shapes. Portrayed as a neighbourhood on the margins, a space largely unpoliced where people who wished to stay hidden could vanish, Tarlabası granted protective invisibility to those who could not find refuge elsewhere, like communities of trans* sex workers and undocumented migrants. The neighbourhood concealed various informal and illegal businesses from the gaze and the arm of the authorities. However, the invisibility I want to speak of in this following part is not the protective cloak that those on the urban margins are able to wrap themselves in, but the “corrosive social erasure” (Carter 2010: 5) that is imposed on those who are not granted an existence. Donald Martin Carter (*ibid.*: 6), in his work on the experiences of Senegalese migrants in the European diaspora, describes this erasure as the result of the “flexible employment of power, politics, and social positioning that must be configured as a kind of routine practice capable of being reinstated into the flow of everyday events.” The capacity to render invisible employs a complex strategic set of cultural and social practices that can change with time and context, and it has the power to make entire groups, entire existences, disappear. This erasure is closely related to stigmatisation, as stereotyping a certain set of qualities and individuals pushes them into social margins and can make them disappear. They vanish behind a discursive wall of negative tropes. While they are being talked about as marginal, as outcasts, as problem people, and therefore made hyper-visible in the public debate, they are not themselves granted a voice and their own experiences remain hidden (Carter 2010: 12–13). It also means, as I will show in chapter three, that the residents of Tarlabası were invisible to project stakeholders, and that their rights to transparency, reliable information, and legal rights could be disregarded.

This obliteration is the power to make a presence disappear in plain sight. It creates a space of nonexistence that both defines that which is marginal and delineates what is within the boundaries of the acceptable. “This space excludes people, limits rights, restricts services, and erases personhood. The space of nonexistence is largely a space of subjugation” (Coutin 2003: 172). It is both imagined – culturally constructed and referring to an actual physical presence – and real, as the practices that make certain people disappear have material effects on those rendered invisible. (*ibid.*) Tarlabası residents, while physically present, were not taken into consideration when the project was being discussed and marketed, when their displacement was being planned, when resistance

was ignored by the authorities and by a large part of the media. They were also (made to be) entirely absent from all advertisement material of the new Tarlaabaşı. This violent erasure of the neighbourhood's residents, their lives and experiences, impacted the way Tarlaabaşı was and is perceived not just by project stakeholders, but also by a wider public. It fed into the stigmatising narrative used to justify displacement and large-scale demolition. This means that the relegation to a space of nonexistence has a major impact on the ability to speak and be heard. If one is erased by the state, does one still enjoy its protection? What authority speaks for those citizens that do not exist in its eyes?

Everyday Tarlaabaşı



Photo by Jonathan Lewis

Residents were rendered invisible in different ways. Tarlaabaşı was variously portrayed as “abandoned”, as “suffering from years of lacking investments”, and residents’ experiences of pending displacement were not taken into account by the municipality. The entire neighbourhood was frequently framed as an empty wasteland. Beyoğlu mayor Demircan said that the renewal area had been designated according to which streets and parts of Tarlaabaşı were the “most dilapidated”, and that the area chosen for the project was “abandoned”, a place where the “density of life was at a minimum”, and that the 278 buildings slated for renewal were “about to collapse” (Yapi.com.tr 2010; Bahar 2010). Speaking in similar absolutes, Demircan also alleged that the area was “a neighbourhood that nobody enters” (Sabah 2014).

Many houses in the designated renewal area did suffer from structural problems, neglect, and needed repair. According to the survey ordered by the municipality, approximately 30 percent of the 1,057 buildings within the project’s borders were abandoned (Kentsel A.Ş. 2008). However, around 3,000 people *did* live in the area that the municipality and the property developers described as “empty”. When mayor Demircan advertised

that Tarlaabaşı would become “one of the best examples for the mass regeneration of an abandoned city centre” (Istanbul 2012), he omitted the fact that Tarlaabaşı had never been abandoned at all, and yet he reiterated the claim that “nobody lived there” (Bahar 2010).

This verbal creation of an empty, uninhabited space, of a supposed *tabula rasa* that needs to be rendered “liveable” and where the authorities and private developers can inscribe their vision on a neighbourhood is a common strategy used by powerful stakeholders in many parts of the world to justify the displacement of current residents prior to the regeneration of an urban area. Poor neighbourhoods are commonly labelled as “no-go zones” and “abandoned wastelands” in order to make the displacement of those that *do* live, work, and go there seem less violent, and frame their replacement by wealthier, more privileged newcomers as positive and unproblematic, or, if one wants to take the argument of an empty space further, not as replacement at all, but as an initial settlement.

This is ominously similar to the white supremacist claim of the colonialist who declares that the land he came to occupy was empty, reflected in the idea of *terra nullius*. Several scholars have investigated the links between colonialism and gentrification, providing examples of the dispossession of land, of displacement and erasure, elimination, or assimilation of the Other under the rationale of urban renewal (Smith 1996; Kallin and Slater 2014; Lanz 2015; Peyton and Dyce 2017). In their analyses of white supremacy and settler colonialism, Bonds and Inwood (2015: 7) underline that the permanent occupation of land that underwrites racial capitalism requires “the continued displacement of indigenous and other marginalized peoples who are an impediment to capitalist development [...]” Neil Smith (1996: xvi), who wrote about the colonial frontier connotations of gentrification in his work on revanchist urban policies, argues that the narrative of the “urban pioneer” that describes stigmatised areas slated for renewal as empty and underused “suggests a city [is] not yet socially inhabited; like Native Americans the urban working class is seen as less than social, a part of the physical environment...the frontier discourse serves to rationalize and legitimate a process of conquest, whether in the eighteenth or nineteenth-century West, or in the late-twentieth [or twenty-first] century inner city”.

The municipal authorities alleged that a large majority of Tarlaabaşı residents held no claim to the neighbourhood because they were “squatters” who had moved into the buildings because the “real owners”, the non-Muslim community who had originally lived in them, was gone (Güleç 2013). Squatters, so the narrative went, were not entitled to negotiations or compensation, and could therefore be overlooked and not taken into consideration when the fate of the quarter was discussed. Tenants, who constituted approximately 75 percent of all Tarlaabaşı residents, were likewise excluded from talks to the developers and the municipality and were thus made invisible (Cingöz 2008).

Furthermore, when talking about Tarlaabaşı, the municipal authorities often spoke in the future tense, as if Tarlaabaşı was a place that did not yet exist as a populated urban environment. The goal of the project, its stakeholders proclaimed, was a “Tarlaabaşı that you can live in” (Dünya İnşaat 2005), suggesting that the neighbourhood in its current state was untamed urban wilderness, uninhabitable and uninhabited.

Similarly, Tarlaabaşı residents rarely featured in mainstream narratives relating to agency and protest. There was an important gap between what was alleged by the munic-

ipal authorities, namely that “everybody is happy with the project and wants it to happen” and the very serious concerns expressed by residents and business owners in Tarlabası (Cingöz 2008; Avcı 2008). The municipality repeatedly alleged that they had fairly negotiated with and convinced the legally necessary majority of Tarlabası property owners, and that everyone who could stake a legal claim had been compensated. On one (now defunct) municipal website that advertised the renewal project, the Beyoğlu administration alleged under the headline “For everyone, all together” that all project development had been conducted “openly and transparently”, that they had chosen the way of “mutual exchange and dialogue”, and that the people who lived, worked, and owned property in Tarlabası had all been consulted in preparation to the renewal project. In the following chapter I will explore this in more detail. The unwillingness of many residents to leave, the forced evictions, the court cases, and the conflict with the neighbourhood association were not mentioned anywhere and had been written out of the municipal narrative. This incomplete tale was subsequently repeated by pro-government media outlets.

While project plans acknowledged the existence of spaces in the neighbourhood used for business purposes, the municipality argued that nobody had invested in Tarlabası for years (Istanbul 2012). This allegation ignored the various types of commercial ventures that did exist, including businesses as diverse as hotels, carpentry workshops, metal workshops, shoemakers’ workshops, restaurants, bakeries, patisseries, butchers, second-hand furniture shops, teahouses [*kiraathane*], dry cleaners, DIY stores, upholstery workshops, internet cafés, copy shops, stationery shops, motorcycle repair shops, hairdressers and wig makers, corner shops [*bakkal*], ambulant trade karts (green grocery, household items, pastries, puddings, plastic coating of IDs and other official cards, knife grinding) as well as a manually-operated carousel for kids and a seasonal shepherd.

Children playing



Photo by Jonathan Lewis

Tarlabaşı also housed a number of informal businesses such as undocumented textile workshops, mussel kitchens, recycling storages, and various businesses of the unregistered sex trade. In the eyes of the municipal authorities, the money and time spent on these ventures did not count as “investments”.

It followed that the majority of these businesses were not deemed valuable enough to reopen in the new Tarlabaşı either. Even if some business owners were offered commercial spaces in return for their property by the developers, they were told that they would not be able to return to their former businesses in these spaces. Gökhan Usta, who owned and ran a bread bakery on Tarlabaşı Boulevard, was not allowed to reopen the bakery in the commercial space he was offered in exchange for his property. The explanation from project stakeholders was that a bakery was too “dirty”, “not modern enough”, and not “in line with the image of the new neighbourhood.” Businesses that were deemed to be illegal, such as sex work, or businesses that required storage room, such as recycling or mobile sales karts, were not offered commercial spaces at all. The reason that project stakeholders ignored the various commercial ventures in Tarlabaşı was that they only considered white-collar, middle class needs and aspirations as being worthy of note. It was the same argument mayor Demircan had used when declaring that Tarlabaşı, with most of its buildings constructed in the 19th century, was a child of its time, but did not meet “contemporary urban requirements” and had been “abandoned” because it did not allow for a “modern urban lifestyle” which in his eyes meant enough street space to park a car (Gebetaş 2006). The many grievances and suggestions brought forth by the neighbourhood’s actual residents, the vast majority of whom did not own a car, were not taken into consideration.

Mobile poğaçacı seller



Photo by Jonathan Lewis

Tarlabaşı residents were also absent from the different marketing materials published by the Beyoğlu Municipality and designed to advertise the project to prospective buyers and investors. The online marketing campaign for the project showed a carefully curated upper middle class neighbourhood populated by white, middle class café goers, shoppers, and white-collar businesspeople strolling between historicist façades. These façades are the only feature that bear a vague resemblance to the old neighbourhood. I will analyse this remarkable absence of residents from the main project catalogues in depth in the following chapter.

This erasure, the authorities' tireless effort to un-remind and un-remember, was later extended to the name of the district itself: When the developers went to promote the renewal project at a real estate fair in Dubai in the fall of 2016, they changed its name from "Tarlabaşı 360" under which it had previously been marketed, to the more neutral "Taksim 360". This attempt to erase the geographical location – and the stigma connected to it – from the brand (Alagöz 2016) did, however, not "stick", and the local media still regularly use the old name for the project.

The symbolic erasure of the neighbourhood's residents took an absurd turn when the Third Beyoğlu Administrative Court dispatched an independent expert committee to Tarlabaşı on October 28, 2009. The court required their expert opinion for a case opened in April 2008 by the Istanbul Chamber of Architects (TMMOB) against the Turkish Ministry of Culture and Tourism and the Beyoğlu Municipality in an attempt to put a stop to project. The online website *Bianet* reported that the members of the committee went to Tarlabaşı to find out "if anyone lived in the renewal area" (Çakır 2009). Local residents later described that the committee members had walked around the neighbourhood without talking to anybody, silently comparing the developer's construction plans to the buildings on the ground: "They come for an inspection, but they don't talk to us, nor do they look at our homes. They pretend they are looking [at the neighbourhood]. And then they say that nobody lives here. But we live here! Is there a bigger lie than this?" The final expert report submitted to the court alleged that the original residents had left their homes and that the designated urban renewal area looked "abandoned" due to the physical appearance of the remaining buildings. The report also made a number of statements about the motivations and concerns of local residents for which the authors would have had to speak with them, which in all likelihood had not happened.¹⁴

This strategy of wilful erasure feeds into the stigmatisation narratives employed by the municipality and the developer in order to justify their plans to demolish Tarlabaşı and evict the neighbourhood's current residents. Characterising Tarlabaşı as an empty, abandoned, and currently uninhabitable wasteland stigmatised residents as not worth being considered. The argument could be made that they were stigmatised both for, and as being invisible. This narrative served to facilitate the appropriation of space and, therefore, the displacement of residents and the demolition of their homes and workspaces. As Sara Safransky (2014: 2) has pointed out in her analysis on the links between colonialist discourses and the green redevelopment of Detroit, the portrayal of an urban area as a

14 A more detailed assessment of the report is outside the scope of this thesis. However, Can Atalay, the lawyer who represented TMMOB in the case, called the expert report "a terrible disgrace" and accused its authors of lack of independence.

vacant plot awaiting resettlement does not only constitute discursive displacement of its inhabitants, but also involves “the dispossession of people and life ways”, as “under settler colonialism, only certain forms of labor and settlement are recognized and legitimated.”

This chapter has shown that different periods in Istanbul history provided different backdrops against which Tarlabaşı was framed as Other: as a neighbourhood of non-Muslim residents in the Ottoman capital, a stigma that evolved into that of non-Turkishness in the midst of the nascent Turkish nation, to later on become associated with conflicts stemming from massive rural migration, including political struggles of incoming Kurds during the 1990s and finally, following neoliberal urban policies and the gentrification of adjacent districts, to be predominantly described as “bad”, “criminal” and in need of “renewal”. Overall, the reputation of Beyoğlu as a place of vice and “debauchery”, embodied by the many bars, music halls and the visibility of prostitution, also informed the perception of Tarlabaşı over time, and it gained in notoriety through the displacement of “unwanted” and “disrespectable” locales and inhabitants, such as trans* sex workers, from other Beyoğlu areas to the neighbourhood. The specifics of how the Tarlabaşı stigma was justified in public discourse varied from context to context, and the ‘reasons’ the neighbourhood came to be stigmatised were (and are) also historical and context specific. The bad reputation of the neighbourhood has never been a static quality. Rather, the stigmatisation has always been an ongoing process of continuous symbolic defilement, and needed constant nourishment, reproduction, and maintenance. As one of the main actors invested in the renewal plans in Tarlabaşı, the state played a crucial role in feeding and exploiting this stigma. Material defilement, such as the wilful neglect of the building stock, the local infrastructure, and the lack provision of state and municipal services were also part of the continuous work that went into the stigmatisation, especially once the renewal project had been decided and, in the face of opposition and criticism, needed to be legitimised. However, neighbourhood stigma in Tarlabaşı was not only attached to place. Stigmatising narratives and anxious public discourses of the neighbourhood as a problematic area were also centred around imagined and stereotyped, generic types of residents, such as Kurds and trans* women sex workers. Another significant aspect of the neighbourhood’s stigmatisation is that it made people who fit these iconic problem profiles hyper-visible, while at the same time erasing Tarlabaşı residents from view. These different layers and stigmas did not simply pile up on top of each other. Instead, they shifted, intersected, and transcended each other, generating resentment and revanchist policies that depended on different social, political, and historical contexts.¹⁵

15 It also does not mean that other parts of Beyoğlu shrugged off all taints once gentrified, and in many ways its image as being insubordinate, immoral and in need of disciplining was reactivated at different stages, such as via the ban on outdoor seating in restaurants and bars in 2011, or during and after the Gezi uprising in 2013.

Chapter three: Judging Books by Their Covers

Cemile, a Turkish woman in her sixties, first heard rumours about the planned renewal project in Tarlabası when she was about to have her spacious six-bedroom apartment in Tree Street repainted. This happened roughly a year after the municipality had convened a meeting with property owners and tenants to suggest a World Bank-supported renovation programme that would allow everyone to improve their own properties with the support of micro-credits. While most residents were enthusiastic about the idea, nothing came of it.¹ However, to property owners like Cemile this public proposition signalled that the municipality had not forgotten about Tarlabası and wanted to support the rehabilitation of the neighbourhood. Furthermore, the municipality's initiative suggested a possible relaxation of restrictions on small-scale renovations put in place when Tarlabası had been declared a conservation area. It certainly did not indicate that the municipality was planning to raze a large part of the neighbourhood to the ground.

Like most people in Tarlabası, Cemile agreed that the local housing stock needed repair. The ceiling of her living room started to shed stucco and cave in after her upstairs neighbour had dropped an old iron stove on the floor. Cemile decided that the entire flat, one of six in a beautiful, but crumbling 19th-century Levantine building, could do with some plastering and a lick of paint. It was an expensive undertaking and would cost her 15,000 TL for the painter alone. In order to pay for the renovations, she wanted to sell some of the gold armbands her daughter-in-law, who at the time still lived with her and her husband Ramazan, had been given at her wedding. In order to make sure that she did not waste such a large amount of money, she and her downstairs neighbour Esma, a 35-year-old Kurdish widow, went to the municipal information office [*Beyaz Masa*, literally: White Table] to inquire about the rumours of a municipality-led renewal project and pending demolitions. Cemile was told to proceed with her renovation:

1 In 2008, the Tarlabası Association wrote about residents' initial reaction to the suggestion: "We believed in this possibility full-heartedly, thinking that it took our troubles on board. At least, we had developed faith that decades' long problems we suffered due to municipal regulations, conservation norms and obstacles posed by other public institutions would come to an end with the renovation of our properties. It was on these grounds that we gave support to the project since it would turn our buildings into livable places" (Ünsal 2013: 130).

There was a fat lawyer at the *Beyaz Masa*. I said that we had heard that there would be demolitions, the people in the neighbourhood are saying something like that. I said that I was planning to paint my apartment and that I wanted to know. But he said that no, there were no such plans. Fatih Bey² was there, too. They both said that there were no such plans in Tarlaabaşı.

With this information from the *Beyaz Masa* in hand, Cemile decided to renovate the apartment. In addition to the sale of the jewellery, she and Ramazan took out a loan to have their living and bedrooms fitted with new PVC windows and a new balcony door (all of which cost another 15,000 TL), and the painters set to work. Four rooms in, the rumours about a renewal project became loud and disconcerting enough for Cemile to return to the municipality. This time, the “fat lawyer” replied to her question about demolitions in the affirmative. Cemile said that she almost fainted when she heard this.

They brought me water, I felt so ill. I said to them: But you told me that there won't be any demolitions! The fat lawyer and Fatih Bey were both there, and they both denied ever having said that. I swear they had said that there wouldn't be demolitions the first time I asked. But I had nothing in my hands to prove that, not about what they said then, not for any of it. I told them that I went to have my house renovated, and that I came to ask and that they said there would be no demolitions. The fat lawyer told me that he never said that.

A few months later the Beyoğlu Municipality publicly announced the Tarlaabaşı renewal project. By then the municipal authorities had hired a subcontractor and declared the entire area an urban renewal zone under a recently enacted law that allowed the local authorities to expropriate homeowners that did not agree to sell their title deeds to the construction company. For months, Fatih Bey called Ramazan, whose name was the only one on the title deed, to try and convince him to sell the house. The deputy mayor never once called Cemile, but he treated her husband with politeness bordering on reverence. He invited him to have tea in the office, constantly asking him to “have a chat”. Fatih Bey played the role of the “good cop”, whereas the representatives and lawyers of developer *GAP İnşaat* exerted increasing pressure on Ramazan to sell, threatening him with a loss of profit on his prospective sale, and even expropriation. It worked. One day in April 2010 her husband came back home from yet another meeting with Fatih Bey and a couple of *GAP İnşaat* lawyers, and told her that he had signed over the house. Cemile was incensed. How could he have done something so consequential without asking her first? Ramazan told her that they had intimidated him, and that he felt “relieved” that it was “finally over”. To Cemile's horror, it was not only their apartment that was gone. Ramazan also had, without having understood or even read the contract he signed, agreed to a deal that put the elderly couple 62,000 TL in debt. Their 135 m² apartment had been appraised at 83,000 TL, whereas the value 52 m² studio flat the *GAP İnşaat* lawyers had offered in exchange stood at 145,000 TL. Cemile could not believe it. Ramazan claimed that nobody had told

2 Fatih Bey was a Beyoğlu Municipality deputy mayor, and in charge of project management and resident relations on the municipality's side during the sales and pre-eviction phase. I never met him, but I often heard his name in conversations. The address means literally “Mr. Fatih” – in Turkish, the formal address “Bey” is used with the first name, and not the last.

him what the contract entailed, and that the lawyers had threatened and yelled at him to sign the papers they had put on the desk. Cemile was beside herself and blamed her husband for ruining them. But later she argued that it had been dishonest of Fatih Bey to offer, or at least support, such a deal to her husband. “He knows we live off [Ramazan’s] little pension. He knows us quite well. He knows our life. He knows that we won’t be able to pay such a large debt.” This “negotiation” had happened before I met Cemile and her husband, but it was very clear that the deputy mayor had been a person that she felt was at least marginally responsible to make sure that their rights were being respected. After all, for months he had assured them of the municipality’s good faith and promised that nobody would be victimised by the project. Even after Ramazan had signed over the title deed, Fatih Bey positioned himself as the person they could come to for any concerns they might have. He told them that they could approach him with all questions about the ongoing legal and administrative procedures, and that he would make sure to keep them informed. This, too, turned out to be untrue. After Ramazan and Cemile were threatened with immediate eviction in July 2011, she told me:

Fatih Bey had told us to bring him all the letters and documents that [GAP *İnşaat*] sent us. He said: anything that arrives at your house. So we brought all these papers to him and never kept any of them, and we never got anything from him either, no proof, nothing. He told me: ‘*Anne*³, don’t worry. Don’t worry about anything. He said: don’t be sad, don’t worry, you will not have to leave before we start demolishing and not before the bulldozers come. Nobody can make you leave before that.’ And now look at what happened.

She felt that her trust in Fatih Bey and the municipality had been betrayed. She and Ramazan struggled to find a new – temporary – apartment, even though they had been searching for weeks. It was important to both of them to stay in the neighbourhood they had spent their entire married life in, where both of them had close relationships with neighbours and shopkeepers. Cemile knew that Fatih Bey lived in the rather expensive Beyoğlu neighbourhood of Cihangir, and she was furious that he – as a representative of the municipality – demanded of them to find a rental apartment for 400 TL a month, when, she fumed, he “should have known that there are no houses here for this amount of money”. And yet this was the monthly rental aid that project agents had agreed to give to property owners who were waiting to move into their new units. This amount, optimistic even in the best of times, did not consider that rents in Tarlabası had quickly increased between 2008, when the renewal project was officially announced, and 2011, when evictions began. The ongoing and rapid gentrification of nearby areas (Ergun 2004; Ünsal 2013; Yetiskul and Demirel 2018), but also the project itself put a lot of pressure on local rents, since many tenants and property owners who had to move out of their Tarlabası homes sought to stay in the area. Furthermore, being kicked out of her old home with such sudden urgency seemed unfair to Cemile. While a number of residents were gone at that point, large-scale demolitions had not begun, and several of her neighbours still lived in their houses and kept their businesses open. The deputy mayor had promised Cemile transparency and security, promises on which he did not deliver. One day after

3 Turkish: mother. This address signals both respect and a certain familiarity.

the frightening visit by the delegation that had meant to evict her, she went to see Fatih Bey in the sales office that he shared with *GAP İnşaat* representatives on Tarlabası Boulevard. She wanted to talk to him about the police showing up at her door, which had deeply humiliated her, and about the threat of an unexpectedly sudden eviction that he had not warned them of. She went to the office in the morning and sat down on the stairs at the entrance of the building, waiting for Fatih Bey to turn up. After a while she lost patience and went inside to ask an employee if it was possible to talk to the deputy mayor.

I said that I wanted to have a few words with Fatih Bey and that that was all. I said that I had not come to make [Fatih Bey] feel sorry for me, that I only wanted to talk to him. But he didn't come out. He was scared of me. Did he think that a 60-year-old woman had come to kill him? [*makes a dismissive gesture with her hand*] What good would it do me to kill him? I swear he didn't come out, even though he was there in his office. He had told the [employee] not to let me come up. I said that he should come down and talk to me by the traffic lights, that I wouldn't do anything to him in the street. I didn't have a knife or a gun, I had nothing! What would I be able to do to Fatih Bey? Then he called me and spoke to me on the phone. I begged him to come and talk to me, just this one time, I told him that that was all I wanted from him. Just this one talk. I told him that my house was his now anyway, that we would leave, that all I wanted was to talk to him. But he told me that he was done with us, that we had sold the house, that he would not get involved in anything anymore.

Fatih Bey did not come down to talk to Cemile. She said that the employee broke out in tears at her plight, but that she did not manage to soften the deputy mayor's heart enough to come see her for that one conversation she had asked for.

This anecdote might raise the question if Cemile, in her continuing attempts to interact with and seek anything from Fatih Bey, was dumb, naive, or ignorant about the nature of the renewal project. Why did she think that her interventions might change the course of the project? Why did she, even after her eviction was underway, try to reach out to the deputy mayor again?

One fundamental fact about the renewal project, and one I would like to analyse in this chapter, is that it was constantly changing and shifting, both in how it presented itself to residents and outsiders, and in terms of how project agents engaged with Tarlabası residents. This happened in ways that were not publicised, and by reneging on promises that had been made very publicly at the beginning of the project. Cemile was neither too dumb to engage with the system, nor was she naive and trusted Faith Bey. However, she was trying to engage with a constantly moving target, the directions of which were impossible to anticipate based on the information that she was being given, both publicly and in private conversations with agents of the project.

This chapter, with the help of a close reading of two different project catalogues published over the course of five years, will trace the history of the project and the drastic changes it underwent over the years. An analysis of the changes to these promotional materials will show that project stakeholders did make certain promises and commitments to Tarlabası residents that were later broken, even while the municipality and the developer *GAP İnşaat* kept claiming publicly that negotiations with residents remained mutually amicable. What follows is a thick description of promotional texts produced

and disseminated at two very different points in the 'life' of the project, bookending the ethnography in this book. As such it provides an exploration of the immediate context and history of the project against which the residents of Tarlabası struggled, with a careful eye to how the status of the project changed, how a shift in potential investor profiles affected the relationship between project actors and residents, and the way that these actors exploited existing stigmatisation and if, or how, they took potential opposition to the project into account. Such a close text-object analysis will provide an anchor for the historical, economic, and social context in which the renewal project developed over time, as well as for the history of the project itself. Both the subtle and the more substantial alterations made to the promotional material, as well as to the way this material was handed out, provide insight into contextual changes in Turkey and in Istanbul that impacted the renewal project's development, and in turn, the way residents positioned themselves vis-à-vis the project. Furthermore, it shows that, like in the case of Cemile, residents had to navigate and react to a constantly changing entity, which profoundly impacted the way they tried to accommodate or oppose the project. The first part of this chapter provides the analysis of the catalogue published in the first half of 2008, and the second part deals with the revised catalogue, published around 2011.⁴ I would like to, as linguistic anthropologist Megan Clark (2016: 77) puts it, judge these books by their covers.

2008 catalogue: The exhibition

In May 2008, Beyoğlu mayor Ahmet Misbah Demircan opened an exhibition titled "Tarlabası shares its future" [*Tarlabası Geleceğini Paylaşıyor*] in the municipality-run Beyoğlu Art Gallery on İstiklal Avenue, where the planned urban renewal project was presented to the public for the first time. I attended the opening reception with two friends who lived in Tarlabası and were interested in what the renewal project entailed. All of us had been alerted to the planned project by a short article in the liberal daily *Radikal* in January 2008 that heralded the "End of Tarlabası", citing mayor Demircan as saying that negotiations with property owners were underway and going smoothly (*Radikal* 2008). Owners of a Tarlabası apartment themselves, my friends were wondering what this announcement meant for their home and their neighbourhood. At the time I had reported on the project but did not yet conduct any research in Tarlabası. I also did not know that I would shortly do so, and it would be another year until I moved to Tarlabası myself. However, I was interested in urban renewal in Istanbul. It was at this vernissage that I picked up the first project catalogue and the accompanying brochure entitled "The Tarlabası Renewal Project in 50 questions".

4 A third version of the sales catalogue is now in use. I am not entirely sure if a paper version still exists, but I was unable to obtain one at the sales office in 2019. However, the catalogues are available online at <https://www.taksim360.com.tr/tr/kataloglar>. A close reading of this commercial promotional material as a text object is sadly outside my fieldwork timeline and the scope of this book. However, it is important to note that the name of the project has been rebranded as "Taksim 360", dropping the immediate reference to Tarlabası. The catalogue is now available in Turkish, English, Arabic and Farsi and promotes the neighbourhood with aggressive nostalgia of an imagined "old Beyoğlu".

The presentation of the project, advertised as an “exhibition opening”, took place on an early May evening. A small bar served non-alcoholic refreshments for guests, and bowls of snacks and finger foods had been placed on small tables around the room. Entry was free, and anybody interested was welcome to walk inside and have a look at the exhibition: large-scale printed panels that showed current pictures of Tarlabası juxtaposed with rendered images of what the same street would look like after renewal. A 3D architectural model of the project stood, under glass, in the middle of the gallery. Following the vernissage, it was moved in the window looking out onto Istiklal Avenue.

This display resonated with a familiar genre of exhibition: corporations, especially banks and large Turkish holding companies, dedicated at least part of their spaces, or even entire buildings, to galleries and cultural spaces on Istiklal Avenue or elsewhere in Beyoğlu.⁵ Running such prestigious locations, along with other cultural stewardship roles as a form of PR such as cultural sponsorship or inhouse publishing houses, is a regular domain of activity for corporations or holding companies of that size in Turkey. However, the stakes for “Tarlabası shares its future” were of course different. The municipality, in cooperation with a private developer, advertised a high-profile, predatory urban development project in a very consciously constructed art exhibit milieu, and handed the audience PR and propaganda materials in a form that resonated clearly with an art exhibit catalogue.

At the vernissage, Beyoğlu mayor Demircan justified the “exhibition” like this: “We wanted the Tarlabası Renewal Project to be implemented through widespread participation. Architects, property owners, civil society organisations – everyone should evaluate the project. Before starting with the implementation, we wanted to bring together positive and negative feedback. The project has been designed by considering the views, propositions, and participation of a wide range of people, most importantly of those who live in the area. This is what is needed for an open, transparent, and participatory management mentality. Before the project takes its final shape, it is being presented at this exhibition to garner the opinion and interest of the people and experts” (Kaya 2008). This promise of inclusiveness was mirrored in the 2008 catalogue as well, and residents like Cemile were initially told the same thing about nature of the project.

2008 catalogue: The material

In order to better understand the position that the catalogues convey, it is important to pay attention to their material form. Linguistic anthropologists have highlighted the necessity of analysing the materiality of text objects because of “the tendency of media to disappear in the act of mediation” (Eisenlohr 2011: 44). In her work on Kurdish linguistic

5 These galleries exhibited not just strictly visual arts, though they did that, too, but historical exhibits about a very diverse range of topics and disciplines, such as engineering, textiles, or literature. One good example is the Akbank Sanat cultural space, run by financial institution Akbank, a subsidiary of Sabancı Holding. Prominently located on the pedestrian avenue close to Taksim Square, it houses a large art exhibition space on the ground floor, as well as stage rooms for concerts, theatre and dance performances and a library specialised in the arts. Akbank Sanat regularly hosts well-known international contemporary artists and exhibitions.

disobedience, Megan Clark (2016: 93) writes that with “any graphic object, be it textbook or notebook or calendar or road sign or bank statement or driver’s license or pink slip or credit card receipt, there is an analytical tendency to skip past a consideration of the way the materiality of such objects and the mediation they perform necessarily influence the meaning they are meant to carry.” And Matthew Hull (2012: 13), in his ethnographic study of urban bureaucracy and the material forms of bureaucratic documentation in Pakistan, points out how the material qualities of graphic objects contribute to their meanings. “Just as discourse has long been recognized as a dense mediator between subjects and the world, we need to see graphic objects not just as neutral purveyors of discourse, but as mediators that shape the significance of the linguistic signs inscribed in them.”

This is why I would like to draw attention to the material forms of the two different project catalogues, and how the differences in materiality influenced their semiotic engagement with their audience. Both project catalogues have a square shape and are smaller than A4 in size. The 2008 catalogue has fold-out covers on both sides made of high-quality carton in a matte grey and is reinforced with Bordeaux-coloured linen binding. The front cover is imprinted with the official logo of the project, then called the “Tarlabaşı Beyoğlu Municipality Renewal Project”, embossed in a lighter shade of grey than the catalogue carton. The logo of the Beyoğlu Municipality is the only other graphic, placed on the bottom of the front cover. The paper of the catalogue itself is glossy card stock paper. The catalogue and the smaller brochure entitled “The Tarlabaşı Renewal Project in 50 questions” are a matching pair. The brochure is bound in the same high-quality matte grey carton trimmed with Bordeaux-coloured linen on one side, but the paper used inside is thick newspaper material. The catalogue is stapled together, whereas the brochure is glued because of the greater number of pages. The 2008 project catalogue is difficult to categorise: it is not a book, not a political handout object, and its makers have very carefully avoided making it look like the commercial catalogue that it technically is. Its materiality and style resemble the portfolio of a top-tier architecture firm or an art exhibit catalogue. Regardless of what the materials used for the catalogue and the brochure actually cost, the style of binding, the embossed logo on the cover and the high-quality grey paper read as “expensive” and “prestigious” in most circumstances, but even more so in the Turkish context, “where domestic publishing has until recently been marked by the use of very low-quality materials (newsprint weight paper, photocopied and not printed pages, glue-and-cardboard binding)” (Clark 2016: 100).

2008 catalogue: The content

On the first page of the 2008 catalogue, next to a smiling portrait photo of himself, Beyoğlu mayor Ahmet Misbah Demircan directly addresses “esteemed Beyoğlu residents and Tarlabaşı property owners”⁶ in a foreword styled like a personal letter. This signals the intended audience of this catalogue, which he formally addresses with the polite personal pronoun “siz”. At the same time, his address excluded roughly 80 percent of Tarlabaşı residents impacted by the project, all of whom were tenants (75 percent) or non-paying resi-

6 All citations in this chapter are from the project catalogues unless otherwise stated.

dents (five percent) (Kentsel A.Ş. 2008). With this conspicuous position in the beginning of the catalogue, Demircan stands in as the “face” and main driver of the renewal project, giving the municipal side in this private-public partnership prominence. He consciously includes himself in the community of Beyoğlu residents by talking about “our district”. The participation of all interested parties, first and foremost of property owners and local, but not necessarily Tarlabası residents, stands at the centre of the foreword-letter. The foundational principle of the entire project, Demircan claims, is to ensure that current property owners will find a place inside the new development and that the municipality’s responsibility to the public – finding solutions for the problems of local residents and preparing them for a better future – is fulfilled. He goes on to praise the planned renewal project, lauding its emphasis on not only spatial, but also social and economic dimensions as well as its “conservationist renewal approach” as a trailblazer for similar future urban projects. A misnomer, since law No. 5366, on the basis of which Tarlabası was declared an urban renewal zone in 2006, overwrites all other laws and regulations, including those that pertain to the conservation and protection of listed buildings. Finally, Demircan extends words of thanks to Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, then prime minister, who “did not spare assistance and support in order to make the project a reality”. Erdoğan had previously assured the Beyoğlu mayor of “any necessary support”, including legislations and political weight in Ankara, to “solve the Tarlabası problem” (Posta 2007). Demircan also extends words of thanks to then Istanbul mayor of the Greater Municipality Kadir Topbaş, as well as to unnamed property owners, district residents and “all local organisations”. The latter also remain anonymous.

In the 2008 catalogue the Beyoğlu municipality is presented as the main interlocutor for the project. Developer *GAP İnşaat* is clearly portrayed as the employed subcontractor, mentioned only as the 2007 winner of the tender for the renewal project, and as one of several members of the “Project Team” presented on a double page. Beneath the Bordeaux-coloured header is a list of the people involved in the planning, design, and execution of the renewal project. These are grouped into *GAP İnşaat* Project Director Nilgün Kıvırcık and the *GAP İnşaat* Project Coordination Team made up of four men who are named but whose functions and titles are not described further. Then follows a list of members of the “Advisory Council”: three professors who are named with their full academic titles, functions, and universities, one academic advisor with the title of “Doctor” but no further information as to his function or expertise, and one man without any academic titles, who then worked for the “Planning Office” of the Mimar Sinan Academy of Fine Arts in Istanbul. Finally, the catalogue lists the names of the members of the project’s “Design Team” – seven architects or architect firms, referred to elsewhere in the catalogue as “star” architects of Turkey, who each are working on one or two different units in Tarlabası. Their names are listed next to the name of their firm and the project unit they have been assigned. This list of names and titles appears next to six black-and-white photographs, each of which depicts a group of unspecified and unnamed people sitting or standing around a large meeting table in various settings. Each picture shows a different room and a different table in a professional or, presumably, an academic context, and participants involved in the planning and discussion of what can be assumed is the renewal project. Scattered architectural maps and drawings, open laptops, pens, paper, open notebooks as well as half-drunk plastic water bottles, tea glasses and coffee

cups index work and/or an ongoing debate and the busy-ness of the people depicted in each picture. The top left photograph was taken in what appears to be the municipality, with mayor Demircan sitting at the head of an oblong meeting table surrounded by what appear to be other municipal or government officials. However, due to the lack of all captions or explanations, their identities remain unclear.

Nobody else involved in the renewal project is featured anywhere in the catalogue. Despite the repeated claims by the municipality of wanting to involve actors from different fields and interest groups, and despite the repeated assurances of widespread participation, the catalogue makes no mention of any civil society organisation, of any outside expert group, or even any Tarlaabaşı residents, by name or picture. None of the property owners whom Demircan addresses in the foreword, and some of whom own several large buildings inside the planned renewal zone, are mentioned.

2008 catalogue: The neighbourhood

Arguably the main protagonist of both project catalogues, the neighbourhood of Tarlaabaşı appears in a variety of maps, coloured photographs, and text descriptions. The 2008 catalogue features an aerial photograph to which the spatial boundaries of the renewal zone were added in a Bordeaux-coloured line, another that shows the neighbourhood from above and from a sideways angle, as well as several colour photographs of present-day Tarlaabaşı and the streets that will be renewed. These photos rarely depict actual Tarlaabaşı residents but include iconic images of washing lines criss-crossing the streets, some parked vehicles, and shopfronts of greengrocers. A coloured picture on the very last page of the first catalogue is the only one where Tarlaabaşı residents – three small boys sitting on entrance stairs in front of a building, one holding a plastic gun – look into the camera.

This image of the three boys is striking, because it is the only one that explicitly features Tarlaabaşı residents. There are no photographs that show recognisable adult residents in their neighbourhood. Also lacking is a presentation or actual discussion of the neighbourhood association's organisers who were very active in 2008. There is no representation of community advocates. None of these people, all of whom are massively impacted by the project, have a voice in this catalogue. They do not get to speak, and they do not get named.

The language in the catalogue describes Tarlaabaşı as plagued by physical and social decay, by crime and economic precariousness. It depicts an area whose heritage and beauty currently lie dormant, or stronger even, are under siege. To underline this, different slogans are scattered throughout the catalogue, each time on a page in a different colour that each feature both the project and the municipality logos. These slogans clearly advertise the renewal project as the saviour of a beleaguered neighbourhood: a green page carries the slogan "Tarlaabaşı encounters greenery" [*Tarlaabaşı Yeşille buluşuyor*], a dark yellow page the slogan "Tarlaabaşı encounters the light" [*Tarlaabaşı Işıkla buluşuyor*], a purple page the slogan "Tarlaabaşı comes to life" [*Tarlaabaşı Canlanıyor*], and a light blue page the slogan "Tarlaabaşı meets the air" [*Tarlaabaşı Havaya kavuşuyor*]. Describing the future

that the renewal promises, these slogans forego all subtlety in order to frame present-day Tarlabaşı as a rank, dark, and lifeless place.

2008 catalogue: The project

The catalogue offers little detailed information about the actual implementation of the renewal project. Some basic numbers are given on one double page, with the information as follows: The renewal zone covers an area of 20,000m². 278 buildings, 210(213)⁷ of which are listed, will be (partly) demolished and joined into nine building blocks. The page includes two architectural maps of the renewal zone inside Tarlabaşı: the first shows the designated plots of the 278 houses included in the project area. The second map, the “suggested plan”, shows the same area after the demolition, with buildings joined into nine blocks invested with augmented spatial capacities for their future various functions as residences, offices, and different commercial ventures. The catalogue reader is further informed that the Beyoğlu Municipality invited bids for the project tender on March 16, 2007, and that construction company *GAP İnşaat* was awarded the project execution. The contract between the developer, Beyoğlu Municipality, and the Greater Istanbul Municipality, which acted as the supervising umbrella institution for all Istanbul renewal projects, was signed three weeks later, on April 4, 2007.

Despite repeated reassurances, not least by the mayor at the “exhibition opening”, that opinions and suggestions of residents and third-party experts would be considered during the preparation phase, the 2008 catalogue handed out at that opening introduces a final design for the finished development project, illustrated with rendered images of what Tarlabaşı will look like after the renewal. These graphics are each juxtaposed with photographs of the old Tarlabaşı, depicting a “before” and an “after” in the same street. Computer-generated architectural images – the Tarlabaşı that project developers imagine and promise to create – show lush courtyards planted with palm trees and colourful flowers, clean cobblestone streets lined by narrow sidewalks, and a combination of restored and rebuilt bow-front façades and modern architecture that adds steel railings and floor length windows to Tarlabaşı buildings. However, these graphics do not only show what the *buildings* in the neighbourhood will look like in the future. They also introduce what kind of *people* project stakeholders imagine will live, work, and shop there. These new residents very pointedly have nothing in common with those that the mayor claimed he wanted to include. The computer-generated inhabitants in the catalogue index a Western model of wealth and middle class lifestyles by way of their clothing, their means of transport, and the accessories they carry. All of them are white, and a large number are blond. Furthermore, the new Tarlabaşı is depicted under bright blue skies compared to the drab and grey neighbourhood shown in the opposite pictures:

Under the headline “Purpose”, the 2008 catalogue lists the main goals of the renewal project as defined by project stakeholders in four bullet points:

7 The headline of that page claims that there are 213 listed buildings, while the number 210 is given in the text.

- A participatory partnership between the municipality, investors, property owners, civil society organisations and local residents
- An approach of conservation through renewal and revitalisation that will replace the small plots unable to accommodate contemporary functions into buildings blocks in line with principles of design and functionality
- Intervention with the purpose of improving the quality of life of local residents, and to ensure their social and economic development
- A vision that will substitute urban disintegration with liveable spaces that are in harmony with their surroundings

The stated “fundamental purpose” of the project, highlighted in the catalogue in Bordeaux-coloured font, is “to ensure that property owners and long-time tenants will continue to live in the area after the finalisation of the construction works and that they will be able to profit from the generated surplus value.” Maybe the most important aspirational description of the project’s relationship with Tarlaşaşı residents is the repeated emphasis on the planned implementation of a “social recovery” [*sosyal kalkınma*] programme with the argument that physical renewal must go hand in hand with the social development of the neighbourhood. The municipality promises a two-pronged approach to this: One the one hand the project will bring economic regeneration to Tarlaşaşı and the surrounding areas through the massive investment in commerce, tourism, and the high-end service sector, all of which are expected to generate “work and habitation opportunities” for local residents. A municipality-led “capacity building programme” based on research of residents’ “social profiles” aims to provide short-term employment in the construction sector during the development phase of the project, and long-term employment in the commerce, tourism and service sectors that will be introduced to the area once the project is completed. On the other hand, the municipality promises education and job training programmes for local residents, with a special emphasis on youth and women, as well as the establishment of a municipality-financed “Tarlaşaşı Social Centre” in order to implement this “social plan”. All of this, the catalogue pledges, will be planned and executed in cooperation with (unnamed) universities, civil society organisations and trade associations.

2008 catalogue: The stated project objectives and procedures

Both catalogues describe Tarlaşaşı as an area plagued by decay, crime, and as a neighbourhood that does not live up to contemporary middle class expectations and standards. In the 2008 catalogue, under the headline “Economic recovery” [*Ekonomik canlanma*] and an image of a dilapidated Tarlaşaşı street where the only visible person is an unrecognisable individual in a wheelchair who inexplicably faces a grey wall, the catalogue text reads:

“Although Tarlaşaşı neighbours important central locations such as Taksim Square and İstiklal Avenue, [the neighbourhood] was unable to benefit from the increasing economic and cultural revitalisation in the area. Even the buildings that line Tarlaşaşı

Boulevard were unable to draw big-scale commercial activity, due to the image problems that stem from the high crime rate and the dilapidated state of the neighbourhood. While this area has a lot of potential, it has engraved itself in the collective memory with empty buildings and neglected streets.”

Throughout the 2008 catalogue, this narrative of a neighbourhood where physical, economic, and social abandonment has created the need for urban renewal is dominant. The chosen colour photographs resemble images that a certain type of tourist might find alluring and that have been criticised elsewhere as “poverty porn” (Miles 2009; Jensen 2014; Feltwell et al. 2017): slightly grubby-looking children, hastily scribbled graffiti, crumbling façades, garbage in the street, battered satellite dishes, improvised and shabby additions to buildings such as plastic awnings, and the slightly disorderly fronts of “unmodern” neighbourhood corner stores.

The 2008 catalogue points out problems in the neighbourhood identified by project stakeholders, but it is unclear if any of the residents’ concerns are being included in them, or if residents were asked to identify problems that they wanted the project to address. However, the accompanying brochure “The Tarlabaşı Renewal Project in 50 Questions” lists nineteen questions that are voiced from the position of a(n imagined) Tarlabaşı resident. Surprisingly detailed, these questions are as follows:

- 2 Could not everyone who wanted it, do the renovations themselves?
- 7 What will the project gain for the people who live there?
- 15 What will be done for tenants and property owners?
- 16 How will the victimisation of property owners in the interim period be prevented?
- 17 Will there be special support for those who have to move their businesses?
- 20 What are the education, life and future opportunities offered to local children and youth in the framework of the project?
- 21 Has it been established where families will move to and where children will go to school?
- 22 What will negotiations between the Tarlabaşı Renewal Project and local residents look like?
- 25 What rights are given to property owners in the framework of the project?
- 26 How is the value of the properties included in the project established?
- 27 What rights are given to those who own businesses and workshops in the project area?
- 28 What rights are given to local tenants?
- 29 Will those who live in the neighbourhood without paying any rent be given any claim?
- 30 Will property owners be able to claim rental aid?
- 31 Will those who do not own property be able to claim rental aid?
- 32 What suggestions will be made to property owners who own small shares or parts of shares?
- 33 Will the construction area be emptied of people in stages or all at once?
- 35 What will happen in the job training programmes aimed at local residents?
- 36 What kind of training programmes will be offered to local residents?

The answers to these questions put an emphasis on fairness and the inclusion of all residents throughout the project planning and execution stage. Just as in the (2008) catalogue, the corresponding answers in the brochure imply that the project will bring an improvement of living conditions, employment opportunities as well as training programmes for local residents. The nature of these training programmes remains vague, but it is stated that young people will have access to (unspecified) job training [*İstihdam Odaklı Mesleki Eğitim Programları*], “talent improvement” [*Yeteneklerin Artırılması Programları*] for foreign languages and computer use as well as artistic skill development programmes [*Sanatsal Becerilerin Geliştirilmesi Programları*], for example in music, theatre and cinema. Education programmes geared towards women include literacy courses, unspecified job training and “mother and child health”. The municipality further promises to offer business development training and “micro-credit possibilities”, without further specification what this might entail. All of these courses and training programmes are announced as free of charge, though the brochure specifies that funding strategies and financial sources for these programmes remain to be clarified.

The brochure guarantees that “not a single property owner” will be victimised, and that “all tenants” will receive some form of (unspecified) assistance [*kolaylıklar*]. While tenants were initially not included in any compensation schemes at all, the brochure promises them the right to the priority purchase of a TOKI social housing unit in a location not specified in the brochure.⁸

Property owners, the brochure alleges, will be presented with various options during sales negotiations. In reality they had two options that were not specified in the PR materials: They could agree to sell their property and receive monetary compensation or buy a property in the finished development project. The latter meant that according to the plans drawn up by *GAP İnşaat*, they would only receive units that covered 42 percent of the floorplan of their old properties. Their properties were to be appraised by an unspecified “Licensed Real Estate Evaluation Company” [*SPK Lisanslı Gayrimenkul Değerleme Şirketi*]. It was possible that owners lost their *Tarlabaşı* homes in exchange for a smaller property in the new project and on top of that, were saddled with additional debt to cover the difference of the assessed value. This is what happened to Cemile and Ramazan. Homeowners who did not reach an agreement with *GAP İnşaat* or who were unwilling to negotiate at all would be expropriated by the municipality on the basis of renewal Law No. 5366. That was supposedly “option” number three.

Property owners who wanted to exchange their old homes against a new apartment were guaranteed a monthly rental aid of 400 TL for the period between their having to move out and the moment their new apartments in the renewal project were handed over. This aid was only offered to property owners who did not own any other real estate than

8 Priority purchase meant that tenants did not have to attend the usual “lotteries” and other bureaucratic hurdles to buy a TOKI unit. The location was later specified to be a newly built TOKI satellite city in *Kayabaşı*, a suburb at a 40-kilometre distance from Taksim Square. The option to rent a TOKI apartment was not offered, and mortgage payments for the *Kayabaşı* units usually ran over fifteen years. While these monthly payments were relatively low, they did not include amenities, extra fees (such as for the mandatory concierge), or public transportation costs, which meant that residents, most of whom did not have a secure monthly income, took a considerable risk.

the one they themselves inhabited. This was the amount Cemile and Ramazan received, and, as they soon realised, it was not enough to find an acceptable temporary rental in the area.

The brochure further claims that business owners would have “various rights” [*çeşitli haklar*] in relation to income loss and employee compensation. Squatters would not receive any compensation for their eviction but were promised a place in the planned “certified” [*sertifikalî*] training programmes. The options for business owners, including landlords, proposed in the brochure are vague: solutions for those who risk losing income, be it from their business or rent, are to be worked out in cooperation between the municipality, the project developer, and the Tarlaşaşı Association. The brochure also states that construction was planned to start by the end of 2008, which means that project stakeholders foresaw negotiations with property owners to last a few months only. Ten out of the fifty questions in the brochure reflect an outsider’s concern *about* Tarlaşaşı and Tarlaşaşı residents:

- 8 What are the social profiles of local residents?
- 9 Where do property owners in the project area originally come from?
- 10 What kinds of work do property owners in the area do?
- 11 How many people in the project area are property owners, how many are tenants?
- 12 How livable are the buildings in the project zone?
- 14 What is the employment status of local residents?
- 18 What is the education level of local children?
- 19 What is the situation of young people in the area?
- 23 When have negotiations with local residents started?
- 34 When will construction begin?

It is evident from the brochure that, while the emphasis is still on inclusiveness and assistance to current Tarlaşaşı residents, the municipality hopes to attract a new kind of urban resident to the area (Ünsal 2013: 127). This is why the text states that local students will be told at a later date which (permanent or temporary) school they will transfer to during the construction phase,⁹ and why the Beyoğlu Municipality promises to provide support to those local residents who “prefer to rent a new home” or “move in with relatives in other neighbourhoods”. Contrary to the 2008 catalogue and brochure statements concerning the inclusive and participatory nature of the renewal project, the municipality had awarded the tender to a private developer already in the spring of 2007, despite the fact that the buildings inside the designated renewal area belonged to Tarlaşaşı property owners who were unaware of the renewal plans.¹⁰ At that time, residents such as Cemile were told that rumours about eviction and demolition plans of the municipality were false.

9 There were no schools inside the renewal area, but families who had to leave Beyoğlu faced the problem of having to find new schools for their children.

10 In 2009, the Tarlaşaşı Association launched a criminal case against the Beyoğlu Municipality for opening up private properties for tender. 120 members and property owners participated in the complaint (Ünsal 2013: 144).

Project stakeholders never disclosed the criteria and methods used by the real estate evaluation company, unnamed in the PR material, for appraising Tarlaabaşı properties. The contracted evaluation experts never entered any of the buildings, or even visited the neighbourhood. They based their findings solely on the buildings' title deeds, which leaders of the Tarlaabaşı Association thought gave them an incomplete idea of their actual value. The developer also refused to share the definite final size of the planned buildings with the association, which made it impossible for property owners to know if they were adequately compensated for their homes.¹¹ Project stakeholders' inconsistent and vague manner in engaging with residents' concerns became one of the reasons that the association finally withdrew from talks with *GAP İnşaat* and the municipality and concentrated on rallying grassroots resistance (Ünsal 2013: 131). The anecdote at the beginning of this chapter illustrates that this inconsistency also pervaded one-on-one interactions with individual Tarlaabaşı property owners.

Rooftop pigeon raising



Photo by Jonathan Lewis

The social programmes, a prominent part of the municipality's advertisement and renewal justification campaign in their 2008 promotional material, had been introduced under the pressure of the Tarlaabaşı Association. The same was true for a revised demographic survey of the area. This indicates an initial will to take at least some suggestions of residents on board. However, in the end none of the negotiation options offered to property owners or tenants took the findings of that new survey into account, and project stakeholders ignored repeated demands by the association to find viable solutions for

11 As part of their tender bid, *GAP İnşaat* promised 42 percent of the newly built units on their title deed (Ünsal 2013: 145–146).

tenants who after all made up the vast majority of Tarlabası residents. The advertised inclusiveness and social responsibility remained only on paper.

In all of the marketing material, there are no photographs or textual descriptions of a neighbourhood where residents are themselves involved in planning, discussing, or negotiating with project stakeholders. There are no pictures of residents interacting and working together to improve the neighbourhood, or even talking to each other. And while the catalogue repeatedly states that the project's main goal is the involvement of local residents, as well as the improvement of their housing, and of their economic and social situations, not a single Tarlabası resident is identified or quoted in the entire booklet. They appear as a huddled, nameless mass waiting for their neighbourhood to be lifted from poverty by outside institutions. As I have argued in chapter two, the rendered images of the neighbourhood after renewal literally erase all of the present Tarlabası as it was before the arrival of the bulldozers.

2008 catalogue context: The association

The Beyoğlu exhibition and the publication of the 2008 catalogue came in the wake of the foundation of the "Tarlabası Association of Property Owners and Tenants for Progress and Solidarity" in March 2008. By that time Tarlabası residents had already heard rumours of a renewal project, including the possibility of large-scale demolitions. Anxious whispers began to spread. While neither the declaration of Tarlabası as an urban renewal zone, nor the awarded tender had been communicated to residents, some property owners had already been approached by the developer's lawyers. The association, realising that the project was already underway and threatening not only property rights, but also the cohesion of the neighbourhood, set to work immediately. In a short amount of time, and with the support of three volunteer lawyers, the founding members mobilised local residents, and convinced more than 200 property owners to accept, via letters of attorney, the association as their legal representative. This clout amongst property owners – the principal interlocutors for negotiations with project stakeholders – secured the association a (temporary) seat at the planning table, especially because prior efforts by the Beyoğlu Municipality and *GAP İnşaat* to convince individual owners to sell their properties had failed (Ünsal 2013: 140). Between March and July 2008, the association attended at least 13 meetings with project stakeholders, during which association representatives collected and documented all project-related data and information. They made this material available to local residents in mass neighbourhood meetings organised in local tea-houses. Property owners who were not members of the association, such as Cemile and Ramazan, had access to those meetings and this information as well. Criticism and input collected at these gatherings was then taken back to the municipality and *GAP İnşaat*. Most importantly, the association succeeded in convincing the municipality to commission a new demographic survey of the neighbourhood, as the then existing one not only lacked crucial information but was partly incorrect (Ünsal 2013: 131). If a social programme really was to be successfully implemented, they argued, the municipality needed precise information.

In July 2008 the association withdrew from the talks over disagreements concerning transparency, legality, negotiation tactics, and the way compensation for residents was being calculated. Project agents also refused the association's demand to view drafts and details of the renewal project. Instead of negotiating with project stakeholders, the association set off a phase of intense campaigning to effect change in the way the planned renewal project was to be implemented. As a result, association members who owned property in Tarlabası unanimously agreed to refuse any one-on-one negotiation meetings with *GAP İnşaat*. The idea was to prevent the developer and the municipality from splintering the resistance through manipulation and individual offers for different property owners. Project stakeholders refused the idea of holding collective sales meetings with the association, which effectively meant that negotiations reached a stalemate. The association's efforts were supported by a stringent information campaign for Tarlabası residents, organised by association spokesman Erdal Aybek. Up until the summer of 2010 he manned an office on Tarlabası Boulevard where worried residents could approach him with project-related questions five days a week. The association painstakingly documented the meetings with project stakeholders and kept tabs on all title deeds, as well as on the development of ongoing court cases. Therefore, Erdal was able to inform residents, and anyone who wanted to know, about who had sold their property, and who had not. Journalists and researchers could also approach him with questions about the project that stakeholders were more hesitant or unwilling to answer.

Erdal was very successful in dispelling residents' fears about landlords or fellow Tarlabası property owners secretly selling their title deeds. He was able to provide copies of the necessary legal documents, therefore putting to rest many of the circulating rumours and forestalling panic sales. With the help of the volunteer lawyers the association was able to provide valuable legal assistance. They helped Tarlabası residents to cut through the legalese of all official correspondence with the municipality, advised them on further possible steps, and how to manage their interactions with project stakeholders.

The association also rallied for the support of civil society organisations, academics, trade chambers as well as opposition MPs. They organised demonstrations on Tarlabası Boulevard and in front of the Beyoğlu Municipality to raise awareness amongst the general Istanbul population. It was a very efficient strategy. All these combined efforts successfully stalled the entire renewal project and put negotiations in a deadlock for almost two years (Ünsal 2013: 133).

2008 catalogue context: Non-resident opposition to the project

The Tarlabası Association was not the only obstacle for project stakeholders. In April 2008, the Istanbul Chamber of Architects filed a lawsuit to halt the Tarlabası Renewal Project on the grounds that it violated the Turkish constitution on several accounts, including on citizen's rights, private property rights, and conservation norms (Ünsal 2013: 133). Following the public announcement of the renewal project at the exhibition and the publication of the 2008 catalogue, outside scrutiny and criticism of the planned project increased. Tarlabası residents started to take legal action in 2009, when they joined their cases to the court case initiated by the Chamber of Architects the previous

year. In 2010, the association filed an additional complaint with the European Court of Human Rights in order to prevent the looming expropriations. A number of Tarlaşa property owners opened individual court cases to contest the pending seizure of their homes by the municipality because they had not come to an agreement with *GAP İnşaat*. At the same time, the planned Tarlaşa renewal and other AKP-led urban development projects had begun to garner negative press both in Turkey and abroad. The association received a letter from UNESCO stating that the organisation shared residents' concerns over the preservation of historical heritage in Tarlaşa (Ünsal 2013: 135). In September 2010, supported by the Chamber of Architects, civil society initiative SOS İstanbul organised a small gathering and the public reading of a press statement on Tarlaşa Boulevard, urging against the demolition of "perfectly intact historical buildings". In July 2011, Amnesty International issued an Urgent Action press release, demanding a stop to forced evictions in Tarlaşa (Amnesty International 2011a).

2008 catalogue context: The red flag

By the time of the 2008 exhibition and the publication of the catalogue, most local civil society associations already harboured serious doubts that AKP government officials, both nationally and in the İstanbul and Beyoğlu municipalities, would follow through on their promises that the Tarlaşa Renewal Project and other similar urban regeneration plans meant to improve the living conditions and the socio-economic status of the urban poor. To an important extent this was due to the then still ongoing "renewal" of Sulukule.

Sulukule, a Romani neighbourhood in the İstanbul district of Fatih has a history that dates back to the 15th century. In 2006, it became the first area in Turkey to be declared an urban renewal zone under Law No. 5366. The highly contested and widely mediated urban renewal project drew local and international protest. Despite widespread criticism, despite a pending application to the Board of Listed Buildings to declare Sulukule protected urban heritage, and despite an ongoing court case against the project, demolitions in the neighbourhood began in February 2008. It was at almost exactly the same time that Tarlaşa residents learned that their neighbourhood was threatened by a very similar project, and under the same legislation. In her analysis of organised grassroots resistance against the Tarlaşa renewal project, Özlem Ünsal (2013: 130) notes that the "juxtaposition of 'the beginning' and 'the end' held strong implications for the community members of Tarlaşa since the experience of Sulukule provided them with a foresight as to what could happen in the future." And indeed, Tarlaşa residents often described Sulukule as a warning to them. The Sulukule project attracted a lot of attention (and scorn) by local and international media, by NGOs, civil organisations, as well as by several EU bodies. The 2007 EU Progress Report for Turkey criticised the Sulukule renewal project for disregarding the rights of local residents and discriminating against Romani citizens. (This EU objection was possibly one of the reasons for the very different frame that the Beyoğlu Municipality initially chose for the Tarlaşa project.) Turkish opposition parties and the mainstream media criticised the Sulukule project for the violation of regeneration standards and blatant profiteering by project stakeholders (Ünsal 2013: 23). Demolitions and forced evictions continued even as the resistance received

various forms of widely-mediatised support from local and international actors such as UNESCO, the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS), the UN Habitat Advisory Group on Forced Evictions (AGFE), the US Helsinki Commission, MPs of the European Parliament, the co-chairman of the Turkey-EU Joint Parliamentary Commission, the commissioner for human rights in the Council of Europe and a number of celebrities, such as popular Turkish singer Sezen Aksu, film director Tony Gatlif, French singer Manu Chao, and US punk band Gogol Bordello. Despite such widespread and diverse protest, the project went ahead. By July 2010, the Sulukule renewal area had been razed, and more than 400 families had been moved to social housing units in Taşoluk, a high-rise TOKI settlement approximately 45 kilometres from their former places of residence. Just as in Tarlaşaşı, tenants were offered the right to purchase an apartment in the newly built TOKI settlement of Taşoluk. They were expected to pay instalments over a period of 180 months, by the end of which they would become the owners of their property. Added to this were monthly amenity bills as well as a fee for a concierge, plus considerable costs for public transport. Many former Sulukule residents lived off precarious day jobs and had no secure monthly income. Most defaulted on their mortgage and sold their new apartments to move back in the vicinity of Sulukule, in several cases cramped in with relatives, as housing prices in the neighbourhood had increased considerably (Letsch, 2011; Ünsal 2013).

All this sounded eerily familiar to Tarlaşaşı residents and the leaders of the Tarlaşaşı association, who closely monitored eviction proceedings and resistance tactics in Sulukule, as well as the experience of Sulukule residents who were sent to a far-away – and ultimately unaffordable – suburb. The question remains if and how the realisation that Sulukule was destroyed despite high-profile solidarity from international organisations and celebrities, something that Tarlaşaşı residents never had at this scale, influenced neighbourhood morale and opposition to the Tarlaşaşı renewal project.

2008 catalogue: Socio-economic and political context

The public announcement of the Tarlaşaşı renewal project at the Beyoğlu Municipality's art gallery came during a time that historian Kerem Öktem (2011: 144) calls the AKP's "European years", when the Kemalist project of a unitary identity and historiography had come increasingly under pressure in favour of a diverse and more democratic political debate that challenged the hegemonic narrative.

Contrary to their predecessors, the AKP, who had come to power in the 2002 national elections, "embraced the free market economy, adopted the discourse of democracy, human rights and rule of law, and enthusiastically supported Turkey's entry into the EU" (Patton 2007: 343). The government undertook a series of legal and structural reforms in order to bring the country in line with both EU accession and IMF programme standards. The (most enthusiastically mediatised part of the) negotiations for Turkey to join the union were to a large part based on the EU's demands for Turkey to guarantee human rights, minority rights, and equity for its citizens. With regards to urban regeneration, EU expectations for social and economic development therefore included that this would be done without dispossessing and further disenfranchising the poor urban populations.

In April 2006, Istanbul, along with Pécs in Hungary and Essen in Germany, was announced as a European Capital of Culture 2010 (ECoC 2010). The project was led by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, the Istanbul Governorship, the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality, and coordinated by the Istanbul Foundation for Culture and Arts (IKSV).¹² The designation as European Capital of Culture put a spotlight on urban regeneration as part of the effort to preserve cultural heritage, but also on the fact that at the time, Istanbul was under threat to be included on the “World Heritage List in Danger” due to the lack of effective and adequate conservation, and the overuse of regeneration policies and practices (Gunay 2010: 1179). One of the stated goals of the ECoC 2010 Istanbul initiative was to “restore cultural and industrial heritage”, including the revitalisation of historic urban sites. Istanbul received the biggest-ever budget for any European Capital of Culture at that time. However, 95 percent of all projects were funded by the central government, which meant that Ankara exerted more control over planning and execution of the programme than local organisers had anticipated (Rampton et al. 2011). Furthermore, in her research on the impact of ECoC 2010 Istanbul on the approach to the regeneration of historic buildings and sites in the city, Gunay notes that “perceived economic benefits from the re-usage of cultural heritage cause the transformation of historic sites into large-scale development projects” with an emphasis on real estate development and tourism (Gunay, 2010: 1175). In this vein Kadir Topbaş, the AKP mayor of the Greater Istanbul Municipality, stated that Law No. 5366 would be used to “meet the demands of 2010”, and a number of historical sites were declared urban renewal zones under this law in the run-up to the ECoC 2010 events (ibid: 1175).

By the end of 2008, the effects of the global financial crisis reached Turkey, which meant that the availability of investment funds was fundamentally impacted. Over the course of the next twelve months, the Turkish economy contracted by twelve percent, with the real estate and construction sectors amongst the most severely affected (Öktem 2011: xviii; Coşkun 2013). Domestically, the slowdown was only temporary. The Turkish economy continued to grow at a seven percent rate on average, mostly on the back of the government-driven construction boom, as the AKP government focussed, in economic policy, legal reforms, and public message, on massive infrastructure and construction projects as one of the main motors to drive economic growth.¹³

By then, urban regeneration had long been a crucial part of the AKP’s neoliberalisation of Turkey, and Istanbul played a central role. In 2005, six years after the devastating Marmara earthquake, a report published by the Greater Istanbul Municipality entitled “Urban Renewal and the Historical Environment” stated large-scale restructuring and renewal provided the opportunity to turn Istanbul into a “world city” in harmony with EU standards and expectations (Ünsal 2013: 78). With the help of 400 million dollars

12 IKSV was founded in 1973 by a group of Turkish entrepreneurs headed by industrialist Nejat F. Ecza-cıbaşı.

13 The economic success of the AKP depended on the ability of the government to initiate projects like the one in Tarlaabaşı, and to enter into public as well as large-scale public-private construction endeavours. This necessitated the government to be able to push through required laws and regulations, such as Law No. 5366 that was used to declare Tarlaabaşı and Sulukule urban renewal zones.

granted by the IMF to make the city earthquake-resilient, the municipality, in close cooperation with the Ankara government, worked out a comprehensive urban development plan, supported by various master plans and reports, that included “the regeneration and rehabilitation of run-down and de-industrialised areas, the central business district and its surroundings”, and “the creation of new landmarks unique to Istanbul” (ibid.). This was justified by the stated need to “advance on a local level”, “develop a progressive sense of urban governance”, “boost the competitive qualities of the city”, “trigger metropolitan development” and “create a conducive environment for national and international partnerships and investment” (ibid.).

In order to overcome and lift obstacles for reaching this goal, the AKP government, starting in 2004, passed a number of substantive legal and institutional reforms in the fields of construction, real estate, local governance and housing finance. This included additional, extensive powers and authorities for greater and district municipalities to implement urban renewal projects, to establish partnerships with private companies, and to sell publicly owned land and assets to private developers (Kuyucu and Ünsal 2010). The heavy reliance on the real estate and construction sectors were increasingly and deliberately being driven and secured by the state (Ünsal 2013: 75). Large-scale urban regeneration projects in Istanbul aimed to integrate public land, coastal and industrial zones and *gecekondu* areas into the capitalist rent circuit (Ünsal 2013; Sakızlıoğlu 2014a; Demiralp 2016; Ay 2019; Yardımcı 2020; Rivas-Alonso 2021). On a more symbolic level, state officials, such as then prime minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan or Istanbul mayor Kadir Topbaş, touted massive urban renewal as *the* driving force to heighten the country’s prestige and standing on the global stage (Ünsal 2013: 76–77).

In the same vein, the government enacted sweeping reforms in regard to informal housing. Framed as security risks in the case of an earthquake, the greater municipality moved to implement massive urban regeneration projects in at least seven different Istanbul districts. *Gecekondu* neighbourhoods became the focal point of this urban renewal strategy in order to fully integrate them into the neoliberal real estate market. As a result, informal housing was criminalised, portrayed as “the sole responsible [agencies] of irregular urbanisation” (ibid.: 83), and informal neighbourhoods were stigmatised as areas of concentrated crime and terrorism. It is important to note that this discourse was a substantial change from the way previous governments dealt with *gecekondu* neighbourhoods. They had formalisation, amnesties and the provision of infrastructure and services to garner votes from residents. The AKP, by vilifying informal neighbourhoods and the urban poor, arguably their biggest voter base, and by continuing to run on a ticket of social justice, the eradication of poverty as well as increased democratic participation, walked a fine and complicated line (ibid.: 83).

Parallel to the demolition of informal housing, the government vastly increased the authority of the mass housing agency TOKI, granting them powers to claim public land for free, build for-profit housing units, set up real estate and construction companies, grant credit for renewal and regeneration projects, establish partnerships with both public and private companies to implement housing and infrastructure projects both locally and abroad, and expropriate home owners in urban renewal zones. This arguably turned

TOKI into one of the most powerful actors in the Turkish housing sector with state-protected access unavailable to other companies in the sector (ibid.: 76–77).¹⁴

At the same time, the government's various urban renewal plans came under increased scrutiny. The case of Sulukule drew criticism of local and international civil society organisations, politicians, artists and activists, and other widely mediatised renewal and demolition plans, such as of the historic EMEK Cinema in Beyoğlu, one of Turkey's oldest and most prestigious movie theatres, or of the Atatürk Kültür Merkezi on Taksim Square, gave rise to a growing grassroots movement of urban rights activism. However, in the 2009 local elections, the AKP regained the mayoral seats both in Beyoğlu and in the Greater Istanbul Municipality, which further strengthened their mandate for planned urban interventions, and increased their zeal to implement them.

2011 catalogue¹⁵: The sales office

Following the public announcement of the renewal project, *GAP İnşaat* rented an entire building on Tarlabası Boulevard across from the renewal site and turned it into their sales office. There, the developer and the Beyoğlu municipality jointly ran negotiations with property owners over the sale of their title deeds. This was a remarkable blurring of boundaries between the private contractor and the municipal district. I was given this second, 2011 version of the project catalogue by a friend who had picked it up in passing from that sales office.

At least two versions of the architectural model of the renewal project were successively exhibited in their ground floor window. While the sales office was, in theory, open to the public, it was not a space one could easily enter “just to look around”. Employees in business attire as well as a security guard were always at hand to hover over stray visitors, and except for scheduled meetings with Tarlabası property owners (and the occasional researcher or journalist), *GAP İnşaat* employees hoped to welcome prospective buyers and investors before anyone else. When I tried to obtain another copy of the 2011 catalogue from the office at a later date, I was told that they had “run out”.

2011 catalogue: The material

The 2011 project catalogue comes in the same size and format as the first version, but the matte grey cardboard cover was replaced with silver glossy cardstock that is thicker than the glossy cardstock pages of the catalogue. The logo of the “Tarlabası Renewal Project” is printed in white on the front cover. However, the Beyoğlu Municipality has been dropped from the project name, and both the municipality logo (a stylised Galata Tower) and name

14 This includes the accusation of favouring subcontractors that are close to the AKP government in project tenders, and allegations of corruption (Ünsal 2010; Ünsal 2013: 84–85).

15 I received a reworked version of a project catalogue in early 2011, before the first eviction I had been made aware of, and before demolitions started in August of that same year. That said, this document does not bear an exact date of issue: for the sake of clarity, I refer to that catalogue as the 2011 catalogue.

have vanished. The municipality's emblem does appear on the back cover, but beneath the more prominent logo of *GAP İnşaat*, who also lists their website, email, and the address of the project office on Tarlaabaşı Boulevard. The catalogue is bound with white thread and glued, which makes it sturdier than the previous version. The "50 Questions" brochure that accompanied the 2008 catalogue had been discontinued. Contrary to the 2008 catalogue, the revised 2011 version is easily recognisable as a catalogue for a development project. The name and contact information of the developer is prominently printed on the back cover, whereas all traces of the municipality's participation have been minimised. The prestige value of this catalogue is lower than that of the first one. The object still signals "high-end housing development project", but it is clearly a project sales brochure rather than aiming to appear as an art exhibit catalogue.

2011 catalogue: The content

Inside the 2011 catalogue the Beyoğlu municipality's involvement moves to the background as well. It is introduced as the "project leader" on the fourth page, and *GAP İnşaat* as the contractor. However, the company is mentioned six times in the catalogue, taking a much more prominent position. Beyoğlu mayor Ahmet Misbah Demircan, on the other hand, is no longer introduced as the "face" of the project, and the personalised foreword-letter that opened the 2008 catalogue is no longer there. Therefore, most of 2008 foreword promises of inclusivity and full participation of all concerned actors have been scrapped as well. Rather, the first, and very short, text in the catalogue describes Tarlaabaşı as "one of the most important historical areas in Istanbul", but one unable to meet "contemporary requirements", where "property owners have been unable to invest in their real estate because of the bad surroundings". 40 percent of buildings, the catalogue alleges, stand empty. The source of this number is unclear, as evictions had not yet started at the time of publication. In the survey urged by the Tarlaabaşı Association and commissioned by the municipality in 2008, only 30 percent of buildings inside the renewal zone were found to be vacant (Kentsel A.Ş. 2008).

When lamenting the lack of owners' investment, the text fails to mention state restrictions on renovations due to the area being listed. It is clear that the focus of this catalogue is on the renewal of the physical area, and no longer even superficially concerned with social regeneration or residents' rights.

The actors behind the project remain anonymous. The only people that are mentioned in relation to the planning of the "multi-actor" project are nameless "experts from different disciplines", "university lecturers", "star architects" and "representatives from the private sector and the municipality". However, no further details or information about any of these people involved in the renewal project are given, nor are their functions specified. The more detailed "Project Team" page from the 2008 catalogue has been substituted by a double page spread entitled "A Multi-Actor System" and is illustrated with ten black-and-white photographs similar or equal to those in the 2008 catalogue and showing various groups of people sitting or standing around a large meeting table in various settings. And again, due to the lack of all captions or explanations, the identity of the persons depicted remains unclear if one does not know them already. The lists of the project

team, the design team, and the advisory board were dropped in this second version of the catalogue. Three of the originally seven architect firms withdrew from the project by the time the second catalogue was published, but no information on this is given, and in the text itself no more mention is made of which architects participated in the project.¹⁶

2011 catalogue: The neighbourhood

In the 2011 version of the catalogue, the first images of Tarlabası appear on a double page spread showing two colour photographs of two different street scenes. One depicts the shopfront of a local greengrocer, and the prominent display of profanity graffiti. The other shows cars parked alongside the curb, a pot-holed asphalt street, a full washing line hung across the street, and hazy shapes of passers-by, none of which are photographed in a way that makes it possible to identify them. The slogan on that page reads “Heritage that has resisted obliteration and collapse is revived”: The wording and the accompanying images establish that the heritage in question only includes buildings, and not humans. Such framing pits the buildings, the vast majority of which were going to be at least partly demolished as part of the renewal plan, against the residents who are portrayed as agents of chaos and obliteration. In light of this slogan the graffiti, the posters, the shop signs and makeshift constructions depicted in the two photographs can all be read as part of the attack on the heritage that the urban renewal project purports to “revive” by removing what it posits as the perpetrators of the “destruction”.¹⁷ The layout of the renewal zone is depicted in two aerial photographs, one of which puts it in context of the district of Beyoğlu, and the other, taken from closer up, shows the buildings and streets included in the Tarlabası project. Next to four colour photographs that show traces of Levantine architecture in run-down Tarlabası buildings – a row of bowfront houses, an arched doorway – the catalogue text lauds the neighbourhood as one where 19th-century civil architecture can be found, the historicity of which is underlined by an image of a 1945 Pervititch map¹⁸ of the area. The 2011 catalogue clearly emphasises the “heritage value” of Tarlabası, as well as the planned modernisation of the existing housing stock, over the (improvement of the) socio-economic situation in the neighbourhood. Only one short, rather vague text even alludes to “social responsibility”, but without listing any details of what such responsibility would entail. The photograph of the three small boys looking into the camera, the only one that featured actual residents, was omitted in the 2011 version of the catalogue.

16 One can however confirm this by comparing the architects mentioned in the 2008 catalogue and the remaining four architects now listed on the project website: <https://www.taksim360.com.tr/en/concept>. I learned of the withdrawal by a friend who knew one of the architects that dropped out and whom I had previously interviewed.

17 Furthermore, it is highly problematic, to say the least, if an originally Greek neighbourhood in Beyoğlu that was abandoned by its original non-Muslim residents due to discriminatory state policies and physical violence, is talked about in the context of a state-led renewal plan as “heritage resisting obliteration”.

18 Topographical engineer Jacques Pervititch drew these maps upon the initiative of fire insurance companies in the period 1922–1945 (Sabancıoğlu 2003).

2011 catalogue: The project

The 2011 version of the catalogue includes more technical details about the renewal project than the 2008 version. It still promises a “conservationist renewal” approach, whereby the façades of listed buildings will allegedly be preserved, and the building itself demolished in order to accommodate planned functions (Ünsal 2013: 122). The 2011 catalogue claims that the inventory of all listed buildings was made according to the rules and standards of the Convention for the Preservation of European Architectural Heritage, and that building surveys and restitution plans drawn up by *GAP İnşaat* have been presented to the state Preservation Council for approval. This information is illustrated by two sheets of building surveys of Tarlabası property. However, no other information is given about how the project aims to abide by international preservation standards.

Under the headlines “A historical experience” and the more obscure “Service to expectations and culture”, this catalogue consecrates two double page spreads to colour photographs of the 3D architectural model of the project that had been part of the 2008 Tarlabası exhibition on Istiklal Avenue. The participation of an “expert project team” charged with the physical renewal of the buildings is announced. However, none of these experts are named or otherwise identified on this page or anywhere else in the catalogue. The question, asked by sceptics and critics of the renewal project, such as the Istanbul Chamber of Architects, how the conservation of listed buildings will be assured when only the façade, if that, of the houses will be preserved, is not answered either. The 3D model only makes this concern more pressing, as it shows that not much will be left of the old neighbourhood.

The same rendered images of what the developers plan to build in Tarlabası – and whom they imagine will live there after the renewal – return in the 2011 catalogue. A few pictures were added, including two images of Tarlabası Boulevard that were not featured in the 2008 version. Interestingly, this includes a current-day photograph of the building that until its closure in 2011 housed the office of the Tarlabası Association where Erdal Aybek provided information on legal proceedings and sales. While the date of the photograph is unclear, the office, located in the first storey of a bowfront house above a betting shop, appears to be empty.

The social and economic development programmes allegedly planned by the municipality and so prominent in the 2008 catalogue, get only minimal space in the 2011 version. Under the headline “Social Responsibility”, developer *GAP İnşaat* claims that as one of the participants in this project, the corporation will take this obligation seriously. This vague claim is accompanied by three black-and-white photographs of what seem to be professional meetings of some kind. None of the photographs are captioned, and there are no further explanations of who, or what, is depicted in them. In one of the images one can see a stack of the first version of the project catalogues as well as the accompanying brochures, which indicates that this image was taken around or shortly after 2008. It is the only acknowledgment of the issue in the entire catalogue, and neither the mayor nor the NGOs and civil society organisations, all frequently alluded to in the 2008 catalogue, find mention here.

In 2011, in preparation for demolitions, and during a time when some of the buildings were already emptied and being scavenged for scraps, a silver metal construction fence was put up around the renewal site. In 2012, the municipality added a row of commercial billboards along the fence facing Tarlabası Boulevard that showed rendered images of the finished Tarlabası project similar to those in the project catalogue with the slogan “Tarlabası is renewed” [*Tarlabası yenileniyor*], as well as the project logo, the logo of *GAP İnşaat* and of the Beyoğlu Municipality. One panel advertised the *GAP İnşaat* sales office across the boulevard. The scale of the text and the scale of the images were clearly meant for people who were driving by on Tarlabası Boulevard, very quickly, and not turning into the neighbourhood. (These panels were changed in 2013 to a more “inclusive” row of stock photos that represented “more local” personages, and text that lauded the inclusionary nature of the project, claiming that it would bring improvement of social and economic standards for residents. As the court case against the project was ongoing at the time, this might have been a fig leaf aimed at the judges.)

2011 catalogue: The stated project objectives and procedures

Under the headline “Fully participatory negotiation”, the 2011 project catalogue claims to have reached and solved the “most crucial” stage of the project: the successful negotiation with property owners. “The large majority” of property owners, the text insists, came to an agreement with project stakeholders. Above a prominent black-and-white photograph of the project coordination and sales office on Tarlabası Boulevard, the catalogue informs readers that the Beyoğlu Municipality directed talks and negotiation agreements with both property owners and tenants. Parroting a condensed version of what had been promised in the 2008 catalogue, the 2011 version claims that the cooperation between property owners, local residents and civil society organisations have shaped and “enriched” the project. Again, no further details about the nature of this supposed participation are given. Across this page are twelve black-and-white photographs, eight of which presumably show the successful agreement between project stakeholders and property owners. None of the people in the photographs are named or in any way identified. All of them show smiling people, apparently content with what they have been offered, and negotiators content with what they have managed to get their interlocutors to agree on. In all other current-day photographs of the neighbourhood residents remain unidentified, and often only vague, blurry shapes that populate the streets as no more than extras. Most of the photographs show empty streets.

I only recognised one person in any of the negotiation photographs: second-hand furniture seller Cemal, around 65 years old at the time, who is depicted with his two smiling, grown-up children, and a female representative of *GAP İnşaat*. While this picture appeared in the 2011 catalogue, it was taken a couple of years prior. Cemal had been one of the first property owners to sell his house to the developer. Never a member of the Tarlabası Association and not one of the many property owners who took the municipality to court, he was deeply unhappy about the deal he had agreed to. In exchange for his five-story building on Tree Street he had been offered two apartments in the new development. He had been told that the handover of these new units was supposed to

happen by 2010 at the very latest, which had been the initial deadline for the renewal project and the year that Istanbul was European Capital of Culture. When we spoke in 2011, Cemal talked a great deal about how he felt he had been deceived by the municipality and cheated by the developer. He told me that he would have preferred to do his own renovations and stay in the neighbourhood where he had lived and worked for more than 40 years. Part of his anger stemmed from the fact that he used to rent out several of the apartments in his building for modest amounts to bolster his family's income, and that he had lost these regular earnings. Despite initial promises made by project agents (echoed in the "50 Questions" brochure) that there would be compensation for any loss of rental income, none had materialised. Furthermore, as construction had not yet begun in 2011, it was unclear when the two promised apartments would be handed over to him. Cemal said that the amicable attitude of project stakeholders – portrayed in the catalogue – changed fundamentally after he had put his signature on paper:

They throw us out on the street, they tell us to get lost. When they bought the house from me, it was all "Cemal Bey, come and have tea with us. Cemal Bey, have a coffee with us. Cemal Bey, let's sit down and talk". The same people who said that now send armoured vehicles to kick us out. [...] So what, I sold the house! I don't have to have it anyway, may God provide for a better one. But we don't want to be treated with such brutality. [The *GAP İnşaat* people] were so nice to me then. But only until I had sold my house to them. After I sold it, they said, alright, that's it, we're done with you. For them we were nothing more than an opportunity. [...] I didn't go to court. I didn't go up against [GAP]. Instead, we sat down [with them] like neighbours, and we talked and came to an agreement, but I'm the one who suffers now. If I had gone to court, I would have gotten 750,000 Lira, maybe even 900,000 Lira. Houses like mine are fetching more than 1,000,000 [Lira] now. They agreed to give me two apartments in the new development. But how many years will I have to wait for that? What will happen until then? That's all unclear! I have no hope that I'll ever get anything. If the government changes, if the municipality changes, or if the developer changes, then I'll lose everything, too.

Some of his (former) neighbours, like the barber Halil Usta, amicably taunted him for having sold his house immediately after the project was announced. Even so, most agreed that the 400 TL Cemal received in monthly rental aid¹⁹, the uncertainty about the timeline of the project, and the developers' unwillingness to discuss either with Tarlaabaşı residents, were unacceptable. By contrast, the 2011 catalogue claims that negotiations with property owners had been "successful" and concluded to the satisfaction of all involved parties. The grievances, the anger and worries that Tarlaabaşı residents continued to express at the time were ignored. The "50 Questions" brochure that had accompanied the 2008 catalogue had been discontinued, so the questions and issues that were addressed there, and that were for the most part still unanswered and unresolved, were rendered invisible. As the only appearance of residents in the 2011 marketing material are the photographs of smiling unidentified property owners who seem to have eagerly agreed to

19 This was the money allotted for him to rent an apartment (or in his case, a shop) elsewhere while waiting for the completion of the project, not a substitute for his lost rental income as a landlord.

sell their homes, the catalogue makes all resistance, all criticism, and the many worries of residents disappear. The 2011 catalogue does not elaborate on what happened to property owners who did not come to an agreement with *GAP İnşaat*, either. It does not allude to compulsory purchase orders and ongoing court cases. In the eyes of project stakeholders, and in what they told an interested non-resident public, the negotiations with Tarlabası property owners were a done deal.

2011 catalogue context: The association

By 2011 the Tarlabası Association had started to fall apart. In 2009, they had joined the case against the project filed by the Istanbul Chamber of Architects (that started in April 2008). In 2010, the association applied at the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) in Strasbourg with the hope of fighting ongoing expropriations. However, resistance and unity began to crumble. Several property owners, amongst which leaders of the association, had gone against the internal association agreement and started to attend one-on-one meetings with *GAP İnşaat* and the municipality to negotiate. In April 2010, Erdal Aybek told me that the association's leadership had de facto been split, and that board members, including a one-time association president, had sold their properties or part of their property, which triggered (panic) sales of other association members and other residents. Following these sales, Erdal explained, board members did not concern themselves any further with tenants who were handed eviction notices as soon as their landlords had sold. For him, this was the final straw, and he left the association:

[They said] that tenants would look after themselves. That's when I said that I will look after myself as well. I understood that we didn't want the same thing. That we were not fighting for the same thing. I even felt used. What had I spent so much time doing then? I fought for those 200, for those 300 people who came to our meetings, those people who trusted me and handed over their homes and their lives to me! I did not fight for these men to become rich.

Project stakeholders successfully exploited cracks in the unity of the association and Tarlabası residents. *GAP İnşaat* offered (sometimes significantly) higher amounts to property owners who had large amounts of economic and social capital at their disposal, and who for that reason were the most influential inside the association.²⁰ This then swayed them to abandon the united front that the association had been able to keep intact for almost two years. Tenants felt abandoned by the association and indeed decided to look after themselves, with many moving out before they could be evicted. This left property owners who had not sold yet without rental income, forcing them to reconsider as well. The fragmentation of the association led to the quick unravelling of grassroots resistance (Ünal 2013). Several individual court cases started by residents were still ongoing. So were the proceedings initiated by the Istanbul Chamber of Architects that attempted to halt the entire project on the basis that it violated constitutional rights. However, following

20 These property owners often owned more than one building, and in prime locations, such as on Tarlabası Boulevard.

the landslide win of the AKP in the June 2011 national elections, letters of expropriation were sent to property owners who still refused to sell their homes or buildings. Two weeks after the elections, a Kurdish widow was very publicly evicted from her home by officers accompanied by armoured vehicles and riot police. The atmosphere in the neighbourhood was sombre and pessimistic. Entire buildings were already empty. The growing uncertainty and the resulting anxiety had started to push more tenants who wanted to avoid evictions and sudden homelessness out of the neighbourhood. A growing number of property owners sold their title deeds to the municipality. In August 2011, demolitions of evicted buildings started. By November of that same year, they were in full swing.

2011 catalogue: Socio-economic and political context

On June 12, 2011, the AKP won a record 49.9 percent of all votes in national elections. It was the third successive electoral victory for prime minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and the AKP, and, according to political economist Ziya Öniş (2019: 202), “the beginning of a new era of Turkey’s political economy, which we could classify as Turkey’s ‘new developmentalism’ or Turkey’s encounter with ‘state capitalism.’” This broad economic and political shift was shaped by profound domestic political changes, as well as by the growing importance of Russia and China following the 2008 financial crisis (ibid.).

Following the 2011 election, the AKP consolidated its power as the hegemonic force in Turkish politics, setting off a strong authoritarian turn in domestic politics on the one hand, and a shift in foreign policy orientation from the EU and the West towards Russia, China, and the Middle East (Müftüler-Baç and Keyman 2012; Öniş 2019: 207). The post-2011 period effectively marked the beginning of a period of de-Europeanisation and de-Westernisation, characterised by a dwindling of the EU membership process and a decline of the rule of law (Acemoğlu and Murat 2015). Turkey started to increasingly align with the Russia-China axis in terms of economic development, and the Muslim Middle East in terms of identity. This also meant that Turkey was able to explore alternative routes for finance and economic expansion, becoming less dependent on Western institutions such as the EU, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), or the World Trade Organisation (WTO) (Öniş 2019: 205).

Allegations against the government of large-scale corruption increased. By then the government’s focus on the construction sector and large infrastructure projects had become even more dominant. Land and real estate continued to be a major source of capital accumulation, with the construction sector still as the key motor of economic growth. As part of the new “state capitalism” economic model, conventional privatisation was increasingly replaced by privatisations based on public-private partnerships as well as mega-infrastructure and construction projects and large-scale housing through actors like the mass housing agency TOKI. The AKP further consolidated its control over institutions outside of its direct authority by transforming Independent Regulatory Agencies (IRAs), set up after the 2001 economic crisis to curb opportunities for partisan practices in the distribution of public funds, into extensions of different ministries (Esen and Gümüşçü 2018: 353). Business groups and family holdings in sectors such as construction, energy, transport and media were able to benefit from the state-led rent dis-

tribution process through often overlapping ownerships and close ties to the AKP government (Buğra and Savaşkan 2014; Öniş 2019: 207-208). This development was reflected in the 2011 AKP election campaign that had been based on a number of planned radical urban transformation projects that prime minister Erdoğan called his “crazy projects [*çılgın projeler*]”: the construction of a canal from the Black Sea to the Marmara Sea, an entire satellite city to be built outside Istanbul, a third airport, a third bridge over the Bosphorus as well as mass housing construction.²¹ On another level, the 2011 election victory and the resulting consolidation of power through increasing authoritarian policies meant a strong mandate for the AKP to follow through with contested renewal plans and mega projects, and the opportunity to silence critics.

In the beginning of this chapter, I wondered why Cemile tried to negotiate and interact with unwilling and powerful project stakeholders even after her husband had sold the title deed to the municipality. A close reading of the presentation of the Tarlabaşı urban renewal project through the promotional material as text objects has shown that the renewal project was not a static entity, but a moving target that was shifting in very specific ways around the relationships with Tarlabaşı residents. Between the two versions of the catalogue, the most significant changes are to the expensiveness and the quality of the materials used, how they were made available, the context in which they were presented to the public, and to what audience they were geared. In short, the “Tarlabaşı is Renewed” project catalogue changed from appearing as an elegant book-catalogue that was produced using high-quality, expensive materials to being a more obvious commercial promotional text-object of a considerably less prestige value aimed at potential buyers. The language of inclusion and participation, so prevalent in the beginning of the project and the 2008 catalogue, changed in a relatively linear and contextually informed way, and those changes had a direct bearing on what was possible for residents to do, and the ways they were allowed to engage with the project. The stigmatisation of the neighbourhood and its residents, very visible in the 2008 catalogue, intensified with the complete erasure of residents’ concerns in the catalogue that circulated in 2011.

The constant and substantial shift of the project makes sense when one considers the contextual political, economic, and social changes in Istanbul and Turkey at the time. The turn towards increasing authoritarianism and a state capitalist model similar to that of Russia and China, as well as the quasi-abandonment of the country’s long-standing commitment of westernisation and its close ties with Western-dominated institutions, such as the EU or the World Bank, meant a shift for the target audience and financialization of the Tarlabaşı renewal project that is reflected in the promotional material.

In retrospect, going back and reading the 2008 catalogue and the accompanying brochure feels like visiting an alternative universe. What is written in those promotional text objects is highly dissonant with what actually happened later, and none of what Beyoğlu mayor Ahmet Misbah Demircan said in the foreword and none of what was promised to residents bore any relation to the reality in Tarlabaşı at any point. It is possible that plans of cooperation, social regeneration and inclusiveness were aspirational in the beginning, but none of it materialised.

21 Both the third bridge over the Bosphorus as well as the third Istanbul airport were finalised despite widespread criticism and opened in 2016 and 2018, respectively.

Chapter four: Experiencing territorial stigma in Tarlabaşı

Tarlabaşı residents generally agreed and were well aware that their neighbourhood was stigmatised, and that they were subject to differential treatment by agents of the state and public institutions. For example, some residents said that in Tarlabaşı, they were being treated with disdain and considerably less civility by the police than they were used to from other Istanbul districts. Barber Halil Usta, an ethnic Turk, ran a small barbershop in Tarlabaşı, but owned and lived in an apartment in a “respectable” gated community-type neighbourhood in Bostancı, on the Asian side of the city. He commuted between both places almost daily, and he keenly felt the difference between the attitude of the police towards him in Bostancı in comparison to his encounters with law enforcement in the neighbourhood where he worked:

I never see any police or checkpoints where I live! [...] On the [Asian] side we might have traffic police, but that’s it. They say [to me]: ‘Sir, good evening.’ [...] That’s because of how they see [Tarlabaşı]. On the [Asian] side it’s ‘Good evening, Sir, good evening.’ Here? ‘Grandpa! Come here, *lan*.’”¹

Halil Usta was not used to being accosted this rudely by the police. Recognising this behaviour as disrespectful, he drew the conclusion that this blatant disregard of social norms was tied to the neighbourhood where it occurred. Halil Usta was an older cishet, married and successfully self-employed Turkish man who had acquired the necessary cultural and social capital to be considered “urban” [*şehirli*], and who had earned the honorific of Usta as a master barber. He therefore occupied a social position that was least likely to draw discriminatory treatment. However, when he entered Tarlabaşı, a deeply stigmatised place, he suffered the consequences of that stigma regardless. Anecdotes like this may lead to the assumption that territorial stigmatisation is solely anchored to place and affects all residents of that place equally, but Halil Usta’s experience raises an important question: if a person with his level of social capital encounters this sort of everyday discrimination, how are residents that are already marginalised by Turkish society affected by territorial stigma? In Tarlabaşı it was easy to apprehend that stigma of place

1 *Lan* is a slang expression and a pejorative term used for men. It is considered aggressive and insulting, especially when the addressee is unknown to the person using the term.

did not 'stick' to people in a uniform way; as a resident of the neighbourhood, I witnessed such discrepancies over the course of my everyday interactions, and these differences were the subject of conversation and concern. It is important to describe and analyse how territorial stigmatisation is experienced by a diversity of individuals that live and work in a stigmatised neighbourhood. Doing so allows for a better understanding as to how stigma of place and stigma of type of person are inextricably intertwined.

This chapter investigates how Tarlabası residents experienced and interpreted the material consequences of the symbolic denigration of their neighbourhood and the everyday manifestations of territorial stigmatisation. This is an important step towards a more effective analysis of how they reacted to this stigma. Here I want to understand how individuals understood and explained their encounters with institutional disinvestment and discriminatory treatment by public institutions. How did individuals deal with the everyday consequences of stigmatisation they faced during the different stages of the urban renewal project and how did their marginalisation as an individual inform this? Firstly, I want to show how the burden of the territorial stigma in Tarlabası was not equally felt by all inhabitants. Residents whose social identities matched the negative ethnic, cultural, and material stereotypes associated with the Tarlabası imaginary and the stigmatising narrative connected to it, discussed in chapter two, suffered more grievous consequences of the territorial stigmatisation than others. I will then describe the ways and circumstances under which the blemish of place was most keenly felt and the impact that this had on residents' everyday lives, and how this experience changed, became more acute, with the announcement of the urban renewal project and during the time of negotiations and evictions. Following that I will show that trans* women, sex workers and Kurdish residents were confronted with multiple stigmas, which heavily influenced how they experienced everyday stigmatisation and the growing pressure resulting from the weaponised stigma immediately ahead of and during evictions. And finally, with the help of thick descriptions of the very different eviction experiences of two women, I would like to show how gendered notions of respectability were used as pressure points for state-based cruelty, facilitated by the territorial stigmatisation of Tarlabası.

Microsocial processes and macropolitical dynamics structured the way that neighbourhood reputation stuck to particular residents in particular ways. They also structured the diversity of tactics one sees in Tarlabası meant to manage or negotiate social life in a deeply stigmatised neighbourhood, which I will discuss in the following chapters of this thesis.

Encountering everyday stigma

Tarlabası, wedged between central Taksim Square, the more gentrified and touristic Beyoğlu neighbourhoods of Cihangir and Şişhane as well as the more religiously conservative Kasımpaşa, stood out in how differently it was approached by state agents and public institutions. The neighbourhood was visibly much more securitised than surrounding urban spaces. Security cameras canvassed the area 24/7, and militarised ID check-

points were located at several points on the neighbourhood's boundaries.² The area was in proximity of three police stations, one of which was located in Tarlaabaşı. A relatively high number of police officers, both in uniform and plainclothes, patrolled the area by car, motorcycle, and, more rarely, on foot. Spontaneous ID checks and stop-and-frisk encounters with law enforcement personnel were common for residents deemed "suspicious". Tarlaabaşı was, symbolically and materially, framed as a space of "concentrated insecurity" that legitimised and required heavy policing in the eyes of the non-resident community.

While the physical space of Tarlaabaşı was hyper-policed, Tarlaabaşı residents were notably underserved by law enforcement. Most did agree that petty crime and drug dealing were a problem in their neighbourhood, with the majority saying that they did not feel safe (Ünlü et al. 2000). At the same time, residents said that the authorities made little to no effort to deal with these issues. Müge, a trans* woman sex worker in her mid-30s described how her emergency calls to the police were routinely ignored, and assistance delayed:

When I call the police to tell them that a woman is being molested or that there is trouble right outside my door, do you know how long it takes them to come? 45 minutes. Why do they come so late? Because [they want] people here to be fed up, they want us to fuck off. They want people here to get upset, to feel desperate, do you know what I mean? This causes problems for the shop owners, and for residents. But then I don't know any other place except Tarlaabaşı where there are ten ID checks, one after the other. That exists only in Tarlaabaşı. There is an ID check at every step.

Müge was the frequent target of disciplinary surveillance, of police harassment and abuse. She knew that the police were both willing and able to make their presence felt in Tarlaabaşı when doing so was deemed worthwhile by the authorities.³ Her experiences led her to interpret the selective engagement of the police with security problems in the area as intentional.

I often heard complaints about the sluggishness of the police response to emergency calls. It was especially remarkable because of the stark contrast between this seemingly wilful negligence, and the overt, aggressive securitisation of the neighbourhood. Unlike the European or North American cities addressed in much of the literature on the topic, it was not the "concentrated poverty" that rendered the neighbourhood suspect, but as analysed in chapter two, the concentrated presence especially of Kurds and trans* persons – categories of people that have historically been deemed a risk to the integrity of the Turkish state and its declared ideals. The high visibility of police, ID checkpoints,

2 Ahead of expected unrest, for example due to the Mayday demonstrations in the Taksim area, additional checkpoints were set up along Dolapdere Street and around some entry points from Tarlaabaşı Boulevard.

3 Due to the controversial 2005 misdemeanour law, she and other trans* women in Tarlaabaşı were repeatedly fined for "obstructing traffic" and "inappropriate behaviour" while going about their daily chores. Once Müge was fined for wearing a "revealing" top, another time police made her pay the fine for "breaching the peace" because she had been eating lunch on her own doorstep.

and other measures of urban securitisation placed the area's inhabitants “radically outside the conceptual boundaries of emancipation, humanness, and global citizenry” (Lloyd and Bonds 2018: 900), marking them as not connected to the rest of the city. At the same time the police routinely neglected security concerns expressed by residents themselves. The police were there to keep the city safe *from* them, not for them.

Tarlabaşı was also underserved when it came to municipal services such as garbage collection and street cleaning. Müge said that living in Tarlabaşı meant living in a “forgotten” area:

The streets are full of garbage. Do you know when the garbage guys come here to clean up? Either ahead of a referendum, or ahead of elections, or just before we vote for a new *muhtar*⁴, that's when.

“Cleanliness is beautiful”



Photo by Jonathan Lewis

As in many other Istanbul neighbourhoods, regardless of the income of residents, it was common in Tarlabaşı to deposit garbage bags on the street to be picked up by a passing garbage truck. The municipality did provide sporadic garbage bins, but they were few and far between. Garbage trucks served nearby Istiklal Avenue several times a day, whereas they sometimes skipped areas of Tarlabaşı altogether. Sedat *Usta*, who with his father Zeki *Usta* worked in the family shoemaking workshop in Bird Street, said that residents did much of the clean-up themselves:

4 In cities, a *muhtar* is the elected head of a neighbourhood [*mahalle*] as the smallest administrative unit. Urban *muhtars* are elected every five years and are tasked with administrative duties, such as the address registration of neighbourhood residents, the provision of official copies of birth certificates, ID cards and “poverty cards” [*fakirlik belgesi*]. The poverty card facilitates the application for further state assistance in healthcare, education, childcare, or other material assistance.

Nothing has changed in this street since I came back from my military service in 2001, even though we tried to change it so many times. For example, I sweep the street every day. I clean it every day. But the municipality's cleaning car never comes. Even if it does come by here, it doesn't turn into this street! You have to force them to run through our street. We also have to clean the garbage up ourselves. Every two weeks I manage to catch that guy [who collects the garbage]. Most of them live here! But it's either us or the neighbours who do most of the cleaning in this street.

Rats, cats, dogs and seagulls were the reason that abandoned garbage bags often ended up scattered all over the street, adding to the image of a "dirty" neighbourhood. Residents thought that this municipal neglect, in combination with frequent breakdowns of electricity and water supplies, were a direct consequence of their neighbourhood's stigma because it meant that local politicians felt entitled to ignore Tarlaşaı without having to fear any consequences. This was not only the case for the ruling AKP. In the run-up to the 2011 national elections, Berhan Şimşek, a local politician of the main opposition Republican People's Party [*Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi – CHP*], made a press statement on Tarlaşaı Boulevard where he said that the renewal project was "unjust", and accused the ruling AKP of profiteering and nepotism (Hürriyet 2010). However, his appearance failed to rally a large crowd and he left immediately after having delivered his speech. Sitting in their small Tarlaşaı restaurant afterwards, Seray and Ekin, a married Alevi couple, discussed the disappointingly swift departure of the politician with Halil Usta. Both Seray and Ekin were lifelong CHP voters and had put their hopes in the support of their party against the AKP-initiated urban renewal project. The barber argued that journalists had given up on Tarlaşaı long ago, and Seray agreed, dismissing Şimşek's brief appearance as a half-hearted attempt at electioneering. Nobody in the small group expected any substantial follow-up to his visit. Seray maintained that the CHP did not see any electoral profit in defending Tarlaşaı residents against eviction:

What did he do? Nothing. Because there's nothing to do. Because there's no voter potential here. So why would they care about us? What is Tarlaşaı to [the CHP politician]? They don't need to care. This is how they discriminate against us. That's all this is.

Another example of this "power to disregard" referenced in chapter two was the infamous expert report commissioned by the 3rd Beyoğlu Administrative Court as part of the court case opened by the Istanbul Chamber of Architects (TMMOB) with the goal of stopping the Tarlaşaı renewal project. The report stated that the designated urban renewal area looked "abandoned" due to the physical appearance of the remaining buildings. In a conversation with a Turkish social researcher who documented housing rights violations ahead of evictions, Cemile recalled how shocked she had been to hear of the report's conclusion:

How can they write such a thing? They told everyone that our houses were empty! They said that nobody lived here! Can you believe that? We are right here, and none of them came to visit to talk to us. We are here, but they pretend we are not.

This deliberate neglect by the authorities and other powerful actors was carried out in ways that Tarlaşaı residents were sure to notice. As shown in chapter two, this feeling of

being overlooked, this “corrosive social erasure” (Carter 2010: 5), is closely related to territorial stigmatisation, because negative stereotypisation hides residents behind a discursive wall of negative tropes (ibid.: 12–13). Being made to disappear in plain sight was painful and frustrating for Tarlabası residents. When they leafed through the project advertising catalogues that presented their neighbourhood as lifeless, dark and unwanted, they expressed both anger and disillusionment. They were angry about the lack of any subtlety, fully recognising that the future Tarlabası would not include them at all. On one occasion Müge asked me while we were all having tea in Hakan’s *kiraathane*:

Where are we? [*waves vaguely at the page of the catalogue*] Can you see us anywhere in here? Who are these people walking around with their fancy clothes and their fancy bags? Look at all these people, these kids with their expensive toys! Did you ever see anyone like this in Tarlabası? It’s as if we don’t even exist! What we want doesn’t matter.

She jokingly pointed out that even the sky was bluer in the rendered images of the planned project. Her neighbourhood of more than ten years had quite literally been erased before the first bulldozers made their way into Tarlabası.

Ordinary iconic figures

Long-time Tarlabası barber Halil Usta obscured his shop’s address when speaking to non-resident outsiders because he was aware of the neighbourhood’s bad reputation and the devastating effect this notoriety might have on his own social standing and that of his family. Scholars who write about territorial stigmatisation have researched residents’ fears that they might be perceived in light of the negative stereotypes attached to tainted spaces. Randol Contreras (2017: 657), in his study of Los Angeles South Central, notes that residents feel “spatial anguish” over being associated with their neighbourhood’s negative stereotypes. He writes that they struggle with feelings of stress, shame and frustration, all caused by living in a stigmatised neighbourhood and the fear “that outsiders will attach the space’s stigma onto them” (ibid.). Contreras observes that residents are afraid, like Halil Usta in his interactions with non-resident outsiders, “that they will become living embodiments of their blemished space” (ibid.). In chapter two, I have analysed how anxious public discourses and stigmatising narratives of Tarlabası are organised around imagined and stereotyped, generic types of residents that Anouk de Koning and Anick Vollebergh (2019) call “ordinary iconic figures.” I have discussed how, in the context of Tarlabası, the “problem profiles” of Kurds, in particular young Kurdish men, and trans* women sex workers are the two most salient stereotypes that play into territorial stigmatisation.

It is important to acknowledge the presence of other marginalised (and stereotyped) groups in Tarlabası that I did not have access to, which is why I cannot speak to the specifics of their experiences of territorial stigma in the neighbourhood, such as Romani

residents as well as refugees from Syria and various African countries.⁵ For example, stereotyped images of the Romani community were put to use in other violently renewed neighbourhoods more exclusively imagined as Romani, like Sulukule in Istanbul (Karaman and Islam 2012; Ünsal 2013; van Dobben Schoon 2014; Lelandais 2014). The presence of a sizable Romani community was certainly part of how Tarlaşaı was imagined in the collective consciousness of the city, and Romani residents undoubtedly experienced territorial stigma and its material consequences in a particular intersectional way. However, I did not have ethnographic access to that segment of the neighbourhood.⁶ It is crucial to underline that the stereotypes of problem people I want to analyse here do not just stand for all residents, but instead they are icons for the place itself. It is partly for this reason that different types of people experience the territorial stigma and its material consequences differently, and why they choose different tactics to deal with them.

While the territorial stigma attaches to a physical place, it is justified and rationalised using these everyday iconic profiles that index bigger threats. The more salient these iconic stereotypes become, the more every individual resident gets viewed as an embodiment of the problem and a justification for their own stigmatisation. As with any stereotype, the everyday lived experience for people in Tarlaşaı involved constantly being calibrated by others to the negative everyday iconic figures. They were being profiled: Any trans* woman was seen as immoral and treated like a sex worker regardless of her working life, Kurdish men were suspected of drug dealing and anti-state political activity and Kurds in general as hostile to the Turkish nation, as backwards and uncivilised. People that looked like poor rural migrants were subject to patronising and discriminatory treatment by public institutions and private corporations. This blatant everyday discrimination, the disdain and the constant subjection to symbolic and physical violence were justified with the notion of ordinary iconic figures, the stereotypes of “problem people”. The everyday discriminatory treatment was therefore not a novel experience for many Tarlaşaı residents the way it was for Halil Usta, whose social identity did not line up with any of the iconic profiles detailed above.

Intersecting stigma / everyday discrimination

While most Tarlaşaı residents encountered territorial stigma in one way or another in their daily lives, and increasingly so during the months immediately preceding evictions, it is obvious that they did not all experience it in the same way. Instead, different encounters with this blemish of place happened at the intersection of ethnicity, gender identity, and class and were heavily influenced by the degree to which residents’ social identities matched negative stereotypes associated with Tarlaşaı (Pinkster et al. 2020).

5 One can understand why members of these communities would refuse to participate in interviews – they are in a profoundly precarious situation and there is no degree of research-protocol assurance one could offer to assuage their very valid concerns.

6 This was partly due to the fact that working closely with some communities directly entailed being excluded by others. This, too, is proof of how strong the stigma of iconic profiles are: people victimised by one profile believe the stereotypes about another.

The intersectionality framework was developed by feminist and critical race theorists to describe analytic approaches that consider the interlocking and mutually reinforcing relationships among multiple systems of oppression (Collins 2000; Browne and Misra 2003; Grollmann 2012; Kapilashrami et al. 2015). This means that any form of discrimination, such as racism, cannot be fully understood without acknowledging how it intersects with, and mutually reinforces, other forms of oppressive bigotry, such as sexism, ableism, or transphobia. Therefore, intersectional perspectives recognise that “individuals exist on multiple dimensions of privilege and disadvantage and, as a result, examinations of their lives and experiences must consider the simultaneous, intersecting nature of these systems” (Grollmann 2012: 201). Specifically, scholars have sought to understand causes of inequality by describing how the intersection between multiple social categories, such as gender, race, or ethnicity, and structural forms of discrimination may negatively impact an individual’s life experience, thereby maintaining inequality within marginalised groups (Crenshaw 1995; Cole 2009; Kulesza et al. 2016). For example, research of racial discrimination against people of colour obscures that women of colour may face additional disparities of gender and social class discrimination (Grollmann 2012: 201).

In the same way, residents’ experiences of territorial stigma and their engagement with it heavily depends on how their identities “intersect with stigmatising narratives of place” (Pinkster et al. 2020: 522). Wacquant (2007: 67) writes that territorial stigma is “superimposed on the already existing stigma traditionally associated with poverty and ethnic origin or postcolonial immigrant status, to which it is closely linked but not reducible”. However, whereas recent theoretical work emphasises the importance of adapting an intersectionality framework in diverse fields of stigma research, such as in public health or psychology, territorial stigma is most often analysed as a generalised experience for all residents of a tainted neighbourhood. Pinkster et al. (2020: 524) affirm that very few studies acknowledge and investigate the multi-dimensionality of place stigma, and that “there has been little attention for the way in which lived experiences of territorial stigmatisation may diverge due to different degrees in which people “fit” negative stereotypes associated with place.” As they have pointed out in their work on the “stickiness” of territorial stigma in the Amsterdam suburb Bijlmer, “substantial inequalities are observed in who carries the burden of renegotiating the blemish of place”, depending on who “fits” certain negative stereotypes associated with a certain place, and to what degree (Pinkster et al. 2020: 522). Bijlmer is often associated with racist stereotypes regarding crime and poverty in the mainstream narrative and described as a “black neighbourhood” [*zwarte buurt*] in the Dutch mainstream media. Pinkster et al. found that residents of colour had to “work harder” to renegotiate the neighbourhood’s stigma than their white, middle class neighbours. The symbolic denigration is felt more keenly by those residents whose social identities and placement in the neighbourhood align more closely with negative racial, cultural and material stereotypes of the “ordinary iconic figures” (De Koning and Vollebergh 2019: 396) described above.

Just as Pinkster et al. (2020: 533) had found in Bijlmer, Tarlabası residents whose ethnic, cultural, class, or gender identities did not match the negative stereotypes associated with the neighbourhood felt (much) less affected by the stigmatisation. Some of those who were able to largely disregard the spatial taint even felt that the images and demo-

graphic groups used to stigmatise Tarlabası were an asset. Advertisements for student housing and holiday rentals that targeted a middle class, often Western audience, sold the neighbourhood as “colourful” and “authentic”.

Vanessa and Berk were a middle class Italian-Turkish couple who had purchased and renovated a historical Tarlabası building that was later included in the urban renewal project. They described their choice to live in the neighbourhood in positive terms that meant to underline their tolerant, cosmopolitan outlook and global lifestyle.

We use this home to welcome family and friends from all over the world. This house was our dream. It's in the heart of the city, right in the centre. It's close to everything, the best possible location in Istanbul. We love this neighbourhood, because all these different cultures live here, together. There are Roma weddings, it's lively, there are children in the street all the time. It's beautifully diverse. Everyone is together here, it's a truly global community.

This was a common view amongst Western and middle class residents. While Vanessa and Berk did not adhere to the negative stereotypes about Tarlabası, they nevertheless re-scripted place identity by describing the neighbourhood as “lively” and “diverse” rather than in the racially and socially more loaded terms found in stigmatising narratives (Cairns 2018; Nayak 2019, Pinkster et al. 2020). This corresponds with Pinkster et al.'s (2020: 533, emphasis in original) findings in Bijlmer, where white respondents, even though the spatial blemish did not directly affect their sense of self, discursively attempted “to neutralize the stigma” because “they do feel the need to justify why *they* live in a place like *this*.”

For me, too, it was easy to navigate the existing stigma. At the very worst, I imagine I was silently judged to be a stingy foreigner who deliberately chose not to live in a “more respectable” Istanbul neighbourhood or who was thought to be hopelessly naive for thinking that Tarlabası was “pleasantly diverse”. If I got any reactions beyond the usual shocked gasp after revealing my address, they never went beyond well-meaning advice about apartment prices and living standards in other neighbourhoods deemed more suitable for me. My Tarlabası address never once led to any form of violence or discrimination. However, for Tarlabası residents whose social identities closely lined up with the negative tropes that featured as ordinary iconic figures in stigmatising narratives, like trans* sex workers and Kurds, the everyday experience of the spatial taint was more salient, and often tied up in symbolic and physical violence.

Being a trans* woman in Tarlabası

Trans* women Tarlabası residents, the majority of whom were (de jure illegal) sex workers, suffered multiple disadvantage due to the stigma attached to their gender identity, their occupation and their address.⁷ Intersecting trans* stigma and the stigma attached

7 As a result of pervasive discrimination and the exclusion from almost all social spheres, the vast majority of trans* persons in Turkey is forced to make a living through sex work. According to a 2011 IKGV report, 4,000 out of 5,000 identified trans* persons living in Istanbul are engaged in sex work (İnsan Kaynağını Geliştirme Vakfı 2011).

to the visible, transgressive sex work economy that Tarlabası was associated with contributed to the neighbourhood's spatial blemish in the dominant narrative.

Müge in the teahouse



Photo by Jonathan Lewis

Gender-motivated violence and hate crimes against trans* persons are widespread in Turkey, and victims do not only suffer the violence, but also the government's unwillingness to prosecute perpetrators – in many cases police officers – and protect their rights. According to Trans Murder Monitoring (TMM), a project run in Turkey by Transgender Europe (TGEU) and *Kırmızı Şemsiye*, 62 trans* persons were murdered between January 2008 and September 2022 alone, by far the highest number of registered hate crime murders against trans* persons in Europe (Tvl Research Project, 2022). The trans* women I spoke to in Tarlabası had all, without exception, lived through horrific violence, including sexual assault and police torture. Once, while we were standing outside the informal brothel on Bird Street, a Turkish-speaking researcher working for an international human rights organisation approached the group: She explained that she was researching rights violations of LGBTQ individuals in Turkey ahead of the 2011 parliamentary elections and wanted to engage in an informal chat about the women's experiences. Müge and Burcu, a trans* sex worker in her late forties who worked out of the Bird Street brothel most of the time, explained that the situation was bad, and that they were angry being denied workers' and citizens' rights. Gülay, a trans* sex worker who by the time we met had worked in the sector for 30 years, did not mince her words.

They look at us as if we were animals. If they could, they would like to put us all in a cage and exhibit us in Gülhane Park, that's what they would actually like to do to us. They don't see us as human beings. [...] Our friends are being horrifically murdered. In some places they are being killed without consequence. When we go to the police station, we

cannot explain ourselves. When we go to the health clinic, we cannot explain ourselves. Because we are transvestites⁸, they refuse to register us. Go to any health clinic and give them your ID, and the doctor will sneer.

Most trans* women in Tarlabası had an ambivalent relationship with the neighbourhood and other residents. They variously faced discrimination by neighbours, landlords and local shopkeepers at one point or another. While she often said that she generally felt at home in Tarlabası, Müge was also angry at the hypocrisy of the men she socialised with in the teahouse in her street and other shopkeepers whose businesses she frequented:

When we sit together in the teahouse, they laugh with me, but on the street, they turn their heads and pretend they don't know me. I run into them on Istiklal Street and they turn up their noses. You know why? Because [trans* women] are always seen as prostitutes. I think that's hypocrisy. They take my money, they joke with me when I come to their shop, but they turn their heads when we meet on the street. Why? Do they think they'll be treated as a whore only because they walk next to me? What nonsense. [...] But if they'll tell them one day to kill us, they'll be in the very front, I am telling you. They'll be the first to comply, just so that their own shit doesn't come to light.

Being trans* in Tarlabası meant the immediate assumption of being an (illegal) sex worker, and being identified as a sex worker in Tarlabası equalled being treated as immoral, not worthy of respect, and, as Müge's words show, it could mean being shunned by their neighbours. Some trans* women experienced physical violence at the hands of their neighbours. Cansu, a trans* sex worker from Adana who had arrived in Tarlabası in the late 1990s, said her neighbours' children regularly threw empty bottles and stones at her and her trans* friends, and even "very small children" spat at her in the street. She also described how interactions with the police were more discriminatory as compared to other Istanbul neighbourhoods she frequented:

Living and working in Tarlabası is very difficult. Very difficult. [...] You walk on the street and get called names. Faggot [*ibne*], poof [*top*], stuff like that. 'Son', *lan*. In Şişli and other places they say 'Ma'am', could we please see your ID?' What's with this discrimination? I am the same person in Tarlabası and there. [...] The police treat me very differently here. '*Lan*, come here! ID!' Or: 'Get lost, *lan*! Get out of here, *lan*!' Where am I supposed to go? Am I not a human being? I just walk on the street, and they fine me. A fine! Why? I just walk on the street, and they want my ID, my social security number and give me a fine. I give them my ID and bam, it's a 69 Lira fine. Like I'm a car. They stop me, and it's like I'm committing a number plate offense. Think about that. Look, in Pangalti, in Şişli they call me 'ma'am', the police here say: '*lan*, come here, hand over your ID.' Should such discrimination be allowed? Why do they treat me one way there, and another here?

Trans* women in Tarlabası were subject to constant and aggressive police harassment. Müge said that police violence against trans* women and sex workers had decreased, but that law enforcement officers used ID checks to intimidate them and their customers.

8 All trans* women I met in Tarlabası referred to themselves as "transvestite" [*travesti*].

They don't look at the ID's of thieves, of criminals and pickpockets. But wherever they can find a prostitute, a transvestite or a homosexual person, or a customer of transvestites and homosexuals, they want to see their IDs. Seriously! An officer sees a criminal and turns his back. How is that possible? But it is.

As I will detail further below, police harassment increased significantly with the announcement of the urban renewal project. However, it is evident that trans* residents had a very different everyday experience of the discrimination and the territorial stigma in Tarlaabaşı than someone like Halil Usta did.

Being Kurdish in Tarlaabaşı

The framing of Tarlaabaşı as *Kurdish-hence-dangerous* facilitated aggressive policing and discrimination by law enforcement officers. Militarised checkpoints, the use of police barricades and frequent, often highly mediated police raids associated with organised crime and illegalised political activity made this securitisation of the neighbourhood visible and provided “proof” that Tarlaabaşı was a “bad place”, which in turn both generated and fed into the existing stigmatising narrative.⁹

For Kurdish residents, in particular for Kurdish men who lived or worked in Tarlaabaşı, being cast as involuntary actors in this “security theatre” meant frequent police harassment, violence, and the feeling that it was impossible to hold those responsible to account. Ahmet, a young Kurdish man from Van in his early 20s, described one particularly violent encounter with the police that he tried to record on his mobile phone:

[The police] were beating up some kids, really beating them up. Kurds. Right here on the street. I took out my phone to film them. But they saw me and caught me. So they started to beat me up, too. I was bleeding, and they took my phone away. They threatened me. They asked me: Who do you think you are messing with here? Who are you going to complain to? Our superiors? They laughed at me, beat me up some more. I got out of there by the skin of my teeth [*kendime zor kurtardım*].

His story was by no means an exception, and many Kurds in Tarlaabaşı that I spoke to had experienced similar violence or knew of family members who had. Reports of police abuse in Turkey have been repeatedly published by human rights organisations (Pino and Wiatrowski 2006; Human Rights Watch 2008b).

Like Ahmet, many Kurdish residents voiced the belief that the police exclusively targeted Kurds and ignored, or even cooperated with, organised crime and petty thieves in the neighbourhood. Research has shown that ethnic Kurds distrust the police and are more likely to view Turkish state institutions, such as law enforcement, as oppressive and illegitimate, due to past and present experiences of severe state repression and discrimination (Sahin and Akboga 2019). The hostile demeanour of the police was also deeply injurious to residents' sense of self. Mehmet, the Kurdish owner of a successful catering

9 Sensationalist police raids regularly feature on Turkish news programmes, usually in relation to the PKK and other outlawed leftist organisations as well as in relation to drug rings and organised crime. TV crews are invited to accompany special police units on such operations which increases their dramatic appeal and blurs the line between news reporting and fiction.

business running out of Tarlaşađı, described stop-and-frisk encounters with the police in the neighbourhood as aggravating and humiliating:

People are fed up with being treated like that here. The police treat us badly, they stop and search us, they make us take off our shoes. People see this and it's bad for us. They think that we are all drug dealers.

As a Kurdish man in his 30s, Mehmet was forced to navigate an urban landscape that was being viewed through the racist Turkish nationalist lens that generalises Kurdish men as criminal and a threat. This narrative, and the stigma it fed into, distorted his feeling of self-respect, demanded constant alertness and emotional labour, and impacted on his everyday life.

Experiencing stigma while under threat of eviction

The period between the official announcement of the urban renewal project in 2008 and the start of evictions in 2011 was characterised by a lack of reliable information and intense insecurity for residents. While there is a growing body of literature on the various effects of territorial stigma on residents' health (Kawachi and Berkman 2003; Burns and Snow 2012; Pearce 2012; Keene and Padilla 2014; Graham et al. 2016.), employment (Warr 2005a; Wacquant et al. 2014), or social cohesion (Levitas 2005; Warr 2005b; Macdonald et al. 2005; Pereira and Queirós 2014), little research has been done into how the spatial taint is experienced by residents who live under the immediate threat of eviction and displacement. Bahar Sakızlıođlu (2014b) underlines the importance of looking at residents' experiences who live under the threat of displacement in order to better understand the trajectory of neighbourhood change in areas targeted for demolition. In what follows I would like to investigate the experience of territorial stigma for different Tarlaşađı residents and communities after the official announcement of the urban renewal project in 2008.

During those years project stakeholders revived and weaponised the existing territorial stigma to bolster their claims that Tarlaşađı was in urgent need of renewal and to rally public support for the contentious project, which in turn aggravated the impact of the stigma. However, residents were not passive victims of this deliberately intensified stigmatisation. Instead, they showed sophisticated understanding of how negative images and narratives operated through the media and state discourse, framing their district as bad. Erdal Aybek, founding member of the Tarlaşađı Solidarity Association, said in an interview with a Turkish journalist:

We saw that all the news reports about us were unrealistic, made-up. I will tell you an interesting anecdote. Of the 269 buildings inside the project zone, 6 were in ruins, in a dilapidated state. *Star TV*, *Sabah* and *ATV* showed only these 6 houses for months. They said Tarlaşađı and showed these 6 houses. But in fact, these 6 buildings were the only ruined ones inside the project zone. [...] We all know that. The media only showed those buildings. For the entire time of the project, they showed only these 6 buildings

to all the people of Istanbul and the whole country and said that they were Tarlabası (Doğan, 2017:177).

Many residents also suspected that existing problems such as crime, dilapidated building structures and a run-down infrastructure were wilfully exacerbated by the authorities in order to make the neighbourhood look worse than it was (Işeri 2008; Kuray 2008). As I will show in the following chapter, rumours started to circulate that the Beyoğlu Municipality deliberately withheld services such as garbage disposal in order to put additional pressure on residents to leave. Müge concluded that the conspicuous underpolicing of the neighbourhood at the time, in tandem with an increase in drug dealing, petty crime, and the general increase of insecurity as buildings and streets started to empty out, was intentional:

Nobody cares. The police have left [the neighbourhood] to the drug dealers. They don't want the people to complain, they want them to fuck off and leave. It's as simple as that. If the police wanted to, would they not crack down on [the dealers]? They would! That's all there is to it. Yeah, the municipality. They don't clean up here, there's garbage everywhere, it's dirty. At one of the meetings the municipality told the [residents]: transvestites have taken over the neighbourhood, drug dealers have taken over, all kinds of people have taken over. So why don't they do anything against that? You handle anything that doesn't suit you, so why don't you handle this? They abandon Tarlabası so they can do what they want to do here.

However, the provision of municipal services sometimes drew similar criticism if their execution was interpreted as deliberately disruptive, sloppy, or lacking respect. In the summer of 2010, the Beyoğlu Municipality undertook lengthy road improvement works on Tree Street, the main thoroughfare that connected Dolapdere to Tarlabası Boulevard. Noisy construction vehicles and machines raised clouds of dust, obstructed the movement of residents and heavily impeded on local businesses, such as green grocers and street sellers. The steaming heat, the pollution and the smell of the fresh asphalt forced locals to keep doors and windows shut during the hot summer months. Laundry that had to be dried on shared washing lines had to be washed twice, or three times. This became a bigger problem as the construction works stretched into the month of Ramadan and interfered with preparations for the festivities that mark its end, *Şeker Bayramı* [Sugar Feast]. Halil Usta interpreted the road improvement as yet another sign that Tarlabası residents had a lower standing in the eyes of the municipality than those of other Istanbul neighbourhoods:

People are doing their holiday cleaning. They hang the laundry outside, and it gets all dirty again. [...] I'm telling you, they wouldn't do that in any other neighbourhood. In any other neighbourhood they'd spray water [against the dust from the construction] right away. On the [Asian] side they'd spray water. But here they don't, so people are unhappy about that. It's shameful, very shameful! I find it shameful as well. It's another attempt to make people here fed up. So they'll leave. That's not how it's supposed to be. They should provide public service, like everywhere else, and not use it against us.

It is important to note that the disruption caused by the road works was no different from the noise and dirt that plagued Istanbul neighbourhoods everywhere in a city dotted with construction sites. However, the sensitivity of Tarlabası residents to stigmatisation and its effects was such that the nuisance of road improvement works was interpreted as a deliberate affront against, and strategy to chase out, residents.

As tenants began to leave the neighbourhood, and with the crumbling of the united front of the Tarlabası Association, the pressure on property owners to sell quickly increased. This pressure frequently translated into unpleasant interactions with the representatives and lawyers of *GAP İnşaat* during talks. Many reported that they were generally treated “without respect” [*saygısız*], treated like “animals”, “criminals”, or “terrorists”, and that during their interactions with them they were made to feel “like nobodys” [*bir hiç gibi*]. Tarlabası residents variously described officials, police officers, and *GAP İnşaat* employees as “inconsiderate” [*anlayışsız*], disrespectful [*saygısız*], offensive [*hakaret eden*], and merciless [*merhametsiz*]. Ramazan, who had signed away the title deed to his 6-bedroom apartment on Tree Street, said that the lawyers he met with had threatened him during the “negotiations”:

They didn't even let me look at the contract properly. They just shouted and told me to sign. So many pages, they just told me to sign them all. They said that if I didn't, we would get nothing at all. I felt intimidated. I didn't understand what was written there, I could not really see well, because of a [recent] eye surgery. They treated me like a child. I signed in the end, because I felt that I had no choice.

I heard several similar stories from other property owners, who felt that they were being looked down on and not taken seriously by project stakeholders, and many argued that this was because they lived in a poor, intensely stigmatised neighbourhood. Some, as I will detail in a later chapter, pushed back against this discrimination and their marginalisation. Others did not.

There were significant differences in how residents responded to the stigma and the discrimination during the period between 2008 and evictions, and these reactions were informed by their earlier experience of territorial stigmatisation and the intersection of that experience as members of marginalised communities.

Experiencing pending eviction as a trans* woman

The announcement of the Tarlabası renewal project coincided with a legislative change that aimed at the bureaucratic and legal control of marginalised populations in urban centres. Introduced in March 2005, the new misdemeanour law, dubbed the “Law on Public Disgrace”, in combination with existing traffic laws and the Law on the Powers and Duties of the Police, became the principal method for harassing trans* persons in public space under the AKP government.¹⁰ It gave police the power to arrest people based

10 The law, aiming “to protect public order, general morality, general health, the environment, and the economic order”, criminalises a number of misdemeanours such as begging, public drunkenness, gambling, making noise, breaching the peace, “occupying” the street, carrying an unlicensed gun and smoking in places where it is prohibited, and punishes them with various fines. While

on their own prejudice and transphobia – for example, if a person apprehended in the street was dressed in clothes deemed “too revealing”, a judgement entirely at the discretion of the police officer. The law severely limited trans* persons’ freedom of movement and impacted on even their most mundane everyday activities, such as walking in the street, shopping, or visiting a café, all deemed potentially “immoral” by the state solely based on their trans* identity (Amnesty International 2011b). The fines handed out under this new legislation, a considerable emotional and financial burden on trans* women who were disproportionately targeted, were applied differently in different districts of the city, with the result of trapping trans* persons in certain areas, while shutting them out of others. Initially, upmarket areas of Istanbul were policed much more vigorously, and fines were imposed more frequently than in certain areas of Beyoğlu, turning the discriminatory laws into tools of mapping out places in the city that became de facto “off limits” for trans* persons. For a while, Tarlabaşı was a space of relative safety and one of the last areas in the city where trans* persons were able to rent a house and to work. In the run-up to evictions, when the municipality increased efforts to pressure residents to leave and to frame Tarlabaşı as a space that needed “cleansing”, policing of trans* women in Tarlabaşı became much more aggressive. Müge was fined several times under the new misdemeanour laws while walking on Tarlabaşı Boulevard and in other parts of central Beyoğlu. Once she was fined 69 Turkish Lira for “breaching the peace” because she ate lunch on her own doorstep in Bird Street.

This is a kind of deterrence. They don't want [trans* persons] to walk on the main streets. They should not be visible outside, they should stay in the parks and side streets. [...] They fine you, so that you will constantly have to pay, pay, pay, pay. Where will the money go that you make? To these fines. Eventually, you will be fed up. That is what they want. [...] Now I cannot even eat food in front of my own house! The municipality wants us to leave Tarlabaşı now, too, they want to show that there is no place for us when they build their fancy houses and their hotels.

Müge had no doubts that this blatant violation of her private space was yet another municipal strategy tied to the planned evictions and made possible because of her identity as a trans* woman sex worker. She also knew that project stakeholders wanted to remove her and all other trans* persons from the neighbourhood.

Trans* property owners, even those who immediately agreed to sell their home to the project developers, experienced trans* stigma when trying to obtain a fair sales agreement. Cansu had bought her 30m² flat on Tree Street when she first arrived in Istanbul. In 2010, almost immediately after sales negotiations began, she sold her apartment to the municipality for a meagre amount several times below market value at the time, convinced that nobody else would even consider buying property from a trans* woman.

[The municipality] estimated the value, they said 50,000 TL, they gave me 48,500 TL in the end. [...] That was fine with me, so I sold it. You know, nobody else would buy this [apartment] because transvestites live here. A family could not come and live here.

some of these behaviours are specific, others are extremely vague, thus giving security forces carte blanche for prejudicial enforcement (Republic of Turkey Law 5326).

[...] Who else would come, and who else would pay more for this flat? Nobody would. Even if I tried to sell it to somebody else, nobody would buy it from me. Because I am a transvestite. Nobody would buy it, that is just the reality in Turkey. ‘Ewww, from them?’ [She clicks her tongue to indicate no.] They just would not buy it. So I was glad, who else would I have sold it to?”

Cansu thought of the disadvantageous sale as her only chance not to walk away empty-handed – a threat project stakeholders routinely levelled against property owners who were hesitant to sell their homes – and she expressed gratitude towards the municipality even though they had, to be frank, screwed her over. Just like the municipal authorities, who had used this to their immediate advantage, she was aware that the stigmatisation she experienced in Tarlaşaı transcended her trans* identity and affected the space she owned and inhabited.

How Cansu responded to the intensifying pressure following the announcement of the renewal project was directly informed by her negative experience of the double stigmatisation of being a trans* woman sex worker who lived and worked in a deeply stigmatised neighbourhood. Based on her previous experience of everyday discrimination, she knew that she did not have a realistic chance of fighting the looming eviction, in court or otherwise. Furthermore, having repeatedly suffered abuse and violence at the hands of the police in Tarlaşaı over the years, Cansu had no interest in provoking an expulsion from her home accompanied by law enforcement. She was aware of the depth of the multiple stigmas constructed around her social identity, and of the consequences they had for her. Unlike other residents in the neighbourhood, she decided not to go to court. What is more, Cansu was able to interpret the events in the run-up to evictions in Tarlaşaı through the prism of the collective experience of what had happened in nearby Ülker Street in 1996, when the police had violently, and unlawfully, evicted trans* women who refused to leave (Selek 2001). Such shared or individual understandings of what had happened before influenced what residents’ choices they thought they had.

Experiencing pending eviction while Kurdish

For Kurdish residents, most of whom had come to Istanbul as a result of forced displacement from their towns and villages in the southeast, the renewed threat of state violence, eviction, and losing a home played into an activation of trauma. Alev was in her late 20s by the time the municipality prepared Tarlaşaı for demolition, but she had been only seven years old when her village in Mardin province was burned down by the Turkish military. This destruction had been preceded by experiences of intense discrimination. Her sister had been detained, and Alev remembered how the young woman was taken away blindfolded. Her brother had been tortured by members of the Turkish security forces during the days of his detention. And once, her father told me, all male villagers, from teenagers to old men, were rounded up by the military and severely beaten in front of everyone. Finally, following the destruction of their village, the family first moved to the provincial capital, and from there to Istanbul. Alev described the looming eviction in continuity of these various violent displacements:

This is the third house that the state will take away from us. That's how it is! The law...in Turkey, the law doesn't work. It never worked, especially not when it comes to Kurds. The third house the state will take [from us]. Our village was burned, they chased us out of [Mardin], now they take away our house in Istanbul. It's hard. Really, it's so hard. Just when you thought you had made yourself a nice home, it's being destroyed again.

In her study on the effect of forced migration on Kurdish women, Ayşe Betül Çelik (2005) describes how the collective experience of displacement and general patterns of social exclusion in the city reinforce Kurdish identity. Her observation that ethnic consciousness is enhanced due to the shared sense of discrimination was true for Kurdish migrants living in Tarlaabaşı. Alev conflated territorial and Kurdishness stigma when she said: "The only reason that they want to demolish Tarlaabaşı is that it is a Kurdish neighbourhood. They want to get rid of us." In her eyes, the urban renewal project was as much about monetary profit as it was about a revanchist Turkish state trying to cleanse the inner city of unwanted Kurdish migrants.

Maher, a tenant who had spent considerable amounts of time in Istanbul as a seasonal worker since the 1970s, was forced to permanently relocate to Istanbul in 1996. As a former village guard, he feared retaliation from the PKK.¹¹ However, it was the Turkish military that destroyed his village as part of their scorched earth policy, forcibly displacing all residents. Maher moved his wife and children to Tarlaabaşı, where he was able to tap into an existing and vital support network of Kurdish migrants. He, too, read his experience of the coming evictions in Tarlaabaşı through the prism of violent discrimination against Kurds in Turkey:

Tarlaabaşı was a place where many Kurds lived. They destroyed that, too. They tried to cast us aside. [...] We were not able to live in our village. They took away all our rights and we migrated here, and here they don't leave us alone either. They made us travel 2,000 kilometres, we worked hard to open a business here, our children grew up here, they did their military service, I helped them open a shop so they could have a profession, but [the state] doesn't allow for that either. We started from scratch. We're still in debt. They don't let us have a life here. [...] They trampled on our rights. The state crushes its own citizens! Is that democracy? Is that justice? They burned our garden to

11 Village guards, officially known as *Türkiye Güvenlik Köy Korucuları* ("Security Village Guards of Turkey") are a semi-official and locally recruited paramilitary group linked to the Turkish government. Originally set up and funded by the Turkish state in the mid-1980s, the village guard system was supposed to protect southeastern towns and villages from the attacks and reprisals of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), in support, but not as part of the regular military. It is important to underline that people were recruited into the role of village guard for different and highly complex reasons. Recent research has shown that the majority of village guards became paramilitaries either because they were pressured by the state, because they felt that there were no other options for salaried employment, or because their tribe as a whole took up arms against the PKK. This means that village guards generally have a more fraught relationship with the Turkish state, the Kurdish mainstream political movement writ large, and the larger Kurdish social community. It will certainly complicate guards' relationship with their fellow villagers if it is not an entire village that is being recruited (KHRP 2011; Acar 2019).

the ground, our fields. If none of this had happened, we wouldn't need to deal with a big corporation now.

Even for Maher who, as a former village guard, had a complicated relationship with Kurdishness, the PKK, and the Turkish state, what happened in Tarlaşaşı resonated with the collective Kurdish experience of forced displacement from villages in the southeast carried out by the Turkish military.¹² His view showed that this experience was separate from alignment with the PKK or any other political affiliation, as well as from an individual's experience, and that these alignments were not absolute categories according to the positions they occupy.¹³ Maher's narrative of past displacement is a shared boundary marker (Barth 1969) for conflict-induced Kurdish migrants in Tarlaşaşı, regardless of the actual cause for their dislocation, and heavily influenced how they experienced stigma in their neighbourhood, both before, and in the run-up to evictions.

Kurdishness and anti-Kurdish discrimination also played an important role in how the municipality and the developer *GAP İnşaat* approached property "negotiations" and the process running up to evictions. Commonly held in an office building on Tarlaşaşı Boulevard and attended by municipal officials, company representatives, and their lawyers, these talks between property owners and project stakeholders purposely exploited residents' lack of economic, social, and cultural capital. But what was more, negotiators on the municipality's side also abused the lack of language proficiency. In at least two cases, Kurdish women who did not understand or speak enough Turkish to give their informed consent on proposed sales contracts were not provided translators or allowed to bring family members who did understand Turkish. The latter was justified with the argument that only the names of the women, and not those of their children or other family members, were written on the title deeds, and therefore only these women were admissible interlocutors for project stakeholders.¹⁴ The failure to provide a translator for monolingual Kurdish speakers was in line with decades of Turkish state policy regarding the refusal to recognise Kurdish as a language in formal domains, such as state offices or a courtroom. This was based on a variety of statutes in Turkish law that

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- 12 Since guards were recruited for very complex and different reasons, an individuals' calibrations to Turkish nationalists or the PKK or other involved actors is complicated. Village guards might attempt to display loyalty to opposing factions. Furthermore, hundreds have been accused, and in many cases convicted, of aiding and abetting the PKK despite their role as village guards (see Letsch 2013; Acar 2019).
- 13 In fact, the view that one must be affiliated with the PKK if one is critical of state military action in the southeast has been used by the Turkish state since the beginning of the Kurdish-Turkish conflict. This false binary has been used as a justification for state violence, but it was also useful for the PKK who has successfully argued that the Turkish state leaves very little room outside the dichotomy of either having to assimilate or be branded a terrorist (see Marcus 2007).
- 14 It was not uncommon for women, often the wives of the male heads of families, to be the official owners and sole title deed holders. One explanation I was once half-jokingly given by several women was that men were "bad with money", as they were "prone to gambling" and therefore more likely to lose family property to debt collectors. Another reason I heard was that because men often owned businesses, families wanted to make sure that business debts would not endanger private family property.

granted state officials the discretionary power to deny access to a translator, as there can be no translation of “gibberish” or of an “incomprehensible dialect”.¹⁵

The deliberate shaming, intimidation and threats of force were keenly felt by all Tarlabası property owners, but for Kurdish residents, these talks tapped into a shared memory of a traumatic past. Alev argued that this strategy of fear worked well because it resonated with the collective Kurdish experience of violent displacement by the Turkish state:

[The municipality] behaves unjustly towards us, and why do they do that? Because 90 percent of people here have migrated from villages, especially from the southeast. Because this is a poor place, because people have large families. [...] Because people here are uneducated, they have no idea about the law...so what do [the authorities] do? They use this to play with people's feelings, with their gullibility. Those that come from the southeast are very good and innocent people [*temiz insanlar*], they don't know anything. And because they are so innocent, they think everyone is like them. [The project stakeholders] say: 'we will cut the electricity, we will make trouble and send the police if you don't make an agreement, you will either agree or we will cut the electricity, we will throw you out with the police...' People don't know what to do about this, they don't know their rights and how to get legal help, so what do they do out of fear? They look to make an agreement. Because they have had all that back home! Yes, 90 percent of villages have been burned down, people were tortured, some lost their children, so they came here. So what do they do now? [...] [The municipality] tries to cheat people by exploiting their fears.

Many Kurdish residents in Tarlabası had experienced state violence, including ethnic discrimination, civil rights violations and human rights abuses, physical assault and torture, forced relocation, and expropriation of land and resources. A majority of the Kurdish community in Tarlabası had fled the violent conflict between the Turkish state and the PKK, and many lost their homes due to the destruction of their villages. These shared memories only influenced how Kurdish residents experienced what was happening in Tarlabası, but it also informed how they interpreted the municipality's threats and the rumours of planned, heavy-handed police deployment during evictions. Anthropologist Stuart Kirsch (2002a: 70), in his analysis of the relationship between rumour and violence in West Papua, shows “how particular rumours emerge in reaction to political violence and the experience of terror that such rumours evoke.” Through “rumour people both experience the threat of political violence and express their concerns about it. Yet these rumours may also be exploited by the state, exacerbating local fears” (ibid.: 57). Rumours of municipal threats to forcibly evict residents, to cut the electricity and curtail access to municipal services with the help of the police merged with people's previous experiences of state violence, and, as Alev noted, they spread fear and drove some residents to seek agreements with the municipality rather than resist the injustice of forced displacement, partly because they lacked the cultural and social capital to seek legal recourse.

15 Until 2013, and unlike non-citizens who were not fluent in Turkish, Kurdish citizens were denied the explicit legal guarantees of access to a court-appointed translator and the protection of their right to testify in their mother tongue (Haig 2004; Bayir 2013; Clark 2016).

These rumours, therefore, not only gave voice to local experiences, but perpetuated unequal power relations between the state and Kurdish locals (see *ibid.*: 70). However, some of those who had first-hand experience of excessive state violence decided that the renewed threat of forced displacement *did* necessitate resistance, because they knew that unquestioned surrender would result in humiliation and defeat. In 2010, before evictions had started, Maher predicted riots in the case that the police would try to forcibly remove (Kurdish) residents:

If they come to throw people out onto the street, there will be riots. [This place] will burn. Everyone will be on the street, you'll see. They'll come from Taksim, too. [...] This is Tarlabası. We fight back. This place will be a warzone. They can't just come here and throw people out. I have been displaced once by this state, I will not let them do it again. I'll fight back.

Maher was sure that Kurdish solidarity would motivate even non-residents to protest the planned evictions, since they, too, would see them as a state-sanctioned injustice. Ann Stoler (1992: 154), in her description of the significance and function of rumours, writes “[a rumour] is a key form of cultural knowledge that [...] shaped what people thought they knew, blurring the boundaries between events ‘witnessed’ and those envisioned”. Maher’s prediction of not only opposition, but violent resistance was likewise shaped by his previous experiences. In a way, his forecast was both a way to deal with past trauma, and the threat of yet another violent eviction from his home. He shared this memory of suffering with the vast majority of his Kurdish neighbours, and the resulting, shared knowledge provided a form of “resistance capital” that other social groups did not have access to. I was often told by Kurdish residents that they did not want to allow the Turkish state to commit the same injustice again, that they had been chased from their homes before, and that this time, they would stay put and fight back.

Evictions as an ethnicised, gendered experience of stigmatisation

Evictions were experienced differently by different residents, and one removal did not entirely resemble another, both materially and procedurally. Some people received only written notification, whereas others got additional “warnings” by municipal agents or through an informal network of communication and influence. Even the final intervention – the appearance of the police and municipal officials at a resident’s door – differed from one person to the next, depending on their social identity.

Furthermore, the gendered aspect of the material consequences of stigma for Tarlabası residents became evident once the evictions began. Individual women’s experiences varied depending on their social status and identity, but they did share the experience of eviction as a particular gendered form of (state) violence, and one that was extremely humiliating. Evictions were the ultimate violation of (female) domestic space. Intrusive as they were, evictions weaponized the threat of the complete and irreparable obliteration of a woman’s capacity to claim the particularly feminine (Muslim) virtue of discretion for herself, the maintenance of socially and morally appropriate boundaries

of privacy, and the social protection of the femininity and respectability it entails (Pfeil 2020).

Esma

The municipal authorities made selective use of excessive force during evictions. In a few cases, they deployed militarised police units, commonly associated with anti-terrorism and drug raids. In June 2011, barely two weeks after the ruling AKP had won a landslide victory in Turkey's general election, the municipality dispatched geared-up riot police armed with teargas and armoured vehicles to Tarlaşaşı in order to force a tenant, a Kurdish widow and mother of an eight-year-old boy, to leave her apartment. This first eviction, a seemingly arbitrary example of the disproportionate use of state force, became a cautionary tale that travelled through the neighbourhood like wildfire. It was one story that almost everybody seemed to have at least heard of. I had not witnessed the expulsion but heard about it in the Halil Usta's barber shop that was just across the street from Esma's building on Tree Street. Burhan, a burly real estate agent and Tarlaşaşı property owner who was a regular customer in the shop, first told me about it. He knew Esma personally and, since he was aware of my research interest, insisted I talk to her about what had happened. Both he and Halil Usta were outraged that a young widow had been treated this way.

Esma immediately agreed. A Kurdish woman in her 30s who had moved to Tarlaşaşı from the province of Ağrı, and was the second, or co-wife [*kuma*]¹⁶, of a man who had died in a car accident several years prior. He had been the owner and title deed holder of their shared flat in Tarlaşaşı. However, he had never divorced his legally married wife, which meant that she, and not Esma, inherited the apartment after his death. The first wife sold it to the developers in 2010, immediately after property sales negotiations for the renewal project had started. The sale, done without her prior knowledge or consent, had left Esma in a desperate situation. Working as a cleaner in private apartments in nearby Cihangir, she was the sole provider for her elderly mother and her son and was only able to get by because she did not have to pay any rent. Following the sale of her home, the municipality offered Esma a vague ultimatum that allowed her to stay in the apartment rent-free "until the start of the project", without specifying a date. Of course, she knew that she would eventually have to leave, but it was impossible for her to know when exactly that would be. Like most Tarlaşaşı residents, she could only rely on the interpretative labour of trying to glean nuggets of information from the scarce, contradic-

16 *A kuma* is married only via a religious, and not a civil ceremony. Second wives therefore lack official recognition and legal protection. While polygamy was outlawed in Turkey in 1926 with the adoption of the Civil Code, it is still practiced, especially in rural areas. While not legally recognised, co-marriage is nevertheless a socially accepted bond between a man and a woman in some conservative communities, and men who take more than one wife are expected to provide for them. A *kuma* is not considered to be a mistress and is respected as a legitimate spouse in their community. While polygamy is often associated with the Kurdish population, this assumption is not free of prejudice: the practice exists in other Muslim communities in Turkey, for example in towns that border Syria where the numbers of co-marriages have increased since the outbreak of the war in Syria.

tory announcements made by project stakeholders, and the many rumours going around the neighbourhood. She did, just like other residents who had been extended similar arrangements, receive a couple of formal letters reminding her of her pending eviction, but Esma had hoped to push back the date until she had found another home in Beyoğlu where her son went to a good school and where she had established a support network that provided her with employment opportunities, material help, and other forms of assistance.¹⁷ However, finding an affordable apartment in the area proved to be extremely difficult. Most rentals in the immediate surroundings were out of reach on her budget. With the approach of summer, Esma had doubled down on her search for another place. At the same time, she still had to go to work, had to care for her chronically ill mother and raise her son. Wanting to be prepared she had stocked up on cardboard boxes and arranged for a porter [*hamal*], so she could move immediately after having found a new place. Nonetheless she had counted on the municipality to grant her at least some leeway since she was a desperate [*çaresiz*] single woman, a young widow, a caregiver to a child and her elderly mother.

One June morning, while at the emergency room with her mother, Esma received a phone call from a municipal official who demanded that she come home immediately. “When I arrived at my house, I was shocked by what I saw”, she said later. “Uniformed riot police, armoured vehicles, lorries, journalists and a growing crowd of people, many of them local residents, were gathered in front of her building. “I could not believe that they had come with all these people, just for me.”

To her horror she found that the police had already broken down her front door, and that ten men, including several officers and a municipality-hired porter were going through her possessions, throwing them onto the floor or out of the window onto the street. They violently dismantled her furniture, including newly bought bedroom furnishings Esma was still paying instalments for at the time. Some of it was damaged in the process. They shattered diverse items of kitchen wares and crockery, and were rummaging through Esma’s clothes and undergarments, throwing them out onto the street where a lorry was waiting. One of the policemen in her apartment had, she recalled, screamed at her that she was “committing a crime” for “squatting an apartment”, that she was occupying a place that “she did not own” and had been “told to leave” by the authorities. “I was afraid to say anything because I thought that if I did, he might have slapped me.” She later recalled that day during a conversation with some of her former female neighbours and me:

They came to evict me from my house. They broke down the door. They came in like that while we were gone, as if I had an army of one hundred people behind me. Outside [our building] all hell had broken loose. Journalists had come, eviction officials had come, there was riot police. They brought armoured cars, they brought...what...Molotov cocktails or what do you call them? [*laughs*] Teargas, they came with teargas. I asked them: What is going on? I live all by myself, did you come to wage a war? I told them that I am

17 Literature on the migration of Kurdish women to Turkish metropolises underlines the importance of the availability of such networks that not only provided access to employment opportunities, but also alleviated the trauma of isolation and coping in a new, and not seldom hostile, urban environment (see Secor 2004; Çelik 2005).

a woman [*bayan*] who lives by herself. [...] They also took [the clothes] and threw them out of the window. They threw everything on the street. [...] Who does that?

Esma said that she raced up and down the stairs, horrified and overwhelmed by what was happening, trying to retrieve whatever she could, and to prevent the police from throwing more of her private things onto the street.

Nobody talked to me, nobody. I also didn't really pay attention to anyone. I just cried. They were breaking all these things in front of me! I tried to gather what I could. That's why I also couldn't pay attention to anyone, I really wasn't myself. I said yes, I said no, I cried, I was angry, I really did not know what to do. I was stunned about what was happening to me so suddenly.

Following the eviction her apartment door was welded shut, even though some of her things were still inside. Her possessions were taken to a municipal storage facility that charged a rental fee for every week that she did not retrieve them. Esma did not have the means to pay for the release of her things, and she did not have the money to pay someone to pick them up. By the time she told me about the eviction two weeks had passed, but she had not been to the storage yet. In fact, she was not even sure where it was, and said that in any case she did not have an apartment that she could have moved her belongings to.

The unannounced eviction from her house during an emergency hospital visit with her mother had been horrific for her, but Esma underlined several times that the “worst part” had been the public humiliation and the blatant transgression of social decency codes. She still could not believe how nonchalantly these men had violated of her private female space. The arrival of armed riot police and armoured vehicles, typically associated with serious crime and illegalised political activism, had made her feel like “a criminal” and “a terrorist”.

Esma's marriage to her Istanbul husband had been arranged by her family in Ağrı. Though not sanctioned by the state, it had been officiated by an imam. While such religious second marriages are illegal in Turkey, *kuma* have a socially accepted status and moral legitimacy in their communities and the eyes of society.¹⁸ Esma had shared the apartment with her husband for more than ten years and they had a son together that carried the late husband's last name. The municipality argued that Esma did not have any claim to the apartment since the title deed had been sold by the legally married first wife of her husband, which is – in a purely legal sense – correct. I argue, and will underpin this in a later chapter, that the municipality nevertheless violated a working social contract in pretending that Esma had no claim to legitimacy whatsoever. More importantly, they wilfully ignored the fact that she had filed a court case for inheritance recovery that had not been resolved at the time, since it was a long process during which her

18 I do not wish to insinuate that the practice is not highly problematic. Women's rights groups in Turkey have long tried to put an end to religious marriages as it leaves women without any legal recourse and therefore makes them especially vulnerable to abuse. However, it is important to underline that in the conservative rural communities where *kumalık* is practiced, the religious marriage ceremony conducted by an imam carries social and moral significance, while the state-sanctioned, civil one is not necessarily accepted in the same way (see Magnarella 1973:103).

husband had to be exhumed twice to conduct DNA tests. The court needed to determine if Esmâ's eight-year-old son was his child like she claimed, in which case he – and his mother – would have been able to defend a partial claim to the inheritance, and therefore the apartment. Both the sale of the apartment and the eviction were problematic, to say the least, because they happened before the conclusion of the paternity trial, but Esmâ did not possess the necessary economic and, in the eyes of project stakeholders, social capital to object and claim her rights.

Cemile

Only two weeks after Esmâ's eviction, during the fasting month of Ramadan, a small group of plain clothes police officers, accompanied by a young female *GAP İnşaat* lawyer, arrived unannounced at Cemile's door. The police told the bewildered woman that she and her husband, a retired textile worker who was not home at the time, were to vacate their apartment immediately. On that scorching hot day in early July, Cemile was at home looking after her infant grandson who was dozing in a makeshift cradle in the living room. Her daughter's mother-in-law, who lived in another Istanbul neighbourhood, was gravely ill and required constant care, so Cemile babysat for her.

The small group of officials had arrived in two armoured police vehicles that were parked in front of the building and started to draw curious onlookers. With Esmâ's humiliating eviction still fresh in residents' minds, some were wondering if this was a police raid or indeed another expulsion.

One of the officers at Cemile's door gruffly demanded that she hand over the keys right away, arguing that she was staying in the apartment illegally. He called her a criminal. Since Cemile's husband Ramazan had signed the title deed to their apartment over to the project stakeholders in May 2010, it was true that it did not officially belong to the elderly couple anymore. This had been the topic of worsening fights between Ramazan and Cemile, who was unable to forgive her husband for having agreed to the terrible deal he had been offered by *GAP İnşaat* lawyers. Ramazan the lawyers for having pressured him into it – his pride did not allow for him to accept at least part of the responsibility – but neither he nor Cemile wanted to try and challenge the problematic sales contract in court, fearing that their debts would only increase if they lost.

However, between the moment of the involuntary sale and that hot summer day, Cemile had repeatedly tried to appeal to Fatih Bey, the deputy mayor charged with resident relations, hoping for some, any really, kind of concession. To no avail. Their title deed had only carried her husband's name and he had signed the sales contract, she was told, so there was nothing they could do. At some point the deputy mayor stopped taking her calls altogether. Cemile knew that the chance to try and declare the sale null and void was extremely small. The helplessness she felt she was forced into literally made her sick, and by the summer of 2011, Cemile suffered from high blood pressure, anxiety and severe insomnia. Her marriage began to deteriorate, and Cemile told me that she had seriously considered a divorce.

I always fight with this [my husband]. I tell him: 'How can you sign something without reading it first? How can you do that, without reading it? Just think about that, he

signed [a contract] that stated that we'd leave the house 15 days after the sale! How can something like this be in a contract? 15 days! Apparently, we sold them the house on the 29th of May, and apparently, he promised to leave in June. How is that even possible? In 15 days! [...] At the municipality they ask me: don't you know your husband's [*beyinin*] signature? He turns the computer around to me and says: 'Look! That's your husband's signature.' I was shocked. [...] I swear, it'll be a miracle if I survive this. I am getting scared that I am losing my mind.

Like Esma, Cemile and Ramazan had received a string of formal letters from the municipality following the sale, including an eviction notice. However, on that fateful day in July, and despite the disproportionately aggressive eviction of her neighbour Esma only two weeks prior, Cemile was aghast at the sudden appearance and disrespectful behaviour of the police.

I saw them arriving from the balcony, I said [to my grandson]: look, the military has come, let's look and see, and then they went into our building! [The officer] said they would take our things. I asked him how he would be able to pack our things and he said he was authorised to do that. I swear, that's what he said. They had never told us that we'd have to leave on a certain day, nobody had told us anything. I opened the door, and I was shocked. He told me to give him the keys. He said I was a squatter. I asked if he could not let us be. He said: absolutely not, take the child and get out. I cried, my blood pressure shot up, I have high blood pressure anyways, I cried a lot.

She explained that she was currently fasting and taking care of her grandchild, so that her daughter was able to look after the sick mother-in-law. The police officer in charge, the one who had demanded her keys, was unimpressed by Cemile's plea to grant her and her family a little more time since they had not even found an alternative apartment yet. He told her in no uncertain terms that she had to leave immediately. The discussion continued, and after the conversation went on like this for a while, the officer agreed to come back ten days later, that time with "more and better equipped police". Cemile believed that it was only because the young female lawyer took pity on her that the group left without evicting them. She was both relieved and aghast. Why would they need to come back with even more police? The image of her poor neighbour trying to retrieve her possessions from the street was still fresh in her mind. Why, she thought, had the officer felt the need to threaten her with even more humiliation?

This announcement set off days of anxious waiting and a race against the clock to find an affordable rental flat elsewhere, since the ultimatum she had been given was by no means binding. What if they came back earlier? In addition to the terrible stress that the unannounced police visit, and the pending eviction were causing, her daughter's ill mother-in-law passed away the next day. Cemile went to stay with her daughter to take care of the funeral and help with household chores. This further delayed the already very strenuous search for a new apartment. (In the end it took another three weeks for the police to come and seal the old apartment, and by then Cemile had found a small apartment nearby.)

But like Esma, Cemile found the humiliation of having been treated like a criminal worse than the actual expulsion. When she later retold the events of that afternoon to her

upstairs neighbours Alev and her sister-in-law, she made clear her indignancy over the municipality sending the police to her door to evict her:

Why would I squat in my own house? Why are they sending the police, how shameful of them [*çok ayıp*!] I have been living here for years, how can they send the police to my door? As if I'm some drug user, as if I have killed a man! That's what I am sad about. That they sent the police to my door. They should have come to tell me that I have to leave. I would leave [if they came to tell me]. But how can you send four, five policemen to our door? They came with armed vehicles...armed vehicles [*panzer*]! I cannot get over it. I should have told that girl lawyer: please don't come with the police. As if I have done something bad, I really resent this. We have never even seen the police station from the inside, never! We never had trouble with the police, in all my years in Istanbul.

Since militarised police raids were predominantly associated with organised crime and outlawed political activity, they were associated with Kurdishness in the dominant discourse and shared consciousness. Cemile's social positionality did not match the Tarlaşaşı imaginary as closely as Esmâ's did – she was an ethnic Turk, a pious elderly woman married to a Turkish man who had been the legal owner of the apartment they occupied – and she felt the need to deflect the stigma attached to the neighbourhood when talking to the police, and when talking to others about the day that the police came to her house. She underlined that she rigorously observed the Ramadan fast even under the strain of a significant workload and the stress of looming displacement. She positioned herself as a caregiver who had a married daughter, who in turn also observed the labour of caring (*vis-à-vis* her mother-in-law) that was expected of her, which could be read as proof that Cemile had raised her “right”. While the title deed was no longer theirs at the time of the evictions, Cemile did stress that the house was hers, that she had thus never been a “squatter” like the “illegal residents” that, in the Tarlaşaşı imaginary, dominated the neighbourhood and who had never actually held the title deed to their homes. I will further expand on residents' tactics to deflect the stigma in more detail in a later chapter of this book.

Both women, Esmâ and Cemile, shared a similar experience before the eviction from Tarlaşaşı. Both had their apartments – their domestic space and their (gendered) private domain – sold without their consent. Both were largely ignored by project stakeholders when they tried to appeal the sale, or when they tried to renegotiate the terms of their eviction. And finally, both women decided to ignore the growing threat of forceful removal from their apartments, disregarding formal letters and eviction notices sent to their home. However, when faced with the arrival of the police at their door, the experiences of both women were materially very different. Cemile, whose husband had in fact signed over the title deed to the municipality and who had been promised an, albeit meagre, amount of rental aid for her and her husband's interim apartment, was not evicted on the day that the *GAP İnşaat* lawyer and her small delegation of municipal officials and police officers came to claim her keys. While Cemile's experience of that day was invasive and extremely unpleasant, the group left and gave her ten more days to pack up her things and leave. Esmâ, on the other hand, at the time a young widow who was looking after her son and her ailing mother and who was still involved in a court case regarding her son's inheritance and therefore the ownership of the apartment, experienced the ex-

tremely violent destruction not only of her home, but of her privacy. What happened to Cemile was different in part because her social identity could not easily be lined up with any of the everyday iconic profiles connected to the Tarlaşağı stigma. Cemile knew this. The way that she particularly argued against her own stigmatisation as a squatter and a criminal cannot be separated from the fact that she imagined herself as incongruent with any of the problem profiles. A few days after the aborted eviction, she told me that it “made no sense” that militarised policemen had been sent to her apartment, because she did not, like her (Kurdish) neighbours, have a “small army of children and grandchildren” behind her that would “surely cause trouble” if the municipality tried to evict them.

Cemile knew how other Tarlaşağı residents had been treated, and she had closely witnessed Esmâ’s eviction. However, as can be seen in the fact that she “wanted to go look” when the armoured vehicles arrived, she had never expected that she would receive a similarly violent treatment. Esmâ, on the other hand, was easier to line up with the problem profiles of Tarlaşağı, which meant that she was easier to victimise. Her categorisation as “bad” was underwritten by anti-Kurdish prejudice and discrimination. Mesut Yeğen (1996: 218–219) writes that the Turkish state, in their exclusion of Kurdish identity from Turkishness, has equated Kurdishness with tribal politics, Islamism, banditry, backwardness, and everything that the modernist, secular nation state was supposed to have overcome as negative characteristics of a pre-modern past. Despite the fact that the negative stereotype of the “uncivilised” rural migrant as an everyday iconic profile had begun to pivot under the AKP, who claimed for themselves to represent these formerly vilified citizens, Kurds remained excluded from that shift. *Kumalık*, commonly associated with Kurdishness in the dominant Turkish discourse, could therefore be dismissed as illegitimate by all project stakeholders as well as by the police officers involved in Esmâ’s eviction, even if all parties were aware of the violation of expected decency codes. Esmâ experienced the culmination of Tarlaşağı stigma, located at the intersection of (Kurdish) ethnicity, gender, and class position, as a violent, humiliating disregard for her capacity for discretion (Pfeil 2020).

While the practice of violent police evictions is not new in Turkey and has, due to the neoliberal turn in urban policies under the AKP government, increased in recent years, it is important to add the factor of territorial stigmatisation as an analytical tool to understand the mechanisms and structures that informed such disproportionate use of state force. Territorial stigma intersects with and deepens prolonged discriminatory practices against marginal groups, and the place stigma of Tarlaşağı is deeply intertwined with the people stigma that surrounds these groups. It follows that the terrain of territorial stigma was uneven and unequal, as were the consequences of the stigma for different people, depending on how their social identities lined up with the everyday iconic profiles. What resonates for different people in what they are seeing happen in Tarlaşağı in terms of them being stigmatised and the actual, material discrimination that they experience in the run-up to evictions, the intimidation and the legal disingenuity, resonates with earlier (collective) experiences. Kurds recognised the threat of displacement in Tarlaşağı as something they had seen and experienced before. Trans* residents felt that what happened in Tarlaşağı resonated with the experience of being run out of other neighbourhoods. These interpretations influenced imaginations of possible reactions or resistance. The state actions in Tarlaşağı, framed by and intrinsically linked to territorial

stigmatisation, have a “canny familiarity” to them. For others, whose social identity did not line up with the ordinary iconic profiles, such as Halil Usta or Cemile, the discrimination and disrespect they faced did come as a surprise and a shock.

Chapter five: Belonging

One of my favourite anecdotes that described the convivial – and, as I later found out, somewhat starry-eyed – sense of community in Tarlabaşı I wished to convey to outsiders was one told by cobbler Zeki Usta. The story began with a stranger that entered Bird Street on an unspecified late afternoon while a number of children were playing outside. The stranger – in different versions of the anecdote he was “a normal-looking middle-aged man” or “a suspicious-looking middle-aged man” – then tried to lead one of the children away, and when the child resisted, one of the trans* sex workers approached him to ask who he was. The man, pretending to be the child’s relative, tried to walk away with the crying child, but the trans* woman – whose identity was never revealed in the cobbler’s tale – insisted on knowing his credentials, and said that since she had never before seen him in their street, he could hardly be a close enough relative to walk away with the child. A mild commotion ensued. More trans* sex workers gathered around the man who started to get afraid and left, leaving the child in the care of the women. “See”, Zeki Usta would say, “We are a tight community here. These transvestites [*travestiler*]¹ saved that child. We keep an eye out for each other.” I never found out if the story was actually true, but it illustrated a narrative I often heard in Tarlabaşı, by residents and non-resident critics of the planned demolitions: the neighbourhood, despite the “colourful” and very diverse mix of people, had been able to preserve what many Istanbul neighbourhoods had already lost – a sense of community.

By the time the master shoemaker, the last artisan on his street, shared this story with me, he had known me for several months; we had sat in his shop a couple of times, and I had interviewed him about his history as a craftsman in Tarlabaşı, his family business, and his ongoing court case challenging the pending threat of compulsory purchase. He knew that I, too, lived in Tarlabaşı and that I shared his appreciation of the familiarity and the sense of belonging in the neighbourhood. We both agreed that Tarlabaşı was being vilified unjustly, and he told me the story as a call to solidarity, as an example of something meaningful about the neighbourhood that he could trust me to grasp. This was also the anecdote that Zeki Usta told several people I visited Tarlabaşı with, other

1 Just like the trans* women themselves, most residents referred to trans* persons as transvestites [*travestiler*].

journalists, activists, researchers, friends and family. He would detail it in a joking manner to family and friends because he assumed that I had already brought them onto “our” side. However, he delivered the same anecdote with seriousness and didactic intent to journalists and researchers, relative newcomers in need of convincing—all the more urgent, as it was understood that they might be able to influence the course of the project. While his demeanour and tone changed depending on who he was talking to, he always told this story with the same goal in mind: wanting to prove what a close-knit community his neighbourhood was in order to convince his interlocutors that Tarlabası was worth saving. The story Zeki Usta chose to tell outsiders is even more remarkable because he had witnessed, and presumably been a part of, the violent conflict with the trans* sex workers soliciting in his street that Müge had told me about. The local (informal) trans* brothel, and the teahouse next to it, used to share one entrance, which meant that customers of both businesses had to use the same door. Not surprisingly this became the source for neighbourhood conflict, but at no point did any of the angered parties think to involve the police. Instead, they decided to handle the conflict themselves. Müge was clear in that she believed the interactions between the local men and the trans* sex workers were largely based on fear and informed by hypocrisy, and Müge often derided Hakan and many of his regular (male) customers as “uptight AKP voters” and supporters of their conservative (and discriminatory) policies. However, and despite this, Müge also insisted to me and others how well she got along with Hakan, the local shop owners and the neighbours in her street, because theirs was a tight knit *mahalle* community—the same prized attribute of the neighbourhood Zeki drew attention to with his anecdote.

Zeki Usta was not necessarily very sympathetic towards the trans* community in Tarlabası. On a good day he was trans* obnoxious, and like Hakan and other non-trans* residents he routinely referred to his trans* neighbours in transphobic slurs. He believed that their presence and the visible sex work economy were part of the reason that Tarlabası suffered a bad reputation. And yet he thought that the anecdote of the trans* women saving the child was the best one to illustrate why Tarlabası was not only a neighbourhood worth saving, but also pleasant to live in. This begs the question why it was this story that he retold over and over, when surely there were many others that he, a Tarlabası artisan of almost forty years, could have chosen. And Zeki Usta insisted on it whenever I brought around someone new. He would invariably ask me: “Have you told your guests already about that time when the transvestites [*travestiler*] saved the child?” An uninformed outsider might not consider this anecdote to be a virtuous story about Tarlabası, a narrative that presented the neighbourhood as a place where a child might get kidnapped off the street, and where trans* women sex workers chased the prospective kidnapper off. It is interesting to dwell on the fact that Zeki Usta, himself not a trans* friendly person, chose and crafted this story into the perfect dramatic explanation of why Tarlabası was great, and what, in his eyes, it said about the vilified neighbourhood. A lot of understanding of what is considered a social virtue in a *mahalle* goes into why this is such a touching story that paints Tarlabası in a very different light than the mass of stigmatising narratives put forth by the media, the municipality, and the private developer *GAP İnşaat*. His anecdote wanted to prove that Tarlabası was a real *mahalle*. Other than any of the anonymous residential blocks and gated communities [*site*] that shot up all over the city, the Tarlabası he

described had maintained the familiarity, solidarity, and sense of belonging that fed so much nostalgia in the rapidly changing city.

In this chapter I discuss how anecdotes like the one put forth by Zeki Usta were part of a tactic to refute territorial stigmatisation by centring the neighbourhood around the narrative of it being a traditional *mahalle*, and therefore a place that had social virtue, and was not, like the dominant discourse alleged, a virtueless place.

When I first met Tarlabasi Association spokesperson Erdal Aybek, his first argument against the demolitions was the existence of strong social ties, diversity, and a deep sense of community in the neighbourhood.

This is a very cosmopolitan place. There are Kurds, Turks, Armenians, Greeks, Arabs, Roma, African refugees, Muslims, Christians, Jews, Assyrians, people without a religion, transvestites, homosexuals. [...] If you look at the mosaic of religions in the project area, it is a real laboratory. [...] We all live here, tolerate each other. We are not at each other's throats. When [Beyoğlu mayor Ahmet] Misbah [Demircan] called us for the first project meeting in 2008 he tried to convince us to agree to it by saying: 'I will rescue you from the transvestites, they have taken over Tarlabası.' But we are content to live side by side. If the transvestites who live here will be sent to Fatih, or to Bağcılar, they will have many problems there.

At our first meeting, Erdal had made a point of taking me to Hakan's teahouse, located just around the corner from the association's office on Tarlabası Boulevard. It was part of the "tour" that he gave anyone interested to find out about the association's struggle to save Tarlabası, and most activists invested in stopping the urban renewal project picked up on his argument that the strong neighbourhood ties were an important reason that Tarlabası was not the hopeless case that the municipality pretended it to be. This claim is prone to sentimentalism and romanticisation, as is the idea of the *mahalle* as a space of unspoiled tradition. Sympathetic newspaper articles and media reports underlined the warmheartedness, the tolerance and the hospitality they believed to find in the neighbourhood, not seldomly to the point of well-meaning caricature.

Neighbourly relations in Tarlabası were certainly a lot more complicated than this, and the friendly co-existence of inter-ethnic and inter-religious groups, as well as trans* and non-trans* residents was based on fragile ties of mutual need, constant re-negotiation, and sometimes, as the example of the trans* brothel next to the teahouse has shown, on a truce following a violent conflict. Stigmatised groups also frequently blamed each other for the bad reputation of the neighbourhood. However, while the picture of Tarlabası as a rare haven of tolerance, void of prejudice and bigotry, was a wishful effort to paint the endangered neighbourhood in a good light, it is true that conflicts between different communities almost never escalated, and that most residents described neighbourly ties as good. Bahar Sakızlıoğlu and Justus Uitermark (2014: 1373) describe "a 'live and let live' mentality and quotidian form of tolerance" that characterised the neighbourhood prior to evictions and allowed for marginalized groups to live in relative safety.

“All our neighbours are invited”, neighbourhood wedding celebration



Photo by Jonathan Lewis

In the face of the constant vilification and the municipality's claim that Tarlaabaşı was nothing more than a loose assemblage of relegated people and ruined buildings, void of any sense of community, the romanticised dismissal of everyday conflict and discrimination was just as much a form of stigma management as Zeki Usta's anecdote had been. Such narratives aimed to demonstrate that Tarlaabaşı, presented as dangerously "different" in the dominant discourse, was in fact a positive example of cultural, ethnic and gender heterogeneity, "juxtaposed with the homogenising effect of the stigma" (Garbin and Millington 2012: 2075).

What is even more important than residents and activists glossing over the negative aspects of living with marginalised communities in Tarlaabaşı, and what I would like to focus on here, is how residents expressed what they valued in the place where they lived. For this analysis it is irrelevant if the anecdotes and descriptions that people shared were factually true. It also does not matter if Zeki Usta had participated in the door blockade and the attempt to remove the trans* brothel years ago, or if the relationship with his trans* sex worker neighbours was sometimes strenuous, conflicted or even hypocritical. Erdal Aybek did sometimes express bigoted views about black Tarlaabaşı residents, while at the same time lauding their presence as "proof" that the diversity in Tarlaabaşı "worked". No social environment is without discord, without pain and struggle, but the way that people talk about their social situation can be analysed independently of that. When Zeki Usta told the story of the child snatcher and the trans* women who successfully interfered, he meant to impress on outsiders the strength of neighbourliness, of solidarity ties, and of the virtuousness of his neighbourhood. Tarlaabaşı residents, in full acknowledgement of all the problems that did exist, tried to prove that their neighbourhood met the requirements for being a real *mahalle*, even if this happened in sometimes unconventional ways.

After the Easter service at the Syriac Orthodox church

Photo by Jonathan Lewis

Therefore, it is necessary to recognise that the way people talked about their stigmatised neighbourhood and which anecdotes they chose to convey – in full knowledge of what Tarlabası was – were “social facts” (Durkheim 1965), and therefore data in itself. Conversations about what they liked about their neighbourhood did not happen in a vacuum, but against the backdrop of looming evictions and the prospective destruction not only of people’s physical homes, but also of their solidarity networks and their community, their *mahalle*. These narratives therefore focussed on reasons why the neighbourhood did not deserve to be destroyed. They challenged the municipality’s argument that the planned demolitions aimed to improve Tarlabası and were done for the good of its inhabitants. Wacquant (2007: 69) alleges that territorial stigmatisation leads to “a dissolution of ‘place’, that is, the loss of a humanized, culturally familiar and socially filtered locale with which marginalized urban populations identify and in which they feel ‘at home’ and in relative security.” Neighbourhoods that carry a spatial taint are no longer such places, but “spaces” void of community and intra-local solidarities that residents detest and seek to leave as soon as they are able (ibid.: 70). This is too rigid a statement for Tarlabası, where residents’ relationship with their neighbourhood was not only more layered and complicated, but also more positive than that.

In this chapter I propose the notion that the traditional *mahalle* as a social concept is a social virtue attached to place, and that the point of Tarlabası being a real *mahalle* was being used by residents to argue against the stigma of Tarlabası as a virtueless neighbourhood. This was not merely a point of argument. The collectivity, the solidarity, and the mutual exchanges that people described and experienced were deeply virtuous social structures that are characteristic of the idea of a *mahalle* in Turkey. The recurring discourse of talking about Tarlabası as a *mahalle* weaved the neighbourhood into a larger narrative about Turkish modern urban life and Istanbul, and it positioned Tarlabası on

the virtuous side of that story. It staked a claim that Tarlabaşı, despite the intense stigma attached to it, was a place that one could feel and express belonging to.

First, I describe what a traditional *mahalle* signifies in the Turkish context, and why a *mahalle* is considered a socially virtuous place. I will then proceed to detail the basic accommodations of a social contract that those who are members of a *mahalle* have access to. Furthermore, I detail how the *mahalle* was both considered an ideal/alised place, and how *mahalle* networks foster a feeling of belonging in the city, for which I would like to introduce the term of “*mahallelik*” – *mahalle*-ness. And finally, I describe why the *mahalle* and its support networks were important for Tarlabaşı residents, and how the risk of displacement threatened these networks of socio-economic interdependence. In order to better illustrate this, I have chosen five nodes of these networks and will detail how they were connected to each other and their surroundings, in short, what *mahallelik* looked like “on the ground”.

The mahalle

Often translated simply as “neighbourhood” and defined as the smallest administrative urban unit in the English language literature, the *mahalle* is much more than a spatial marker in the Turkish city. It is difficult to assign a *mahalle* to a single social category. In everyday discourse it is thought of as a space of familiarity, social closeness, and collective identity, but also as a moral territory of mutual control and oppression. As *modus vivendi* the traditional *mahalle* involves certain expectations and demands for those who live there, just as it offers close-knit social ties and support networks. In opposition to the *mahalle* as a geographical and administrative unit, the *mahalle* as a social concept does not have a clear physical shape or size. Instead, its boundaries are set by the everyday practices and itineraries of people and commerce.

Cem Behar (2003), in his examination of a traditional neighbourhood in 18th- and 19th-century Istanbul, argues that the Ottoman *mahalle* prescribed a close-knit hyper-local network of social relationships before it started to be used to outline an urban administrative unit, and that the sense of a shared *mahalle* identity was largely based on the upholding of morality and functioned as a collective defence mechanism. Similarly, Işık Tamdoğan-Abel (2000) argues that the everyday practices that create the collectivity of a contemporary *mahalle* are rooted in their historic socio-political organisation. Ottoman tax and criminal law operated on the basis of a *mahalle* being a legal person, which meant that if one member of the *mahalle* violated these laws, the entire *mahalle* was held responsible by the authorities. This legal framework facilitated and relied on the mutual surveillance and control of fellow residents’ behaviour which strengthened the sense of a collective identity and explained the preoccupation with the collective reputation that is reflected in the cultural practices in a present-day *mahalle*. It also cemented the collective interest in settling intra-*mahalle* conflicts without involvement of the police or the authorities – similar to what Müge described in trans* sex workers’ handling of the obstruction of their brothel – since this meant avoiding being collectively held responsible by outside institutions that might inflict material consequences on *mahalle* residents. While Behar claims that the traditional urban *mahalle* as a social category has all but van-

ished from the urban fabric of neoliberal Turkish cities, others argue that it remains relevant in today's everyday life and discourse as a “contested system of order” (Woźniak 2018: 80) and as a “cultural space of closeness and belonging” (Mills 2007: 339).

In her discussion of the Istanbul neighbourhood Kuzguncuk, Amy Mills (2007: 341) writes that it is the concept of “knowing” [*tanımak*] that defines a *mahalle*: “everyone ‘knows’ each other, or is ‘known’ in the neighborhood”. Mills observes that these “bonds of ‘knowing’” are produced through “neighbouring [*komsuluk*]”, the (gendered) practice of frequent and reciprocal neighbourly visits, mostly amongst women, that link the inside of homes to the residential street, turning it into “an extension of private family life” (ibid.: 339). The idea of a neighbourhood embodied by the Turkish *mahalle* turns neighbours into extended family, “a ‘we’ particular to Turkish culture” (ibid.). The idea of the traditional *mahalle* feeds a “rich ‘semiotic pool’. Innocence, unspoiledness, purity, warmth, intimacy, unbrokenness...all of these qualities are in this pool” (ibid.: 339). The (imagined) ideal *mahalle* is a place of longing, of profound nostalgia and romanticisation, which is why “authentic” traditional neighbourhoods such as Kuzguncuk or Fener-Balat have become a popular backdrop in Turkish popular culture, and a primary location for rapid gentrification.

Neighbourhood cooperation



Photo by Jonathan Lewis

More generally, the familiarity of a *mahalle* is to a large part cultivated through “micro-publics” (Valentine 2008: 330–331) that residents incorporate into their daily routines and that include the frequentation of available social spaces, for example the barber shop, the teahouse, or the corner shop [*bakkal*], as well as neighbourhood socialisation on the street, at the weekly market, and festivities such as weddings. Regularly patronising the same local shops is also an important part of developing social bonds and trust in a *ma-*

halle. As a regular customer [*müdavim*], be it in a shop, a restaurant, an artisan workshop, or any other business, one will be treated courteously and with friendly familiarity and can be sure to get the choicest offers and best prices.² These loyalty ties are mutually beneficial, as it guarantees income for the business owner, and the – often crucial – possibility to buy items on credit for the customer.³

The image of vibrant collectivity is mirrored in traditional and contemporary Turkish forms of cultural expression. For example, in the traditional *Karagöz* shadow puppet theatre, the *mahalle* is represented by a single group of neighbours fixed under one umbrella (Mills 2007: 339). This character was used to show that, when rumours, gossip or news travelled through the community, it became known to the *mahalle* as a whole. In the TV show *Perihan Abla*, the first of the popular genre of “*mahalle dizileri*” (*mahalle* TV series) that began broadcasting in 1986, the problem of an individual resident is resolved by the collective effort of the entire *mahalle*. Solutions are proposed by the community, and plans devised and discussed in the street under the inclusion of all the neighbours (ibid.: 339–340).

For many Tarlaşaşı residents, the sense of belonging to their *mahalle* meant being known and recognised in their community, being respected and greeted on the street [*merhabalaşmak*]. It was a place of real emotional value. Alev, who moved to Tarlaşaşı in her early teens, described her experience of the neighbourhood in almost romantic terms:

What is there not to love? Every street, every corner...I don't know. Not because it is in the heart of [the city], but because I grew up here, I spent my childhood here, I was able to have a childhood here. What I love most is that I have a friend at every corner, how we greet each other in the street, the warmheartedness...even if there are some rascals. [laughs] If you greet somebody, you'll get a warm greeting back. No matter how much Tarlaşaşı is being vilified, Tarlaşaşı is beautiful. [...] And neighbourly relations are very good here. We all depend on each other. There is support...people are kind, you never feel like a stranger. Neighbours here are great neighbours! Tarlaşaşı is beautiful, it just is.

Residents of all groups often spoke about the different ways in which they were connected to their neighbourhood. They described the length of time that they had lived in Tarlaşaşı and the depth of detailed knowledge that they held about the area, its residents,

2 Once a customer is considered a *müdavim*, loyalty to the business in question is expected by the business owner, even if this might occasionally be to the customer's disadvantage. At the weekly vegetable market, I regularly had to forego better produce from a stand if the same items were sold at the tables where I was considered a regular. Similarly, getting “caught” by one's *bakkal* with a shopping bag filled with another shop's wares was, at the very least, awkward.

3 In corner shops [*bakkal*], especially in low-income neighbourhoods, the possibility to buy essential everyday items and food on credit are the only possibility for residents with a low and often irregular income to secure their subsistence. It is common that the items bought are written down and paid at the end of the month, or whenever money comes in. It is not unusual that the *bakkal* does not know every customer's name, and credit sheets will sometimes be marked with qualifiers such as “woman from red house at the corner”. The important thing is that there is a trust relationship between the *bakkal* and customers that has developed over time.

and its recent history. Many said that their social and professional life was firmly embedded within the neighbourhood and its immediate environs.

Without any parks or playgrounds in Tarlabası, residents socialised in the street.⁴ During the warmer months, women congregated on the outside stairs of their buildings and the stoop to drink tea, snack, and chat. They tended to (and shared) their chores as well: preparing food, doing needlework, soaping down and cleaning rugs, or washing and drying sheeps' wool used for the filling of bedding and pillows. Local business owners left doors open, and sometimes put chairs in front of their shops to engage with neighbours and passers-by. Some, like the second-hand furniture sellers on Tree Street, moved part of their wares onto the street to display them, turning couches and chairs on sale into impromptu outdoor seating. Men extended their social interactions to the men-only barbershop as well as to local teahouses. Trans* women frequented an otherwise all-male teahouse. These everyday interactions and micro-publics strengthened familiarity bonds and trust networks in Tarlabası, creating the *mahalle* that Alev praised.

It bears mentioning that the constant monitoring of *mahalle* spaces by its members is also an oppressive tool of social control. Turkish sociologist Şerif Mardin coined the term *mahalle baskısı* [neighbourhood or community pressure] to describe the intra-community policing of collective (religious) morals and conservative values in a *mahalle* (Çetin 2010). Non-conformance to *mahalle* norms and expectations can lead to shunning, shaming, or (verbal) reprimands (Çakır and Bozan 2009: 155). This equally important characteristic of a *mahalle* such as Tarlabası, as a space of mutual control, further defies Wacquant's claim that residents of a stigmatised neighbourhood commonly distance themselves from it.

A social contract

Following the birth of his two children in the mid-1980s, barber Halil Usta bought an apartment in a middle class *site* in a suburb on the Asian side of the city, because he did not want to raise a family in a “bad neighbourhood”. However, he kept renting the barber shop he ran in Tarlabası, where he had lived for more than ten years and worked for over four decades. When we met, Halil Usta spent almost every day of every week in the neighbourhood, even Sundays and most official holidays, when the shop was (supposed to be) closed. He explained that he “did not feel at home” in his residential neighbourhood where he had by then lived for many years.

No matter what problems I have for [working] in this place, I miss it a lot. When I have been away for ten days it feels like I have been away for a whole year. I moved to Bostancı in '86, but I don't know anyone in my building [there]. I don't know anyone where I live. That's how it is. You leave in the morning, and you come back in the evening. You use it like a hotel. The neighbours...we see each other on the stairs. In the mornings, we say 'good morning', in the evenings, we say 'good evening'. That's it. I don't

4 With the exception of Tree Street, most smaller streets in Tarlabası did not have any transit traffic and were mostly car-free.

know who lives on which floor, and who they are. I am [in Tarlaşaşı] all day. The family lives [in Bostancı], and business is here. [In Tarlaşaşı], people greet everyone they meet, they pass the barber shop and say hello. People meet each other all the time and are together. [...] In five years I have maybe talked to the *muhtar* [in Bostancı] five times. I know the *muhtar* [in Tarlaşaşı] much better. My family asks me why I go to [Tarlaşaşı] even on Sundays. I tell them: 'What am I supposed to do [in Bostancı]? Who do I know here? It's only one hour [when I take the ferry], I come here, there are people here that I have known for years. This is such a lively place. It's an amazing place.

The intimacy of *mahalle* life that Halil *Usta* experienced in Tarlaşaşı is a social ideal that is anchored to place. As an intransitive virtue it cannot be moved from the neighbourhood it is connected to, even if one is part of that *mahalle*, which is why Halil *Usta* spent as much time in Tarlaşaşı as he did. The modernity of the *site* that he talked about provided respectability and status, but it lacked the close social ties and the familiarity associated with a *mahalle*. Of course, he attached positive attributes to his residential complex in Bostancı – he described it as “very clean” [*tertemiz*], “safe” [*güvenli*] and “modern” [*modern*]. However, none of these attributes are considered to be the social virtues that characterise an (idealised, imagined) *mahalle*, such as warmth, hospitality, generosity, charity, or solidarity.

Murat, a Kurdish man who owned a small apartment building and a textile workshop in Tarlaşaşı, expressed similar ambiguity about his *site* as Halil *Usta* had. Murat and his family had moved to the suburb of Başakşehir where they lived in a “clean and modern” apartment in one of the newly built tower blocks that were praised by the government as the future of urbanism in Turkey. He was proud of having, literally and figuratively, “moved up”. However, he also said that the population density of large residential complexes, paired with the anonymity of these blocks, brought with it problems that he had never encountered in Tarlaşaşı, where the familiarity between neighbours facilitated communication, and therefore could make it easier to sort out conflict and misunderstandings.

When so many people live in such a small space, it's not always easy. One guy turns the radio up all the way, another turns the sound on the TV really high. In the evening when you come home from work, you're tired, but it's very loud in your flat, I can't stand that. It's more crowded, you get edgy. You want to take the elevator, but someone left the elevator door open again, you wait for the elevator for hours. I mean, there are many problems. [...] People [in Tarlaşaşı] are much closer to each other, they talk to each other if there are problems, but there you just don't.

As I have mentioned, the social virtuousness of a *mahalle* can be stifling and oppressive, and the social control exerted to maintain it has been investigated by scholars researching the *mahalle* (Tamdoğan-Abel 2002; Behar 2003; Mills 2007; Woźniak 2018). However, and maybe as the other side of the same coin, the familiarity ties of a traditional neighbourhood such as Tarlaşaşı also offer access to basic accommodations of a social contract for those who are part of it.

Drying sheeps' wool for bedding

Photo by Jonathan Lewis.

The social contract I am referring to here does not concern the legitimacy of the authority of the state over the individual described in political philosophy, but the basic ability to accrue social capital for the social participation in a community. This social capital includes access to material support, like food, clothes, or even money, as well as the ability to receive credit at local businesses, such as the *bakkal*. It also includes close neighbourly relations, protection, cooperation, and, in the form of *torpil* [influence], access to work.⁵ All these things are supplied by the community itself, not by institutions or outside agencies. Just as the neighbourhood familiarity and intimacy that Halil Usta praised, these accommodations of a social contract were anchored to the neighbourhood, intransitive, and could not be earned in Tarlaşaşı and then taken away to a new place. Residents who had moved away from Tarlaşaşı to a different neighbourhood described how they were unable to do certain things that the social capital accrued in their old neighbourhood had made possible and that they used to do in their old homes, for example display their Kurdish identity, do sex work, or clean and dry sheeps' wool on the street. Like Murat had, they said that the lack of a *mahalle* social network made the communication and conflict resolution with neighbours who might object to these activities and displays, more difficult. Even without the need to resolve neighbourhood discord or disagreements, people who had moved away said that they simply missed the easy contact and the everyday conversations with neighbours they had considered family. Other scholars who conducted research in Tarlaşaşı made note of the common complaint that the evictions destroyed a certain personal "order" [*düzen*], built up over years of living in a neighbourhood (Ünsal 2013; Sakızlıoğlu 2014a).

5 "Torpil" might best be described as a (masculine) form of social capital. It includes the ability to secure advantages via "influence", often in the form of employment. It has negative connotations as nepotism.

Outside of Tarlaşaşı, these forms of social capital were not only lost to many people but could not be accrued again at all. The ability to amass social capital for the social participation in a community is the one thing that marginalised people are denied. These accommodations of a social contract gave marginalised communities in Tarlaşaşı access they would not, and did not, have anywhere else.

The mahalle as urban ideal/ism

When talking about positive aspects of Tarlaşaşı to outsiders, many residents underlined the solidarity networks that provided various forms of support. I was often told that people would readily help each other out, that the doors were always open for neighbours and those in need. Cemile said:

Whatever I have, I eat with my neighbours. If there is nothing, there is nothing for either of us. Isn't that right? [...] Our neighbours upstairs are not so well off. I give them a few things and tell the children to sell them so that their mother can cook some chicken. The children are happy about that. [...] I cried a lot when [my downstairs] neighbour died. I was screaming at the top of my lungs in the hospital in Okmeydanı, they were wondering if I was his sister. They told them that no, I was a neighbour, I cried even more than the sister, that's how sad I was. That was Esma's husband. He was such a good person, whenever he made some food, he shouted: Cemile Abla, come join us for eating, otherwise I will shout even louder! He shouted this from downstairs. I told him: Stop, everyone is going to hear you, it's three in the morning! He said he would keep shouting if I didn't come down to eat with them. At three in the morning, I would eat with them. He was like a son, that one.

Again, it is important to underline that these descriptions were very rosy, and that they glossed over existing rifts and conflicts between residents and different communities. In a neighbourhood like Tarlaşaşı, where many people lived under precarious circumstances and in poverty, resources were sometimes too scarce to share. There were many residents, especially women who raised children in the neighbourhood, expressed their dislike of the dirt, the crime, and the dilapidation, and said that they would leave if they could. Discrimination, especially of the trans* community, existed.

However, I did witness many instances of neighbourly solidarity and charity, big and small. One case even made it into a national newspaper, the left leaning daily *Radikal* (Ince 2011b). Jirayr Zincirci, who was known as Jirayr Amca in Tree Street, was a 65-year-old Armenian man who had fallen on hard times. He shared a single ramshackle room with several cats, on the ground floor of the building where Alev and Cemile also lived. Otherwise without any means of his own, he could rely on his neighbours for support. Several of them, including all the women in his building and the barbers Halil and Necmi across the street, brought him food. He got free shaves and haircuts at their shop, and neighbours would give him leftovers to give to his cats. Alev said that he sometimes turned up at her door to ask for a cigarette, and that she gave him tea, or a little bit of money if she could spare any. By the time that evictions started, he had lived there for forty years. He had been a concierge in the building, and the previous owner had left the room to him,

unfortunately without giving him a title deed for it. That meant that he risked homelessness and losing the support network of his *mahalle* because of the Tarlabası renewal project. However, because of the newspaper article in *Radikal*, the subsequent pressure on authorities in social media, and the tireless engagement of Necmi Usta, the Beyoğlu Municipality offered Jirayr Amca a small apartment in the new development, and free temporary housing nearby until the planned apartments were finished. Elif Ince (2011c), the journalist who had initially reported on his case, wrote that Jirayr Amca was more worried about having to leave his *mahalle* and everyone he knew there than about his housing situation. His life, and that of his cats, depended on the trust and solidarity networks he had built there over many decades. Necmi Usta, who often spoke to me about Jirayr Amca, later told me that he refused to leave his room for many months, fearing that his cats that he was not allowed to take to his temporary apartment, would die without him.

The traces of the strong social network in the neighbourhood coloured many of the residents' anecdotes about Tarlabası. Second-hand furniture seller Maher told me the story of one of his Greek neighbours, an elderly woman who had passed away in her home:

She would always go out to buy bread at the corner shop [*bakkal*]. Or lower a basket to ask someone on the street to do it for her. But when she wasn't seen for a day, everybody started to get worried. Everyone asked: 'Have you seen the [Greek lady]?' We went to her house, she didn't answer, so we broke down the door. We were worried! You know, we always hear how in other countries old people die alone and how nobody finds them for days, or even weeks! That would never happen here. Muslim, non-Muslim, Christian, it doesn't matter, we look after each other.

Such narratives of Tarlabası as a space of unquestioned tolerance and mutual acceptance were another aspect of how residents imagined their neighbourhood as an idealised *mahalle*, one where inter-ethnic and inter-religious conflict did not exist. Research in the neighbourhood of Kuzguncuk has shown that such descriptions serve to "obscure a contentious and traumatic minority history" (Mills 2006: 368). Romanticised narratives such as the one Maher told me did erase the violence that historically marginalised communities suffered in Turkey. However, in the context of Tarlabası and the looming evictions, this idealised frame of multi-ethnic tolerance can also be read as defiance against the dominant ideology of a unified, ethnonationalist Turkish identity, the "monolithic culture" imposed from above that excludes different identities as disorderly and corrosive of the Turkish nationalist project (Secor, 2004: 355), and, by extension, the planned state-led urban renewal project. By declaring the "right not to be classified forcibly into categories which have been determined by necessarily homogenising powers" (Garbin and Millington 2012: 2075) residents asserted their attachment to Tarlabası as a real *mahalle* despite the stigmatising discourse that framed the presence of the diverse communities there as threatening and dangerous.

Mahalle/lik as belonging

The various ways in which people develop emotional attachment to their places of residence, if and how they develop a sense of belonging, have caught the interest of social scientists from different disciplines, including sociologists, geographers, anthropologists and environmental psychologists (Pinkster 2016: 873). Scholars have developed a wide variety of conceptual approaches to analyse how people relate to a certain place, such as feeling at home, place attachment, sense of belonging and sense of place, with the spatial scale ranging from their own residential surroundings to the nation state and beyond (Morley 2001; Fenster 2005; Mee and Wright 2009; Antonsich 2010; Pinkster 2016).

However, instead of trying to make my observations fit into theoretical concepts from the English language literature I would like to contextualise the sense of belonging that Tarlabaşı residents expressed, and that cannot quite be captured by the aforementioned theoretical concepts. For how Tarlabaşı residents related to their neighbourhood, I would like to propose a Turkish word that is attached to a salient, tangible concept of the shared social virtue of place, and use the term “mahallelik” (*mahalle-ness*) as one that describes what belonging means in the Tarlabaşı context.⁶

Backgammon



Photo by Jonathan Lewis

Michel de Certeau, in his study of neighbourhood spaces in Paris, writes that a sense of belonging is created through daily practices that transform a place into a space of “accumulated attachment and sentiments of accumulated knowledge, memory, and inti-

6 The Turkish -lik is a suffix that forms abstract or collective nouns (from adjectives, nouns, numerals), similar to the English suffix -ness. Here it is meant to describe the quality or attribute of being a *mahalle*.

mate corporal experiences” (Fenster 2005: 243). Many Tarlabası residents justified their attachment to the neighbourhood in similar terms. Barber Necmi Usta had lived in Tarlabası for several years before moving to a nearby neighbourhood in 1999 following the devastating earthquake in Izmit. But like Halil Usta, he continued to work in the *mahalle* barbershop.

He was content with his apartment in an adjacent residential neighbourhood, which was also considered a traditional *mahalle*, but which had a more favourable reputation. However, this did not diminish his strong sense of belonging he had about Tarlabası, or his grief for losing the neighbourhood:

I have been here for 25 years. it is difficult to leave. I came here from the village when I was ten years old, and I have been here for 25 years. I know everyone. [Tarlabası] is a part of me now. I visit other parts of Istanbul, I go to the [Princes'] Islands, I go here and there, but I always miss Tarlabası. There is something about this place. We all feel bitter inside for having to leave.

In Tarlabası, “daily examples of solidarity and small gestures of ‘keeping an eye on each other’” (Ünsal 2013: 165) were an important part of how a sense of belonging was created through the *mahalle* network. Despite the widely shared discontent over the crime and the bad physical state of the housing stock, residents stressed that any solution to these issues, and any kind of renewal “should not cause displacements and disrupt working networks of solidarity” (ibid.: 168).

Contrary to Wacquant’s (2010) claims that residents of a stigmatised neighbourhood will distance themselves from the area and their neighbours, deny any kind of belonging, and try to leave as soon as they are able, most Tarlabası residents I met rarely had an unambiguously negative experience nor were they desperate to move. Far from it, many people expressed an affection for their neighbourhood that was deeply rooted in their experience of *mahallelik* as a sense of belonging. Despite the constant and intensifying stream of media and state narratives of social abandonment, crime and desolation in the run-up to evictions, residents spoke of a vibrant, supportive community and of strong neighbourhood ties that they had built through social relations of everyday life, of solidarity networks, the establishment of businesses, and years of memories of living and working in Tarlabası. When given the opportunity to buy into social housing blocks in the newly built suburb of Kayabaşı, many residents said that they did not consider moving so far away from their old support networks, their neighbours, and work opportunities.

The importance of *mahalle/lik* for Tarlabası residents

For many residents, spatial belonging was prescribed by a lack of viable alternatives, their poverty, the necessity to access informal and low-skilled jobs available in the Beyoğlu service sector, by (relatively) cheap housing, or because Tarlabası provided relative safety for certain socio-demographic groups and marginalised communities, such as Kurds or trans* sex workers. However, as I aim to show here, this lack of viable alternatives transcended mere coping mechanisms. To people who were marginalised and excluded, in some cases violently and physically, from other Istanbul neighbourhoods, Tarlabası of-

ferred not only an absence of exclusion, but a real sense of inclusion. Many Tarlabası residents described more than the ability to walk the streets without being physically or verbally assaulted. Instead, they went through the effort to describe that their belonging in Tarlabası was more than just a neutral state, that they were able to be part of a real *mahalle* there: they talked about relative physical safety, about economic inclusion, and access to basic accommodations of a social contract supplied by their community and their neighbours.

In her work on belonging in the low-income Nottingham neighbourhood of St Anns, anthropologist Lisa Mckenzie (2012: 459) shows that communities who are denied access to resources that make up various forms of social, economic, cultural and symbolic capital “do not simply passively accept their fate, but instead engage in a local system that finds value for themselves and their families in local networks and a shared cultural understanding” of how their neighbourhood, stigmatised by the dominant discourse, works. She notes that local solidarity networks might bind people living with social disadvantages together instead of only bridging those disadvantages. Therefore, these networks can have use-value to residents, even if this value is not recognised outside of the (stigmatised) community and is sometimes dismissed as a way of “mere coping”. Mckenzie writes: “It may be the case that poor neighbourhoods have strong systems, resources, and social capital but these are not recognized because they have no relationships with the institutional capital which can be exchanged in wider society such as employment, as a route to becoming ‘respectable’” (ibid.: 471). She adds that the spatial concentration of poor and marginalised communities within stigmatised neighbourhoods can therefore act as a buffer against said stigma, therefore increasing social capital locally (ibid.: 472).

Prior to the announcement of the urban renewal project, rents in Tarlabası were relatively affordable, and many places – municipal offices, banks, the post office, a large public hospital – could easily be reached on foot. In Istanbul, where public transport and taxi costs can quickly add up, this is important for those who do not own a car and who have to get by on a tight budget. Just as importantly, many residents’ workplaces were at walking distance from their homes.

In addition to that, and counter to the dominant discourse that framed the neighbourhood as “chaotic”, some residents found that the constant bustle, the diversity of people and businesses, and the informality made Tarlabası a better, and livelier, place than the more homogenous neighbourhoods that were praised as “modern”, “clean”, and “family-friendly”. In their eyes, these districts were “too quiet” and “boring”. The central location of Tarlabası was not only convenient from a financial, or professional, point of view, but it also meant that residents could take part in the 24/7 Beyoğlu economy. Baker Gökhan Usta explained:

In Tarlabası, there are two days, two days in one! One lasts from morning to the evening, and the other from the evening to morning. Some guys run places that are open from evening to morning. There are guys who run bars, coffeehouses, and restaurants. You need clothes? You can find clothes. If you get sick, there are doctors right here. Right at your fingertips. If you want to buy something, no problem. If you feel like reading, you can go to a bookstore. You really can find anything you might want here. There’s everything!

The geographical make-up of Tarlaşa, as for many more traditional neighbourhoods where small shops and businesses are scattered throughout residential areas, facilitated shopping, especially for women. Cemile explained how she found this more difficult in a more “modern”, more upscale neighbourhood:

Sometimes I visit my daughter in Alibeyköy, and I don't like it there very much. My daughter asks me why and says that I have just grown used to the smell of Tarlaşa...yes, probably! When I lower the basket from my balcony, I can get anything I want from the *bakkal* here. And [in Alibeyköy]? You can't even find bread there after six o'clock! There is no cornershop. You have to go all the way to the [centre] of Alibeyköy, to the supermarket. The market is there, and the supermarket. There is no shop where they live. But they have built very luxurious villas.

Bahar Sakızlıođlu (2014a: 174) underlines the importance of social solidarity networks as a crucial channel for the exchange of information about where and how to apply for material support, such as government assistance, or the availability of cheap rental housing in the neighbourhood. However, Sakızlıođlu also stresses that kinship ties and local solidarity networks that bolster, and sometimes substitute social welfare in Turkey, have been considerably weakened due to neoliberal policies (Sakızlıođlu 2014a: 268, see also Kalaycıođlu and Rittersberger-Tılıç 2002; Keyder 2005). This was certainly true for Tarlaşa, and residents could not fully rely on these informal networks to alleviate poverty and hardship.⁷ However, people who were part of the neighbourhood, who were “known” and part of the *mahalle*, could nevertheless count on neighbours to assist them with the provision of food or clothing if they fell on hard times or lacked the sufficient funds to provide for themselves and their families.

Residents were also able to turn to solidarity networks to rally support and charity in the case of bigger disasters elsewhere. Veysi, a recycling worker in his early 20s originally from the eastern, predominantly Kurdish city of Van, collected several truckloads of clothing, blankets and foodstuffs in the neighbourhood with the help of Tarlaşa co-workers and neighbours after an earthquake had laid waste to his city in October of 2011.⁸

Since the familiarity of everyday *mahalle* life is partly created through the frequent patronage of local shops and businesses, these social relationships allowed for residents, people known to shop owners, to buy goods and pay for them later, which was a vital option for those who lived on low, insecure incomes. This way of doing business is impossible in neighbourhoods increasingly dominated by large supermarkets and more anonymous housing complexes, and equally difficult as a newcomer in a more traditional *mahalle*, especially as part of a minority community.

7 Bahar Sakızlıođlu describes the increasing fragmentation of Tarlaşa, mostly along class and ethnicity lines, that accelerated after 1980 with the implementation of neoliberal policies that led to the precarisation of labour, the criminalisation of informal labour such as the itinerant sale of goods, paper and metal recycling and sex work. This in turn resulted in the considerable limitation of opportunities to cope with poverty, increased destitution and therefore weaker solidarity networks (Sakızlıođlu 2014a: 175).

8 On October 23, 2011, a severe earthquake killed 604 and injured 4,152 people. Due to the number of buildings that sustained damage, at least 60,000 people were left homeless.

Home delivery

Photo by Jonathan Lewis

It was also not uncommon that residents were afforded access to gainful employment through neighbourhood and kinship ties. For example, Alev had a job in a local textile workshop that she had found with the help of a relative who also lived in Tarlaşaşı. Sometimes local kinship networks provided the basis for the set-up of a modest business. Recycling worker Veysi had pooled money with relatives from Tarlaşaşı to rent a local depot in order to start a metal and recycling business with them and his brothers.

Networks of socio-economic interdependence

The overwhelming majority of project area residents were employed in low-skilled, insecure jobs in the Beyoğlu service sector, in construction, or local textile, leather, and metal workshops.⁹ Close to one fourth of renewal area residents worked in semi-legal, informal and (increasingly) criminalised businesses, in metal and paper recycling, the sex economy, or as street vendors – all businesses that were possible in Tarlaşaşı partly because they relied on the proximity to the Beyoğlu retail, service, and night time economies.

For many people on a low, insecure income without benefits or social security it was crucial to live within walking distance of their workplaces. Residents who lived and worked in Tarlaşaşı, or who owned or ran a business there, were facing the double threat of losing both their home and workplace, and therefore their income. Several

9 According to the survey conducted on behalf of the Beyoğlu Municipality in 2008, 77 percent were employed in temporary, insecure jobs. Only 19 percent of those in employment had health insurance and retirement through their jobs. 29 percent were employed in the local service sector. Another 22 percent worked in construction or textile workshops (Kentsel A.Ş. 2008; Sakızlıoğlu 2014a: 173).

residents used their homes and basements to prepare, store, and sort food that they sold from mobile karts, such as vendors of filled mussels, of fruit and vegetables, or sandwiches, pastries, and puddings. The link between the informal labour and informal housing markets in Istanbul is strong, because “many workplaces on the ground floors of residential buildings are operated by the owners of these buildings or their family members” (Sakızlıoğlu 2014a: 175).

Moreover, local artisans felt a deep emotional connection to the neighbourhood. Many had learned their trade there as children, either from their fathers or their, often Greek or Armenian, *Ustalar* through the traditional apprentice system (Ünlühısarıcıklı 2001). Furthermore, artisan workshops, of which there were only a few left in the neighbourhood by the time the renewal project was announced, depended on “the osmotic relationship between the workshop and its surroundings” (Kaya et al. 2011: 64). A tight exchange network between suppliers, employees and customers, the overwhelming majority of whom were regulars, made moving an established business extremely difficult, if not impossible. Generally, Tarlabası business owners felt great pride in the small-scale, cordial atmosphere that characterised the local *mahalle* economy and that stood in stark contrast to the nearby commercial district around Taksim that was increasingly dominated by global chain stores, franchises, and supermarkets. In what follows I examine what *mahallelik* looked like “on the ground”, and what residents were talking about when they praised their deeply stigmatised neighbourhood for its support and solidarity network that ultimately created their sense of belonging.

The bread baker [fırıncı]

Gökhan and his younger brother Burak took over the eight-storey building from their family’s tenant, a Turkish bank, in 1990 and opened a bakery there in 1993. Both men had been born in Istanbul into a family of bakers originally from Camlihemişin on the Black Sea coast. Like many of his compatriots at the time, their great-grandfather had emigrated to learn the trade in Russia and returned to Turkey to open a bakery (Biryol 2007). His sons and grandsons continued the family business in various cities in Turkey before Gökhan and Burak opened the Tarlabası bakery they had been running without interruptions except for the time when they went to do their military service.

The actual bakery – an industrial-size oven for bread, a dough mixer and shelves to proof the dough and the raw loaves – was situated in the basement of the building. The ground floor held the shop for over-the-counter sales and a gallery where bags of flour were stored as well as a small office where Gökhan kept files, orders and bills and did all his administration. The ground floor was also the space where he and his employees sat down for breakfast and lunch. The main business of the bakery consisted of the sale of the yeasted white wheat loaves fashioned after French baguettes and sold all over the city, and, during the month of Ramadan, of the traditional flat *pide*. Weight, ingredients, and prices of these loaves and the *pide* are fixed by the state. Prior to the announcement of the renewal project, the bakery put out around 7,000 loaves a day, one third of which was sold to customers over the counter. The rest was delivered, in plastic crates by hand truck and on foot, to nearby restaurants, eateries and *bakkal* shops. However, with the start of

the project, and as residents and local businesses started to leave, the total output of the bakery dropped to around 2,500 loaves a day.

The project announcement had caught the two brothers unawares and in the wake of a large shop renovation that had been part of a Beyoğlu beautification campaign initiated by AKP mayor Demircan. Gökhan explained:

That [renovation] put a large dent into our budget. The mayor gathered [the local bakers]. Back then nobody spoke of demolitions yet. He said that he would start controls of all the bakeries. Those days there was a lot of talk about bakeries in the city being dirty. He said that bakeries should be renovated, that he would make the rounds with cameras to show everyone how clean and nice Beyoğlu bakeries were. We spent almost 5,000 Lira back then. We put the oven downstairs, built the upstairs [gallery], fixed everything on this floor.

Both Gökhan, who was married with two small children, and his brother Burak lived in the building above the shop and rented out the remaining eight apartments, the money of which provided a comfortable extra income. By 2010, all but two of their tenants had left. Gökhan employed ten people in his bakery, all of whom lived in Tarlabaşı. As a business owner and their *Usta*, Gökhan felt the obligation to provide alternative employment for all of them once the bakery would be shut down. He hoped to be able to “arrange” [*ayarlamak*] jobs in nearby businesses for all of them, as he was well known in the neighbourhood and confident that his recommendation would open doors.

What Gökhan was about to lose was not only the material investment in the bakery, such as shop renovation, a new oven and modern machinery, but also the accumulation of social capital: the employ of local and reliable staff, the establishment of a distribution network, of suppliers, as well as loyal network of customers, both businesses and private residents who bought their bread at his shop.¹⁰ For neighbourhood bakers [*mahalle fırıncılar*] like Gökhan and his brother, who had a more or less fixed network of customers in the vicinity of their shop and whom they were able to rely on for their monthly income, a move into another quarter, one where other, similar bread bakeries were already established was precarious at best, and impossible at worst.¹¹

Gökhan had accrued this social capital through his long-standing participation in the neighbourhood community, an involvement that transcended the everyday commercial ties between him as a small businessman and his regular customers. Over the years he had built up the trust that his bread would be delivered on time and meet quality standards, and his customers, in turn, had earned the possibility to buy bread but to pay for

10 The bulk of the bakery's income came from nearby restaurants who bought crates of bread from Gökhan every day.

11 This was further complicated by the fact that bread prices were fixed by the authorities. In general, small businesses that were firmly embedded in a neighbourhood and dependent on a loyal, predominantly local clientele, such as bakeries, barbers, tea kitchens, or corner shops (*bakkal*), could not easily transfer to a new neighbourhood, where similar businesses had already established a customer and loyalty network.

it later [*veleziye*]. In low-income neighbourhoods, where people had to rely on bread as the substantial staple for any given meal, this option could be vital.¹²

It was also not uncommon for men who worked in nearby shops and workshops to heat up their lunch in Gökhan's oven. Women who did not have access to an oven at home sometimes asked him to cook a casserole, *lahmacun*¹³, or other food that required one. Lunchtime usually brought a lull in bread baking, but the large oven was not allowed to cool down entirely in order to be ready for the pre-dinner bread run.¹⁴ Burak, who was very interested in herbal remedies, ran a veritable little pharmacy from behind the bread counter. He swore that poppy seeds were the best medicine against light headaches, and often made teas for me when I was under the weather. Many local residents trusted him with advice on ills such as fatigue, small aches, a lack of appetite or digestive problems, and Burak regularly handed out teas and herbs, or advised people on where to get and how to take them.

Bakery



Photo by Jonathan Lewis

Gökhan was angry about the deal offered to him by the municipality, but he agreed to exchange the title deed for his eight-storey-building of more than 700 m² for an apart-

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- 12 While bread is an important staple and accompaniment for all income groups, tomato paste [*salça*] or raw onion on dry bread constitutes a main meal for very poor people.
 - 13 *Lahmacun* is a thin flatbread topped with minced meat, minced vegetables, and herbs including onions, garlic, tomatoes, red peppers, and parsley, flavoured with spices such as chili pepper and paprika, then baked like a pizza.
 - 14 Neighbourhood bakeries in areas and villages where women bake their own bread but lack the access to an oven or the hot metal plate required to bake flat breads, commonly accept for residents to drop bowls with risen bread dough and bake it for them in exchange for a small fee, which is cheaper than having to buy ready-made bread from a bakery.

ment of 40m² and a shop of around 150m² at no extra cost for him. Furthermore, he was paid a monthly rental supplement of 2,800 TL for the duration of 30 months, the projected amount of time it would take for the new buildings to be finalised. However, when asked by a foreign housing rights researcher if he was content with the deal, Gökhan said that he was not: “They gave us very little. We are losing our work, we are losing our homes. We have a life set up here, and we will lose that, too.” For him, the looming loss of familiarity ties and his place in the *mahalle* was irreplaceable:

We invested a lot of work in this place, a lot of work. We gave years of our lives. When I walk from here just across the street, I exchange greetings with 500 people. We exchange greetings at every shop, we know everyone. We know who everyone is. Now we have to build a new life. We don't know anyone there. Everything starts from scratch.

The social capital that he and his brother had managed to accrue in Tarlaşaşı over the years, and that firmly connected them to the neighbourhood, was at risk of being squandered by the looming demolitions.¹⁵ In addition to that, the municipality had already announced that it would not renew businesses licenses for bakeries and most other artisan workshops inside the development project once that it was finished, because they were considered “dirty” and “not modern” enough for the upscale neighbourhood they aimed to establish.

The cobbler [kunduracı]

Zeki Usta, an ethnic Turk originally from Konya and in his 60s when we met, had been a cobbler for more than five decades by the time the renewal project was announced. He got his start in the profession when he was eight years old and an apprentice for a Greek Tarlaşaşı family. His business was set up in a historical four-storey building that he had bought in a dilapidated state from an Armenian woman in the early 1980s and renovated. Close to Tarlaşaşı Boulevard, it housed the workshop, a depot for the raw materials, shoes and extra tools, a small shop/showroom and, not unimportantly, a small apartment on the second floor that he could use if work hours required it, or for eating and taking a nap. Running the workshop together with his then 35-year-old son Sedat, Zeki Usta said that the business of quality handmade shoes was viable only because they did not have to pay rent for the building, and that renting out a similar-sized workshop would be impossible almost anywhere else in Beyoğlu.

Before the announcement of the urban renewal project in 2005, twenty people had been in the master cobbler's permanent employ, but by the time I met him, this number had shrunk to a small handful of three, sometimes four employees. The looming loss of his property and business had forced Zeki Usta to cut costs and decrease financial risk. At the height of success, dozens of customers, shoe sellers from various Istanbul neighbourhoods and other Turkish cities, had come to visit his place to order and buy the shoes Zeki had learned to make from his Greek master and from study trips to Italy, but now this

15 Gökhan fought his eviction in court for many months, while his shop and bakery remained open. However, he noticed a considerable drop in income during the time that residents moved away, and other local businesses closed down.

constant stream of visitors had dried up to a small trickle. He had a number of fixed customers who required a particular model or material, and who had frequented the shop for many years.

Our customers come here because they know us. But for them to find out where our new place is, to come there will probably take, I would say, five to ten years. What will I do in these five to ten years? In order to make a living, that is a long time to have to wait. And in order to cover the cost [of moving, of rent], we will have to increase our customer base by at least two or three times as many. We have to earn *something*.

Hilal Usta, a shoemaker for 45 years who still worked with Zeki Usta and his son at the time, and the other few employees lived nearby and could walk to work, saving on commuting costs and time. An established network of shoemakers, leather traders and makers of metal ornaments used in clothing, bag and shoe making were all located in the immediate vicinity, which facilitated the exchange and sale of materials, of tools, and expertise. The short distances were crucial and cheap. Sedat explained:

We don't make an enormous amount of money with these shoes anyway. And many people are involved! Each of the shoes that you see here went through the hands of maybe fifteen or twenty people all in all. Just the pieces of leather...[*holds up a large sheet of leather*] they come like this to the workshop. But this piece of leather has already passed through the hands of another fifteen people. That also means that one shoe feeds fifteen families. [...] All these people will be unemployed.

Zeki Usta had also established deep social ties with the neighbourhood he lived and worked in: he spent many hours in Hakan's teahouse a few houses down, and the trans* sex workers who also lived and worked in Bird Street directed searching customers to his shop, and watched over it when it was closed. Sedat once told me, in somewhat of an extension of his father's anecdote above, that, when he had just come back from his military service and was unknown to the people in his father's street, a group of trans* sex workers almost beat him up when he tried to open the workshop, thinking that he was a burglar:

Only when [one person] recognised me as Zeki Usta's son did they let me go. I was really scared! It's because everyone knows everyone here. This is a real *mahalle*, that is how it is. We also know who the real thieves and the drug dealers are, and they know who we are. That's why they don't harm us, or my customers.

In 2011, Zeki Usta was the last shoemaker on that side of Tarlabaşı Boulevard. Some of the workshops that used to supply parts he needed to make shoes had already left. A majority of the master craftsmen who used to work (and sometimes live) in Tarlabaşı – the carpenters, bag, belt and other shoemakers – had either stopped or left the neighbourhood to settle in one of the industrial parks that had been set up in the faraway suburbs. This was not an option for Zeki Usta because the entire production process of the shoes made in his workshop, all the way to their sale, was linked to an intricate system of labour and support that he had established in the vicinity of his Tarlabaşı workshop.

The barber [berber]

Halil Usta's barbershop was small. It fit only three chairs, one of which was never occupied since it was only him and his business partner Necmi Usta who worked in the shop. During the colder months his shop window was often fogged up by the steam rising from the ever-boiling teapot or the meal he was cooking on the camping gas stove for lunch. During the summer, Halil often sat on a stool outside the shop, smoking and interacting with neighbours and passers-by.

Halil, originally from the central Anatolian province of Kayseri, had arrived in Tarlabası in 1972. He had started his career as a teenage apprentice and opened a barber shop in the neighbourhood soon after. In those years, Tarlabası had been a centre of artisanship and small-scale industrial production. Halil recalled that he and Necmi often had to work for fifteen hours a day, and that for a while, there had been a third barber in order to keep up with the pressing demand of the local male workforce who wanted to maintain a neat appearance. Back then long lines outside the shop were a common occurrence – something that by 2010 happened only during the days immediately preceding religious holidays. With the migration of the wood, textile and leather workshops to the city's suburbs, business had begun to slow down and, with the announcement of the renewal project, had almost dried up completely. The two barbers sometimes reminisced that it would have been smarter to move their shop into one of these new industrial centres, that they had missed their chance to keep up with urban development and economic requirements. Despite that realisation, neither Halil nor Necmi ever seriously considered moving the shop to Merter, Ikitelli, or any other neighbourhood where sprawling factories and manufacturers promised a steady supply of customers.

Barber shop



Photo by Jonathan Lewis

Despite the increasing difficulties facing the barbers in Tarlabası, Necmi and Halil still served a significant number of loyal patrons, many of whom lived or worked in the neighbourhood. Some of their customers travelled long distances after moving away from Tarlabası, and not wanting to miss out on the excellent service of Halil's and Necmi's shop. There I also met Murat, the Kurdish textile workshop owner who had moved to Başakşehir, a high-rise suburb to the west of Istanbul, in 1987. Murat frequently crossed half the city to get a shave and a haircut. True, he owned a business in Tarlabası as well as a small apartment building that he rented out. While these ventures brought him to the neighbourhood at regular intervals, he could of course have frequented another barbershop, somewhere more conveniently located and closer to where he lived. Even though I was told that Halil Usta was renowned for his soft touch and smooth shave, he certainly was not the only possible option even for very demanding customers in a city awash in barbershops. However, Murat did not only come for his personal hygiene, but for the familiarity and the friendly banter. He once told me that no matter where Halil and Necmi would move their business following the demolition of the neighbourhood, he would come and find them.

Loyalty ties between customers and the owners of small businesses are an important part of what makes a *mahalle* and the network of social ties that runs through it. I once witnessed an interesting scene at Halil's shop. A customer, obviously a regular, came for a haircut. After he had sat down, Halil remarked that he had gotten his hair cut elsewhere. While this was done in jest and was accompanied by some friendly bickering, the customer also felt "caught" – a feeling he alleviated by fervently agreeing with Halil that whoever had cut his hair had done shoddy workmanship.

By the time I met Halil, he was officially retired, but like many men in Turkey continued to work to bolster his meagre pension check and, just as importantly, to nurture the deep relationships he had established with neighbours and friends in the *mahalle* over the years. A considerable number of men that frequented his shop in 2011 had gotten their haircuts there as little boys. The wall above the barbershop mirrors was covered with photographs of their numerous customers, passport photos and professional studio headshots, as well as a couple of pictures that displayed haircuts that Halil and Necmi had done and that they were especially proud of or thought of as funny. Both barbers had detailed knowledge of their customers' lives, they knew their children and grandchildren, were informed about their health, the state of their marriages, and their professional successes and failures. With the proliferation of hairdressers in Beyoğlu, many of whom were more modern than theirs, or offered very fast service and cut-throat prices, Halil and Necmi relied on their reputation as an excellent "neighbourhood barbershop" [*mahalle berberi*] with longstanding ties in the community to stay afloat. Necmi said:

We are neighbourhood barbers. That's not just any quick thing. [...] Customer relations...[they] don't just pass by and have a quick shave. We are now like the barbers of the family, that's how it is.

Halil underlined the importance of familiarity over style and appearance of the shop for his customers. He said that it was the convivial atmosphere and his detailed knowledge, accumulated over many years, about them, their tastes, and their conversational preferences that motivated their customers to stay loyal to his business. It was agreed that this,

maybe more even than the skill to wield a razor and scissors, was the core ability every *mahalle* barber needed to master (Toklucu 2015: 106).

My shop is a bit old, it's not as modern as others. You might look inside and wonder: Is this an animal stable or a barber shop? [*laughs*] But our customers come here because they can find something that those shiny big barbers don't offer. They come for the warm, friendly atmosphere, for the conversations. As a barber, you need to know how to make conversation in the same way that you need to know how to cut somebody's hair. When you have known your customers as long as I have, you also know what they like to talk about, or if they don't want to talk at all.

Halil's small barber shop was an important fixture in the neighbourhood, and a point for the exchange of information in the *mahalle*, for example concerning the availability of rental apartments or jobs. Since Halil was reliable and always there, residents would leave their keys with him, and I often observed that he functioned as a sort of "neighbourhood telephone" and black board, transmitting messages from one person to another.

I met several of the people I later interviewed either in his shop, or via his customers. There were often neighbours who had just dropped by, or customers who had come a little early and were now waiting their turn (though having to wait in line became a rarer occurrence as time and the project progressed). Halil cooked lunch in his shop every day, delicious one-pot meals that he would prepare on a gas flame and that he shared with hungry customers and visiting (shop) neighbours, or journalists and researchers like me. During Ramadan, he cooked *iftar* meals, sometimes jointly with Ekin and Seray, the chicken döner restaurant owners a few doors down, even though they were Alevis and did not observe Ramadan. Halil had developed deep friendship ties with the couple who lived in the *gecekodu* suburb of Sultanbeyli on the Asian side of the city, but who owned a building on Halil's street. When Ekin retired¹⁶, Halil joined them at their local *çemevi* for a feast of a sacrificial ram Ekin had bought to celebrate the occasion.¹⁷

Halil said that he felt at home in Tarlabaşı despite living in an apartment on the Asian side.

I don't have a place here, but this is my neighbourhood, and it has been for many years. I am sad [that it is being demolished], even though I don't live here. I will not be able to see my friends as we used to, except maybe for a wedding, if everyone is free, every now and then. That will be it. For years we were together as a family, this will be over and that is what I am sad about.

Halil had developed a strong network of micro-publics over the years. When business was slow, as it was increasingly wont to be as the renewal project advanced and evictions picked up pace, he walked the few metres down to the teahouse in his street to play a

16 He also only retired on paper. While he did receive a pension check, he continued working in the restaurant together with his wife.

17 In neighbourhoods where Alevis were in the minority, as they were in Tarlabaşı, they sometimes faced discrimination and were shunned by some Sunni Turks who would refuse to even eat food from the hands of Alevis. The chicken döner restaurant worked well despite that, but the close relationship between Halil and Ekin's family was noteworthy.

few rounds of cards. Halil was a regular there, and he did not have any problem to either find co-players or join an already ongoing game. If an unexpected customer did show up, Halil would make him wait until the round was finished, since drop-out players were considered the losers of the game and therefore expected to pay for everyone's beverages (usually tea and Nescafé).

When eviction began and the first buildings were gutted, scavenged for metal and wood, Halil said he felt "orphaned". Despite having found a rental suitable for opening another barbershop further down the street (outside the renewal zone), Halil lost his enthusiasm for the job he had loved so much when his entire social network broke down around him. After Ekin had packed up his restaurant and left, Halil' Tarlaşa visits became rarer. When the teahouse shut down, one of the last businesses to go, he stopped coming altogether, leaving most of the remaining business in the new shop to Necmi.

The trans* sex worker [seks işçisi]

Müge had lived and worked in Tarlaşa for almost ten years when we met. She had moved to the neighbourhood after the violent evictions of trans* persons from Ülker Street in Cihangir (Selek 2001) and rented a two-bedroom apartment that she shared with her copper-red Persian cat named "Çapkın" (*Rake*). Her street was a cul-de-sac that housed the workshop of cobbler Zeki Usta, Hakan's small teahouse, a former Armenian school that was currently being refurbished by a separate developer, an informal brothel as well as the homes of several other residents. Except for the very occasional municipal or police vehicle, it was a pedestrian street which meant that there was room for a lot of interactional activity between residents. Importantly, the trans* women were able to solicit customers there without having to brave traffic.

Müge was able to work at home, but her best friend and "mentor" Gülay, a trans* sex worker then in her late 40s, rented a room in the informal brothel up the street. There, up to six women were able to share extra costs, exchange information about customers, and generally look out for each other. Müge and Gülay said that Tarlaşa was one of the last places in Istanbul where they could live and work in relative physical safety. As a result of pervasive discrimination and the exclusion from almost all social spheres, the vast majority of trans* women had few, if any, other work opportunities in the city.¹⁸ The same rigid cultural norms and deep societal prejudice could make it extremely difficult for trans* persons to rent a house in Istanbul, or any other Turkish metropolis.¹⁹

Müge paid 400 TL for her entrance-level flat and said that she was on good terms with her landlord, who did not object to her working at the house. But when he sold the building to the municipality, Müge was forced to think about alternatives.

18 Müge told me on various occasions that she would rather work in a different profession, but that this was impossible due to ubiquitous discrimination and ferociously anti-trans* prejudice in Turkish society.

19 In most cities it is impossible. The trans* and sex workers' rights group *Kırmızı Şemsiye* [Red Umbrella] lists inflated rents, arbitrary evictions and the sealing of trans* homes by the authorities on accusations of harbouring illegal brothels (without further proof than the presumption that all trans* women engage in sex work), as examples of how trans* persons' right to housing is routinely violated (see Ördek 2016).

She did not consider moving to the faraway suburb of Kayabaşı, where the municipality offered Tarlaabaşı tenants priority purchase of a flat in one of the TOKI social housing high-rises.

Why should I live anywhere else when I am so comfortable here? While I have a nice house and pay little rent? Why should I go and pay 700, 800 [TL] elsewhere? Look, if you live somewhere else, you have to pay for public transport, but here I don't have to pay for that. Here I have everything at my fingertips. Down this way there is the teahouse, that way is the cornershop [*points*]. Go that way, you'll get to the post office. Everything is here. That's why. But when you want to go to the post office in other neighbourhoods, you'll have to pay for the *dolmuş*²⁰ or a taxi. If you want to go to a restaurant, you have to pay for public transport. Here we are right in the [city] centre. I would make a loss otherwise. I would have to change busses twice to go to Kayabaşı, one-way, how much does that add up to every month? And it's not even safe there.

Müge and Çapkın



Photo by Jonathan Lewis

Another issue was that investment in flat ownership, with instalments sometimes running over decades, posed an important risk.²¹ For sex workers like Müge, this risk was compounded by the lack of a guaranteed monthly income, and the absence of social

20 A *dolmuş* is a shared taxi that runs on fixed routes at a set price inside and between cities and towns.

21 In Turkey, even social housing offered and managed by the Housing Agency TOKI is only available to buy, not to rent. People on low and/or unstable incomes who are forced to move to such a TOKI settlement because of urban renewal-related evictions risk to default on their long-running mortgage payments, leaving them to scramble for different housing options or to lodge with relatives. This has happened in the majority Roma neighbourhood of Sulukule.

security or insurance of any kind. Health issues, misdemeanour fines and unexpected legal fees could have an unplanned and severe impact on the ability to pay the monthly rates. In addition to that, many trans* sex workers had to break ties with families and other previous solidarity networks and could therefore not fall back on them in case they had to default on their payments.

Nevertheless, Müge eyed the option of moving to Bahçeşehir, a middle class residential neighbourhood in the western suburbs, where she had even made a down payment on a flat in a gated community [*site*]. She argued that from Taksim, Bahçeşehir was easily reachable via public transport, which was important since Müge wanted (and had) to continue to work in Tarlaabaşı. She knew that sex work would prove to be very difficult, if not dangerous, to do from an apartment in a residential complex. But this was not the only reason she hesitated.

I won't be able to sit in front of my house [in my new neighbourhood]. But here I sit in front of my house, I go to the teahouse, all the shop owners know me. And they love me. There is no one who doesn't, they all love me, I know that. How do I know that? For example, when I leave my house, they keep an eye on it. When a stranger approaches, they ask him what he is doing there. Someone who does this loves me. Do you know what I mean? But there...it's a giant *site*. I'll be all alone there.

Despite the many problems in the neighbourhood and the prejudice that she sometimes faced from other residents, Müge said that Tarlaabaşı had become a place where she felt at home.

For better or for worse, I manage to fill my tummy here. Okay, maybe it's a disgusting place. Maybe it's falling down. Maybe the streets are smelly. There might be thieves, there might be this and that. But this is my home after all. It's where I get by, where I help my family get by. It's where I live, where I get up and where I sleep. It's where I open the window in the morning, where I wash my face and exchange greetings with other people. I won't be able to do that anywhere else. Maybe, in order to do that, I will need five or six years. One doesn't create a home like that in a couple of years. Because [people] increasingly live in [anonymous] housing blocks, in gated communities. Here you can ring anyone's doorbell and ask for a cup of cooking oil, for water, for salt, or for food. But in a *site* that's impossible.

In Tarlaabaşı she felt a certain respite from the continuous struggle against different forms of discrimination that she faced everywhere (else) in the city. When asked how she would describe *komsuluk* [neighbourliness] in Tarlaabaşı, Müge replied:

It's very nice. If only it was like that everywhere. I get along well with the local shop owners, and they tolerate me. I can get credit [at the shops], I don't have any problems with them here. I can postpone the payment of my debts [*veleziye*]. I can tell them that I don't have money, I can even tell them to get lost if they pester me. If you can say that [to a shopkeeper], that means there is great familiarity between us. As for my neighbours, they bring me food when they have cooked something, they ask how I'm doing. And I'm a working woman [sex worker]. Is it right for a family woman to greet me in the street? If you ask most people, they'd say that it isn't. But here, when [a woman] walks past me,

she asks: ‘Mügecim, how are you sweetie? Do you have any worries, any problems?’ They ask me how things are. I tell them: ‘I am fine, *anneciğim*, what can I do, I get by.’ I ask: ‘Do you have any worries?’ And I say that if she does have any, she should tell me, and she says that she will. That’s how it is here. After all, I can buy on credit, when I am sad the people here console me and support me. They are helpful. I have no problems with the shopkeepers, the neighbours, the families. Because we are like relatives here now, that is how I could sum it up. We are like family. We have been around each other for a long time by now. I can ask [neighbours] for a handful of bulgur. No problem. I know they will always give it to me. If I say ‘good day, *hayatım*’ to a woman I don’t even know she will smile, and [wish me well and success at my work]. If someone says this, that means they have accepted [me]. I mean, many of them are hypocrites. They say [have a good workday] to your face, but then turn around and gossip. [*laughs*].

Müge’s entrance-level flat was only a few metres down from the corner where she waited for customers. The teahouse was frequented almost uniquely by regulars: local shopkeepers, artisans, workers, municipal cleaners, and the trans* sex workers from the brothel next door. Müge and Gülay both spent a considerable amount of their time there during the day, especially when it was cold or raining, if they needed a break, or to play a round of cards or *okey*²² with the other guests during a lull in customers. Other trans* sex workers would make use of the place to rest and refresh their make-up, or to have a tea or Nescafé. The atmosphere in the teahouse was convivial and friendly. Hakan and the other men would refer to Müge affectionately as “my girl/daughter” [*kızım*] or “sweetie” [*canım*], and she seemed to be at ease with the jokes and sometimes teasing comments. She could also hold her own, and did not shy away from wisecracking, even if the pun was somewhat “slippery”. There were few, if any other places in Istanbul that I knew of where trans* residents and non-trans* residents entertained such friendly ties, let alone played cards together. However, and as I have described earlier, what at first glance looked and felt like a tight neighbourhood community had required a lot of negotiations, emotional labour and, at times, physical violence, and still amounted to a somewhat uneasy truce that papered over the underlying tension and conflicts. As she describes above, Müge was ambivalent about her neighbours and the men in the teahouse. At times she accused them of hypocrisy, arguing that they were in fact transphobes who talked badly about her behind her back and who only tolerated the brothel because they had received “a good beating” ten years prior. However, she equally underlined the good relations that she had established in the neighbourhood and said that the men in her street loved her enough to keep an eye out for her and her home. It was this “certain level of familiarity” (Sakızlıoğlu 2014a: 184) that she was going to lose with the demolition of Tarlabaşı and her move into a suburban *site*.

Other than relative safety and acceptance, a diverse infrastructure had emerged around the illegal and semi-illegal sex trade in and around the wider Tarlabaşı and Taksim area. It included bars, music halls [*pavyon*], discos and hotels that allowed trans*

22 *Okey* is a popular tile-based game that is often played in coffeehouses/teahouses. While in theory it can be played by two or three players, it is usually played by four. It is very similar to the German game *Rummikub* as it requires the same set of boards and tiles, but it is played under a different set of rules.

sex workers to enter and to find and entertain possible customers. This network also encompassed a number of hairdressing salons and wig makers, tailors and cobblers that catered to a trans* clientele. I had been granted a seat off the side in one of these salons thanks to my friendship with the women in Bird Street. It was run by Cigdem and her husband, an impossibly gaunt man who rarely spoke, and who, under the direction of his wife, was responsible for hair styles and wigs. Cigdem tended to outfits and make-up, and was assisted by Kemal, a young man bedecked in tattoos, and her teenage daughter.

On Friday and Saturday nights the shop was usually packed. The usually harried owner, wielding fake nails, bottles of glitter and large make-up palettes, shouted commands to Kemal and her husband who was trying to efficiently rotate the use of their four chairs. Some customers – those that were good at it and could not afford the hairdresser's service each time – were allowed to do their own hair, make-up, and nails. The women also helped each other with hair clips, zippers, or putting on jewellery. Some used the computer in the shop to find customers on websites set up to arrange the exchange of sex against money. Here, too, the presence of colleagues made it easier to screen potential clients, as information about those that cheated on pay or were prone to use violence could be pooled and exchanged. Müge, who preferred subtle make-up and sober outfits, only made use of the hairdressers to sit and rest during the day, when business was slow.

Hairdresser, Saturday night



Photo by Jonathan Lewis

The fact that Tarlabaşı had a “spoiled” reputation and was, in the shared consciousness of the city, a trans* space, afforded a certain, if relative, safety for trans* people. The sizeable trans* presence in the neighbourhood gave rise to a trans* infrastructure and strengthened solidarity ties of the trans* community. The trans* women I got to know better during my fieldwork in Tarlabaşı had all, without exception, experienced discrim-

ination, and harassment in their everyday lives. All had lived through horrific violence, including sexual assault and police torture. The proximity to each other and the possibility to exchange information – on customers, police controls, safe and unsafe working locations – was therefore vitally important.

Trans* solidarity networks extended beyond Tarlaşaşı. Several of the women, including Müge, regularly frequented the LGBTQ and sex workers' rights associations that were situated in the proximity of Taksim Square at the time, and could all be easily reached on foot.²³ These associations not only provided legal and health advice, but also organised marches, conferences and street protests around Taksim Square and on the main İstiklal Avenue. These extended trust networks gave trans* women, as Müge put it, a sense of increased agency: "There are many of us in Tarlaşaşı. We are a community. We are strong here." She added that she felt trans* persons had more power to act in Beyoğlu than elsewhere in the city because they were many. She believed that the police refrained from all-out discrimination and violent abuse in Tarlaşaşı because the government dreaded local trans* person's ability to organise legal street protests quickly.²⁴

The (female) neighbours [kadın komşuları]

When I first met Alev, she was in her late twenties. Unmarried, she lived in a three-bedroom apartment in the building on Tree Street. She shared the place with her elderly parents, her older brother, his wife, and their two young daughters. Because Alev was working in a textile workshop in Tarlaşaşı six days a week, the family had been able to afford comforts such as a washing machine that they kept in the entrance for reasons of space. Like many women in Tarlaşaşı, Alev and her sister-in-law made their own bread. They baked the flat bread on an electric sheet metal oven [*sac*], a not inexpensive kitchen utensil that in cities had replaced the open flame and gas ovens used in rural homes. Since there was too little space in the kitchen and baking too messy to be done in any other room of the house, bread baking happened in the hallway. Done usually once a week, they moved the large bowl of dough and the *sac* there and set to work. Their front door always remained open then, and the baking spilled out into the shared staircase. It was common that Cemile or other female neighbours from the building joined them there. They would either help, make use of the oven (since they didn't necessarily own one themselves) and bake a few batches of bread, or take care of each other's children and grandchildren. It also was an opportunity to chat and keep each other company.

Over the years, the women had developed close friendships and a close-knit support network across the floors of their building in Tree Street. The doors of their apartments were always open, and the women (and their children) arrived unannounced in each other's homes to visit almost every day. In her work on gender and belonging in

23 Some of these NGOs, such as Lambda, had to move away from Beyoğlu since then.

24 By that time, the LGBTQ movement in Turkey had gained considerable traction. Despite the prevalent attitude of AKP politicians, especially following the election success of 2007, of opposing LGBTQ rights, groups such as Lambda were able to substantially increase LGBTQ visibility and solidarity with LGBTQ persons in Turkey. Somewhat counterintuitively, the conservative AKP and the queer movement in Turkey grew stronger at the same time, as the space for social movements had grown considerably, at least until 2011 (see Çetin and Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik 2016).

Kuzguncuk, Amy Mills (2007: 341) identifies such frequent neighbourly visits as a constitutive (and gendered) practice that creates and sustains *mahalle* life. She writes: “The responsibility of visiting frequently enough to demonstrate membership in the community and the ways of visiting with other women (talking, reading coffee fortunes, drinking tea, eating, helping prepare food or interacting with children, or keeping company while someone does chores) are important characteristics of *mahalle* life.”

For these women, the most crucial neighbourhood community in Tarlabası was that of their own building. And while all of them had other relatives and friends in the area and visited them, the most frequent social calls were on the other women in the same house. Neighbourly activities in Tree Street included the sharing of childcare duties and household chores, but also crucial emotional and material support. The looming threat of displacement brought the women closer together.²⁵ Alev’s downstairs neighbour Cemile, the only non-Kurdish woman in the building by the time I met them, spent many hours in Alev’s company to discuss her fears of displacement, her marital problems, the mountain of debt that she and her husband Ramazan were facing, and the difficulties of finding another apartment.

Cemile’s marriage had begun to deteriorate after Ramazan signed away their shared six-bedroom flat. She was stressed and angry over Ramazan’s “idiocy”, and he had started to become violent towards her during their increasingly frequent fights. The crucial support of her female neighbours helped her a lot, she told me later. Both Alev and Esma regularly took her in when Ramazan had again thrown her out of their shared house, and once even went to the project sales office to hold Fatih Bey and his colleagues accountable. The women blamed them for the abuse their neighbour Cemile now suffered at the hands of her husband. Cemile said:

Go and ask Esma! The whole house went [to the sales office] and told them: you just come and see how badly Cemile Abla is being beaten up because of you. My husband even threw me out of the house. [points] He opened this door and threw me out. He said, leave, go wherever you want. Whose fault was that? Theirs!

Esma also offered to speak to the lawyer she had hired to claim her late husband’s inheritance for her child when Cemile started to consider getting a divorce.

Most of the women had little or no say in what happened to their homes, because title deeds were in their husband’s names. They were not being consulted by their families or the developer over alternatives and the options they had. Fikriye, a Kurdish woman in her thirties who shared a two-bedroom apartment with her husband, three small boys and a newborn baby girl lived on the top floor of the building in Tree Street. Her husband was working long hours as a porter [*hamal*] in the Istanbul neighbourhood of Eminönü²⁶,

25 This manifested also in political engagement. In the 2011 national elections Cemile, a long-time AKP voter, was swayed to cast her ballot in favour of the independent candidate, a well-known film director backed by the pro-Kurdish Peace and Democracy Party (BDP). Alev, who was invested in the Kurdish struggle and interested in politics, had jokingly rallied for that candidate for months in front of Cemile, and praised him as “handsome”. Cemile later told Alev that she had voted for “one of yours this year”.

26 The historic district of Eminönü has been a centre of business and trade for centuries. Narrow paths and steep, often very crowded streets prevent lorries from passing through, which is why porters

and was therefore often alone at home with the children. The family was quite poor even for Tarlaşa standards. Contrary to Alev, Fikriye did not work outside the home and was dependent on others, her husband, her relatives, and the charity of her neighbours. After the first families moved out of Tarlaşa, the presence of drug dealers and non-resident sex workers on the streets increased, and a general feeling of insecurity worried those that had stayed behind. Because Fikriye was alone and did not dare to send her small boys to buy food from the cornershop after nightfall, Alev often did it for her, and generally kept an eye out for the other woman.

Staircase socialising



Photo by Jonathan Lewis

The women's local solidarity network had taken a first hit early in project negotiations. Two former (female) neighbours had sold their apartments early on during the negotiation stage and left the building, which was cause for reproach from the remaining women in Tree Street and who blamed them for their lack of neighbourly solidarity. I never met either of them. Cemile told me that one of these women had agreed to sell her apartment at the very first meeting with the municipal lawyers and *GAP İnşaat*. While she added that the woman "had wanted to leave anyway to be with her son in Eskişehir", it was clear that she resented her neighbour's decision because, she felt, it had weakened her own resolve. "They did not object to anything, never! That's why it all happened the way it did. Because they never objected to anything, we never even thought of [resisting] either." Alev was more direct. She blamed the two defecting neighbours for the eviction of all remaining residents in the building. "I swear, those people made a mistake. If we had all stuck together, they wouldn't have been able to do anything."

carry heavy loads (up to 200kg) on their backs. *Hamallık* is an extremely precarious occupation, as it does not provide any form of financial stability or social security.

Alev's outgoing personality, her resolute demeanour in the face of threats by the municipality and the *GAP İnşaat* lawyers and her decision to fight them in court led her other neighbours to seek her out when they wanted to talk about their fears and worries regarding the renewal project. Even though she was younger than all the other women, she was the one who often gave them advice.

Despite the closeness of the women to each other, the network that connected them was ultimately tethered to place and very fragile. After all of them had had to move out, and despite most of them finding at least temporary accommodation in the immediate neighbourhood that put all of them within walking distance from each other, mutual visits grew infrequent. And since they did not live in the same building anymore, the nightly chats and the sharing of chores ceased altogether.

Contrary to Wacquant's claim that residents will seek to exit a stigmatised neighbourhood as soon as they are able, many Tarlabası residents displayed a profound attachment to their *mahalle* based on a wide variety of reasons. Rather than distancing themselves from their deeply tainted neighbourhood, residents challenged the stream of negative representations of it (Kirkness 2014: 1289). They defied stigmatised aspects of Tarlabası through ideas of mutual care, solidarity, kinship ties and strong community relations (Nayak 2019: 936).

By describing Tarlabası as a real *mahalle*, a spatial qualifier that evokes socially virtuous traits that are not commonly associated with the "modern" neighbourhoods that are increasingly replacing them, residents insisted that Tarlabası, too, was in fact a virtuous place and worth saving. Despite the problems and tension that existed in Tarlabası as they do in any other neighbourhood, it was evident that people felt a strong connection to their *mahalle*. For many, these ties were born out of necessity and for a lack of alternatives. They were dependent on the relatively cheap rents, on the proximity to a large number of service jobs in Beyoğlu, and on the existence of minority group networks they could fall back on for support. However, as the above examples have shown, belonging in Tarlabası did not mean the mere absence of exclusion, but real inclusion and access to the basic accommodation of a social contract that is available to those who are members of a traditional *mahalle*. Many of the minority groups that had access to such crucial support struggled to find it elsewhere. Furthermore, Tarlabası was a place of memory for the many people who have lived in the neighbourhood for years, who were raised there, who found a home after experiencing the trauma of displacement, who established strong neighbourly ties, and who built a business there. Highlighting social relations of everyday life rescripts a neighbourhood as stigmatised as Tarlabası and challenges the stigmatising narrative. Such a portrayal speaks to the kind of deep ties and relations of mutual support and solidarity that can be found in a *mahalle* but are erased in outsider accounts and the negative frame put forth by project stakeholders and much of the media (see August 2014; Nayak 2017; Cairns 2018).

Chapter six: Have you heard?

In 2006, the Beyoğlu Municipality convened a meeting with Tarlabaşı residents to discuss a possible regeneration of the neighbourhood financed by a World Bank loan. Municipal officials told attendees that property owners would be able to renovate their own properties with the help and guidance of municipal authorities and public institutions responsible for the preservation and upkeep of listed buildings. Residents were told that nobody would be displaced. For the most part, the community welcomed the idea, as people generally agreed that the housing stock in the neighbourhood was in dire need of repair. Furthermore, regulations and conservation norms concerning the renovation of listed buildings in Tarlabaşı had prevented house owners from investing in their properties, and several people had been slapped with fines for undertaking repairs without consulting officials and obtaining required permits.

Second-hand furniture seller Cemal, the 60-year-old Turkish man who had sold his five-storey Levantine building on Tree Street, recalled his initial excitement at the prospect of a neighbourhood upgrade: “We were not against the project. Tarlabaşı needed renovations. We were happy about the idea, and we thought that we would make gains from it.” However, for more than one year there were no further news about the proposed World Bank-financed regeneration project. But rumours began to circulate in the neighbourhood. Some property owners had received letters from the municipality and corporate lawyers that worked for a project developer, inviting them to engage in one-on-one talks. Were these sales negotiations? Would the World Bank regeneration project actually happen? But now there was talk of demolitions – was that true? Would people lose their homes after all? Some property owners, like the retired Turkish couple Cemile and Ramazan, were suddenly unsure of their plans to take on a considerable debt to undertake urgently needed home renovations. Furthermore, the media began to report on the Romani neighbourhood of Sulukule that was being evicted under contentious municipal renewal plans. Was Tarlabaşı in danger of suffering the same fate? Tarlabaşı residents were suddenly afraid that they, too, would receive meagre compensations and lose their homes and businesses. The municipality stalled and put to rest individual fears of displacement. Cemile proceeded to take out a loan, buy new PVC windows and a new balcony door, and hire painters and plasterers. At the same time the municipality tried to negotiate with some property owners, and it was one of their

private lawyers who was finally able to obtain hard information: the urban regeneration scheme was going to be implemented on the basis of a public-private partnership between the Beyoğlu Municipality and construction company *GAP İnşaat*, a subsidiary of Çalık Holding, a business conglomerate then under the leadership of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's son-in-law Berat Albayrak (Ünsal 2013: 140). Upon receiving such alarming news, some property owners called for a meeting with the municipality, where they learned that the municipality had declared Tarlaşaşı an urban renewal zone on the basis of Law No. 5366 back in 2006 and issued a tender behind their backs. Not they, but *GAP İnşaat*, who had already signed the contract, would redevelop Tarlaşaşı. Some residents learned this, together with the rest of the Turkish public, from the media. Cemile had to obtain this information from the same municipal officials who had previously told her that no demolitions would take place. She was not the only one who later told me that the shock of the news had made her and her husband sick. In later conversations residents blamed at least two strokes and one death in Tarlaşaşı on the distressing revelation that a large part of the neighbourhood would be destroyed, and everyone evicted.

Even after the public announcement of the Tarlaşaşı renewal project, access to information for residents remained difficult. During the three months that the Tarlaşaşı Association had a seat at the planning table, and therefore (limited) access to renewal proposals and strategies, there was somewhat more transparency. When association spokesman Erdal Aybek ran the consultation office on Tarlaşaşı Boulevard, residents were able to find out who had already sold their buildings or homes, and who had not. However, most other reliable information was hard to come by. It became an even rarer commodity, and one that was more difficult to decipher when the association fell apart, and project stakeholders started to liaise with property owners individually. Just like Cemile, residents were given conflicting information from various – or the exact same – actors. In the same way that the materiality and content of the promotional material changed, information radically fluctuated over time, in tandem with radical shifts in the project and the general political and economic context.

This lack of information and transparency provided the perfect breeding ground for speculation and rumour. James Scott (1990: 144) writes that “rumour thrives most in situations in which events of vital importance to people’s interests are occurring and in which no reliable information or only ambiguous information is available.” Because the channels of reliable information were intentionally strangled or obscured by the municipality, residents had to rely on rumour to navigate the preparations for the project and base their decisions on whichever rumour seemed the most likely. Even data gleaned from sources like municipal press releases did not have more value than a rumour, because there was no single reliable channel of information. All little pieces of information delivered by whatever means, be it the municipality, the *muhtar*, a lawyer, or a conversation overheard somewhere, had the insecure, unreliable status of hearsay.

Rumours could be pessimistic and defeatist, and sometimes they could be reason for renewed hope that the project might stall or change to the advantage of residents. Some rumours centred on possible resistance, and others conspiratorially whispered of project stakeholders’ nefarious efforts to break it and make the neighbourhood look worse than it was. More often than not, rumours were confusing and paralysing, making residents second-guess their own decisions. In November 2011, when evictions and demolitions were

well underway, furniture seller Cemal told me that “someone from the municipality” had told him that stakeholders were lacking the funds to continue the project and might yet resort to asking people to renovate their individual homes, just as the municipality had initially suggested in the 2006 meeting. If true, these were not welcome news for Cemal. He had signed over his title deed early on during the negotiation phase and exchanged his building for two apartments in the new project. He was therefore dependent on the project to continue as planned. The “information” he received came from an individual municipal official he had randomly encountered in the street and was not more than a rumour, but Cemal had no way of knowing if it was credible. It contradicted media statements previously made by mayor Ahmet Misbah Demircan, and the information Cemal had been given in talks with the notorious deputy mayor Fatih Bey. Cemal was desperate to know when he would be able to access the two new apartments. By 2011 he had already spent years without being able to collect the rent from the tenants he had lost together with his property. The promised deadline for the official opening of the new development and the handover of apartments had long passed, and no new final date had been given to future owners. Anthropologist Jayaseelan Raj (2019: 53) underlines that it is irrelevant if rumours are accurate and based on “facts” because they have real life consequences. Cemal had to decide on how to react to the conflicting information he had received, but how? Should he act on the rumour he had heard on the street, for example by taking legal action, or by rallying fellow property owners who were in a similar situation? Or should he trust official channels of communication and dismiss this disquieting rumour as unlikely? The instability of available information stemmed partly from the uncertain accuracy of the information itself, but also from the unpredictability and unreliability of the source delivering it. After all, Cemal was given contradictory information from different people who nevertheless all worked for the municipality. Thinking of himself as a law-abiding citizen and a Turk who, if not entirely trusted, nevertheless respected the authorities, he was unsure if the word of a lower municipal official could be trusted over public statements made by the mayor himself. Then again, project stakeholders had not been open and transparent either and some of what the mayor had promised, like the microcredit for owners to renovate their own homes, had turned out to be untrue. Cemal’s Kurdish shop neighbour Maher dismissed either source as untrustworthy, as both were representatives of the Turkish state. Cemal was at a loss. What would be the most sensible decision?

Despite the fundamental impact that the planned urban renewal project would have on their lives, Tarlabası residents were given very little information on the planned procedures, the legal steps, or the timeline of the project. The municipality and the project developer fully exercised their power over the dissemination of information and peoples’ time in order to pressure them to leave. They made people wait, both for personal appointments and as a community as a whole. They deferred plans without explanation, leaving people to guess if this happened for a lack of funds or for political gain, for example prior to local and national elections. The municipality toyed with residents’ hopes and told them that they might not have to leave for a while, only to then rush parts of the project along unexpectedly (Sakızlıoğlu 2014b: 215). They also used elements of surprise to shock residents, for example by sending riot police and armoured vehicles for an eviction without clear prior announcement that the people in question would have to leave

that day. During the years of nerve-wrecking delays and project changes, people had to contend themselves with “anxious, powerless waiting” (ibid.).

Fencing in the renewal area



Photo by Jonathan Lewis

In the absence of meaningful information, they resorted to speculation and the circulation and interpretation of rumours in an attempt to make sense of the continued ambiguity. Anthropologist David Samper (2002) writes that rumours are more likely to develop when the need for news and reliable information is not, or not sufficiently, met. He defines a rumour as “unverified information that is constructed in order to explain uncertain, ambiguous events or intangible fears, anxieties, or perceived dangers. It emerges in situations where news and information is scarce” (ibid.: 4). It is not surprising that rumours fall on most fertile ground in life-threatening situations, such as war, epidemics, famine, or riots (Scott 1990: 144). The looming menace of displacement and the fear of losing one’s home, work, and social network presented a threatening situation for people living in Tarlaşaşı. In their seminal work on rumour, sociologists Gordon W. Allport and Leo J. Postman (1947) point out that, in situations of crisis and confusion, both the importance and the ambiguity of information increase considerably. The reasons for this initial ambiguity can vary. It can be caused by the absence of information as well as by a lack of clarity in the information someone receives, or by the fact that conflicting versions of information have been spread. It is also possible that the person receiving the information does not manage to comprehend it, for example because of the scientific complexity of the reported facts that may require expert knowledge (ibid.: 2).

In Tarlaşaşı, scraps of information, and clues scoured from direct or indirect interactions with the municipality or the developing company, from the media, from marketing materials, or simply hearsay, were eagerly interpreted and retold. Rumours, as

they travelled through the communication channels of the community, underwent small alterations, depending on who was retelling the “facts” and who was listening. Rumours were therefore a tool of sense-making during a time of growing and stressful uncertainty, a “tactic of the weak” (Scott 1985, 1990) that aimed to glean as much information as possible from their surroundings. In circumstances where people’s safety, livelihoods, and homes are potentially threatened, they have no other choice than to “keep their ears close to the ground” (Scott 1990: 144). The example of Cemal illustrates how Tarlabası residents were burdened with the task of interpretative labour, forcing them to constantly evaluate the sources of information and their trustworthiness. For that they had to rely on their personal history and their previous experiences. People decided if and to what extent they trusted a particular piece of information according to their own wishes and expectations, which in turn determined what they communicated to others. “As rumor travels it is altered in a fashion that brings it more closely into line with the hopes, fears, and worldview of those who hear it and retell it” (ibid.: 145).

In this chapter, I examine different forms and functions of rumour during the run-up to evictions and analyse how rumour interacted with territorial stigmatisation in Tarlabası. While the relation between rumours and violence (Kirsch 2002a; Samper 2002; Stewart and Strathern 2003; Bhavnani et al. 2009; Espeland 2011; Santos 2021.), as well as between rumour and stigma (Varas-Díaz et al. 2005; Zhu and Smith 2016; Bresnahan and Zhuang 2016; Kwesell and Jung 2019) have been extensively researched, the link between rumour, territorial stigmatisation, and the violence of eviction and displacement remains a gap in the literature. My fieldwork in Tarlabası has shown that rumour can provide explanations in that context.

Demolitions



Photo by Jonathan Lewis

The symbolic denigration of the neighbourhood was a constantly renewed process of undermining peoples' social and moral authority, denying them the access to some basic form of social contract, including the right to reliable information and transparency. The municipality's strategy of actively withholding or confusing reliable information had profound legal impacts and material consequences for residents, such as the denial of their rights to recourse, their right to institutional inclusion, and protection from a state in which they were citizens. While these forms of denigration took different shapes, they were all bound up in stigma and intentionally marginalising.

Being forced to rely on rumour was therefore both a material consequence and a mechanism of the neighbourhood stigmatisation. And as I have shown in chapter two, the invisibilisation of residents, which is causally linked to the withholding of information, was part of the stigmatisation process. In a way, the rumours, and the massive amount of interpretative labour that went into their assessment and interpretation, were part of peoples' tactics to cope with the material consequences of stigma. On the other hand, withholding of reliable information was part of the everyday work that agents of the state and the developers were doing to make the stigmatisation of the neighbourhood stick. In the following pages I aim to show how the lack of information and circulating rumours made it difficult for house owners and tenants to make sense of what was going to happen to their homes and their neighbourhood, and thus difficult to plan or take actions about how to deal with looming evictions.

Firstly, I will show how a certain rumour gained momentum in the neighbourhood, how it was interpreted by different people, and how, through a chance encounter, this specific rumour was put to rest. I will then elaborate on how residents, unable to verify the accuracy of the information they received, tried to analyse the channels of communication that the information was spread through, and how their own personal experiences influenced the way they might reach a conclusion of what to believe and act on. Following that I will give examples of rumours that created stronger solidarity ties in the run-up to evictions, as well as examples of rumours that weakened them. And finally, I want to show how residents used rumour to make sense of the stigmatisation and the discriminatory treatment they felt they were subjected to by the municipality.

The scope and life cycle of a rumour

In June 2010, Feyzullah Yetgin, then a board member of Çalık Holding and the CEO of its construction company *GAP İnşaat*, publicly said that 75 percent of all property owners in Tarlabaşı had reached an agreement with the municipality, and that demolitions were imminent. Yetgin argued that the majority legally necessary for the start of the project had thereby been reached. His statement was widely published in the mainstream media. Two months later, Beyoğlu mayor Ahmet Misbah Demircan claimed that 70 percent of property owners had sold their title deeds to the municipality, and that compulsory purchase proceedings had been launched for the remaining 30 percent (NTV 2010).

These statements created a wave of panicked rumours amongst residents who were still in dispute over their property, and amongst tenants who lacked the access to infor-

mation on when they would be evicted.¹ It is impossible to verify if the public claims made by Yetgin and Demircan were true at the time. Contradictory as they were in their chronology, they likely were not. The Tarlabası Association was adamant that the number of sold title deeds at the time was considerably lower. Furthermore, both men failed to mention that a considerable number of residents were still opposing their expropriations in court, and that the court case to stop the entire project, initiated by the Istanbul Chamber of Architects (TMMOB) in 2008, was ongoing. And both the executive and the mayor glossed over the threats, blackmail, and lies that had preceded a number of “agreements” made with residents. And even if their numbers were (close to) being accurate – and none of the residents had any means to verify this independently of the media reports – their statements clearly meant to inject fear into the neighbourhood and motivate property owners to sign over their title deeds by insinuating that sales negotiations would soon be replaced by legal expropriations.

It is just as impossible to determine if project stakeholders deliberately spread rumours in order to further their interests, but it is certain that they contributed to their spread. Intentionality in the rumour process is complex (Scott, 1985; Kapferer 1990; De Feyter 2015). Sophie De Feyter (2015: 291) underlines that “[e]ven if rumour-mongers are eyeing certain interests, this does not necessarily mean that a rumour was started by a particular actor with the deliberate intention to influence public opinion on a large scale”. Actors who are involved in spreading rumours are “profiteers”: while they might not be the authors of a certain rumour, they do have an interest in seeing the rumour spread in order to further their aims (ibid.: 297).

The above media statements were made during a time of growing uncertainty in the neighbourhood. The Tarlabası Association had succeeded to considerably delay the progress of the renewal project and to rally support from a number of local and international civil society organisations. During that time, *GAP İnşaat* and the municipality followed the strategy of approaching religious charitable trusts [*vakıflar*] and other larger institutions who owned property inside the renewal zone. Additionally, they made revised offers to some property owners, predominantly to those who owned large properties and properties in advantageous locations, in order to convince them to restart one-on-one negotiations. They also contacted individual property owners who were not members of the Tarlabası Association in the hope to persuade them (Ünsal 2013: 134). None of these efforts were made public, and none of them were transparent for residents. They were nevertheless aware of them, as bits and pieces of information travelled through the neighbourhood. This only increased the uncertainty and provided ample fodder for rumours of a growing number of property owners who were secretly attending negotiation meetings and selling their properties (ibid.: 135). Furthermore, the press announce-

1 It was common knowledge in Tarlabası at the time that project stakeholders were legally authorised to expropriate the remaining buildings if they came to an agreement with 75% of homeowners. However, originally there was no law that stated this. I was told by a fellow researcher that the law was later modified to legalise threats of and actual appropriations, but I have not been able to independently confirm this. Tarlabası residents believed this regulation to be law at the time, which drove the resulting panic. This is further proof of how incoherently and constantly the stakes, and, in this case, literal laws changed during the time residents had to interact with the project.

ments that more than 70 percent of properties had been sold were made at a time that the association's provision of information was faltering, as spokesman Erdal Aybek left over disagreements with the board. That meant that residents had lost the option to verify which title deeds were still in the hands of their Tarlabası owners, and which title deeds had already been sold. Tenants had started to move out, fearful that they might find themselves homeless, which in turn put pressure on landlords unwilling to sell, as they were losing rental income without compensation or the possibility to find new tenants. In short, both *GAP İnşaat* CEO Yetgin and the Beyoğlu mayor exploited and fed into an already well-established rumour, which convinced some residents that it must be true.

Alev was one of the property owners who fought compulsory purchase of her family's apartment in court. The title deed of the three-bedroom flat was in her mother's name.² Since Alev's mother she did not understand or speak Turkish Alev accompanied their lawyer to the courthouse. One day after a hearing in January of 2011, Alev started a casual conversation with one of the project lawyers in the hallway. The tone of their conversation was pleasant, and Alev felt comfortable enough to complain about the pace of the Tarlabası cases being reviewed. In reply, the project lawyer accidentally told her that the property sales were not going as fast as the mayor had previously alleged. A few days later Alev retold the story in her home:

So the lawyer told me: 'We are three lawyers. I am in charge of [court cases for] one hundred houses. By myself.' So I said: There are three lawyers, that makes three hundred houses, if each lawyer is in charge of one hundred. But I thought half of Tarlabası has already been sold? So how is that possible? [...] Then [the lawyer] started to get nervous. I said: that's a nice number. If this is how it is, not many people have sold [their homes]. Most court cases are still ongoing then. [The lawyer] said: 'Yes, that's mostly the case.' Because [this information] had already slipped out of her mouth.

Alev was delighted when she told me about this encounter. She felt that she had gotten the better of the project lawyer in the courthouse. Even more importantly, she had finally received some tangible information. She judged the lawyer's blunder to be more reliable in part because she had the impression that the woman told her about the lagging sales by mistake. The fact that the developers and the municipality were still battling such a large number of cases in court was not meant for the ears of property owners who were resisting compulsory purchase. The lawyer's immediate discomfort following her slip of tongue suggested to Alev that this unintentional private comment was the truth, even though it contradicted stakeholders' previous claims that the necessary majority of property owners had already come to an agreement with the municipality. For Alev, this inconsistency was less surprising than it could have been. Her experience with Turkish state institutions and agents of the state had been almost entirely negative, and she did not trust the municipality or the pro-government developers to tell residents the truth and defend their best interests. It follows that when she got one of their lawyers to slip up in the courthouse corridor, she knew that she had succeeded to catch a glimpse of

2 Alev had worked hard to be able to buy the apartment for her family while still in her late teens. She told me that she had not wanted to put it in her father's name because her father was so "good-hearted" and would give away the apartment to help "the first relative in trouble who would ask".

the offstage, the hidden transcript (Scott 1990) that powerholders did not want Tarlaşa residents to see. This knowledge strengthened her resolve to pursue legal steps against the municipality, and to follow through with a court case before the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg.

Alev chose how to act based on her interaction with the project lawyer and on the interpretation of the information she received from her, even if this piece of information was still just rumour, and not an authoritative fact. Those never existed. For Alev, the rumour that more than 70 percent of property owners had come to an agreement with project stakeholders was therefore laid to rest. Despite the fact that the lawyer's information could not be independently confirmed and that it contradicted what the mayor and the project company had publicly claimed, Alev picked it up as a trustworthy piece of information, that aligned more closely with her hopes and her previous experiences with the Turkish state.

Traffic analysis

Neither Alev nor second-hand furniture seller Cemal had any way of verifying the information they received. In order to assess their response based on what they heard, be it in the corridors of a courthouse or during a random encounter on the street, they needed to consider the person who told them, and the circumstances under which the news had been delivered.

If people have no access to material fact of a piece of information, they make their determinations of factuality based on other aspects, such as the channel that the information moves along. This form of interpretative labour can be compared with “traffic analysis – an analytical practice more commonly associated with intelligence/espionage activities” (Clark 2016: 246). Traffic analysis is defined as “the process of intercepting and examining messages in order to deduce information from patterns in communication, which can be performed even when the messages are encrypted” (ibid.). Gretchen Pfeil (2012: 52) underlines that “traffic analysis becomes the privileged mode of interpretation precisely in those cases where other aspects of communication are obscured or occluded.”

This is what happened with the rumours in Tarlaşa. People did not have access to information of where a rumour originated, and whether it was truly fact. However, it was possible to know who spread them and under which circumstances, and some sources were considered to be more reliable than others. The process that people based their reactions to rumours on were, to say the least, complicated. Whether someone sold their house could come down to the question of who was considered a credible source of information, and who was not.

The rumour that the legally required 75 percent of property owners had signed over their title deeds to project stakeholders had been delivered by senior officials and through the “serious” channels of mainstream media. And the stakes were high. Worries over possible disadvantageous expropriation agreements amongst property owners increased the pressure. Tenants were afraid that their landlords had sold their buildings without telling them, leaving them at the mercy of the municipality and the project

developer. Whispers of residents that this had happened to (and it *did* happen) further fuelled this fear. These fears accelerated the domino effect of them moving out, forcing a number of property owners to consider selling as their rental income vanished. However, at the same time the Tarlabası Association was still lobbying for fairer negotiations and more profitable deals. Residents often knew property owners, or tenants of property owners who were still deadlocked in legal disputes with project stakeholders over the sale of their title deeds. It was difficult for residents to decide whom to believe.

It is therefore no surprise that people tried to estimate the veracity of the mayor's and the GAP İnşaat CEO's statements from conversations with neighbours, landlords, shopkeepers or an occasionally passing low-level official. They tried to keep track of people who had moved out and observed which buildings had been abandoned. (However, since the knowledge of who was a tenant, and who held a title deed was often confined to their immediate surroundings and not known to each resident for the entire project area, this was in no way a reliable method to reach a conclusion.) Rumours about how many buildings had been sold were avidly exchanged. Knowing, at least approximately, how many people were still negotiating with the municipality was important to decide if further resistance was a good idea, or possibly detrimental to the final sales price of one's property. It is important to note that project stakeholders had an interest to fuel the belief that most property owners had reached an agreement, since they wanted to force doubters to follow suit and accept cheaper sales prices. GAP İnşaat representatives and municipality officials regularly threatened property owners with dropping sales prices should they be amongst the last to agree.

Having to rely on traffic analysis is in itself not that unusual. For example, one might do this during personal conflicts, or to assess the efficiency of a work meeting. However, in Tarlabası the stakes to come to the most accurate conclusion based on the analysis of communication channels and signs were incredibly high. Residents faced displacement, loss of income and their social network, and in many cases, being evicted from a house they owned without adequate compensation. People had to rely entirely on rumour, without any underlying layer of statutory fact that they could somehow find and compare. They had ample proof that everybody interested in the progress of the renewal project was lying to them: the municipality, the developer, the project lawyers, *zabıta* officers, and the media. Alev had been "lucky" in the courthouse and decided that it was to her and her family's advantage to appeal the low price the municipality had wanted to pay. Cemal, on the other hand, had more difficulties to discern the best possible action based on his conversation with a *zabıta* officer, as he was not only interested in the fast completion of the project, but also reluctant to flatly dismiss the words of the Beyoğlu mayor.

Interpretative labour

There was not only a lack of reliable facts, but the information that was made available was constantly changing. The project catalogues analysed in chapter three are an important example of that. Project deadlines had come and gone without any real progress and without explanation from the municipality. Most crucially, residents were largely kept

guessing as to when they would have to leave their homes and workplaces. There were multiple reasons for that. In some cases, tenants who lived or worked in buildings whose owners were locked in court disputes with the municipality had no way of knowing what the outcome of these court cases would be, and when they would come to an end. Tenants whose buildings had already been sold received eviction orders from the municipality but were also told by individual municipal officials that they could stay “until the start of demolitions”. They were not told, however, when that might be. Many tenants struggled to find new lodgings and had nowhere else to go. Property owners who opposed compulsory purchase orders had to depend on the slow, and often erratic, timeline of the courts. And even with ongoing court cases, such as the trial initiated by the Chamber of Architects, the municipality illegally pursued evictions, and later, demolitions.

Unverified scraps of information became rumours that residents had to weigh for their credibility in order to make a meaningful decision on how to react to it. In the same way that certain groups experienced stigma differently and depending on previous collective or individual experiences, all interpretative labour was informed by a person's personal history and previous experience, their relationship to the source of the rumour, their political affiliations, and their own expectations.

With the summer of 2010, the rumours of expropriations and the de facto dissolution of the Tarlabası Association, much of the talk in the neighbourhood centred on the question when evictions and demolitions of homes would *really* begin. Temporal markers like national elections, religious holidays, or the return to school in the fall were all feared possible starting points. These rumours were in turn fanned by project stakeholders. Again, people tried to guess the “right” course of action from conversations with neighbours, from things they had randomly overheard, and from events happening around them. Again, project stakeholders did not volunteer reliable information.

In January 2011, rumours on pending demolitions caused a renewed wave of fear in the neighbourhood. One evening, Cemile joined Alev and me to talk about the latest snippets of information they had heard.

- A: [cheerful] Girl, there will be demolitions in February, have you heard?
- C: That's what they're apparently saying in the association, I don't know about that.
- A: Who in the association said this? How can they start to demolish, half of the houses are still disputed in court! That would be illegal.
- C: Vallah, in the teahouse they say that there has been talk of it.
- A: But where do they know this from?
- C: I don't know either. I just got here. I haven't yet talked to my husband. [In the teahouse] they asked me what I was going to do, but I told them, look, now I'm really depressed, don't talk to me right now. That's how I left it. There's nothing we can do now.

Alev, had left the Tarlabası Association in 2011 and hired her own lawyer because she did not believe the association to be very effective or even trustworthy, which made her sceptical about all unverified information coming from that group. Alev wanted to exhaust all court instances in Turkey to be able to take her case to the European Court of Hu-

man Rights, because she was convinced that the project and the planned expropriations were unlawful. This was only possible if all instances of Turkish courts rejected her claim. Her belief that the dispute *would* go all the way to Strasbourg reflected her distrust in the Turkish judicial system and the state, whom she did not view as a reliable “provider of justice” (Biner 2012: 243). Despite her bad experiences with unjust laws, she did believe that “the law” as an abstract and “a normative order of potential social justice” (Eckert 2012: 152) would protect her against arbitrary illegal actions by the state. It is one reason why she dismissed the rumour of the February evictions. Julia Eckert (2012: 150–151), in her research on the “rumours of rights” in an Indian slum, demonstrates how law appears “as a site of hope, of a just world in which the poor would not lose out.” She shows that marginalised groups, despite their adverse experiences with the law as it was enacted by state institutions, place their hope in a “diffuse idea of law” (ibid.) that, in their opinion, will deliver (social) justice.

Alev’s hope to attain justice rested on the law (as an abstract), and less on political means such as demonstrations or protests, a phenomenon analysed under the term of “juridification”: “[P]eople demonstrate a startlingly persistent faith in ‘the law’, as evidenced by their ever-increasing recourse to legal means to settle conflicts” (Eckert et al. 2012: 5–6). While this may lead to depoliticization, it is a tactic that is increasingly being used by marginalised groups to hold the powerful to account. A detailed analysis of the perception, especially among the Kurdish population, of the European Court of Human Rights as an almost mythical institution that infallibly delivers justice is beyond the scope of this work. Suffice it here to say that the court was often mentioned as *the* place that would stand up to the Turkish authorities in the fight against evictions from Tarlaşaşı, and most often by members of the Kurdish community.

Cemile, on the other hand, reacted very differently to the rumour of pending evictions. Her family’s adverse experience with legal procedures, due to the way in which project stakeholders pressured her husband into signing away their title deed, had weakened her trust in the idea of “justice”. While her two adult children, both employed in white collar jobs, argued that their father’s signature had been coerced, rendering the contract null and void, the family lacked the economic and social capital to pursue legal action and never formally contested the agreement. Cemile said that she “did not know how” to pursue a court case, and that they “did not know anyone who could have pushed such an endeavour”, and, on another occasion, that she “did not want any money” and that she “simply didn’t see the point”. Despite having been property owners, Ramazan and Cemile had never been members of the Tarlaşaşı Association, because, she told me roughly a year after her eviction, she did not believe that the association would have been able to halt the project: “What could they do? The association did not serve any purpose. Everyone protested, but [the project stakeholders] kept saying: we will demolish this place.”

By January 2011, the precariousness of their situation was putting considerable strain on Cemile. She suffered from insomnia, anxiety, and chronic stress. Her marriage had deteriorated. This partly explained her morose reaction to the rumour she had heard in the teahouse. She told Alev and me what she had told her unknown interlocutor: that she was “depressed” [*moralım bozuk*] and therefore not willing to discuss the information she had received further. Though it was only based on hearsay and not more credible than

any of the other fearful estimations of when demolitions would begin, I sensed that it had significantly lowered her morale.

Furthermore, she was not reassured by Alev's comment that evictions before the conclusion of all court cases would be illegal, or that this would stop project stakeholders. Cemile did not believe in the justice of the Turkish court system, and unlike her younger neighbour, she also did not believe in any kind of abstract idea of The Law as a site of hope and possible opposition to *injustice*. This negative view of what The Law could or could not do for her partly stemmed from her family's recent encounter with actual lawyers who had abused legal tools in order to force her husband to sign the sales contract. A number of scholars have underlined the importance of past events and experiences for the production and spread of rumours (Kapferer 1990; Stewart and Strathern 2003; Greenhill and Oppenheim 2013; De Feyter 2015). Based on her recent history Cemile did not believe that any kind of justice system could protect her. Alev, on the other hand, had hired a lawyer, closely followed each judicial step, and was set on exhausting all legal avenues available to her because she was confident that justice and The Law, once freed from the confines of Turkish state discrimination, would prevail. For Cemile, an ethnic Turkish woman who had never had any legal troubles before, this was the first time that she was confronted with such lawlessness and injustice from the Turkish state, and she experienced this as a deep betrayal of her as a citizen. It made her hopeless and passive. Alev already knew what Turkish state institutions were capable of in terms of structural and physical violence. Her trust in a vague notion of the law was not anchored to the Turkish judicial system, but outside of Turkey, in the European Court of Human Rights, an institution she believed would protect her and her neighbour's rights and deliver (social) justice. She knew that in order to be able to litigate her case, she had to fight and exhaust all legal avenues in Turkey first. As one consequence of this, Cemile's reading of the situation had a paralysing effect on her solidarity with others, such as Alev, and her will to oppose the project.

Tenants: Between a rock and a hard place

Around the same time, the continuous delays of project key points and the resulting deferment of its completion fuelled rumours that the developer had vastly miscalculated costs and run out of money. A number of residents wondered if the renewal project might be postponed for a longer period of time, or if it might be shelved altogether. This was similar to what the *zabıta* officer had told Cemal. Starting in 2011, I noticed the circulation of rumours that alleged a fallout between *GAP İnşaat* and the Beyoğlu Municipality over financial matters. Whispers that neither party could agree on how to proceed fuelled hopes – I have to admit that I, too, was susceptible – that the demolitions might be stalled indefinitely. It was impossible to verify these claims. However, some tenants decided to stay put which put them at considerable risk. They partly based that decision on the rumours that evictions were far off, or would perhaps never materialise at all. Kurdish second-hand furniture seller Maher was the tenant of a small shop and the above flat where he lived with his wife and three children. He also rented a shop for his grown-up son in the vicinity of Tree Street. As the (alleged) dates of planned evictions neared, Ma-

her said that it was near impossible to find affordable spaces under similar conditions in the neighbourhood. His livelihood and that of his older son were tied to Tarlabası. While he was searching for alternatives, he decided to stay put despite receiving a string of eviction letters. The rumours that the project would be postponed were more convincing – and more manageable – to him than the municipal correspondence. Furthermore, these letters contradicted the messages and rumours he heard more and more often in his daily neighbourhood interactions.

I asked both the municipality and the company when they would start with the project, and they said: oh, it will take a very long time [*moves his arm in a gesture that illustrates this*]. At this rate it will take at least 20 years to demolish Tarlabası. Why? Look, it takes them one month to fix ten metres of asphalt on one street.³ Nothing is clear here. I heard that the municipality has pulled out [of the project] for a while. Some say that the company fired three different [subcontractors]. And they said we could stay in our houses until the bulldozers come. They said we can stay and that we don't have to pay rent until then, they said otherwise other people would come in and squat these buildings anyway. That's what I'll do. They said that they won't throw anyone out on the street. But then they throw them out and seal the doors to their houses! It's like a children's game. They said we can stay until they start to demolish, and afterwards we can fuck off and go wherever. I have received [eviction] letters, but I haven't signed anything. I didn't open them anymore. They want us to leave right away, but they haven't even started to demolish yet! They should come and buy all the houses, then they can put people out on the street and demolish all the houses! We can stay until they start to demolish, and that's a long time away.

Maher's Kurdish landlord had sold his building to the developer in early 2010. This had left Maher to renegotiate all further rental agreements with project officials and their lawyers. As a tenant he had next to no judicial recourse to appeal his pending eviction, or to demand compensation. In Turkey, housing legislation provides almost no protection for tenants against arbitrary rent increases or eviction, and existing regulations are rarely enforced by state institutions charged with their oversight. Few people rely on the justice system to settle rental disputes. Furthermore, written contracts are rare, which leaves tenants vulnerable to abuse by their landlords. In Tarlabası, rental agreements were frequently based on verbal negotiations. Housing arrangements with relatives or compatriots were based on kinship ties rather than legally binding contracts. Therefore, information and queries about money, the necessity of renovations or the sale of a building were based on kinship norms rather than on the less socially charged relationship between landlord and tenant. In the framework of the renewal project this could mean that details of the sales negotiations were not openly discussed between landlords and tenants who shared family or kinship ties, for reasons of propriety or custom. This of course added to tenants' uncertainty about if and when they would have to leave.

3 At the time of our conversation, the municipality was renewing the pavement on Tree Street, presumably to prepare for the passage of large construction vehicles. Work on the street proceeded very slowly, which caused anger amongst local residents who suffered from the disruption caused by the dirt and the noise.

Maher never received a written contract from his new, temporary landlords, but was initially told that he and his family would be able to stay without paying rent for at least another year. However, he soon began to receive ambiguous and conflicting information concerning his rental status. Official letters that set an eviction date for mid-summer of 2011 started to arrive. Yet in January 2011 Maher was told by civil servants touring the neighbourhood, somewhat randomly, that he should “leave right away”. A few weeks later a *zabita* officer told him during a chat on the street that the renewal project was in fact far from nearing completion, and that he would be able to stay in his home and shop until “the arrival of the bulldozers”. The officer did not specify when that would happen, but implied that this would take a long time.

This left the burden of interpretative labour to Maher. It was impossible for him to know which of the conflicting messages he received was credible enough to act on. He was unable to distinguish inaccurate from accurate information if he ever came across it at all. He therefore based his decision on prior experiences and his hopes for the future (Scott 1985). One could argue that the official eviction letters were the most tangible piece of information he had and likely to be the most definite. However, Maher also knew that other official statements, for example the claim that no resident would be victimised or claims concerning the project timeline, had been false. Besides, he had nowhere else to go, which made the rumours about the delayed project at least more pleasant to believe.

Maher deployed a very limited arsenal of “weapons of the weak” (Scott 1985) in order to strengthen the rumours of delay for himself: he did not open, or did not react to, official letters threatening eviction in the summer of 2011 – he dragged his feet as much as possible – and feigned a certain amount of ignorance despite the risk of being forcibly evicted. His banking on a scrap of unreliable information given to him by a *zabita* officer on the street, a man he had a friendly relationship with and to whom he had often offered glasses of tea, over the official eviction letters of municipal lawyers was also informed by his deep distrust against Turkish state institutions. Since his forced displacement from their home village in Siirt, promises by the Turkish government to compensate him and his family for their losses and to restore a sense of justice had not materialised.⁴ His personal history and his identity as a Kurdish man shaped how he made meaning of the various rumours he had heard. Anthropologist Julia Eckert (2012: 154), in her research on how rumours of rights interpret, communicate, and shape legal norms and laws, underlines: “Rumours, more than any other kinds of knowledge and because of their particular uncertainty, are strongly shaped by fears and hopes, and thus on the one hand by norms of what should or could be, and on the other hand by social constructions of dangers and threat.” In Maher’s case, the deep distrust in the state and its institutions, paired with his precarious situation as a tenant who had nowhere else to go, led him to favour rumours relayed to him by a minor municipal official he had a prior relationship with over, in his eyes at least equally unreliable, written municipal orders of eviction.

4 Failures of the Turkish state to compensate victims of the violent conflict in the southeast have been well-documented (Ayata and Bilgin 2005; Kurban et al. 2007; Biner 2012).

Creating opposition

Rumours have been discussed in the context of insecurity and uncertainty, for their potential to instigate violence (Stoler 1992; Kirsch 2002a; Osborn 2008), to express collective fears (Kaler 2009; De Feyter 2015) and exacerbate social tensions (Stewart and Strathern 2003; Espeland 2011). However, they can also play an important part in fuelling hope. Scholars have shown that rumours can lead to more unity in a beleaguered community, and that they might encourage people to look for solutions. David Samper (2002: 17), drawing on the work of Ralph Rosnow, Gary Alan Fine and Tamotsu Shibutani, writes that rumours can “create cohesion in social groups”. His findings reveal that the exchange of stories that reflect collective worries and anxieties among members of a concerned public bring people together and strengthen community bonds, solidifying the social network. They might even lead to open defiance: “Rumors, shaped by the historically constituted experience of a community, allow people some measure of joint control over ambiguous, stressful situations; they affect the solidarity of a group, creating a public that can then participate in collective action. As counter-hegemonic discourse, rumors may lead to resistance” (ibid.: 2). Rumours might also stand at the beginning of hopeful action: “People act on rumours of possibilities, of opportunities; many a strategy, many a plan or endeavour is motivated by rumours of possibilities”. Economic investments, speculation or migrations to safety are all examples of how rumours motivated people to be optimistic about outcomes and take certain risks (Eckert 2012: 155).

In Tarlaşaşı, even if the municipality was able to capitalise on the existence of certain rumours, they were unable to control how they would play out on the ground. On 11 August 2010, the first day of Ramadan, the grassroots organisation “SOS Istanbul” held a public protest against the planned demolitions on Tarlaşaşı Boulevard. Around fifty people participated, including a handful of local reporters and non-resident activists. Three large banners bearing the three letters “S”, “O”, and “S” and the logo of the initiative were unveiled on building façades facing the street. The organisers read a press statement that called on “all concerned institutions and all attentive citizens to protest against this secretly and quietly conducted project”. There was no visible municipal or police presence.

On the morning of the same day a small number of construction workers and one mechanical digger moved into the neighbourhood to demolish the remaining shell of an abandoned house, a ruin really, on Old Fountain Street. It was the first municipality-led demolition in the renewal zone since the official announcement of the project in 2008. When returning home from the protest, some people noticed the ongoing construction work, but to my surprise, nobody was alarmed. (I, on the other hand, was shocked. For me it was a tangible sign that the project had really started.) People were mostly incensed that the AKP municipality would authorise such a measure on the first day of Ramadan. It was not entirely clear to me if they were upset because they saw it as a provocation nobody expected during the fasting month, or because the messy tear-down caused considerable dirt and noise.

A handful of residents inquired about what the construction workers were doing, but the all-Kurdish work crew somewhat timidly replied that they were not authorised to give out any information about the demolition, or about possible future demolitions in Tarlaşaşı. They unsuccessfully tried to prevent journalists, most of whom had been

at the protest, from taking photographs or video footage. While unable to gather any reliable information, several people loudly expressed their opinion about the ham-fisted demolition.

A few people suggested that it might be an attempt to intimidate locals on the day of the planned protest. One man, a resident whose name I did not know, was sure about it.

Who demolishes a house like this, with only four men? I work in construction as well. I know how this should be done. This is not how you're supposed to do it! This is them trying to put psychological pressure [on us], nothing else!

After this first demolition the rumour that the municipality had embarked on a form of “psychological warfare” quickly spread in Tarlaşaşı. A second bulldozing in the same street barely two weeks later had a similar effect, except that this time residents were not only unimpressed, but also angry because the shock waves caused by the heavy machinery had seriously endangered neighbouring buildings.

The tenants in these houses had not been notified by the municipality and were woken up by tremors that they at first mistook for an earthquake. It was unclear – and impossible for outsiders to know – if these demolitions were part of the renewal project or if they would have been undertaken in any case. What was important, however, was that many residents interpreted them as an attempt by the municipality to exert “psychological pressure” [*psikolojik baskı*] in order to make people nervous, enough to sell them their property without much dispute. This rumour was picked up by outside activists and lawyers of the Istanbul Chamber of Architects who were still locked in a court case against the Tarlaşaşı project. The plaintiffs then turned this particular rumour into a legal argument, an accusation of deliberate intimidation, and used in litigation proceedings (BIA Haber Merkezi 2010b).

Tarlaşaşı residents again had no way of knowing for sure if their assumptions were accurate. Previous false statements by the municipality and the developer, residents' prior experience of intimidation tactics and threats, either first-hand or told to them by neighbours and friends, influenced the way this particular rumour was generated, interpreted, and passed on. The demolition of the ruined buildings certainly did not cause the panic I had expected. It even strengthened some residents' resolve not to let themselves be intimidated and continue their legal battles against expropriation.

Violent resistance never occurred in the run-up to evictions. However, rumours about the possibility of riots circulated in the neighbourhood from the moment that I began my fieldwork in 2010. These rumours spread both inside and outside the neighbourhood. Outsiders' expectations of riots were largely based on the stigma-fuelled assumption that Tarlaşaşı was an inherently violent place, and its residents hostile to the Turkish state. As David Samper (2002: 5) states, rumours not only strengthen social and solidarity ties in the community where these rumours circulate, but they “become expressions of a community's collective anxieties and beliefs” as they circulate in a community. Most of these speculations centred on the neighbourhood's majority Kurdish

population, and the (stereotyped) presumption that any state activity would inevitably be met by violent opposition.⁵

Police disperse May Day protests with teargas



Photo by Jonathan Lewis

However, these rumours were not always framed as negative, and could also relay the hopes of the speaker for forceful pushback. Some Kurds in Tarlabaşı, people who had first-hand experience of excessive state violence, thought that the renewed threat of forced displacement *did* necessitate violent resistance, partly because they knew that unquestioned surrender would result in defeat. Research has shown that rumours can be strong indicators of the narrators' anxieties, prejudices, or aspirations, as well as the communities' collective unconscious (Allport and Postman 1947; Rosnow 1991; Samper 2002). This is why second-hand furniture seller Maher speculated, with no little certainty, that there would be riots and that Tarlabaşı would "turn into a warzone" if people would actually be evicted. (Violence as a resistance tactic was a disputed topic in Tarlabaşı. For example, a number of Tarlabaşı Association members were opposed to any protests that risked breaking the law or drawing a violent police reaction because it would "make them look like terrorists", a thinly veiled discriminatory insinuation that non-legal protest might make *all* Tarlabaşı residents "look like Kurds".)

5 Due to the fact that the pro-Kurdish, then Peace and Democracy Party (BDP, renamed as the Peoples' Democratic Party, HDP, in 2012) had its headquarters in Tarlabaşı, violent clashes that involved the police and Kurdish youth were not uncommon in the area. Media reports on street protests in the Taksim area, especially when they were related to the Kurdish political movement, often included the naming of "Tarlabaşı", anchoring the location as a centre for Kurdish political violence in the collective memory of the city.

Splitting solidarity

There were other macropolitical past events that impacted the production and spread of gossip and rumours in Tarlabaşı. In Turkey, corruption and nepotism in government institutions have been pervasive problems for many years, and corruption appears to have permeated all levels of government (Adaman 2011; Soyaltın 2017). A multitude of corruption scandals have been exposed and mediatised over the years, but rarely anyone has been held accountable. Rumour studies have shown that people who distrust the government are more prone to accept rumours that criticise the government, since rumour then activates and confirms pre-existing assumptions and prejudice rather than creating new ones (Allport and Postman 1947: 182). Since corruption amongst members of all levels of the government was expected by many people, the rumours of graft in the Beyoğlu administration took hold very easily. These allegations were bolstered by accusations of corruption in the media and by oppositional and civil society groups, who argued that the tender for the renewal of Tarlabaşı had not been organised openly and transparently, and was finally awarded to Çalık Holding, a company at the time under the leadership of Berak Albayrak, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's son-in-law.

Tarlabaşı residents who had moved to the neighbourhood before 1990, like Cemal, also remembered the construction of Tarlabaşı Boulevard between 1986 – 1988 under Bedrettin Dalan, the first mayor of Metropolitan Istanbul who had a reputation for being a dishonest and fraudulent politician, as well as fabulously corrupt. Despite widespread opposition from professional chambers as well as local and international organisations for the preservation of historical buildings, the plan was implemented under the auspice of “cleansing the area of prostitution and drugs” (Sakızlıoğlu 2014a: 166; Rüzgâr 2018). For many Tarlabaşı residents, this renewed threat of forced evictions and demolitions under a similar pretext was thus somewhat of a *déjà-vu*. Urban policy and re/development under Dalan, under whose leadership corruption, clientelism and nepotism flourished, and who had licensed numerous high-profile projects in areas that were either under protection or that were not slated for construction to companies with strong ties to the administration, became known as one of the most “corrupt” and “scandalous” within the history of Turkish urbanisation (Ünsal 2013).⁶

Knowledge of government corruption, dysfunctional courts, the lack of accountability for the misconduct of the police and the authorities, as well as knowledge of the brutality of other urban renewal projects in Istanbul heavily influenced much of the rumour production in Tarlabaşı. While optimist interpretations of such rumours existed, a large part of the speculation about government misconduct in Tarlabaşı was negative. Such pessimistic takes had a detrimental effect on neighbourhood cohesion, solidarity ties, and the will to engage in any kind of resistance. One example were rumours about the eventual enlargement of the project zone to include neighbouring, previously untouched parts of Tarlabaşı. Kerem Usta, a musical instrument maker who owned the title deed for his workshop that lay just outside the designated renewal area, wondered if he would

6 Dalan infamously reacted to the threat of losing a court case over the demolition of 370 listed buildings with the comment: “I’ll demolish, and I’ll accept my punishment” (Rüzgâr 2018: 54).

have to leave his atelier, how much money he would be able to get from the municipality in terms of compensation, and whether he would be allowed to reopen a workshop if he was to agree to exchange the two title deeds of his atelier. (As all businesses had to rely on the municipality to grant operating licenses, it was easy for the authorities to keep them out of the renewal project, leaving small business owners in doubt about their future income. Unsurprisingly this led to considerable anxiety.) Kerem Usta, an ethnic Turk in his fifties whose grandfather had migrated to Istanbul from the Black Sea city of Giresun three generations ago, was not a very contentious person to begin with. His political views were much less anti-AKP than those of the other master carpenter employed in his atelier, whereas his younger brother, who also worked there, supported the AKP government. While he saw himself as a “leftist” in the vaguest sense, he was not politically active.⁷ He generally trusted the Turkish state, if not the current government, to protect deserving citizens. He certainly expressed his dismay over the pending forced displacement of old friends, such as barber Halil Usta, when we chatted about the renewal project. However, Kerem Usta also saw the planned revitalisation of Tarlabası as an opportunity to restore the neighbourhood to its former glory, a sentiment I will explore in more detail in chapter eight. He did not see political motives or betrayal in the municipality’s plans to renew the neighbourhood, partly because he was not yet personally affected.

However, the lack of reliable information had a negative impact on his ability to make plans for the future, which is why he paid attention to rumours and speculation, trying to assess if his shop was about to be included in future demolition plans. It was impossible for him to be sure. At some point, the municipality published a statement on its website claiming that the current version of the renewal project was only a “first step”, and that other parts of Tarlabası would be included in demolitions later on. They did not specify an exact area or a date when this was supposed to happen. The plans never materialised, and the announcement was later deleted without further comment. This insecurity affected the instrument maker’s solidarity with friends and neighbours who did live and work in the allocated renewal zone. Despite his awareness of the distress and anger his long-time friend, barber Halil Usta, felt at his pending eviction, Kerem Usta did not attend public protests or voice opposition vis-à-vis authority figures or in settings where he could not be sure if anyone present might report his discontent back to the municipality. After all, he had to be careful not to anger or alienate the authorities with whom he might have to negotiate a deal for his property in the future. The rumoured extension of the renewal project limited Kerem Usta in his ability to openly voice criticism, participate in protests, and to demonstrate solidarity with other Tarlabası residents.

There were other reasons that rumours either caused or widened existing fault lines between people impacted by the project. In the run-up to evictions, residents kept a keen

7 A lifelong Democratic Left Party [*Demokratik Sol Partisi* – DSP] supporter, he briefly became a member of the pro-Kurdish HDP in the run-up to the national elections on June 7, 2015, something he admitted to me in a gleeful conspiratorial whisper. He was thrilled when the co-leader of the party, Figen Yüksekdağ, showed up in his atelier to inquire after his work and take a selfie with him. However, his support for the HDP waned after the breakdown of the peace process following the June 2015 elections and the renewed, catastrophic violence in the southeast.

eye on what their neighbours, landlords or, in the case of business owners, what their customers were doing. They were eager to extract as much information as possible from their actions and comments since property sales or even the willingness alone to negotiate with project stakeholders could have an impact on their own situation. This led to a large number of rumours that dealt with levels of resistance and compliance of landlords or other property owners. Following the closure of the Tarlabası Association information office, suspicions over property sales increased and were eagerly exchanged. Barber Halil Usta rented his small shop on Tree Street from an entrepreneur whose family had migrated to Tarlabası from the Black Sea city of Tokat in the 1970s. That businessman, by 2010 the owner of a *simit*⁸ empire, had bought the entire apartment building for a relatively low price immediately after his arrival in Istanbul.

Inside the barber shop



Photo by Jonathan Lewis

In 2011, the sale of the building was still being disputed in court, because the landlord was not content with the amount of money offered for his property. This left a lot of guesswork to Halil Usta and his business partner Necmi Usta, since both wanted to avoid sudden eviction and were planning to reopen the barber shop in a new location close by. Halil explained:

[My landlord] has not sold the building yet. But he will! They will sell the building. When they offer him one million and two hundred thousand. Because he has been in

8 Simit is a circular bread dough pastry covered with sesame seeds that is very popular for breakfast or as a snack. Commonly sold from street carts, simit-selling fast-food chains and franchises have opened since the early 2000s in Turkey.

Istanbul for fifty years, and he has never even seen fifty thousand in one place. He'll sell it for sure. If it wasn't for this project, our [shop] would not even be worth two hundred thousand. That's the reality. It wouldn't be! That's why [our landlord] was able to buy it for thirty thousand years ago. In instalments. Only because of the project [prices went up]. [Erdal Aybek] fought a lot [for Tarlabası], at first. He came to the shop to talk. But he saw that everyone would sell once they'd see the money, every Tom, Dick, and Harry. [*Ahmet de verir, Mehmet de.*] [...] Our Cemal⁹, and the hardware shop owner as well... I asked Cemal: you own a place here, what are they giving you? 50,000, or 60,000. Ok, I say, now you fight against it. 50,000. If they'd give you a million, or two hundred thousand, will you sell? He says he would! Nobody cares about history here. [...] That's why... those that fight a lot now will get more money and leave. There is no more work, what are they supposed to do?

As a tenant Halil Usta had no legal recourse to fight his pending eviction. His landlord did not inform him about the ongoing court case against the Beyoğlu municipality that by then had been dragging on for more than a year, which meant that Halil Usta also lacked the necessary information to base any kind of business decisions on. He remained in the dark about a possible eviction date, when people and businesses around him started to move out of the neighbourhood. It was unlikely that he and Necmi Usta would receive any assistance from the municipality for moving the barber shop, but as the municipality did furnish movers and a lorry to some tenants in Tarlabası, he could not be sure of that either. In the meantime, and contrary to other tenants whose landlords had sold their property to the developer already, Halil still had to pay the full rent every month, a fact that he thought was an indicator of his landlord's love of money. If he was going to be paid royally for his property anyway, why did the businessman not at least lower or waive the rent? After all, his landlord knew that his business had almost trickled to a halt since the announcement of the renewal project in 2008. While Halil never directly accused his landlord of being greedy, he did say that he found the court dispute over a higher amount of compensation unjustified. After all, Halil Usta reasoned, the landlord had bought the building very cheaply and now took advantage of the renewal project to ask for a larger sum. It was impossible to independently verify how much different property owners had actually received, as such information was not freely shared, and amounts allegedly varied wildly. However, rumours about property sales prices and the fantastic sums that some owners had supposedly received were enthusiastically exchanged. Depending on the context and on who was involved in the conversation at the time, property owners who were suspected of having made a good deal were disparaged as greedy or praised as clever. Absentee landlords, such as the Tokat entrepreneur, were more often criticised for their excessive demands of compensation, as their ties to the neighbourhood were seen as built on money only, and not on their connection to the community. Halil Usta was certain that his landlord, just like other property owners, would eventually give in and sell, as long as he was paid enough for his building.

This distrust in the businesspeople who had cheaply bought up property in the neighbourhood in the 1970s and 1980s, and who now vied for a large profit on their invest-

9 Halil Usta is referring to second-hand furniture seller Cemal whose shop was in the same street.

ment also extended to the board of the Tarlabası Association. One evening Halil Usta and his shop neighbours Ekin and Seray, talked about ongoing negotiations and the association that Seray and Ekin were both members of. Halil, who did not own property in Tarlabası and thought that as a tenant he would not gain anything from a membership, was not. The conversation turned to the recent disputes between different factions of the association and the falling-out between the board and spokesman Erdal Aybek. Someone jokingly wondered if it had been the association president who might have driven Erdal “crazy”. It was clear that nobody in the room had much respect for the president, a property owner who did not live in Tarlabası and who owned several buildings on Tarlabası Boulevard. They were convinced that he was only after the money and would have dropped the association and everyone in it at the drop of a hat in exchange for a large enough sum from the developer. By then rumours circulated that the association president had already sold part of his property to the municipality and was now merely hoping to break off a larger piece of the profit for what remained. These rumours were fed by the public claim of Beyoğlu mayor Ahmet Misbah Demircan that of seven Tarlabası Association board members, four had already come to an agreement with the municipality. Demircan had told the press that those board members only “pretended to care” about cultural heritage, when they had really “asked for the construction of high rises behind closed doors in order to make a larger profit on their properties” (Birgün 2010). It later became clear that these claims were not unsubstantiated.

Rumours about sales and the greed of landlords were deeply divisive and led to distrust and the corrosion of solidarity ties in Tarlabası. I was told at numerous occasions and by different people that property owners might *say* they would resist, but that their claims were really a lie designed to keep face. Sometimes such cynical speculation extended to tenants, too. Halil Usta, for example, did not think that second-hand furniture seller Maher actually meant it when he said he would resist eviction:

Let's talk about the tenants. Maher across from us, those. So, they are “resisting” right now? They talk about injustice and politics. They talk and stuff, you know...if the municipality would tell them, here take one hundred thousand for every apartment that you rent, they'd also leave immediately.

Halil's speculation was moot since tenants were not offered any financial compensation by project agents for moving out. However, his comment illustrated how little faith he had in neighbourhood solidarity ties, which in turn had a profound impact on his will to participate in public protests:

If you ask me, Halil Ağbi¹⁰, will you participate in [a protest]? I won't. If you ask me why, I will tell you that I am a tenant here, so they won't give me anything. If the property owner sells, I will say: whatever, that doesn't concern me.

It was clear that rumours and speculation about residents' assumed self-interest, no matter how much they themselves said that they wanted to fight, had a detrimental impact on neighbourhood cohesion and therefore, joint opposition.

10 The word *ağbi* means “brother” and is commonly used to address a male interlocutor. It is an expression of friendly informality and/or familiarity.

Rumours of conspiracy

Tarlabaşı residents were aware that the municipality and the developer used the intense stigma that surrounded the neighbourhood in order to rally public support for the renewal project. As I have shown in chapter four, many believed that the Beyoğlu Municipality deliberately withheld services such as garbage disposal and policing in order to put pressure on residents and make the neighbourhood look worse than it was (See also İşeri 2008; Kuray 2008). It is no surprise that these suspicions fuelled rumours that project stakeholders were actually staging criminal acts and illegal activities in the neighbourhood to deepen the already existing intense stigma. The stories I heard reflected at how much residents distrusted the authorities. One of the most poignant anecdotes came from Burak, the younger brother of baker Gökhan Usta:

The taxi stopped [at the end of Tree Street] before turning [onto Tarlabaşı Boulevard]. A man came running and opened the door and snatched the purse of the woman inside. Can you believe it? Right here, during the day. He got away! Everyone was so stunned. The police station is right there, the municipality building is across the street. I am telling you, the municipality is behind this. They send all these thieves and criminals here to make us look bad. They send them here. Because of the project. They do this on purpose.

His claim that it was the municipality who had staged the purse snatching was significant because petty crime was common in Tarlabaşı. However, the mugging that Burak had witnessed had apparently been unusually audacious. It had been committed in broad daylight and in close proximity not only to various businesses and a busy bus stop, but also the local police station and across from the project sales office that the municipality was jointly running with *GAP İnşaat*.

While Burak, too, was under no illusion concerning the existence of crime in the neighbourhood, this particular mugging did not entirely align with his knowledge and his experiences of Tarlabaşı. In his eyes it was highly unlikely that any thief would risk mugging a taxi in close proximity to the police, and if he did, that he would not get caught. There was usually a high police presence on Tarlabaşı Boulevard, and local residents complained about the frequent ID checks and police harassment they were subjected to. Burak also said that he generally knew the local pickpockets and thieves at least from sight, and that he had never before seen the man who had robbed the taxi. This is why he interpreted the entire incident as one that had been staged by the municipality, an assumption that squared with many residents' beliefs that the municipality actively and intentionally tried to make Tarlabaşı look bad.

Neglect

Photo by Jonathan Lewis

I cannot know if the rumour that the municipality had sent the mugger to Tarlaabaşı originated with Burak or another eyewitness, as by the time we spoke the news of the incident had already made the rounds in the neighbourhood, and the claim that it had been orchestrated travelled with it. It is irrelevant to the discussion if residents' suspicions that the municipality deliberately encouraged crime to speed up the eviction process was true. The collective belief that they did was a social fact, whether it was "real" or not, with real effects in the social world of the neighbourhood. People made decisions based on that "fact". This does not imply that Tarlaabaşı residents believed that crime did not previously exist. Most agreed that petty crime and drug dealing were a problem in their neighbourhood, with the majority saying that they did not feel safe (Kentsel A.Ş. 2008). At the same time residents were aware that, while their neighbourhood was described as "dangerous" and "criminal", the authorities did little to deal with these issues.

With the announcement of the renewal project and the effort of project stakeholders to push residents out of the neighbourhood, they increasingly suspected that the municipality exploited social problems in order to make Tarlaabaşı look worse than it was. Marginalised groups who were frequently the target of discrimination and police violence, such as Kurds or the trans* community, were especially quick to believe rumours that the authorities intentionally pushed crime and ignored criminals, or, like Burak claimed, even entirely orchestrated illegal acts.

The municipality-sanctioned, gradual abandonment of an emptying, but still inhabited neighbourhood made people feel less safe on the streets (Sakızlıoğlu 2014b). An increasing number of people from outside Tarlaabaşı had begun to deal and use drugs on street corners and in deserted buildings, and a number of sex workers who were not part of the local sex economy had moved in and were solicitating in broad daylight and in

plain view of residents and passers-by. These women often consumed drugs and alcohol. Many residents were scandalised, and women who lived in Tarlabası were especially scared to walk past them. People could not make sense of the fact that both the police and the *zabita*, usually so quick to fine trans* women who lived and worked in Tarlabası, simply turned a blind eye to such blatantly illicit activity. Some residents were convinced that this was, again, a deliberate attempt by the municipality to smear their neighbourhood, and that the authorities not only let the sex workers peddle their trade on one of Beyoğlu's busiest thoroughfares, but that they had shipped in the sex workers themselves.

Sex worker in a ruined building on Tarlabası Boulevard



Photo by Jonathan Lewis

In late 2011, *GAP İnşaat* started to demolish the façades of most buildings lining Tarlabası Boulevard, further destroying the outward-facing exterior of the neighbourhood, in part to prevent squatting. However, it also added to the impression that Tarlabası was an abandoned, run-down slum while hundreds of people in fact still lived in the renewal zone. The construction company put down concrete slabs painted in bright yellow and bearing the brand logo of the renewal project, which lent the decrepit scenery behind them an air of officially branded endorsement. At the same time the developer hired a number of uniformed, private security guards to patrol the streets. These guards strictly prohibited all photographs and filming whenever they noticed someone doing it, but ignored sex workers, drug users, dealers, and scavengers, which provided more fertile ground for rumours that the neglect of security issues and street cleaning was deliberate and orchestrated by the authorities.¹¹

11 One time, a photographer and I had to run away from a private project security guard who wanted to confiscate my notebook and the photographer's camera because we had been looking at (and

Again, the veracity of these conspiratorial assumptions is of little importance to the discussion, as many believed such rumours to be fact. David Samper (2002: 5) argues that “[t]he individual’s ability to (re)shape the rumor multiple times transforms it into a collective representation of fears and anxieties.” One might also argue that this narrative was a form of stigma management. These rumours helped to make sense of the pervasive stigma that had been mobilised by project stakeholders in order to justify the evictions.

“Beware of the dog.” Tarlaabaşı Boulevard in December 2011



Photo by Jonathan Lewis

In Tarlaabaşı, territorial stigmatisation was deeply intertwined with project stakeholders withholding reliable information on the renewal project. Without access to this information, residents had to rely on rumours as a tactic to cope with the material consequences of the stigma, their invisibilisation, social isolation and exclusion. Rumours that circulate in a community starved of information can be read as collective interpretations of an ambiguous, or possibly dangerous situation in a moment of crisis. They can be a tool and a tactic to manage uncertainty. However, the interpretative step of determining how to decipher that rumour might vary, as different members of the group will differ on the credibility of sources, the reliability of communicative channels, and the motives of the involved actors. Previous personal experience as well as collective experiences play an important role in making those decisions. Therefore, rumours could be the cause for less cohesion and a break-down of solidarity in Tarlaabaşı, both of which have a detrimental effect on resistance, be it as an organised group or as individuals. Even if rumours sometimes offered hope, this happened largely on an individual level and did not lead to more organised resistance. The analysis of the rumours in Tarlaabaşı shows that residents were

taking pictures of) the construction site. The legal basis for his claim was unclear as we were on a public street, but we did not want to take any chances.

very critical of the way their neighbourhood was portrayed, and aware of the municipality's attempt to exploit existing crime and problems to advance the renewal project. In this context, rumours functioned as a form of symbolic opposition which shows that residents were conscious that the state weaponised the stigma.

Chapter seven: In the eye of the beholder

In 2012, after evictions had gotten well underway, geographer and anthropologist David Harvey came to Tarlabaşı for a video interview about state-led gentrification and housing rights with our (now defunct) blog “Tarlabaşı-Istanbul” (Tarlabaşı Istanbul 2012). The videographer suggested using an abandoned row of buildings just inside the renewal zone as a backdrop for the shoot. Refuse lined the entrance of the deserted houses, and the walls were covered with scribbles and graffiti. All doors and windows had been removed, which reinforced the image of ruin. Harvey offered to sit down on the stoop of one of the buildings, behind him a gaping hole where the door had been. Scattered garbage bags thrown into the empty building were visible behind him. However, before the interview could begin, a woman who lived in an opposite building, the row of which lay outside the project area, started to shout from her window. She castigated us not only for making Harvey sit “in the dirt”, but also for choosing to portray Tarlabaşı in such a negative way:

Why do you make that old uncle [*amca*] sit in the dirt like that? Why do you have to film him in this filth? Can't you see what it looks like here? Why would you want to show this to the whole world? All this garbage, these ruined houses! What a shameful sight. Why do journalists always want to show everyone how dirty Tarlabaşı is? As if this was the only thing people want to see!

I told her that our location choice for the interview was supposed to illustrate the injustice of ongoing evictions. Still talking to us from her window, she disagreed and argued that such a frame rather perpetuated the image of Tarlabaşı as a dirty, run-down neighbourhood. After a few minutes of friendly squabbling, the woman joined us outside. There she explained how she regularly swept the street. She also threw the garbage bags that others carelessly tossed between the ruins behind the aluminium construction fence that had been erected around the renewal area. The municipality had more or less stopped to dispatch garbage collectors and street sweepers, she explained, so she took it upon herself to keep the surroundings clean. She did that not only because she still lived there and had an interest in basic urban hygiene, but also because she detested that the garbage bags, often ripped open by stray cats and other animals, made Tarlabaşı look dirty and uncared for to outsiders and passers-by.

The woman who objected to our shooting location did not simply accept the negative narrative about her neighbourhood and did not want to concede to the frame of Tarlaabaşı being a filthy, bad place. Her efforts to keep at least her own street clean and her protest over our choice of filming location were a “strategic re-scripting of place” (Nayak 2019: 928). This tactic is not dissimilar to the concept of impression management in social psychology, which is closely related to Erving Goffman’s (1959) concept of self-presentation. Goffman demonstrates that people present themselves strategically in order to try and control how others perceive them, chiefly to ward off embarrassment and loss of status. Scholars studying impression management have shown that the tactics people employ to manage their own image vis-à-vis their audience depends on context, and especially on the identity of the person or persons they are speaking to, including their race, class, gender, and their social status (Baumeister 1986; Leary and Kowalski 1990; Banaji and Prentice 1994; Tice et al. 1995; Brown 1997; Pitcan et al. 2018). This is particularly challenging for marginalised groups who are expected to align their presentation of self with the dominant, white, heteronormative, and middle class narrative in order to be accepted as respectable (Pitcan et al. 2018).

This chapter explores examples of how individual Tarlaabaşı residents tried to control outsiders’ perceptions of them through impression management of themselves and their immediate surroundings. Firstly, I establish how territorial stigma creates a backdrop of negative bias that tips interpretation of outsiders’ impressions of an individual who lives in that tainted area towards less favourable interpretations from the outset. Then I analyse the removal of dirt and the investment in one’s physical surroundings as one tactic of impression management in stigmatised Tarlaabaşı. Finally, I examine how the urgency of the successful performance of respectability in Tarlaabaşı was gendered in a particular way. The below examples of impression management do not constitute a direct challenge, or opposition to the territorial stigma, but individual attempts by individual residents to shift the negative focus away from themselves by trying to prove that the stigmatising narrative was unjustified or wrong.

Impression management in a stigmatised neighbourhood

On August 10, 2011, the now defunct left-leaning daily newspaper *Radikal* published a reportage about the ongoing evictions in Tarlaabaşı. The piece, available online and in print, included written portraits of all the remaining inhabitants of the apartment building on Tree Street and a photo gallery that included, amongst others, pictures of Cemile and her husband Ramazan. On the day of publication, I visited them in their new rental apartment they had finally found and moved into after their eviction in July 2011. Cemile was very upset. She had received a phone call from her relatives in Antakya about the *Radikal* article, letting her know that they had seen her and her husband’s pictures. They also told her how shocked they had been to hear about the circumstances of her expulsion and the destitution that she and Ramazan apparently found themselves in. I had not yet seen the article and neither had Cemile, so I went out to buy a copy of the newspaper in a nearby *bakkal*. A picture of Cemile was at the top of the frontpage, and more pictures of her illustrated the article itself. The photograph on the cover showed her in half pro-

file, standing in her old bedroom. The bedroom floor was covered in rubble, shards, and pieces of bricks. She was looking towards the large gaps where the windows had been, but both the glass and the PVC frames were missing. The most humiliating detail of the photograph, in Cemile's eyes, was that she was not wearing her headscarf, but only the undercap that she wore to prevent slippage. Cemile was a deeply religious woman who did not even allow her own children to own or display photographs of her in their homes, therefore the fact that her semi-uncovered face was now on display for the whole nation to see horrified her. Furthermore, she was deeply ashamed that her home looked like an uncared-for ruin on the frontpage of a national newspaper. And her relatives in Antakya now thought that she had lived in such a place!

In addition to the images that Cemile felt had been published without her consent¹, she was deeply offended that the accompanying article portrayed her and Ramazan as destitute. The journalist, a reporter who had worked on housing issues and urban renewal in Istanbul for years and who was sympathetic to the plight of Tarlabası residents, described the bad deal that Ramazan and Cemile had been forced to accept by the development company, the insurmountable debt they had incurred as a result, and the few remaining possessions they had been able to take from their old home to their new, "tiny", rental apartment. She quoted Cemile as follows: "There is no money left in our pockets. [...] We boiled eggs for iftar and ate them, we haven't eaten anything else in 16 hours. We never relied on anyone all our lives, how can we now ask anyone to buy bread for us" (Ince 2011a)? When Cemile later explained to me why she was upset about this, she argued that her comment had been framed to make her look discontented and poor, but that she had in fact only expressed a logistical problem:

Yes, I boiled some eggs in the evening. I never expected that [journalist] to do something so bad. My son called me, he was very upset that we had gone hungry. But we had not gone hungry! I simply didn't have anything else to cook that evening. You know how it was! The oven was already gone, that's why I boiled the eggs. I was so ashamed, [the article] made us look like beggars. And we never ask anyone for anything!

The journalist had wanted to show the desperation of Tarlabası residents to illustrate the destructiveness and injustice of the renewal project. On the day of her visit in mid-July 2011, during the month of Ramadan, Cemile and Ramazan were waiting for their eviction and lived, somewhat improvised, amongst their packed and boxed-up possessions. At the time an intense heat wave swept the city, making daytime fasting more difficult and sleep almost impossible. Cemile suffered from insomnia, extreme stress and anxiety following several altercations with project officials and the police. Ramazan, angry

1 The photographer who had accompanied the Turkish journalist was an American woman who did not speak any Turkish. I had been in Cemile's apartment when she had taken the pictures, and it was not entirely clear to me where the miscommunication had happened. The photographer had openly and very obviously taken pictures in the house and of Cemile. I am not sure if the photographer had assumed consent for publication in the newspaper because she had been with the journalist, or if she had asked, but had not been clear about the planned publication in *Radikal*. However it had happened, Cemile would have never agreed to having her picture published like that, had she been asked to give her informed consent on the matter.

about the municipality's refusal to postpone the expulsion, had broken out all PVC window frames that the couple was still paying instalments for at the time, and given them away to recyclers. He had taken to them with a sledgehammer, which meant that pieces of brick and plaster had come off the walls and were still strewn on the floor when the photographer took the pictures.

On the day of the interview Cemile had told me, too, about the meagre *iftar* meal consisting only of boiled eggs. I knew that her despair at the time had been real. Both the description of the apartment and the quote in the article were accurate. Cemile and Ramazan *had been* destitute, and they had been, and still were, very anxious about the large amount of money they would have to pay the developer as part of the deal they had been forced to make with them. This begs the question why Cemile was this upset about the frame of the *Radikal* article. At the time of the interview, she had desperately tried to postpone the eviction from what she felt was still *her* house. Moreover, she and her husband had been forced to relocate to a small, somewhat run-down rental apartment a few streets over from her old building, since the housing market pickings had been limited and they urgently needed a place to go. This meant that they had to get rid of many of their possessions, such as pieces of furniture that would not fit in the new rental flat.

Cemile's numerous attempts to hold the municipal authorities to account for their lie – or at least consequential misinformation – that there would not be any demolitions had fallen flat. By July 2011, nobody at the Beyoğlu Municipality or GAP *Inşaat* even accepted her phone calls anymore. It had been a rare and somewhat unexpected opportunity for Cemile to be able to talk to the journalist about her situation, about her outrage, about her feelings of helplessness about the looming eviction and the difficult situation it left her and her husband in. Finally someone, and someone who was potentially able to get the attention of the authorities via the national media, was willing to listen. It was impossible for Cemile not to seize this chance when she was so full of anger and when those responsible for the project refused to listen to her.

By mentioning the boiled eggs she and Ramazan had eaten for *iftar*, she had meant to send a message to project stakeholders, shaming them for the desperation they had forced on residents, especially during Ramadan. However, it was not them who responded. Her son who lived in Istanbul with his family and who visited her often, also called Cemile about the article, distressed to hear that his mother had gone hungry and not told him about it. Her Antakya relatives, including two of her younger sisters, were distraught to hear about her debt. Cemile was afraid that neighbours and members of her Qur'an study group might also read what she had told the journalist and think of her as destitute and in need of assistance. Cemile felt that this was especially shameful because her answer in the newspaper had implied that none of them had come to help her, which was not true. Her decision to tell the journalist about the difficult situation she had been left in also potentially shamed those closest to her, especially her own children. In the end Cemile called the journalist and asked her to take down the photographs and amend the article. To the reporter's surprise and distress, she even threatened to open a court case. It was an attempt to manage the intersecting stigma of being poor and living in Tarlabaşı, and to have some control of how she, her home and her life were being represented. Instead of succeeding in her attempt to show that

it was really the fault of the renewal project and project stakeholders that they only had a few boiled eggs to eat for *iftar*, Cemile found herself having to manage the fact that her children, her sisters, and other family members or members of other groups she was a part of felt embarrassed and ashamed by the *Radikal* article.² For Cemile, it was the almost impossible balancing act of describing her destitution to accuse and shame project developers while at the same time hiding it from her family, neighbours and friends. In a way, Cemile struggled with the management of what Richard Sennett and Jonathan Cobb (1972: 196) call the “divided self”, the “[p]rotective alienation of the real person from the performing individual”, whereby this performing, socially mandated self is called into service by people who hold any kind of power over the person, such as, in Cemile’s case, strong social expectations by her family or her Qur’an study group. Necmi Erdoğan (2007: 72), in his research on the “injuries of difference” of poor people in Turkey, demonstrates that the performative self is regularly mobilised inside the home and the family. İsmet, a worker from Istanbul, conceals the fact that he cleans stairs for a living from his elderly mother and his teenage daughter, telling them that he is employed as a chef in the local municipality instead, in order to spare them the grief and preserve his own self-respect in front of his close family members (*ibid.*).

Cemile exposed her real feelings, and her private problems, to the journalist in an attempt to reach the audience that project stakeholders refused her. However, the familial guilt and the implied blame of the family’s expressed concern moved Cemile to retract her original statement, and to say that it just been a coincidence and logistical issue that they could only eat boiled eggs for *iftar*, when in fact she knew that this was really not the case – and so did the journalist who tried to convey the destitution that Tarlaabaşı residents had been abandoned to.

This effort to manage her own image did not cease after her eviction. When I visited Cemile almost a year after she had to leave her old home, she insisted on showing me a glossy brochure published by the Beyoğlu Municipality as part of a marketing campaign advertising large urban renewal projects in their district. She had first come across it in one of the municipal neighbourhood houses [*semt konakları*] and picked up a few copies after leafing through it and finding a photograph of her old building alongside a text advertising the Tarlaabaşı renewal project. One of the pictures chosen to illustrate the municipality’s plan, taken from a low angle, showed the front façade of her old apartment, with the PVC window frames and the balcony railings missing. One had to look very carefully to even notice this detail in the photograph, but Cemile had seen it right away. She was incensed:

I took this brochure because I saw our house in it. It must be a recent photograph because there is no balcony and no window. It is outrageous [*çok ayıp*] to put such a photo-

2 On one hand they were right to be embarrassed, because according to social norms in Turkey, they were responsible for their close relatives being destitute, which is also one important reason why project developers could get away with their abject treatment of Tarlaabaşı residents: people in need are not supposed to be the problem of the state, but of their families and communities. The most important part of this narrative, that they had just destroyed this community in Tarlaabaşı, remained unsaid.

graph in this magazine. They make it look as if everything was run-down, but it wasn't like that! We had washing lines, we had everything!

The picture that upset Cemile was by far not the most stigmatising in the brochure. However, because it showed her own house, the one that she had taken such pride in renovating and maintaining before being evicted from it, the manipulation at work in the marketing campaign was deeply injurious to her. Employed to illustrate the need for the renewal of a dilapidated neighbourhood, it had in fact been taken after residents had already been moved out. Furthermore, the image angered Cemile because it not only misrepresented her home, and by extension her and her family, but also because she felt that it somehow blamed her for the bad state of the area.

Parallel to Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's (1988) well-known observation that subaltern groups cannot speak, these anecdotes show that they also have very little say in how they and their environments are being represented. I have shown in chapter two that the municipality had the power to determine which representations secured hegemony and how the narrative around Tarlaşaşı and the renewal project were framed. John Beverley (1999: 66) writes that "[o]ne of the things being subaltern means is not mattering, not being worth listening to". Cemile had no control over how her neighbourhood was portrayed to a wider audience. However, she did not unquestioningly internalise the prevailing negative representations. Therefore, she picked up several more copies of the offending brochure and showed them to others, visitors like me, in order to provide a rectified narrative. She explained that the picture was a deliberate attempt by the marketing department of the Beyoğlu Municipality to manipulate the perception of the neighbourhood by using images of homes that had already been evicted. Cemile insisted that the dominant image of Tarlaşaşı as a neighbourhood of decay omitted the positive aspects of it, underlining only what was bad and glossing over the many smaller and more substantive actions that residents took in order to make it better.

These three examples show that images of and anecdotes about Tarlaşaşı in the press (or promotional material such as the catalogue Cemile picked up) operated on more than one level. The same image might be read in two different, and diametrically opposed, ways. The physical backdrop we chose for the video interview with David Harvey operated on the level of stigma that the woman across the street was worried about: she was sure that the dilapidated houses, the garbage and the rubble would reinforce the dominant negative image that the neighbourhood already had. However, the backdrop also worked on a visual level that involved contextual knowledge of why the street looked abandoned and run-down, and why the garbage was not being picked up, which was the reason that the videographer had insisted on this location and why it was valuable. The same backdrop that the woman in the window had found embarrassing was also evidence of the injustice inflicted upon the neighbourhood and that we were trying to report on.

The images and anecdotes that proved how grim and deeply injurious the entire project development process had been could equally work as something deeply embarrassing that only bolstered the existing stigma. However, the balance between the two is not even. Territorial stigma influences the interpretation towards the unfavourable explanation. Any such interpretation has to rely on an audience that is both able and willing to hear the full context surrounding an image, and the dominant narrative

surrounding Tarlabası foreclosed that option in the vast majority of cases. Most people in Istanbul did not have access to or were unwilling to find out about the full context surrounding the many Tarlabası images and descriptions that circulated, which is why the municipality had the privilege to subsequently make sure that the majority looked at only their representation of Tarlabası and agreed with its destruction.

In the same way, the photograph of Cemile's old home in the municipal marketing brochure, given the right and full context, could have been an excellent example of why the renewal project was deeply problematic. It could have illustrated how this building that had been painstakingly renovated by its occupants, with a nice balcony and new PVC frames, was destroyed and left abandoned by project stakeholders, leaving its former residents to scramble for lower quality housing wherever they could find it. The same image, robbed of its context, was used to stand in as what the house was like when Cemile still lived there, which is entirely implausible. However, this is what it was used as in the brochure. Since it was just an image that depicted a neighbourhood *known* as run-down, as ruined, and as dirty and uncared-for, it was easy for viewers to interpret it the same image by using that frame.

"Don't litter, lan". Neighbourhood beautification



Photo by Jonathan Lewis

While not a physical image, the story conveyed by the *Radikal* article could also be understood either way, depending on the available context. Readers could interpret Cemile's anecdote as having been failed by her own family, or they could use it as an explanation of how she and her husband had been crushed by the renewal project. In the case of the reportage, the journalist had provided background information in order to convey the injustice inflicted by project stakeholders. However, the stigmatising narrative of the municipality that there was no community or virtue in Tarlabası, making it plausible

to readers that Cemile's family abandoned her to her fate, overwrote the story the journalist had attempted to communicate. Territorial stigma here puts the burden of proof on the "victims" because the bias leans against them from the start. Even the children, despite having all the necessary background information on how Ramazan and Cemile had been deprived of their home and under what circumstances evictions had been carried out, read the article as an accusation against them, instead of an indictment of the municipality and their project partners.

Scrubbing off stigma

Scholars have shown that low-income neighbourhoods have long been associated with filth in the middle class imagination (Douglas 1966; Stallybrass and White 1986; Skeggs 1997; Özyegin 2000; Erdoğan 2007). A perceived lack of hygiene and the apparent physical disorder in these urban areas are interpreted as signifiers of deeper character flaws, as a sign of disease, crime, and moral depravity of the poor. The accusations of uncleanness transcend mere aesthetics, and instead pass judgement on the (contemptible) moral character of poor people (Özyegin, 2000: 10).

The stigmatisation of Tarlaşaşı as "filthy" was especially injurious to women who are primarily held responsible for the upkeep of their domestic space. In Turkey, especially in rural areas and low-income urban households, inegalitarian gender relationships and deep-seated patriarchal dynamics result in a normative division of labour (Fikret-Pasa et al. 2001; Sarioğlu 2013; Kavas 2019). Housework tasks and childcare are seen as a woman's prime duty. The concern over cleanliness is therefore a strong (and gendered) marker of status. A clean and orderly home not only represents the housewife, but also her competence as a homemaker and her respectability as a woman (Gürel 2009). In her research about the identity building of working-class women in England, Beverley Skeggs (1997) underlined the way in which hygiene is a strong signifier of respectability. Mary Douglas (1966), in her work on dirt, purity and pollution, argues that many industrialised and non-industrialised societies associate cleanliness with goodness and dirtiness with badness, such that cleanliness and dirtiness take on moral connotations. "Because dirt threatens the sanctity of cleanliness, it is cast as taboo, and societies strive to separate what is clean from what is dirty" (Ashforth and Kreiner 1999: 416).

In Tarlaşaşı, the performance of domestic work was visible everywhere. Many household tasks had to be carried out in the staircases of buildings, on the stoop at the entrance, or in the street, primarily for lack of space inside homes, but also as an important opportunity for women to socialise. Many women completed their chores together with other women from the same family or with female neighbours. This included soaping down and vigorously scrubbing rugs and carpets that were spread out on the street, knitting and other needlework, and the washing and subsequent beating of sheep's wool used as upholstery in pillows and blankets. (The wool was then hung up and dried on lines hung along walls and windows.) Shared washing lines, strung between windows across the street, were ubiquitous. Many kitchen chores, such as preparing bread dough, baking bread, cleaning and cutting vegetables, were also done in shared, public, and semi-public spaces. Women who spent time outside their homes were rarely idle. This visibility of

domesticity was also a way to *show* that one kept busy. It was a way to demonstrate, and for others to witness, that a woman was “doing her job” as a respectable housewife.

As visitors could, and frequently did, drop in unannounced and at any time, this impression management included keeping the house tidy and uncluttered at all times. Cemile described her own fear to be perceived as careless by outsiders:

I am always cleaning. I get up in the morning, and I clean, it's a habit you know. Believe me, I want to wipe down everything, sweep everywhere. [...] I love cleanliness and hygiene. Everything should always be really clean and orderly. Even if it's not that clean, it should at least be orderly. I always tell my daughter and my daughter-in-law, whatever you do, after you get up in the morning you should clean up around yourselves before breakfast. Just in case. The doorbell rings, a guest arrives, and you have to make that guest wait at the door to make the beds? Would that be possible? No way. Sometimes, when you go on a visit to someone's house, there are pyjamas, socks, and other stuff [laying around]. [*Makes a disapproving noise.*] I always say: what if someone comes to visit? Your home should always be clean and orderly.

Just like Cemile, who judged if other women were deserving of respect by the state of their homes, the women in Tarlabası were constantly aware of their social positions and the judgement of real and imaginary others (Skeggs 1997: 4). This anxiety to position themselves as respectable was fed by and intersected with the “haunting shadow” of territorial stigmatisation (Pinkster et al. 2020: 526). The stakes to successfully evade being read in light of this taint were especially high during the run-up to evictions. As described in chapter two, project stakeholders insisted that the neighbourhood was “run-down” and “dirty”, and that homes were “abandoned” and buildings “about to fall down by themselves”. Women challenged this narrative by underlining how much time, money, and effort they invested not only in the daily upkeep, but also in the renovation of their homes. Alev often talked about how she, then still a teenager, had fixed up the apartment that her family had been able to afford because it had been in a state of neglect. She told me how it had taken her several months and a lot of effort to make it liveable again, and how proud she had been for, quite literally, making her own home. When she reminisced about those times, Alev got very emotional.

There was no glass in the windows, no doors, no floor. [...] When I came here, there was no toilet, there was nothing, nothing at all. You know when you enter a cave? That's what the house was like. [...] I did the entire floor, did you know? All by hand! All by myself. I carried [the materials] up the stairs. [...] I never got tired. I had one pair of pants, one jumper. I put my hair up and I pushed a handcart, for the concrete. I would get one bag, then split that bag up into two, and bring them up here. I could not bring up one bag all at once. [*cries*] Making your own house liveable with your own hands, that's great. I didn't just sign somewhere to get this house. This is why this all makes me so sad.

Alev recognised that the house *used to be* decrepit and in a very bad state, but she underlined this only to draw attention to the vast amount of labour and effort she invested to fix it, to make her home “liveable”. Alev had worked day shifts at a textile workshop in the neighbourhood and at night, she had renovated the apartment. Her mother had been

almost immobile due to an illness, her older brother had been away to do his military service, and it had taken her many months to complete the renovation. Together with her father, a kind, elderly man who spoke hardly any Turkish, Alev sold bottled water and packages of tissue paper on nearby Taksim Square to be able to buy plaster, paint, and flooring. She was very proud of what she had achieved, at that age and with such limited resources at her disposal, and proud that all the hard work had resulted in her ability to provide a comfortable home for her elderly parents.

At the time my mother was sick. [...] My only worry was to have enough food so we could eat. Oh dear...it was wonderful despite all that. There is a memory for me in every corner of this house. The electricity lines, the water pipes...I changed all of it. I brought in one or two repairmen. My father and I went out to sell water and we earned a bit of money that way. Sometimes we made five [TL], sometimes ten. I would make tea and bring in a couple of workers. And I had a few friends, I asked them to lend us a hand. There were friends I worked with. I am so grateful to them. That's how we did it. [...] I painted the doors myself because I had no money left. But that's what they say isn't it? You might buy something under difficult circumstances, but you'll keep the beautiful memories.

Home decoration



Photo by Jonathan Lewis

Alev was sentimentally invested in her house, partly because a great amount of physical and emotional labour had gone into it. To her, the family apartment was much more than just “a place to live”, or mere “brick and mortar”, as British sociologist Chris Allen (2008) claimed of how working-class respondents felt about their homes. In his study of the intersection of social class and housing consumption, Allen notes that working class informants only expressed “a basic functional attachment to where they live” and did not,

as middle class residents did, strongly identify with the home they occupied (Paton 2014: 51). But it is clear from how Alev described the many memories attached to “every corner” of her apartment, as well as from the careful choices of colour, of decoration, and of the effort that she put into the renovation, that her Tarlabası home was much more than just a roof over her head.

Cemile, too, felt a strong emotional connection her home. Both of her then still teenaged children had worked in part-time jobs in order for the family to afford the necessary renovation materials. Cemile recalled that they had to wait for each week’s salary to be able to buy another bucket of paint, plaster, or paint brushes. She and her husband Ramazan had bought the house somewhat in a rush in 1992 after they had to vacate their rental house in a nearby street. Cemile had never actually seen the inside of their future home before they bought it. The tenant at the time of the sale, a woman who rented out the rooms to foreign sex workers, was angry at her landlord for selling his property and did not want to let the new owners in. Even after Cemile and Ramazan held the title deed to the house, the woman refused to vacate the apartment. When she finally did, she left the apartment in a state of utter disrepair out of spite. Cemile said that she was so shocked when she saw the state of the flat that she initially told her husband to sell it again right away.

I remember what the house looked like then. The tenant had broken a flowerpot inside the house because she had been so angry with the landlord. She didn’t open the door when we came. We had to open a court case because she just wouldn’t leave and there was nothing we could do. [...] When she did leave, she broke the windows and filled the toilet with glass. She broke all the keys inside their locks. She also left everything in a dirty state, the whole house was so dirty! When I first saw it, I said [to my husband]: oh dear, I don’t want this [house], go and sell it immediately. When they sent the eviction notice, she just ran off. She had left the electricity and the water running, we had no idea! We were afraid to come here, she was such a vile woman! She shouted and cursed [at us], I was so ashamed. She had such a dirty mouth. She shouted at us from the balcony, she said she was going to kill us. How can you talk to such a person? So we went to court. And finally, after this whole ordeal we were finally able to move into our house...we suffered so much from this house, so much.

In addition to an immense amount of economic capital and physical labour that Cemile and her family had invested in the house, she felt that the emotional hardship – the humiliation and the insults suffered at the hands of the former tenant – had created a strong attachment to this new home. I heard similar stories from other women in Tarlabası: of how they had turned dilapidated houses into habitable, clean, and comfortable homes by investing economic capital, their labour, and their social skills. Interestingly, I was rarely told such anecdotes by men. However, the attempt to manage the stigma of being a woman in a tainted urban area by performing gendered respectability fell flat when project stakeholders refused to recognise this effort. Cemile explained:

We told [the municipality and the developer] that we renovated the house, but they didn’t believe us. I invited [deputy mayor] Fatih Bey for tea so many times, but he never came to visit to see for himself. None of them ever came to visit. If they would have

come and seen what it looks like inside [our house], they would have been amazed! And the experts go around and say that all the houses here are empty. None of them came to have tea with us.

The deputy mayor's brush-off was even more offensive because he had positioned himself as a person who took a deep interest in her and her husband's case.

This, too, was part of the "corrosive social erasure" (Carter 2010: 5) Tarlabası residents were subjected to. The voices and labour of the women who lived in the neighbourhood (were) disappeared behind "a discursive wall of negative tropes" (Carter 2010: 12–13), like the stereotypes of Tarlabası being "dirty", "run-down" and "empty", while the experiences of women like Alev and Cemile, of their constant and hard work to perform and prove their respectability, were ignored. However, despite this hyper-marginalisation women found ways to rewrite, reframe, and contest the stigmatising discourse. Cemile once told me an anecdote about how she invited a group of strangers into her house. The small group that included some foreigners had been walking around Tarlabası, engaging in conversations with local residents. Cemile had insisted on serving them food. This invitation had been an act of kindness and hospitality, but it had also presented her with the opportunity to show outsiders that her home was, contrary to dominant claims about Tarlabası, well-kept, clean, and beautiful. Since her guests had been journalists familiar with the renewal project and those responsible for it, Cemile also hoped that they might communicate their positive impressions to project stakeholders:

I saw this group walking around in the streets, and I invited them in to have breakfast. They were so hungry! They were journalists, some of them were foreigners. [One of the journalists] who came here said: 'Fatih Bey or Nilgün Hanım should talk to me whenever they want, I will go to them and give them my name and tell them that I have been to many houses in Tarlabası, but that I have never seen a cleaner, more beautiful, or bigger apartment than this one. That's what I'll tell them and that's all I'll tell them.

This desire to refute the stigmatisation by performing respectability through cleanliness transcended the effort to oppose forced displacement. While waiting for her eviction and without knowing when the police would turn up to make her turn over the keys to her house, Cemile continued to meticulously clean the entire apartment every day:

I cleaned everything. Everywhere! [My children] say: mum, are you crazy, you are leaving anyway, why are you cleaning? I am so used to it... Look, it's squeaky clean, look, not a single speck of dust anywhere in the whole house! They'll see. [...] They said they would demolish the house, I said fine, let them demolish it, but despite that I will clean things up, there were some scratches and stripes and I scrubbed them off as best I could. I painted my daughter-in-law's old room. So that it would look clean.

For many women in Tarlabası, negotiating daily life amid the looming threat of eviction while coping with the impact of stigmatisation required constant innovation and tactical impression management. Performing as a "respectable woman" and a diligent housewife was one such tactic.

However, female residents were not only concerned about physical grime, the garbage, and the dust on the streets, but also about the metaphorical "dirt" of crime and

the visibility of commercial activities that were illegal and/or deemed to be immoral. When evictions were well underway, and an increasing number of buildings and entire streets were abandoned and fell into ruin, sex work, petty crime, and drug dealing started to become more and more visible. Many of the sex workers who solicited in Tarlaşaşı during that time were non-residents who openly consumed alcohol and used drugs, which stood in stark contrast to local trans* sex workers. Trans* sex worker Müge was very uncomfortable with the arrival of these women. She thought that the presence and demeanour of these intoxicated sex workers not only violated an unwritten contract of how sex work was supposed to happen in the neighbourhood, but also put her and her Tarlaşaşı colleagues in a bad light and possibly in danger:

We don't know who these women are, we have never seen them before. They act badly, they behave badly. It is not how it is supposed to be, they have no respect for us and the people who live here. And the worst part is that they make us look very bad. People think that we are like them. That they work with us. People get angry at them, but they also get angry at us.

Like Müge, many residents who remained, and especially women, were left feeling unsafe and “tainted” by their deteriorating surroundings and by the increasingly visible illicit behaviours and activities. Several women I spoke to during that time expressed their discontent over the feeling that these “indecencies” reflected badly onto them, putting their respectability, already threatened by their place of residence, further into question.

Fikriye, the Kurdish woman who lived on the top floor of the building in Tree Street, described how she experienced the increased visibility of daytime sex work in the run-up to and during evictions:

It's very shameful [*çok ayıp*]. As a woman [*bayan*]³ I don't want to see this, it's shameful to have to see this. There are families living here, women have to go past [the sex workers] every day, and they feel ashamed when they have to do that. And what should my [family members] think when they come to visit? They shouldn't have to see that.

Fikriye expressed her deep discomfort with having to walk past sex workers who solicited in full view of passing women and their children. She was worried what visiting family members who themselves were not Tarlaşaşı residents would think, and think of *her*, when they saw the dirt, both literal and metaphorical, in the neighbourhood she lived in. She underlined the particular shame women, and in extension, their families, experienced in the face of perceived dirtiness and vulgarity. However, and as much as it added to her own feeling of stigmatisation of living in Tarlaşaşı, as a woman Fikriye had very little influence or control over what happened on the street. While she was aware that the regulation of sex work was in no way her responsibility, she was unable to shake the fear that she would be *held responsible* for the image it projected to outsiders, a feeling of shame for living in a stigmatised space that Randol Contreras (2017: 657) calls “spatial anguish”.

3 *Bayan*, loosely translatable as “lady”, is the conservative way to refer to a woman, since it does not distinguish between *kız* [girl/virgin] and *kadın* [woman/no longer a virgin].

In order to resolve this tension of being caught up between the dominant negative imagery of the neighbourhood and a different, more positive self-image, Fikriye and other women in Tarlaabaşı “devised tactics to preserve a sense of themselves as decent and respectable” (Reay and Lucey 2000: 415). One of the tactics available to them was to successfully *perform* domesticity, to keep their domestic space, one of the few where they wielded influence and control, meticulously clean.

A clean and well-ordered house is thought to reflect the good moral standing of the woman who lives there, and by extension, that of her husband and family. Conversely, a cluttered and dirty home is a sign not only of a woman's laziness, but also her suspected lack of morals and family values. This perceived connection between disorder and immorality “exists to such an extent that the dirt and disorder are considered to be the external manifestations of an innate flaw or moral lack, and the dirty woman [...] becomes dirt in herself” (Gallagher 2011).

Respectability politics in a stigmatised place

Trans* sex worker Müge once told me about a day she had spent with other trans* women friends on one of the Princes' Islands, a popular getaway destination for Istanbul residents. Müge had been looking forward to the day away, but came back disgusted, telling me about the “scandalous behaviour” of her friends who had sunbathed topless or by pulling the straps of their bikini tops down in order to avoid tan lines. She felt that this lack of modesty had reflected badly on her, and the negative attention she thought their group had drawn had spoiled her day on the beach. Her friend and colleague Gülay, Müge's best friend and mentor⁴, agreed that this was unacceptable behaviour. Both women felt that trans* women “like these” reflected badly on the entire trans* community and were the reason that others disputed their respectability. This fear translated directly onto their life in Tarlaabaşı.

They both lived and worked in Bird Street, a cul-de-sac that led onto Tarlaabaşı Boulevard and that housed the informal brothel. All of the trans* women who worked on Bird Street solicited customers at the end of the small lane and on the corner with the main boulevard, which allowed them a certain amount of control and relative security, as they could keep an eye on each other there. Both Müge and Gülay never dressed in tight or revealing clothing, not only in their off time, but also when they were soliciting customers. Müge often wore a buttoned-up short-sleeve blouse and trousers, or woollen tops and cardigans in the colder winter months. She usually wore sneakers or other flat-heeled walking shoes, or flat sandals during the summer, and always only wore a subtle amount of make-up and faint lipstick. Gülay wore a similar “office chic”- outfit when she was waiting for customers at the end of the street. When talking to others about herself, she regularly described herself as a “good Muslim woman”, and she observed fasting days.

4 Gülay had taken Müge “under her wings” after her arrival in Istanbul and taught her the ropes of the sex trade and life in the city as a trans* woman. This system of “big sisters” (*abla*) taking on and helping those who were just entering the trans* community was very common in Turkey (see Selek 2001; Siyah Pembe Üçgen 2012).

Müge said that she did not like the way some of the other trans* women in their street dressed, those that preferred tight fabrics, short skirts, and high heels, dismissing them as “too flamboyant” and “unladylike”.

Müge also did not like to use flirty language when she tried to attract customers in the way that some of the other women did. Burdened with the intersecting stigmas of being trans* women, sex workers, and Tarlaşaşı residents, both Müge and Gülay managed their image and their respectability very carefully. They sought to distinguish themselves from the hyper-feminised and explicitly sexualised self-presentation by some of their trans* colleagues through embodied and discursive practices meant to establish themselves as respectable and *different* than other trans* sex workers in Tarlaşaşı. Scholars have described similar processes of disidentification and distinction from the negative narratives that surround sex work in other contexts (Skeggs 1997; De Meis 1999, 2002; Blanchette and Da Silva 2011; Rivers-Moore 2010; Carrier-Moisan 2015).

Both Gülay and Müge were also very clear about the fact that they had not chosen to do sex work. In conversations with me and other researchers, journalists or other interested outsiders I accompanied, they insisted that they had been forced into that line of work due to the pervasive discrimination against trans* persons in Turkey. Both women said that sex work was a necessity they endured in order to be able to earn a living and save enough money to buy an apartment and retire without having to fear poverty in old age. This rhetoric was a discursive pushback against the dominant, and stigmatising, assumption that trans* women in Tarlaşaşı preferred sex work to any other type of labour, and that it was in their “nature” to sell sex. Müge sometimes reminisced on the jobs she would have liked to do – beautician, architect, computer engineer – if she would have had the chance to choose her profession. She dreamed of joining one of the vocational courses offered by the education ministry in order to get a “respectable” job.

As an unregistered sex worker, the service she offered was *de jure* illegal, and her business was not listed in any government ledgers. Sometimes she said that she would love to pay taxes like all other working citizens, but “they did not want her money”, and that the law on prostitution in Turkey did not allow for her to participate in society that way. Her identity as a trans* woman who did sex work, combined with her place of residence in a deeply stigmatised neighbourhood, made her feel like a second-class citizen. It was important for her to discursively push back against this:

It doesn't matter if you're a prostitute [*hayat kadını*], or a transvestite. Why? Because we are all citizens of the Turkish Republic. Every single citizen holds citizenship. They might not be able to have me do my military service, but they are still relying on me. How? I buy this [*picks up a glass from the table*], so I am paying taxes for it. That's the truth. Fine, I don't pay income tax for what I earn. But I buy this, I buy that, so I still pay taxes. But many people don't know that. Many people think that I work without paying any taxes. No! You pay rent, you pay taxes. I buy food for [my cat], one kilo costs 7.50 [TL], so I pay taxes on that after all.

Müge carefully navigated the corridors of state bureaucracy and made sure that all her papers, such as court orders, filed reports or receipts for misdemeanour fines, were shipshape. Whenever a human rights researcher, a journalist, or any other person came by to talk with her about any of these issues, Müge produced a binder where she kept all her

documents. She would explain: “Everything is neatly filed away. I have proof for everything, I don’t throw anything away, not for years.”

Beverly Skeggs (1997: 3) writes that respectability is a moral discourse: it characterises a person in moral terms and accords moral authority to some but not others. Beverly Skeggs writes, “[r]espectability embodies moral authority: those who are respectable have it, those who are not do not. But only some groups were considered to be capable of being moral, others were seen to be in need of control.” Respectability is therefore a system of hierarchy and domination grounded on distinctions between the respectable and the degenerate.

Historian Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham (1993: 186) introduced “the politics of respectability” to describe how late 19th-century black Baptist women presented themselves as polite, morally upstanding, chaste and thrifty in order to reject “white America’s depiction of black women as immoral, childlike, and unworthy of respect or protection”. Since then, scholarship on respectability politics has shown how marginalised and stigmatised groups enact a sequence of attitudes and behaviours that recreate dominant norms, self-presentation strategies that aim to counter negative stereotypes that aim to disavow them of their right to full citizenship (Giles 1992; Higginbotham 1993; Harris 2003; Joshi 2012; Morris 2014; Pitcan et al. 2018). Higginbotham (1993) describes respectability politics as a successful strategy to overcome social and legal exclusion based on racist structures. However, critics of respectability politics point out that the concept both reflects and reinforces the norms of the status quo: a white middle class, cisheteronormative frame for understanding the behaviours of marginalised groups from a gendered, sexist, classist, and racist perspective (Wolcott 2013). Furthermore, the focus on the individual struggle ignores structural inequalities (Pitcan et al. 2018: 164). Others have argued that respectability politics reinforces intra-group hierarchies by ostracising those perceived as shameful and unworthy of respect, in favour of normative behaviour that is deemed respectable (Ward 2008; Wolcott 2013; Pitcan et al. 2018). This is well illustrated by the anecdotes of Müge and Gülay.

This begs the question how the stakes of successfully performing respectability varied for different Tarlaabaşı residents. What happened if the performance failed? Cemile performed respectability as a means to social safety, to avoid being ostracised from her social surroundings and her peers. Müge used it as a tactic to assure her physical (Human Rights Watch 2008a; Amnesty International 2011b; Ördök 2016) as well as her social safety. She felt that she needed to distance herself from the hyper-feminised, “flamboyant” trans* women around her, and she needed to disassociate herself from the sex workers who arrived in the neighbourhood after evictions had started. For Müge, the successful performance of respectability really was an issue of safety, which raises the question how territorial stigmatisation can put people in danger, and if women are affected in a particular kind of way.

Gendered respectability politics in a stigmatised neighbourhood

While the stakes were very different for either woman, they were high for both Müge and Cemile. Müge had to worry about a different category of personal safety and secu-

urity than Cemile, but for the older woman, the danger felt just as real. For Cemile, being perceived as “good”, as a respectable, and pious woman by others, determined her level of social acceptance. This important social capital was threatened by the neighbourhood stigma that was made more salient by the dominant narrative that surrounded the renewal project. These were different categories of consequences, but (the necessity to achieve) respectability was urgent and similar enough for both Müge and Cemile, and it was so in a gendered way.

In order to illustrate this, I would like to convey the story of Kemal. A Kurdish man in his late fifties who had migrated to Tarlabası from Urfa province in 1972, he had been very eager to talk about his dire situation and the danger of being made homeless by the renewal project. Kemal had worked in a restaurant after his arrival, and later became a *dolmuş* driver. In 2005 he developed coronary artery disease. In addition to medication, his doctor prescribed oxygen therapy, which meant that Kemal had to use an oxygen tank with a face mask three times a day. His illness fully incapacitated him for any kind of even light physical labour, and he was told that there was no chance of recovery. When I met him, he received invalidity benefits from the state, a monthly amount of 200 TL that was paid once a trimester. Social security covered the (substantial) cost for his oxygen treatment and his medication. Divorced from his wife, he had no further income. Two of his grown-up sons were in prison, one for murder and the other for aggravated assault, though Kemal never volunteered the details of their convictions, and I never asked. His third son was married and lived in an apartment above Kemal’s own. The son’s wife did not work. Kemal explained that his youngest son’s “brain angels were gone” [*beyin melekleri yerinde değil*], by which meant to explain that he was seriously mentally disabled and had been declared unfit for employment by a government agency. Kemal had a sister who lived in a suburb close to the now defunct Atatürk Airport and who came to clean and do his laundry almost every week. Quite poor herself, she sometimes cooked for him or brought some groceries. Kemal was well-known in the neighbourhood, and many of his neighbours brought him food, or gave him small amounts of money. He was a regular [*müdavim*] in the teahouse on Tree Street where he often played cards or *okey* with barber Halil Usta, who also cut his hair and gave him regular shaves.

The house that Kemal, his son and his son’s wife lived in was a dilapidated two-storey Levantine building. While many people in Tarlabası lived in unsafe and substandard housing, Kemal’s apartment was one of the most decrepit that I had visited in the neighbourhood. The walls were cracked and crumbling, electric fixtures were broken, and his bathroom, a small nook that doubled as his toilet and his shower, was run-down and dirty. The staircase between apartments was extremely worn-down. However, Kemal spoke fondly of his landlord because he had “mercifully” kept his rent at 200 TL a month, the entirety of Kemal’s invalidity payment, despite the continuous rent increase in the Beyoğlu area. However, in June 2009, the landlord sold the building to the municipality. Kemal told me that the landlord did not tell him about the sale. For more than one year, nobody came to collect the rent and Kemal, relieved over not having to pay, never asked why. In March 2011, project officials turned up at his doorstep “out of the blue” to tell him that he was behind on his rent and therefore 35,000 TL in debt. They also said that the building would be sealed and demolished. Kemal was stunned and outraged.

I told them: You have bought [this house], but have you ever come here to consult with me? Did anyone ever come here to ask for rent and did I not give it to them? Thirty-five thousand! I have never seen such an amount of money in my life! They told me that I was squatting. Squatting! I said, no sir, I am not squatting, I have a contract, the electricity is in my name, I am registered with the *muhtar*. I am registered in Beyoğlu. I have proof.

Kemal insisted that his tenancy was legitimate because he had never refused to pay rent but had not paid because nobody had ever come to ask for it. He angrily underlined that his paperwork regarding the occupancy of his home was in order: he had registered at his address both with the district administration and with the *muhtar*, and all amenities bills were in his name.⁵ He bristled at being called a squatter [*işgalcı*], because the term does not merely refer to someone who lives in a property without paying rent, but it is indexed as disreputable and dishonest. In the Turkish context, the term is commonly used in relation to the illegal appropriation of (mostly public) land and the construction of *gecekondu*.⁶ In the run-up to the project and especially during the eviction period, project stakeholders, municipal officials, and the police indiscriminately labelled residents “squatters”. Contrary to other large urban renewal zones in Istanbul that predominantly targeted *gecekondu* neighbourhoods in lucrative areas of big cities, less than five percent of Tarlabaşı residents were squatters in a legal sense.⁷ Property owners in Tarlabaşı frequently underlined their legitimacy to reside in the city in comparison to *gecekondu* dwellers perceived as having illegally “invaded” the land they occupied. (Sakızlıoğlu 2014a: 160). Kemal argued for his legitimacy by underlining that he was an officially and legally registered tenant who was subscribed to and paid his own utility bills.⁸

Somewhat indignantly Kemal pointed out that the only reason that he was not in gainful employment, the main reason that he was poor and in need of assistance, was not because he was workshy, but because he was incurably ill.

I have a government disability card. I have to use the [oxygen] tank in the morning, at noon, and at night. If I don't use that machine, I cannot breathe properly. I can't breathe. Without the machine I wouldn't be able to speak for more than two minutes. I cannot walk up hills because I cannot draw breath. [...] I am ill. That's why I cannot work. And this illness is forever. I have the card, and then I have a doctor's certificate for all the medication I have to take. [*He takes an assortment of pill packages out of a plastic bag.*] I

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- 5 This was not self-evident. In Turkey it is not uncommon that the electricity, water, and gas bills are registered in the name of the landlord, or previous tenants. This can make claims on outstanding bills very complicated, but also puts tenants in danger of undue demands to pay the bills of previous renters by their landlords.
 - 6 While the definition and description of *gecekondu* housing has undergone significant reanalysis and critique over the past decades, the term is generally associated with urban poverty and an inferior, threatening Other (Pérouse 2004; Erman 2001, 2013).
 - 7 In their assessment of the renewal area, the municipality-hired consultancy firm found that five percent of residents did not pay any rent. Some of these people were friends or relatives of property owners, and some were squatters in the “classic” sense (Kentsel A.Ş. 2008).
 - 8 Interestingly and somewhat ironically, *gecekondu* dwellers frequently use this tactic to establish legitimacy as well in the hope of obtaining an official title deed.

have to take these, and this, and I have to take blood pressure medication. I mean, I have to take all of these. [*He places a few more packages of medication on the table.*] All of this is medication.

One day a videographer who wanted to film a documentary about the renewal project in Tarlabası came to Kemal's home. Half an hour into the interview, Kemal suggested that he display his assembled oxygen tank with the facemask as well as the various boxes of medication that he kept in a plastic bag by his bed. That done, he insisted on being filmed while using the tank, because, he reasoned, viewers should be aware how serious his illness was, and how much the treatment impacted on his life. He hoped that this self-presentation would motivate charities and human rights NGOs, some of which he had been in touch with at the time, to support him. Kemal had an entire folder of documents, receipts, and filled-in forms that certified his illness and his resulting poverty, and that documented his applications for financial assistance at various Turkish charities and government offices.

I wrote these letters to the [Beyoğlu Municipality], and to the district governor [*kaymakam*]. In them I explain my situation. I tell them, look, here is my poverty card⁹ that I got from the *muhtar*, where the *muhtar* confirms that I live only on assistance. [...] All I need is some help, I am still waiting to hear back from everyone. [...] I talked to all the places I was supposed to. I got registered with *Kimse Yok Mu* and with *Deniz Feneri*.¹⁰ They came to my house, they had a look, made some notes, but so far nobody has come back or given me any assistance. I tried human rights [organisations]. I did interviews with journalists. Until now I have not been able to get any aid, or any offer. So, there is nothing I can do.

In contrast to Cemile, who insisted on not wanting to ask anyone even for “a piece of bread” because it would make her feel ashamed, Kemal was offended that he had so far been denied the necessary assistance to move from his home.

All I want is some help. But nobody does anything. I talked to everyone. I am still waiting to get something from them. The district governor gave me 200 Lira. But for 200 Lira you cannot rent a house, and you cannot go anywhere, *kardeşim*¹¹.

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- 9 The “poverty card” [*fakirlik belgesi*] is a document that residents have to apply for with their local *muhtar*. The requirements to qualify for this document are to have an income below the state-specified hunger line, not to be party to any other social security coverage, such as a state pension fund, and not to own a car or real estate property. The document facilitates the application for further state assistance in healthcare, education, childcare or other material assistance.
- 10 The *Kimse Yok Mu* foundation was established in 2002 to organise poverty, and later emergency relief in Turkey and abroad. Closely affiliated with the Fethullah Gülen movement, it was shut by government decree in the aftermath of the 2016 coup attempt. The *Deniz Feneri* charity association, close to the AKP government, delivers relief and aid both in Turkey and abroad. In 2008, the association was involved in a scandal when executives in Germany were sentenced to prison terms for swindling and illegally acquiring funds.
- 11 Denotationally, the word *kardeşim* means “my brother”, but it is a word of solidarity and familiarity between men as well. Here this choice of a word indexes a certain condescension and cynicism. Other than the common address *ağbi/m* [my/brother] that is also used, mostly between men, *kardeşim* retains a lateral, rather than a hierarchical quality. Because this distinction matters, but

His attempt to acquire a TOKI apartment was rejected because he did not have the necessary 5,000 TL for a downpayment, and because the 480 TL of the monthly mortgage he would have to pay over a span of about twenty years was too high an amount for him. Kemal was not ashamed that he was too poor to afford a home in what the government provided as mass social housing. Far from it, he was justly outraged that TOKI was only available to those who had enough money to advance a large sum for a downpayment and who therefore, in his eyes, were neither really poor nor in need of state assistance.

As a destitute handicapped man, the stakes to find social acceptance and feel safe were extremely high for Kemal, just as they had been for Cemile and Müge. However, and even though Kemal was forced to prove his deservedness in order to get the assistance he was entitled to, he did not feel the need to prove his respectability. For him, that was a given.

The above anecdotes have made clear that in the context of Tarlabası as a stigmatised neighbourhood under the threat of renewal, the urgency of successfully performing respectability was gendered in a very particular way. Kemal was a divorced, unemployed and impoverished man. Two of his sons were in prison for serious crimes. He was never uneasy about the disorder in his home, or worried that it might not be clean enough, not even when he was giving an interview on camera.¹² He was never ashamed of his living situation, or for not being able to pay back the rent he allegedly owed, because he was confident that the reasons for being unable to pay provided a satisfactory enough explanation. He never doubted that anyone would deny him the respect he deserved. Even though Kemal's material situation was arguably worse than that of both Müge and Cemile, and though he risked homelessness in case of an eviction, the stakes for his successful performance of respectability were lower. At no point did he risk physical violence like Müge or being socially ostracised like Cemile. He did not risk ceasing to exist as a person. Even if Kemal's physical living situation would change for the worse, his social status would not undergo significant changes. As a poverty-stricken, disabled man with no other recourse than charity, he nevertheless did not risk further debasement. Cemile and Müge both felt a threat of deep shame with potentially noxious consequences, and both women worked very hard, and knew they had to work hard, to achieve the respectability they hoped would offer a certain level of safety.

Stigma is as much about marginalisation as it is about power and privilege (Link and Phelan 2014; Tyler and Slater, 2018; de Souza 2019). It is "about the power to present and to represent – the power to mark, assign, stereotype, and frame issues, people, and situations in particular ways. Stigma is about the power to levy accusations, to cast suspicion, and to be heard. Stigma is the power to shut up and silence others" (De Souza 2019: 19).

The above anecdotes have shown that territorial stigmatisation meant the loss of residents' control over the narrative of themselves and their physical reality, because that reality had been prefabricated through the lens of territorial stigma. When people saw an elderly man sitting between ruins and garbage bags in Tarlabası, they might readily

is invisible in English, I retain the Turkish in my transcription where it is important to the meaning of the quote.

12 A similar observation can be made about Cemile's husband Ramazan.

interpret this as proof not of the injustice of the renewal project and the wilful negligence of the municipality in the run-up to evictions, but of the general and well-known dilapidation of the neighbourhood. In the same way, the photograph of Cemile's building included in the municipality's marketing catalogue should have been evidence of the destruction of a community, but instead it was used as proof for a fabricated counter-reality in which it was plausible that residents lived in half-ruined buildings void even of window frames and balcony railings.

Since communication and the production of images and narratives are central to the production of stigma, the power to stigmatise is a discursive privilege. It gives those who have the power to stigmatise the privilege to "to tell a story about who the Other is and who 'We' are. (ibid.)".

This means that the work of impression management for residents of stigmatised neighbourhoods is always an uphill battle, as outsiders have been steered towards the less favourable interpretation of what they see before they have even cast the first glance. Furthermore, as the above examples have illustrated, the stakes of the successful performance of respectability are gendered. While Tarlaşaşı residents were all deeply affected by the stigmatisation of their neighbourhood in various ways, the need to successfully perform respectability against that prefabricated stigma was more urgent for women, as they risked physical or social obliteration if they failed.

Chapter eight: Giving in to stigma

Lute and *saz* maker Kerem Usta owned a two-storey workshop on a corner just outside the project area. He had spent his childhood in Tarlabası and used to live there, but by the time I met him in 2010, he owned a modest apartment in a high-rise residential complex in Sefaköy, two hours from Taksim by public transport.

Kerem Usta commuted to Tarlabası every weekday, and sometimes on weekends as well. His workshop was spread out over three and a half floors (the low room that he used as a depot occupied a low-ceilinged room accessible via a set of steep stairs), and he shared the workspace with his younger brother and another master instrument maker. The three men arrived in the morning and stayed until the early evening, which made it necessary to cook and eat breakfast and lunch in the shop. For the various customers, business partners, neighbours and random guests, Kemal Usta kept a small stock of biscuits, and of course tea. There were several corner shops [*bakkal*] and a few eateries in proximity of the workshop, including a good mussel kitchen¹ just across the small street. Despite this, Kerem Usta never bought or ate anything at any of them, with the exception of one *esnaf lokantası*² that he had frequented for decades and that was at a 15-minute walking distance. If he could help it he did not even buy bread or packaged biscuits at any of the corner shops in Tarlabası, arguing that the wares there might not be “clean” or of a quality he would be able to offer to guests. He balked at the idea of eating cheese or eggs from any of the *bakkal* closest to his workshop, and only did so as a last resort, for example when they hosted an unexpectedly high number of guests for breakfast or lunch. His brother Efe sometimes went all the way up to and across Tarlabası Boulevard to buy food – at least a twenty-minute walk at a brisk pace back and forth – even for items as simple as savoury biscuits to serve with tea. Both Efe and Kerem Usta frequently warned me not to “trust” local Tarlabası sellers, be it in a shop or on the Sunday vegetable market, because, they argued, in shop owners might “mix anything” into the foodstuffs they sold.

1 While many mussel kitchens in Tarlabası were informal, and often quite unhygienic – businesses in the basement of buildings that sold the mussels on itinerant trays – this mussel kitchen was a state-of-the-art manufacture that delivered to several well-known restaurants in Beyoğlu.

2 Literally a “small shop owner restaurant”, an *esnaf lokantası* is a restaurant that offers a range of home-cooked meals in self-service style. They usually do not offer dinner.

Residents of stigmatised neighbourhoods find different ways to manage the stigma of living in a defamed place. Some residents of stigmatised urban areas this territorial taint, which sets off a number of negative social effects (Wacquant 2007). Feelings of guilt and shame can lead residents “to deny belonging, to distance themselves from the area and their neighbours, and to emphasize their own moral worth in contrast to other residents (Jensen and Christensen 2015: 75)”. This chapter examines the various ways in which some Tarlabaşı residents internalised the bad reputation of their neighbourhood and how they tried to deflect the stigma onto other groups they blamed for the disrepute. Following that I analyse along which fault lines residents mirrored the stigma onto other groups. Finally, I want to show the role that weaponized nostalgia played in such lateral denigration. The main question hereby is not *if* lateral denigration happened amongst residents in Tarlabaşı, but more crucially, *how* this denigration happened, and what kind of “symbolic boundary work” (Lamont 2000) maintained and justified it.

Internalisation

Kerem Usta was ambivalent about the neighbourhood that he was, after all, very familiar with, and he was not the only one. Halil Usta’s barber shop was an important fixture in the neighbourhood, and both he and his associate Necmi Usta often spoke lovingly about their *mahalle*. However, this affection for Tarlabaşı was not without handicap. For example, they both bemoaned the decline of quality standards in their trade that had apparently occurred over the years they had been working in the neighbourhood. Halil partly blamed the lack of *zabıta* controls. The regulatory officers were tasked with the control of hygiene standards and working hours in barber shops. This absence of oversight, he argued, meant that some barbers did not always use fresh towels, or that shaving blades might be reused to save money. He thought that the *zabıta* had not dared to come to the neighbourhood for a long time, which affected his trade and his business. Hygiene regulations were violated to cut costs, leading to worsening overall quality in an attempt to undersell the competition. It also meant that Halil felt the need to open his shop on Sundays:

Barber shops are supposed to close on Sundays, but nobody checks if they do. The *zabıta* are worried that they will get beaten up if they come. So, they just let it slide, but that means that I have to open my shop on Sundays as well, because I’m afraid that I will lose customers otherwise. The *zabıta* are afraid to come here, so they don’t, or just very rarely. Here they’d be told anyway [by residents]: Get lost, man, what do you want from me?

Halil said that the *zabıta* checks were important because they were a public service that would have alleviated barbers’ workloads and forced everyone to stick to basic hygiene rules. It was also beneficial to their health and kept them safe in their jobs:

Before everyone would get licenses, there were public health checks, like 20 years ago, I remember that, done by the *zabıta*. Now they don’t exist anymore, and I don’t go to these check-ups either, which is bad in fact because it would be good for my own health

to have them. Customers could be sick, they could have tuberculosis, these checks were good for me, too.

Necmi added that the lack of control and check-ups was not the fault of the *zabıta*, but in fact the fault of Tarlaabaşı residents whose “rudeness” towards public officers and municipal officials was the reason they stayed away in the first place. He argued that people in Tarlaabaşı did not “deserve” public service if they did not show the necessary appreciation and deference:

Some of the shops here are not very diligent with hygiene. Some of the cheaper barbers use the same blade for several customers, things like that. Normally the *zabıta* would fine them for that, but if people treat them so disrespectfully, why would they bother to come here? If people here behave like that, why would they care about such things?

During my fieldwork I have indeed never seen a *zabıta* control – or even a *zabıta* patrol – in Tarlaabaşı.³ I have also never heard of first-hand incidents in the neighbourhood where *zabıta* had been insulted or beaten. The municipal police were not popular amongst Tarlaabaşı residents, especially those who were engaged in the informal and illegalised economies of recycling and itinerant sales karts. However, they usually dealt with the municipal police through avoidance, not confrontation. Anecdotes of encounters with the *zabıta* by other residents did not reflect what the two barbers alleged. On the contrary, *zabıta* officers were often unfriendly and high-handed, and showed neither mercy nor understanding for the often-desperate situation of those they reprimanded.⁴ This is not to say that verbal, or even physical, violence against *zabıta* officers was impossible, but I have never encountered any evidence for it during my fieldwork. What the thoughts relayed by Halil and Necmi do show is their impression that Tarlaabaşı was a neighbourhood so uncivil that it did not deserve the municipal attention and care that were expected and taken for granted in other districts of the city.

Residents that have internalised the stigma associated with their neighbourhood sometimes view experiences of inequality as a natural consequence, a rational reality for them to face simply for living in a ‘bad’ place. As Wacquant (2010: 217) writes, the “physical disrepair and institutional dilapidation of the neighbourhood cannot but generate an abiding *sense of social inferiority* by communicating to its residents that they are second- or third-class citizens undeserving of the attention of city officials and of the care of its agencies.”

It was also not uncommon for inhabitants to acerbically joke about Tarlaabaşı as a no-go zone, a place void of beauty and interest for any visitor. (Incidentally, this was also

3 They were quite common on nearby İstiklal Avenue and its side streets in Beyoğlu, however, where shops and itinerant sellers were rigorously policed, and beggars and street musicians not seldom – and often rudely – removed. This also concerned street sellers and recyclers from Tarlaabaşı, whose goods and karts were regularly seized by the *zabıta*, but usually outside of the neighbourhood. The only *zabıta* officer I regularly came across in Tarlaabaşı was one man tasked with logistics during the eviction period.

4 The seizure of karts and products meant a considerable financial (and temporary income) loss for sellers and recyclers that was difficult to recuperate. For example, the iron kart and the large bag used by recyclers cost 100 TL at the time, a large sum that could mean several days’ work.

an argument put forth by the municipality in order to justify the renewal project.) Sometimes people mocked me for my interest in the neighbourhood, and my bringing visitors with me to walk the streets and meet the people I was spending so much of my time with. Tourists also found their way into the neighbourhood, mainly because of the rapid proliferation of apartment hotels in the area. Halil Usta ridiculed the tourists who chose to stay in one of the accommodations in the neighbourhood, or who came wandering in to see Tarlaşaşı:

Tourists come here, their guidebooks in hand, and wander around Tarlaşaşı. *[animated]* One should say to them: You idiots, why did you come here? [...] They are building hotels everywhere now, in every street, and for what? What is there to see here? The only thing Tarlaşaşı is famous for is being the *worst* place in Istanbul!

This internalisation of the neighbourhood stigma affected how residents thought about the renewal project. When I asked trans* sex worker Cansu what she thought of the renewal project in general, she said that she was in favour of it. She agreed that Tarlaşaşı could only be salvaged if it was demolished and rebuilt from the ground up, because it was dilapidated beyond saving and its infrastructure hopelessly outdated:

They will demolish this place and there will be new construction projects. That's great! At least there will be natural gas then. Look, we don't have natural gas here. In the very centre of Istanbul. Natural gas! In Istanbul! We don't have it here. But all that will come now. With the new projects. The streets are way too narrow. They are right [to demolish]. Something happens here and the fire trucks cannot even enter! The ambulance cannot enter! But if everything is demolished and cleaned up nicely, it will be much more beautiful, I think.

Cansu thought that the only way to improve the infrastructure in Tarlaşaşı was not by careful renovation or the installation of lacking amenities, but by the neighbourhood's destruction, including the displacement of everyone in it. She accepted the loss of her home and her workplace in exchange for a meagre compensation because she considered Tarlaşaşı to be beyond the pale and impossible to redeem. Views like hers were not uncommon. I regularly heard residents argue in favour of the renewal project, even if they themselves were to be displaced or cheated on the sales price of their property, by saying that Tarlaşaşı just "did not deserve better", "residents had only themselves to blame", or because the neighbourhood was "simply too bad to save it". Bahar Sakızlıođlu (2014a: 199) found that a number of residents supported the renewal project as an opportunity to get rid of the Kurdish community, and the concentration of crime, even if it meant their own displacement.

Such an unfavourable view of the neighbourhood and its residents obviously had a detrimental impact on any opposition to the renewal project. If residents accepted that Tarlaşaşı was the dirty, dangerous, and irreparable place that project stakeholders described it as, they would not fight against its demolition. The internalisation of stigma also led to a lack of empathy for residents who did resist their eviction, and who sought to rally support from their neighbours and fellow Tarlaşaşı dwellers. More than once I told someone about a pending expulsion, hoping (and fully expecting) that my interlocutor would share my outrage. However, that was not always the case. Sometimes that person

defended the developers' arguments and interests. Once I told Halil Usta about how upset some people I had spoken to were about being thrown out of their homes. He argued that they were wrong to complain:

Believe me, and I am telling you this from the bottom of my heart, most of the people who live here are squatters. No matter who you ask here, no matter who you interview, that person will be a squatter who lives in an apartment that they don't own or rent, I guarantee you this. They'll say that they are being thrown out, that this is unfair. But that's not true. They are squatters and have no right to live there.

Halil based his assessment on the allegation of project stakeholders that the vast majority of Tarlabası residents had no claim to the area. The point that only five percent of all residents in the renewal zone were squatters has been made several times throughout this book (Kentsel A.Ş. 2008). The existing negative image of Tarlabası, painting it as a neighbourhood of undeserving squatters, criminals and terrorists made it easy for the municipality to manipulate and exploit the stigma, and residents who aimed to distinguish themselves from that negative image sometimes took these arguments at face value, without questioning them.

Lateral denigration

Hakan, a Turkish man in his late forties who ran the small teahouse on Bird Street, often complained about the amount of garbage scattered on his street. A relatively narrow cul-de-sac inside the renewal zone, municipal cleaning vehicles rarely passed through to mop up refuse. Even street sweepers, many of whom played cards in his teahouse, seldomly took to the street with their brooms. On one side of the street, a development company renovated an old Armenian school independently of the renewal project. Several abandoned, half-ruined houses steadily filled with rubble and material discarded at the construction site and garbage. These were at least partly the reasons that Bird Street looked increasingly uncared for, though the residents that still lived there, such as Müge and cobblers Zeki Usta and his son Sedat, often swept in front of their places. Nevertheless, Hakan blamed local residents, not the municipality or even the construction site owners, for the dirty appearance of the street.

Look at this mess. Bags everywhere, rubble everywhere! [In other neighbourhoods] there are garbage containers and people leave their garbage in those containers. They don't do that here. They just don't! Here people just open the window and throw their garbage on the street. They couldn't do that elsewhere. Some people in Tarlabası just behave in such a bad way. I don't think this is right.

His words implied that there was something about Tarlabası residents that made them inherently dirty. In his eyes, the problem was not a lack of garbage bins, infrequent garbage disposal, or negligent construction site management inside a residential area, but a negative quality that was ingrained in some residents because of where they lived. Hakan's argumentation therefore perpetuated the stigmatising discourse used to describe his neighbourhood. Wacquant (2007, 2008) has identified such "lateral denigra-

tion” as a coping strategy for residents of tainted neighbourhoods to try and deflect the stigma from themselves onto a demonised Other. Like Hakan did, they might describe faceless others as the “real” transgressors whom they blame for the bad reputation of their neighbourhood (Hastings 2004; Palmer et al. 2004; Warr 2005b; Watt 2006; Eksner 2013; Contreras 2017; Cuny 2018; Verdouw and Flanagan 2019; Sisson 2020). However, while the accused were name- and faceless, they did fit into certain identity categories. Some people in Tarlaşaşı tended to variously direct their anger and distaste against (more recent) rural migrants, Kurds, Roma, Syrian refugees, trans* sex workers, and migrants from African countries instead of against the municipality or the media, to blame them for how Tarlaşaşı was being perceived from the outside. These narratives were often informed by the same ordinary iconic profiles that project stakeholders used in their stigmatising discourse about the neighbourhood. This inclination to blame neighbours for the area’s bad reputation corresponds with sociologist Michèle Lamont’s (2000) concept of “symbolic boundary work”, which she uses to explain that members of a group increase their own sense of moral worth compared to those of another group by denigrating them (see Contreras 2017).

Necmi Usta, the 35-year-old assistant barber [*kalfa*] to Halil Usta had first migrated from the central Anatolian province of Konya to Tarlaşaşı in 1985 to start his apprenticeship. When I met him, he had been working in the barbershop on Tree Street for ten years. There, he served customers of “all kinds of” ethnic and religious backgrounds, as he often hurried to underline during our chats. However, when he spoke about the people who lived in the immediate vicinity of the shop, predominantly Kurds from the provinces of Mardin and Siirt, he complained that their lifestyle and daily practices were incompatible with what he considered to be “urban culture” [*şehir kültürü*]. He argued that these newcomers he euphemistically termed as “coming from the east” [*doğudan gelen*] were to blame that the neighbourhood and its image had deteriorated. As was often the case in the Tarlaşaşı, this did not prevent Necmi from entertaining excellent relations with his Kurdish neighbours and customers. When talking to me, knowing about my pro-Kurdish stance, he stressed that he meant “no harm” by his complaints, and that it was a “simple fact” that Kurds, who had migrated to Istanbul from the countryside, did not conform to life in a big city. Once I observed the following conversation between Necmi and long-standing (Kurdish) customer Murat in the barbershop:

M: I used to live here, and I’ve had a business here since 1983. I own a textile workshop here. This used to be a very nice neighbourhood, believe me. A lot of successful [karyerli] people used to live here. Respectful people. It was a more luxurious place, a cleaner place...

N: Many artists used to live here.

M: A lot of distinguished people used to live here. An elite. When the people from the countryside came here, in the 80s and the 90s, those people fled. They went to more luxurious neighbourhoods, to quieter neighbourhoods. Because when those villagers came here, those people that lacked city manners, these people, the former inhabi-

tants, they started to withdraw from here. [...] When that happened, they left Tarlabası to a different kind of people.

N: Yes, that's how it is. Whatever these people that came from the east did in the east, they now do in Tarlabası as well. [...] For example the thing they do with their bedding. We buy our blankets and pillows, but they don't. [They use] sheep's wool. Ok, it's nice to use natural things, but to do this in the middle of the street...you saw it in the summer. They take a stick and start beating that wool, bam, like that.¹³¹Necmi refers to the practice of filling pillows and blankets with sheep's wool, which is common in rural areas in Turkey. This wool is regularly taken out of the cases, washed, fluffed up and dried in the sun. Ok, that's what you are supposed to do [with wool], but not in the centre of Istanbul! Urban culture is different. If you'd take these people and put them in a residential complex...[...].

M: I now live in one of the more luxurious apartments in my complex. But you know what they do [in Tarlabası]? Those people who have come from the southeast, these guys they just open the window and, bam! They throw their used baby diapers out into the street from their window. There really are people with peculiar manners who live here. Very peculiar. How many times have they landed on my head...when I got into my car...I have seen all sorts of things here unfortunately. There really are very strange, very peculiar people here now. And when you say something, they give you a rude answer. [...] Don't get me wrong, they are our brothers, I don't mean to badmouth them, that's not my intention.

N: And this has nothing to do with education. It has nothing to do with education when you throw your used diapers from the balcony. It's not required to teach someone not to do that. You should think of that yourself! Put it in a plastic bag and put it in front of your door in the evening. When the garbage truck comes, it will pick it up. You cannot just throw a diaper from the third floor.

M: And they bring out their garbage just after the truck has left! How hard is it to bring the garbage down in time? Put it at your front door before the truck comes! Those people have a very peculiar outlook on life. Because I own a building here and my business is here, I couldn't move it elsewhere. But I really want to move my business elsewhere. This is the centre of Istanbul. Tarlabası, Beyoğlu! Beyoğlu, the place where gentlemen [beyler] live! It's supposed to be a place where distinguished people, elite people live. I have not seen that either, I came in the 70s, but there really used to be very different people in Beyoğlu, in the centre of Istanbul.

N: I really don't mean to talk badly about anyone. After they came, the feeling of neighbourliness declined a bit more. Do you know what I mean? It's not like when the madamlar [non-Muslim women] lived here. Those colourful bowfront houses...some guy moved in and has lived there for thirty years, why doesn't he paint it, at least once? Should the government come and do it for you? There is [cheap] paint, and there is [expensive] paint. Only to make it look nice and clean, but they don't even do that.

The complaint about the "ignorant villagers" who migrated to the city but do not know how to adapt to urban life has been a well-known and much-used trope in the media, fictional artwork and daily conversations in Turkey for decades. During my fieldwork

I heard it often, mostly from ethnic Turks who had come to Tarlaşaşı a decade or two before their Kurdish neighbours.⁵

It is important to note that Murat, a Kurdish businessman whose family had also migrated to Istanbul, did not protest Necmi's observations. Similar to Müge, who was trying to distance herself from trans* sex workers she deemed unworthy of respect, Murat distinguished himself from stigmatised Kurdish rural migrants by adopting the same negative narrative used in the mainstream Turkish discourse.

Randol Contreras (2017), in his research on residents' reactions to territorial stigma in Compton and South Central, Los Angeles County, cites Patricia Hill Collins' concept of the "matrix of domination" to point out how marginalised communities deflect negative stereotypes onto more vulnerable groups, and by so doing reinforcing intersecting marginalisation and oppression based on categories such as gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, class, etc. The belittling of other residents, evident in the barber shop conversation, reflects macrosocial divides in Turkey that are not specific only to Tarlaşaşı. It does not echo random hostilities either. Necmi Usta airing his grievances about Kurdish rural migrants in his street has little to do with his neighbours specifically. The differences and conflicts he described followed lines that are salient and meaningful outside of Tarlaşaşı, and in Turkey as a whole. They will be recognised anywhere. Contreras (*ibid.*: 657) shows that residents of stigmatised neighbourhoods do not just deflect the stigma to anyone, but to those that are lower in the social hierarchy made up of intersecting categories such as gender, race, or class. The way people deflected the Tarlaşaşı stigma depended on categories of Other that are supplied by the broader political context. In that sense they are only Tarlaşaşı-specific inasmuch as there are very few neighbourhoods in Turkey that were threatened by urban renewal and where such a diversity of groups lived side by side.

The faceless Others that some residents blamed for the bad state and bad reputation of the neighbourhood often corresponded with the ordinary iconic icons (De Koning and Vollerbergh 2019) that personified macro-political fissures and societal problems. Burcu, a trans* sex worker in her fifties who worked from the informal brothel in Bird Street alongside trans* sex workers Gülay and Müge, reproduced well-known racist stereotypes about the criminal Kurdish male when she explained why Tarlaşaşı had deteriorated:

Things went downhill in Tarlaşaşı. Fifteen, twenty years ago there was not a single Kurd. They are all with the PKK. All of these backstreets are in the hands of the PKK. A Turk or a tourist cannot go there, they'd rob the tourist. There are thieves and pick-pockets. [...] There's all kinds amongst the Kurds. The whole place needs to be cleaned up.

As a trans* sex worker in Tarlaşaşı, Burcu did arguably not have more social power than most of her neighbourhood's Kurdish residents. Like them, she represented a "marked" member of society in Turkey, a person significantly "below" the norm of the unmarked, perfect ideal of a Turkish citizen.⁶ Her distance to the ideal put Burcu in danger of vio-

5 Ethnic Turkish rural migrants who arrived in Istanbul after 1950 were disparaged in the same way by Istanbul residents who were living there before (see Lanz 2005).

6 Sociologist Wayne Brekhus (1998: 35) writes that the "unmarked represents the vast expanse of social reality that is passively defined as unremarkable, socially generic, and profane". In the Turkish

lent discrimination. It is no surprise then that she felt moved to deflect the stigma onto anyone else who might be perceived as the “real problem” instead of her. In order to do that, she points to the same “problem categories” anchored in the Turkish dominant discourse that Necmi Usta did. In the same way, I frequently witnessed Kurdish residents rail against the local trans* community and the visible sex work economy.

The discrimination of an entire ethnic group or a community sharing a social identity was common in the deflection of the spatial stigma. Once, during a family gathering at Alev’s house, her uncle who lived in a different part of the neighbourhood talked about the changes in Tarlabası and the ongoing renewal project. He elevated the successes of the Kurds compared to the Romani residents who, he argued, had lived there much longer but achieved much less:

Just take the local Roma. They’ve been here for 100 years, and they’ve not been able to wise up in 100 years. I don’t mean to talk badly about Roma. But they are, how should I put it...they’re lazy people. They have been living here for 100 years, but they are all renting their homes. They are not hard-working people. We have them on our street, too! And we get in fights with them. That happens. Look, it’s been 15 years that our people have moved here from the east and all of them are property owners, are homeowners, are business owners. They’re hard-working people. We’re hard-working people, not like the Roma. The Roma have been here for 100 years, and they’re still tenants, they languish in cellar flats. But us Kurds are not like that. We made a life for ourselves here in only 15 years, that’s a short time. For example, 90 percent of the people from our village have become homeowners here, they’ve become business owners.

The stereotypes used in such deflective descriptions reflected racist and discriminatory tropes that I heard many times in various settings and contexts in Turkey, and they were directed at Romani residents, African and Syrian refugees, but mainly at Kurdish residents. Randol Contreras (2017: 667) points out how the symbolic violence of constant violent discrimination in stigmatised spaces drives targeted groups to search for “an enemy within”. The Kurdish, trans* or the Romani communities were an obvious target.

However, sometimes these scolding narratives reflected the kind of intra-group denigration that members of marginalised and stigmatised groups used to prove their own respectability in comparison to peers who were described as less deserving of respect and rights. When I told Cansu about the difficulties that Müge, Gülay, and the other trans* women who lived and worked in Bird Street were facing, she expressed no sympathy. On the contrary, Cansu argued that the women, whom she knew personally, had no one but themselves to blame for being threatened by eviction and displacement.

What else is [the developer] supposed to do? And they have been working there for so many years! They should have saved some money and invested it in something, buy a house...something! They have been working there for years. Where did all that money go? You have to work, save money, and do something with it. People should use their

context, the closest to an ideal citizen that does not require additional markers to “Turk” would be an ethnically Turkish, Sunni Muslim, able-bodied, cisgender male. The image of the “ideal Turk” has arguably shifted with the rise and consolidation of power of the AKP, but I would argue that at least these signifiers remain largely the same.

brains. It's not right to now whine and complain and ask [the developer] not to evict people. Save your money and do something. Isn't that right?

In her time in Tarlabaşı Cansu had continuously faced violent discrimination from some of her Kurdish neighbours, and especially their children who had thrown stones and bottles after her and some of her trans* friends. On the other hand, she said that she got along well with her ethnic Turkish neighbours, a family who had migrated to Istanbul from the Black Sea, and with whom she shared a negative view of Kurds. In fact, she defended that most Kurdish rural migrants in Tarlabaşı had unduly profited and had no right to claim victimhood.

Do you really think that anyone here is a victim? Are those that have been living here for years without paying rent really victims? For years [the Kurds] have been...what do you call it? They've been squatting here. They broke into buildings, they painted them and started living there. Can those people be called victims? For years they have not paid any rent! They could have worked, saved money, and bought a house! [In instalments], like paying rent. Is this victimhood? They've been living here for years, have not paid for electricity, nor for water, nor for rent – so where has their money gone? They don't have any. Don't you think so? This has nothing to do with being a victim, they've been living for free for years. [...] There are people that are much worse off. Are the people in Tarlabaşı being victimised? They walk around decked in gold everywhere [points to her upper arms, where some women wear gold arm bands]. They cover it up! There are so many hard-up, hungry people. [...] Those are the people that are really being victimised. I don't mean them. But there are so many people who live here for free. Squatters.

Cansu never explicitly specified that she was talking about Kurdish families. However, the descriptions she used to vent her anger over alleged squatters corresponded to the anti-Kurdish narrative used in the dominant Turkish media and political discourse, accusing Kurds of free-loading and failing (or refusing) to pay their amenities bills, while presenting themselves as victims. She tried to establish privilege over space and respectability she had worked very hard to secure for herself and did so by portraying Kurds as undeserving. The accusation that many Tarlabaşı residents were in fact “not really” victimised by the urban renewal project was one I heard repeatedly, and it was very detrimental to neighbourhood solidarity. Barber Halil Usta once angrily told me that the majority of the people who lived in the project area were shirkers:

You see the people that live [at the end of this street]. 80 percent of them are unemployed. When you go to our teahouse, ask those people, those people are all opposing the project. But none of them even have a job! If you give those guys a house, they'll want a villa. Sometimes the fault lies with the people, they don't work.

Halil Usta's estimation of unemployment in Tarlabaşı, based on his encounters and gossip in the tea house, was much higher than it actually was.⁷ Halil Usta, who was officially

7 A 2008 survey conducted by a consultancy firm that had been hired by the municipality concluded that 11.5 percent of household heads were without employment. However, 92 percent of surveyed household heads were unskilled workers, many of whom were employed in precarious and poorly

retired by the time we met, owned his own small business and was proud of the honorific of “Master” that he had worked hard for. His assessment of the living situation of many of his neighbours made clear that Halil Usta did not think that those men, idle, poor, and “unemployed” as they were – the “undeserving poor” – had the right to complain about the project, or about the threat of being evicted from their homes without adequate, or any, compensation. Halil Usta, while himself a tenant of his shop, and therefore just as much a victim of pending evictions as the other tea house patrons, set himself apart from those he dismissed as “unemployed”. As a business owner who spent his entire working life in a respected profession, he thought that the “idle unemployed” did not have the right to complain about evictions and demand compensation, certainly not if he did and could not. As a tenant whose landlord was still in a legal dispute with the municipality, he had no possibility to do either. Furthermore, Halil Usta was very angry that he still had to pay his monthly rent to the landlord, despite an increasingly painful lack of business, while tenants whose landlords had sold their property to the developer were often granted a rent hiatus until the start of evictions. This led him to double down on disparaging other residents, while trying to demonstrate that *he* was treated unjustly, because in his eyes, he was offered even less choices in a situation that was in fact unjust to everyone:

Sometimes fault lies with the people here, too. That *han*⁸ for example. They told [the people] there: we will not take rent from you until the project is implemented. Look, it's been two years. [The municipality] didn't ask for rent for two years. Look, this guy, the turner next door. That adds up to 24,000 [TL]. He was told to sign, he did. Now the [agreed] day has come, and he says he won't leave. Now there's a thing called justice in this country. There are laws. I'm talking about the turner. For two years you didn't pay rent, you sign a contract where you promise you'll leave, and then you go and say: Conni⁹, write this and that. Who is right now? If it's one-sided...look, this is going to happen to me, too, one day or another. Look, I still pay rent now. If they would say: Halil Usta, you don't have to pay rent for two years, I'd be fine with that. Even though we are paying rent, we'll be the first to be thrown out, you'll see. [laughs]. [...] *Ya* believe me...I am telling you with all sincerity, many people here are squatters. They're squatters, [but] they say: they are throwing me out. They say: they are cheating me.

Halil did criticise the project for destroying the social fabric of the neighbourhood he had lived and worked in for more than 40 years. However, he believed that the state-

paid jobs in the service sector, construction, textile, or recycling. Only 19 percent of household heads had health insurance through their employers (Kentsel A.Ş. 2008). Those that worked in these insecure jobs often found themselves without employment over longer stretches of time, or they had to work evening or night shifts, which could mean idle time during the day. Pay was very often dismal, and it was not unusual in these jobs not to be paid on time, or at all. The local tea house was a place where men who were, for whatever reason, without occupation at that time, could congregate with friends and neighbours. However, in Turkey, the tea house (*kiraathane*) has a reputation as a space for idle men who do not work, and some men, like Necmi Usta, underlined with pride that they never went there.

8 A *han* is a collection of several businesses and workshops inside one building.

9 Almost everyone in Tarlabasi called me by my nickname.

led renewal, no matter how much he disliked the general idea of it, nevertheless happened within a legitimate legal frame, because contracts were signed between residents and stakeholders that were equally binding for each side. Halil believed the legal norms set by the state justice system to be “objective” and binding for every person operating within it. While activists and lawyers opposed to the project argued that the laws passed to make the Tarlabası renewal possible were in itself a violation of people’s rights, and the contracts signed largely unjust or even illegal, Halil demonstrated faith in “the law” as being above politics. On the other hand, his unquestioning belief that the men in the teahouse, who in his eyes refused to adhere to it, were “shirkers”, was informed by his experience of living in a deeply stigmatised neighbourhood. Halil Usta argued that many residents in Tarlabası were in fact squatters and cheats who had no right to protest the evictions. This was part of the narrative that the municipality and the developer used to stigmatise the neighbourhood, and to stifle protest inside and outside of Tarlabası. Halil Usta overlooked the fact that most tenants had signed agreements with the municipality because they had no other choice at the time, and he glossed over the reasons why Kurdish families had to move to Istanbul in the first place. He did not challenge the social problems, the structural inequality, the racism, and discrimination against many of the neighbourhood’s inhabitants. Instead, he accepted the dominant narrative and viewed Tarlabası, the residents, and the renewal project through that same lens.

Sometimes the deflection of the stigma was used as a direct way to try and fend off discriminatory treatment during the evictions. When Cemile faced the small delegation of policemen who appeared at her door, demanding that she vacate the apartment she was “squatting” and hand over the keys, she felt that it was not *her*, but the Kurdish residents in the neighbourhood who merited such humiliating treatment:

I told the policemen: ‘There is no need for you to come, we are two people, we are both old, we won’t do anything to you.’ Those others, they have ten kids and fifty grandkids, that’s a different matter. It’s of them that they should be afraid, not of us.

Cemile also used a bigoted stereotype – “they have too many children” – that has constantly been used against Kurds in the dominant narrative.

In some cases, lateral denigration meant that people blamed others for the planned demolitions, arguing that it was them who were *really* responsible. Osman Yazıcı, a Turkish man in his sixties whose family had migrated to Tarlabası from the Black Sea coast in the 1970s, co-owned a hardware shop on Tarlabası Boulevard with his brothers. He had decided to take the municipality to court in order to increase the compensation he had been offered. Aware of the bad image of the neighbourhood and of the excuse it provided for the municipality to demolish, he was keen to rectify whatever I, the foreign researcher and journalist, might think the reason for the planned renewal might be. He told me:

Do you know why they are really demolishing this place? All these people here came from their villages, from the East, they came straight here, before going anywhere else, before seeing anything else. They came with their trucks, they don’t know how to dress in the city, they don’t know how to talk in the city.

The rumour that Kurds were to blame for the project were not generated in a vacuum either. The prevailing Turkish nationalist ideology, anti-Kurdish sentiment and bigotry were generally accepted in the mainstream.

Nostalgia

During a conversation with Halil Usta and Necmi Usta, I told them about family members who had recently visited me. I excitedly described our various walks through Istanbul and added how much they had enjoyed strolling through Tarlabası with me. Halil was pleased but said that they had not come “at the right time”. Necmi agreed, stating that they “should have come twenty years ago instead”. Halil nodded emphatically, and launched into a detailed, nostalgic description of what they would have encountered in those (imaginary) years:

Yes, exactly. Had they come then, they would have moved here! Then there were the *madamlar* [non-Muslim women], these sweet old ladies, all of them so beautiful! They had these sweet accents. Had they come then, they would have not wanted to leave again. The houses were designed in a certain way back then. Almost everyone had their kitchen downstairs, one little bathroom, and in these very small houses they lived with their own families. They took off their shoes at the door, the families were not that big anyway, for example there was a preacher who had two daughters. He was a carpenter himself, what a nice man! They took off their shoes at the door and went upstairs. And now? It stinks everywhere. [...] And they wore such nice clothes, even when they sat on their doorsteps. We would always go and play elsewhere in order not to disturb them, they had to say only one word and we would leave.

If my guests *would* have come to Istanbul twenty years earlier, we would have wandered Tarlabası in the very early 1990s. The neighbourhood would have indisputably been very different from the one we visited in 2011. However, we would not have found the community that Halil Usta described. There would not have been less poverty, nor less dilapidation, and most of the non-Muslim residents who used to live in Tarlabası would have been long gone. There *would* have been fewer Kurdish families living in the neighbourhood. The migration of Kurdish people, most of whom had been forced out of their homes in the southeast of the country by Turkish state forces, was just starting to accelerate in those years, and only a part of those migrants had moved to Beyoğlu by then.

The kind of nostalgic image of an earlier, better Tarlabası that Halil and Necmi were describing was a very common narrative exclusively shared by non-Kurdish residents. The exact time frame used in these nostalgic descriptions was always vague, sometimes reaching twenty years back, sometimes thirty years or slightly longer, somewhat depending on the age of the speaker (though Necmi Usta was in his mid-thirties at the time and had only just arrived in Tarlabası in the 1990s), but the point of reference was always an idealised, better past that included the presence of a “civilised” non-Muslim community, and the absence of the more recently arrived Kurdish “villagers”. On one occasion I witnessed a conversation in Halil’s barber shop between the Usta and one of his customers, a middle-aged small business owner who had moved away from Tarlabası, where had lived

for eighteen years, to the high-rise suburb of Şirinevler. The customer, an ethnic Turkish man, explained that he had left because he could not stand how much the neighbourhood had changed, and that it was “no longer a place to raise a family”.

C: The culture in this place used to be very different. Before, in the summer around midnight families sat together, and guests came to join them to eat with them, and it didn't matter what your financial situation was, that was the humanity of this place.

H: And nobody thought of stealing your money!

C: Nobody would have even been able to glance at it, that's how good it was. I was small, in the evening we would play, and when our parents went somewhere, the neighbours would look after us, take us into their house. People swept in front of their doorstep every day. they kept flowers in their windows. Everything was neat and tidy.

H: Everyone was well dressed, too. People were polite and would not shout and use bad language. There was no spitting in the street.

C: Yes, these people were civilised [medeniyetli] people. It has changed a lot since then. A lot!

I have analysed how the nostalgia for an imagined, counterfactual multiculturalism, harmonious ethnic diversity and distinctive culture had been exploited by those interested in marketing Beyoğlu, stakeholders such as the municipality, real estate developers, investors, and local business owners (Maessen 2017: 91). This nostalgia was also aggressively marketed by the Beyoğlu Municipality in order to justify the Tarlabası renewal project and sell the future development to investors. And just like their marketing campaign, the romanticised narratives by residents entirely erased the area's, and Turkey's, violent past and ignored the forced displacement of the non-Muslim minority populations from Beyoğlu. Trans* sex worker Burcu, who had lived and worked in Bird Street for several decades described the “old” Tarlabası as an improbably rosy, idealised place:

The street used to be very beautiful. The shop owners were good, everyone was good, they respected us. We had nice chats. We sang together, had tea together. How nice, right? [...] Greeks and Armenians didn't harm us. They were gentlemen, the neighbours waved at us. Even tourists and Americans came here. They came from Austria. They came, they sat down...they walked around, they were on holiday. But now the neighbourhood has filled up with indecent people.

None of the residents who lauded the former presence of a “civilised”, “friendly” and “well-mannered” non-Muslim community in Tarlabası made mention of the fact that all of them, in one way or another, moved into buildings, homes, and shop spaces that had at some point been forcibly abandoned by their former owners, and that these former owners had been subjected to violent discrimination by their fellow citizens and the Turkish state.¹⁰ Sometimes these accounts claimed that former (non-Muslim) Tarlabası residents

10 Following the 1955 anti-Greek September pogroms, the Turkish state expelled more than 10,000 Istanbul Greeks in 1964. Tens of thousands more left Turkey in the following year, and the Greek population in the city decreased from around 80,000 to 30,000 in 1965.

had left because “those people from the countryside” had arrived in the 1980s and 1990s, and that they had simply relocated to “more luxurious neighbourhoods” in the suburbs. Baker Gökhan Usta argued that the Greek residents left because the neighbourhood deteriorated and that Greeks who could not afford the Istanbul suburbs left to Greece:

Things got bad here, very bad. There are none of the old Istanbulites left. They all left. Those with money went to Etiler, to Bebek or to Tarabya. To pretty places. To areas along the Bosphorus. Those without money went abroad. Many went to Greece. And why did this happen? There was pickpocketing here, too then. There were only non-Muslims here, normal families, everyone knew each other. There were thieves, there were misfits, too. But they wouldn't do their thing here. They'd go elsewhere to do that, this was a neighbourhood of families, everyone was like a family. So there was no crime, no problem. That changed with time, and pickpocketing started here...after 1997. After 97 things went downhill here. Maybe it was state policy. Before that there were all kinds of small businesses here. Bag makers, shoemakers. But all these workshops are gone now. They were all here. Belt makers, wallet makers. They left. When the pickpocketing started. [...] There is nothing likeable left about Tarlabaşı. Tarlabaşı used to be very likable! There were non-Muslims, there were friends, there were decent [*düzgün*] people. There's none left now, it's been 15 years and they are all gone.

While Gökhan Usta argued that Greek residents left because they did not like the increase of petty crime in the neighbourhood and because, how he euphemistically puts it, “things got bad”, the vast majority of Greeks, who used to be the largest group of non-Muslims in Tarlabaşı, had left because they had been violently chased out of their homes.

I once had the opportunity to hear a first-hand account of the everyday violence against Greeks in Tarlabaşı by a Greek woman I interviewed in Athens. Then in her late fifties, she was born in Tarlabaşı in the early sixties, and said that her parents had told her not to speak Greek in the street as a child, for fear that she would be attacked. With an increase in violence and anti-Greek sentiment due to the ongoing Cyprus crisis, her parents told her not to speak Turkish in the street anymore either, because they were afraid that her Greek accent would be detected and spark violent reactions. She remembered that her family home, a house on Kalyoncu Kulluk Street, was repeatedly targeted by stone throwers. The sad result of her parents' anxious policing of her language was that she refused to speak at all for several months following their arrival in Athens.

Trans* woman Burcu arrived in Tarlabaşı in the late 1970s. Throughout Turkey this was a time of unstable coalition governments, violent political strife and extreme economic hardship that was neither peaceful nor in any way safe.¹¹ The early 1980s, particularly the time following the violent military coup of September 12, 1980, were characterised by intense political repression and state violence against activists and marginalised groups, especially on the left.

The residents quoted here all expressed a nostalgia of an era in Tarlabaşı and Beyoğlu that never existed, and none of them could possibly have lived in or remember a time that was not in any way violent towards minorities, non-Muslim or otherwise. Nor was the

11 Between 1976 and 1980, 5,000 civilians were killed in street violence between opposing political factions in Turkey (Ersan 2013; White and Gündüz 2021).

nostalgia for a better past unambiguous, or ignorant of the historical events. Halil Usta, for example, told me about violent police repression he had experienced as a younger man in the neighbourhood in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Once he was arrested in a tea-house for simply “looking like a leftist”, due to his, as Halil explained, “thick, leftist-style moustache”. Burcu told me in great detail about the horrific violence she lived through as a trans* woman at the hands of the military and the police in the months following the 1980 coup.

But just as the municipality had done in their city marketing campaigns, the sentimental discourse recounted here weaponized nostalgia as a way of deflecting the neighbourhood stigma onto a group of “newcomers” that had put an end to the alleged “golden days” of Tarlaşa. This discourse almost exclusively targeted the Kurdish community, even if this was not always explicitly expressed. These veiled allusions to Kurdishness sometimes referred to a certain point in time such as the 1990s, when forced Kurdish migration to bigger cities in the west of the country accelerated. In other cases, they were voiced in the form of racist complaints used to describe problems understood in the collective nationalist narrative as being rooted in Kurdishness, such as Cemile’s comment about having a large number of children and “shady” connections. Whatever the angle, these frames always erased the reasons why Kurdish families arrived in Tarlaşa in large numbers. It remained unsaid that most of them had been burned out of their homes in the southeast of the country, and that Turkish state policy towards Kurds was the reason they had to migrate elsewhere.

Most non-Kurdish residents I came across, including ethnic Turkish business owners and artisans, trans* sex workers, Romani, and non-Muslims (such as members of the Orthodox Assyrian community who came together in a local church or two elderly Armenians whom I met via lute maker Kerem Usta) were united in their resentment of having to live amongst a Kurdish majority.

Especially those residents who had been in Tarlaşa prior to the arrival of forcibly displaced Kurds in the late 1980s and the 1990s felt that they had been “robbed” of “their” neighbourhood specifically by the incoming Kurdish population. This was also true for non-Muslim residents who really did remember the days when a Greek majority resided in the neighbourhood. Sarohi Hanım, an 84-year-old woman of Armenian descent who still lived in the family house built by her great-grandfather, said that her only friend left in the neighbourhood was a single Turkish woman of the same age as herself who lived in a *vakıf*-owned building across the street. Both women entertained distant, yet friendly relationships with their predominantly Kurdish neighbours, and they said that they never had any problems with them, on the contrary: When Sarohi Hanım fell ill, and after breaking her hip falling down the stairs of her house, the Kurdish woman next door looked after her, cooked and brought her food, and did her shopping, since Sarohi Hanım did not have family left. However, when it came to their views on the more abstract idea of a Kurdish majority in Tarlaşa, both women insisted that they did not like

what their neighbourhood “had become” and that “it had all gone downhill after the Kurds had moved in”.¹²

Turkness as Whiteness

Lute maker Kerem Usta, whose workshop was close to Sarohi Hanım’s building and who had introduced me to her, expressed a similar sentiment:

30 years ago, there were almost only Non-Muslims [*Gayrimüslim*] in Tarlaşaşı. I came to Tarlaşaşı around 35 years ago. That’s how it was then. [...] Later they came from the east, they came from Diyarbakır, from Mardin, they filled all the houses. [...] It was much better before. When the [non-Muslims] lived here, people respected each other. We would drink tea together in front of my shop, for example. We don’t do that anymore. These things just don’t happen anymore. Neighbourly relations were good back then, but now neighbours don’t have any relations anymore.

It is worth picking apart the instrument maker’s stance. While not entirely surprising, it is nevertheless important to note that Kerem Usta maintained a very good relationship with the Kurdish owner of a stuffed mussel kitchen across from his workshop and generally got along very well with Kurdish neighbours and other Kurdish owners of neighbouring businesses. Many of his customers were in fact Kurdish musicians, and many of them were regular visitors in his shop. In 2015, Kerem Usta even joined the pro-Kurdish Peoples’ Democratic Party (HDP) as a member, and he voted for the HDP in the June national elections. HDP co-chair Figen Yüksekdağ had visited his shop during the election campaign and Kerem Usta told me several times about how pleased he had been to make her acquaintance, and how proud to have taken a selfie with her.

Therefore, it is worth asking why Kerem Usta thought that Kurds were responsible for the decline of the neighbourhood, and why he, like other ethnic Turkish residents I had spoken to, tried to deflect the territorial stigma onto them. It was obvious that he felt alienated from Tarlaşaşı. The neighbourhood taint weighed on him, and like so many other of his fellow non-Kurdish neighbours had done, he blamed the Kurds for the physical and symbolic deterioration of the neighbourhood. In his eyes they, in the most abstract sense, were “intruders”. It is not a stretch to say that this nostalgia was a euphemistic way to vocalise racist thoughts against the Kurdish community. But how did Kerem Usta reconcile his favourable view of the Kurdish neighbours he appreciated with his bigoted view about the local Kurdish community as an anonymous whole?

I would like to suggest that “Turkness”, the metaphor of a naturalised performed identity of privilege, can provide a useful analytical tool. Most (especially cis-het, male, Sunni Muslim) ethnic Turkish residents never questioned their own position, their “right” to live and work in Tarlaşaşı, or if their presence impeded on the comfort of other

12 Sarohi Hanım never once talked about Turkish state violence against the non-Muslim minority, which was arguably a protection mechanism and something I have witnessed many times in Turkey.

communities. In that sense it can be argued that *Turkness* is similar to the idea of whiteness.¹³ Ruth Frankenberg (1993: 1) characterises whiteness as a “structural position of social privilege and power”, a standpoint, a “location of structural” advantage. Research on whiteness has shown that whites benefit from a number of social understandings and institutional processes, “all of which seem – to whites at least – to have no racial basis” (Hartigan 1997: 496).

Turkness, then, is a position of invisibilised privilege and of naturalised “everywhere-ness”. It is a point at the top of the social structure in Turkey, a position that affords ethnic Turks to settle, live, and work at a place of their choosing without having to justify or defend their presence. From a position of privileged *Turkness* one will expect to be treated with respect in any shop, restaurant or business, and that one’s needs and standards, such as to be able to communicate in Turkish, be met. However, many ethnic Turks will bristle at the idea of affording a Kurdish person, or any member of a native non-Turkish minority community, the same rights and privileges in Turkey.

In the context of Tarlaşa, the fault lines along which lateral denigration happened was often based on this kind of naturalised position of entitlement when it was practised by ethnic Turks. The underlying assumption was, similarly to the concepts of whiteness and white privilege, that belonging to the unmarked category of a person meant that it was mainly their comfort that the surroundings needed to cater to: the non-Muslim community was perceived as nice and respectful, even as “civilised”, but historical and structural reasons why they would behave that way towards an ethnic Turkish majority were ignored. Kurds, on the other hand, did not necessarily perform niceness in Tarlaşa, and did not take Turkish sensitivities (and privilege) into account. This was one reason why some Turks derogated the entire neighbourhood as a “shithole” that deserved to be bulldozed to the ground, even if it meant that Turks would, metaphorically, be buried under the rubble, too.

Lateral denigration as described by Wacquant was something I observed in Tarlaşa. However, that some residents tried to deflect the neighbourhood stigma onto “a faceless, demonized Other” (Wacquant 2007: 68) was only the starting point of the analysis in this chapter. Maybe more important than the existence of lateral denigration in a stigmatised neighbourhood is the analysis of the fault lines and symbolic boundaries along which such denigration happens, and why. The denigration of fellow residents in Tarlaşa was not random, and neither was it specific only to the central Istanbul neighbourhood. Instead, that the grievances some residents voiced about their neighbours reflected macrosocial conflicts and fissures that were supplied by a broader political context in Turkey. This context provides the background before which the work that goes into drawing, maintaining and reinforcing symbolic boundaries is done, and it determines peoples’ ability to make choices of whom to direct their anger and blame against. It partly explains why neighbours were able to angrily point at neighbours in an area with strong social ties.

13 Here I do not refer to the concept of “White Turks” and “Black Turks”, terminology that was used as “an explicit reference to the American racial categories suggesting an analogical similarity between the oppression of African Americans by the white supremacist system and that of pious Muslims by the secularist regime in Turkey” (Güner 2021).

Furthermore, the kind of weaponized nostalgia I observed in Tarlabası offered a two-pronged form of stigma management. As a concept it was oriented both towards an imagined past, insisting that the neighbourhood *used to be* beautiful, tidy, and safe, while the messy, violent, and discriminatory history of the area was erased. As lateral denigration it offered a forward-oriented explanation of why the neighbourhood was not beautiful and safe *anymore*, pointing mainly at the Kurdish community as a scapegoat in the form of bigoted blame. Implicit in this use of lateral denigration, both before and during the run-up to evictions, are two categories of deflection: pointing at a vilified Other as the reason for one's own marginalisation and mistreatment rooted in stigma ("They are the reason this is happening to me!") and the assertion that it is these Others that should in fact be targeted ("This should happen only to them!").

The question arises why people do not direct the denigration against someone else, for example against the people who dehumanise them and their neighbourhood. Why did many residents target other marginalised communities at all, when the threat came from such a clear institutional centre located in plain sight and just across the street? One could argue that socially, the naturalised location of structural advantage *Turkness* as a position of naturalised privilege did not make that choice likely. However, in the following chapter I examine several ways in which Tarlabası did decide to reject the neighbourhood stigma and "speak back" at those who stigmatised them.

Chapter nine: Speaking back

Alev once told me about a meeting with Nilgün Kıvırcık, the *GAP İnşaat* executive responsible for the project and relations with local residents on the developer's side. Kıvırcık was often present at negotiation talks. At her most recent meeting, Alev then told me, there had been an elderly man in the room with her, a resident she did not know but someone who had also been in negotiation talks with GAP İnşaat over his property. During his conversation with the executive, he addressed her as “my daughter” [*kızım*], a common, rather familiar appellation used by elderly people when addressing a younger person. Kıvırcık, sensing a lack of respect – or at least a lack of the professional distance her position during the rather unpleasant negotiation required – reacted angrily, reprimanded the man that she “was not his daughter” and harshly demanded that he address her with the more formal “Nilgün Hanım” in the future.¹ Alev remembered how shocked she was by the female professional's behaviour toward an elderly man, and she told Kıvırcık that it was inappropriate, after which the executive lost her temper.

[Kıvırcık] told me: ‘You talk a lot. You’ll finally be able to live among human beings [when you leave Tarlaşa]. You’ve been raised amongst animals. You’ve been raised in a place where animals roam around all day. You should go and live amongst human beings for a change.’ I became angry when she said this and I asked her what she meant by this, if she had meant to insult me. That it sounded like she wanted to call me an animal. I said that if she had, I might take her to court for that. She apologised. I said that I have seen sheep walk around Etiler as well during the Sacrifice Holidays [*Kurban Bayramı*] and asked her why she insisted that [Tarlaşa] was a place for animals and Etiler wasn't. We fought like that for a while.

In retaliation for the perceived slight of criticising her in front of other Tarlaşa residents, Nilgün Kıvırcık targeted Alev's self-worth. Similar to the sanitary reformers of 19th-century Britain who described the topography of the city along lines that divided

1 The more familiar address also implies social norms that Nilgün Kıvırcık had no interest in recognising for the negotiation talks. The formal, more distant relationship gives her the opportunity to disregard social norms that would otherwise shame her for treating an elderly man badly/depriving him of his home.

the “respectable” quarters from the “depraved” slums, the poor neighbourhoods characterised by filth and a population that was indistinguishable from animals, the executive framed Tarlaşaşı as dirty and disgusting, a place “where animals roam around”. In the bourgeois imagination, “the poor are pigs” (Stallybrass and White 1986: 131). Kıvırcık did not mention a specific animal, using the word “*hayvan*”, which can be read as “beast”. Alev, in her reply, rejected this metonymic association between the poor of Tarlaşaşı and animals, and instead chose to understand this grave insult literally: Tarlaşaşı as a place where animals, like rams and sheep, can sometimes be seen on the street.² She underlined this by comparing her neighbourhood to the upscale Istanbul quarter of Etiler, a place that Alev associated with the white-collar, middle class lifestyle that Nilgün Kıvırcık represented. In the run-up to the Sacrifice Holidays [*Kurban Bayramı*], she said, animals could be found anywhere in the city, signalling that the rich residents in Etiler were really no different from her poor neighbours in Tarlaşaşı. Alev’s “interpretation” was not only a rejection of a negative stereotype about poverty, but also a clever way to use the executive’s insistence on a formal, legal framework of the interaction to her advantage: she asked if Kıvırcık had meant to call her and other Tarlaşaşı residents animals – the metonymic association that is clearly implied here – and if so, that this would be an insult Alev was willing to take to court for defamation.

Poverty does not only imply the lack of certain material possessions or money. Scholars differentiate between absolute and relative poverty. The former usually refers to a lack of basic human needs such as food, housing, health care, education, and clothing, whereas the latter is based on economic inequality in a society and related to an unequal distribution of resources and power (Akfirat et al. 2016). Research has shown that relative poverty does not only bring material deprivation and economic insecurity. It also has severe socio-psychological consequences, such as reduced self-esteem as well as feelings of humiliation and disrespect (Jones and Novak 1999; Lister 2004; Erdoğan 2007; Tomlinson et al. 2008; Yongmie 2013; Akfirat et al. 2016). In his study of poor people’s self-perception in a Turkish context, Necmi Erdoğan (2007: 66) underlines the central role that symbolic and emotional violence, through the constant assault on the self-respect of the poor, play in their everyday lives. Most of the people that he and his colleagues interviewed found these aspects of poverty more difficult to deal with than increasing material deprivation and social inequality, making the defence and preservation of self-respect the “main pre-occupation” of the urban poor in Turkey.

Alev underlined that this unpleasant conversation with Kıvırcık had been the final straw for her. She would not talk to GAP *Inşaat* representatives again, not about the prospective sale of the flat or any other topic pertaining to the renewal project. She also forbade her mother, who was the legal owner and whose name was written on the family’s title deed, to interact with Nilgün Kıvırcık in any way, fearing that the elderly woman who barely spoke any Turkish would not be able to “handle” the conversation without being insulted. Alev expressed her contempt for project stakeholders by turning

2 There was indeed a shepherd in Tarlaşaşı whom I sometimes spotted from the window of my apartment, and whose presence was revealed through sheep droppings along certain routes. However, I never met him in the street or spoke to him. Just prior to the Sacrifice Holiday, some people would keep rams on their balconies or terraces.

the assault on worth around and stating that it was them who were “just not worth it”. Speaking back to the *GAP İnşaat* executive was a form of breaking through the stigmatising frame that posited Tarlaabaşı residents as invisible, as having no voice, and having entirely accepted and internalised the negative narrative about their neighbourhood and themselves. Imogen Tyler and Tom Slater (2018: 725) point out that “stigmatisation arises in contexts that are shaped by unequal relations of power, and [...] stigma and anti-stigma initiatives are the site of intense social struggles”. There is ample evidence that project stakeholders used their power and their discursive privilege to frame residents of the neighbourhood as immoral, as lumpenproletariat and as criminal as part of their deliberate stigmatisation strategies (Paton 2018), and to erase them from the present and the future of Tarlaabaşı.

“Those that call Tarlaabaşı residents ‘terrorists’ should be ashamed.”



Photo by Jonathan Lewis

This chapter examines different ways in which Tarlaabaşı residents tried to push back against this effort to invisibilise them. In the following pages, I explore what “speaking back” looked like under the circumstances in Tarlaabaşı, and how such “backtalk” not only gave voice and form to residents’ humiliations, their anger, and their attempt to circulate a counternarrative to the stigmatising discourse that targeted their neighbourhood and themselves, but also opened cracks in the façade of project stakeholders’ pretence that the stigma was the “objective”, “natural” state of Tarlaabaşı, and not a fabricated lens that necessitated enormous amounts of work to build, maintain, and renew. To do that, I open the chapter with a thick ethnographic description of a failed eviction, and of how the problematic position of one single municipal official lifted the curtain of seamless stigmatisation and allowed a glimpse behind it. Then I go on to describe the symbolic and discursive struggles that some residents engaged in to reframe the story about them-

selves and their neighbourhood. And finally, the chapter lists various messages that residents, unheard and ignored by project stakeholders, nevertheless attempted to deliver to them during evictions.

Dissonance

On a hot afternoon in July 2011, a small delegation of two lawyers and several municipal officials as well as two uniformed policemen turned up in Tavla Street to evict Kemal, his mentally ill son and his daughter-in-law from their small rental house. Kemal was almost 60 years old at the time. The arrival of the municipal delegation and the looming threat of Kemal's eviction immediately caused a small commotion on his street. The two uniformed policemen parked their car away from Kemal's front door, got out and each lit a cigarette. They appeared otherwise uninterested in what was happening. They had arrived with a lawyer, a bald man holding a briefcase who turned out to be a municipal official, and another woman. The lawyer, a young woman in casual business clothes, approached Kemal and told him, in no uncertain terms, that he and his family would have to vacate the building right away. A few neighbours had started to gather around the scene, but nobody commented or interfered. Kemal did not let himself be intimidated and told the lawyer matter-of-factly that he was unable to leave because he simply had nowhere else to go. If she really was to evict him that day, he explained, he and his son's family would have to sleep in the street. The young woman, who explained that she had come at the behest of the developer *GAP İnşaat*, was unmoved and dismissively told Kemal that he was not the only one in the neighbourhood who "had this problem" and that he should not expect her delegation to help him out in any way. Kemal, unfazed by her rude demeanour, told her that he had recently turned down a 500 TL charity offer by the municipality because that money would not be enough to rent an apartment elsewhere, and that he would need at least three months' rent in advance in order to be able to leave his current house and pay a deposit elsewhere. The lawyer scoffed that he should expect neither the municipality nor the developing company to help him out: "Do you suppose that we will pay from our own pockets or what?" She impatiently reminded her colleagues and the lone municipality official that more evictions were planned for the same afternoon and that there was no time or reason for any further delay. She further accused Kemal of having long overstayed his assigned leaving date, which, in her words, made him a "squatter". Therefore, she barked at him, he did not have the right to protest his eviction.

The municipal official on the other hand, a man of approximately Kemal's age, seemed inclined to enter into discussion with him. He offered to give him "fifty, maybe one hundred Lira as a mercy", but said that he could not possibly hand him the minimum of 1,500 TL Kemal had said he needed to be able to find another home. Again, Kemal protested that he would not be able to do anything with 100 TL, that it was simply not enough to avoid homelessness. At that point the official theatrically turned to the group of neighbours who had gathered around the stoop to watch the altercation between Kemal and the eviction delegation. Raising his voice, and with a sweeping gesture over the small crowd, he said that there were "so many people present", and might they not

be able to help Kemal out? This rather disingenuous suggestion was met with stunned silence. Falsely interpreting this silence as a lack of objection, the official continued:

The municipality has no obligation [to help]. But this citizen is in pain, he is in trouble...anyone with a shred of humanity in them would be sad about that. Right? If I had the means, I swear I would give him [1,500 TL] from my own pocket. If I just had the means! But I don't have the means, I am a lowly government official, I work, I make one and a half [thousand TL] a month. I have kids and stuff...but small alms, a little bit of help...you for example, you live in this neighbourhood...you could [help] this citizen.

At this point Kemal, troubled that the official seemed to insinuate that his neighbours were to blame for his destitution, tried to interject by saying that the people in his neighbourhood *were* helping him, but the municipal official, now on a roll, was having none of it:

Sssh. You don't understand, that's different. In the coffeehouse, if each of your friends gives 50 Lira each, and you can collect that, and if [the municipality] gives you five hundred, then look, you'll get the 1,500 you need. If everyone would pitch in like that...it wouldn't hurt anyone.

His attempt to put the onus on other poor residents of Tarlabaşı was not immediately picked up by the crowd. Instead, the gathered neighbours replied by asking the official if the eviction could not be delayed by another week, or maybe two, so that Kemal would have a chance to find another house. The official volleyed their question back at them, and again tried to implicitly shame them for not helping out Kemal themselves.

If I had the authority to delay the eviction, I would. Why would I want to hurt a disabled person like that? Do you think I am that cruel? Am I not human? Come on! Now there are so many people here who want to help this person. You all want to help your friend, right? [*He dramatically puts his briefcase on the stairs and gets up, clearly about to make a speech that turns the outrage back at them.*] So, let's see it, why don't you all give him fifty, or one hundred Lira from your pockets? [*He demonstratively puts his hand in his pocket without pulling anything out.*] I'll go first.

However, his thinly veiled attempt to deflect the responsibility for Kemal onto the neighbours gathered in the street fell flat. While most of them only grumbled at his suggestion, one young man got angry, and retorted in a voice dripping with sarcasm: "*Ağbi*, what a great idea! What a wonderful idea! [*He turns around to other neighbours.*] Who has fifty Lira here?" His biting comment was greeted with angry derision from other bystanders, and another man, someone I only knew as a minor drug dealer who had set up a small guerrilla garden on the corner of Kemal's street, started to shout at the municipal official who was now nervously attempting to calm the crowd. The drug dealer yelled at him:

As if anyone here has the means to help Kemal *Ağbi!* You come from the municipality! It is your fault that he is being put out on the street! You want to throw him out today, you have the power to do that, so surely you can stop it, too! If anyone here had this kind of money, we would not be in this situation, would we?

The *muhtar* and some others held him back while he angrily raised and shook his fist at the official who had gotten increasingly anxious and stepped down from his entrance stair podium. The drug dealer continued to express his dismay about the way the project stakeholders treated local residents, but was finally led away by the *muhtar*, a young Kurdish man popular in his district, while the rest of the crowd looked on.

As soon as both men were out of earshot, the official tried to rally everyone's sympathy again. With theatrical gestures, he stressed his own weak position as a lowly municipal employee who maybe represented the authority of the state but who was in fact only a cog in the wheel of government and did not have the power to change the course of events and halt Kemal's eviction. However, the scene ended with the delegation leaving after all, and the eviction postponed for another week. Some of Kemal's neighbours went to congratulate him for "standing up" to GAP *Inşaat* and the municipality, and for a while, grumbling discontent and outrage was exchanged in conversations on the street before people dispersed again.

However, it had been the guerrilla-gardening dealer who pushed back at the seemingly innocuous attempt by the official to "ease" Kemal's hardship. As one of the only people there, he had shown his anger publicly and embarrassed the municipal official in front of everyone, drawing attention to the hypocrisy of his request. Just as the aforementioned GAP *Inşaat* executive had done by insisting on being called "*Hanım*", instead of the more familiar "*kızım*", the municipal official charged with Kemal's eviction was appealing to a certain social code of appropriateness by asking the gathered neighbours to help out Kemal. At the same time, and just as Nilgün Hanım had done, he violated this code by acting inappropriately, since he was himself the agent of the institution that set out to destroy this kind of social contract of appropriateness for the entire neighbourhood. Part of the state-led stigmatisation was the allegation that Tarlaşaşı was an empty, forgotten place without any sense of community, and that this "fact" had nothing to do with the municipality or national urban policies. However, chapter six described the basic accommodations of a social contract that residents in Tarlaşaşı had access to, and that included support networks and the importance of solidarity and mutual care between neighbours. The scene between Kemal, the official, and the guerrilla gardener laid bare the deep dissonance between the way the neighbourhood was framed by the municipality, and the municipal representative's publicly displayed knowledge that this frame in no way corresponded to the reality on the ground. His implicit accusation of Kemal's neighbours showed exactly that: he (wrongly) blamed them for being disrespectful and in violation of the social contract he clearly knew existed in a neighbourhood like Tarlaşaşı. The social contract, the solidarity ties in the neighbourhood that the state-led stigmatising discourse erased, were real. The official's appeal to that contract proves that he, too, knew that it was real.

The solution the official suggested was highly hypocritical. Charged with the oversight of evictions in the street, he knew that most of the people gathered there were facing problems similar to Kemal's. The official also knew that despite their poverty and their destitution, they had been helping Kemal, because that is what Kemal explicitly told him. He on the other hand *represented* the state authority who was just about to evict a handicapped man, his handicapped son and that son's wife. He was the problem he appealed

to the solidarity network in the neighbourhood to solve. The drug dealer's public display of anger was the pushback that made this contradiction visible for everyone at the scene.

The marginalisation and discrimination of Tarlaşaşı residents during the negotiation stage of the renewal project and in the run-up to evictions was to a large part based on the neighbourhood stigma, that both created and justified the victimisation of those deemed unworthy of justice and respect. A lot of the work of the municipality, of the project lawyers, of the development company representatives, and of the entire neoliberal state apparatus and its agents was only possible by pretending that this stigma was not, to a very large part, the result of the power and discursive privilege of these actors, powerful people and institutions that were able to shape the narrative about Tarlaşaşı and its residents. The municipal official's reaction, his appeal to the very social contract that the agents of his and other state institutions denied, lifted the curtain, and afforded onlookers a glimpse of the machine that churned out the stigma of that the municipality pretended it did not exist.

Symbolic struggles

Considerable marketing efforts initially went into the attempt to sell the demolitions as progress that would benefit everyone. However, few Tarlaşaşı residents believed the glossy advertisements over their own experiences with state agents, with the knowledge about state corruption and their view of the rich and powerful as self-serving, greedy, and dismissive of the urban poor. When Müge and Gülay looked through the project's marketing catalogue together, they were under no illusions who the target audience of the renewal project really was:

Look at this. All these rich people. These streets. Look at this guy with his nice briefcase. What does this have to do with Tarlaşaşı, or with us? These expensive cars, the shopping bags, the cafés they want to build, there will be no room for us. This is all for rich people. They are lying when they say that the new Tarlaşaşı is for us. They want us to leave, they want us to disappear.

Kurdish second-hand furniture seller Maher reacted similarly when he was leafing through the catalogue, calling project stakeholders out on their discrimination against Tarlaşaşı residents, even when they attempted to dress the project up as benevolent. He pointed out that none of the people or the objects in the catalogue represented current Tarlaşaşı residents:

Nobody in Tarlaşaşı looks like that. Where are the women wearing headscarves? Where are the Kurds? No kid in Tarlaşaşı has nice toys like that. Who here has the money to buy such a [tricycle]? Where is the laundry? They make it look like our Tarlaşaşı is bad, and as if only rich people deserve to be here. They are not better than us. It's shameful [*ayıp*].

Just like Gülay and Müge, Maher was offended by the aggressive "Before/After" imagery that the municipality was using. He rejected the suggestion that the Tarlaşaşı he recognised, where most people were poor, where many of his neighbours were Kurdish like

himself, where laundry lines crisscrossed the streets, and where women were dressed in traditional long skirts and headscarves, were in some way “worse” than the polished, gentrified version of the neighbourhood that the project promoted. On the contrary, he shamed the municipality for this insinuation. Tarlabası residents regularly underlined the strong neighbourhood ties in the *mahalle* as more important than material wealth. Özgür, Alev’s fiancé, said that the marketing speak in the promotional material was merely a thinly veiled attempt to hide the immoral financial gain and the planned socio-demographic engineering.

So, they’ll demolish this neighbourhood. [...] They are kicking people out of their homes overnight. Why? Because there is money to be made. So that rich people can come and live here. [...] What are we then? Are we not human?

Özgür called the developers greedy and only interested in profit. This ties in with the widespread image that many poor in Turkey have of the rich (Erdoğan 2007). Cemile often underlined that she did not wish for material wealth, since she thought that rich people lacked human qualities that she considered more important.

How about that! So we are not allowed to live here. Why shouldn’t I live here? What are we then? You are rich, but you’re just as human as me, no matter if I am poor. Maybe my poverty is better even than your wealth! There is more goodwill...our table is full, we are rich that way, but most importantly we are rich in goodwill. Wealth has no use. If I have ten Lira today, I’m a rich person. [...] *Vallah*, I really don’t want any wealth. I say *Allah*, if you want to change me, don’t make me rich. If I stay as I am, it’s better. When I find five Lira, two Lira, that makes me so happy, I buy bread for one Lira and cheese for one Lira, there you go, that’s our dinner.

In his study of self-perceptions of the urban poor in Turkey, Erdoğan (2007: 48–49) underlines that the many “discriminating, degrading and hurtful” descriptions of class difference show that, despite a lack of thorough analysis of social hierarchies, the relationship between “the rich” and “the poor” rests on mutual enmity. In the narratives of the poor that he and his colleagues interview, the wealthy are described as “arrogant”, “greedy”, “spoilt”, “tightfisted”, “cruel”, “immoral”, or “dishonest”, to name but a few, whereas the poor are depicted as “helpful”, “cooperative”, “morally above the rich”, “pure”, “sympathetic”, or “generous” (ibid.: 49).

Erdoğan underlines that it is not wealth per se that is seen as offensive, but the patterns of behaviour that wealth produces, as well as the lifestyle of the wealthy and the way money is spent. This finds its echo in countless Turkish movies where the bourgeois/middle class is portrayed as degenerate, cruel and manipulative as opposed to the pure, morally upstanding poor (ibid.: 50). While the poor generally differentiate between the “good rich” and “the bad rich”, the general image they have of the wealthy is a negative one.

This is something I came across in Tarlabası as well. I heard anecdotes and stories that aimed to illustrate how frivolous, unhelpful, and stingy wealthy people were, often in relation to food and shelter. Hospitality, I was told, was freely offered in Tarlabası, but I would never find it in richer Istanbul neighbourhoods. Sometimes these stories centred on anonymous actors, and sometimes they were stories about rich relatives who behaved

badly. Following an unpleasant encounter with Nilgün Kıvrıkcık, during which Cemile felt she had been treated with particular disdain and disrespect by the younger woman, and had finally been thrown out of Kıvrıkcık's office, Cemile told me a story about an invitation to distant, wealthy relatives in order to explain to me why the wealthy – a class to which Kıvrıkcık belonged in her eyes – not only lacked manners, but were in fact ridiculous, too:

I don't like rich people's places [*sosyete yer*]. Once we went [to visit relatives] and there was a small child, and they were so worried the whole time. 'Oh, the ashtray was so expensive, be careful, it'll break', it was 'be careful with this' and 'be careful with that'...I don't like to visit them unless I have to. [...] And you know what, you always stay hungry in the homes of the rich. *Vallahi*, you stay hungry. Once we went, they invited us to eat. We were 15 people. So we sat there and waited, I couldn't ask them for anything because I was ashamed to. But then I was so hungry that I started to get dizzy, so I asked them for a piece of bread. [The host] said: 'Oh no, what do you want with dry bread, we'll eat food!' He said 'food', but what can I tell you, it was a tiny pot filled with a little bit of meat! [*Shows how little with her hands.*] Such a small pot. So that was the meat from the sacrificial animal, right? They said they cooked the meat, and then he lifted the lid off the pot, and there was so little in it! I thought that I'd fill my stomach with bread...but there was one loaf of bread for 15 people! [...] They told me not to eat bread because there was food, and how could I have said anything about how little meat there was in the pot? [*Laughs*] I didn't say anything. There was one loaf of bread, *vallahi!* They put out the bread, and a tiny bit of rice, a small dish of peas. There were 15 people! The kids had one spoonful of rice, a spoonful of peas. [...] Then we went home, can you imagine how fast we went? [*Laughs*] Bread! Eggs! I said, get out all the food, let's eat until we are full! I don't like going to these chic homes. You'll stay hungry in rich peoples' houses. That's how the rich are.

Cemile told me this story about rich people violating one of the most basic social norms in Turkey, generous hospitality, with considerable glee. While it did not directly target Nilgün Kıvrıkcık, it was a way to re-establish self-worth in the face of the condescension of the wealthier woman who had clearly positioned herself as belonging to a higher class than Cemile. James Scott (1985: 197) writes that in the symbolic struggle between the rich and the poor, "character assault is one of the few remaining social weapons" for the latter. The anecdote that Cemile told me provided her with proof, and the consolation, that the rich might own more things and put on airs, but that they were in fact attached to material objects more than to their own family and comically greedy despite their material wealth. Poor people, on the other hand, could claim generosity and warmth for themselves, and were therefore at least morally superior.

Cemile also explained that she preferred Tarlaşağı to more luxurious, or more "modern" Istanbul neighbourhoods. When she visited her daughter who lived in a residential complex on the outskirts of the Alibeyköy neighbourhood, Cemile said that she often felt sad because of the lack of interaction in the street, the anonymity of big supermarkets she had to go to. She was also unable to "lower a basket"³ when she wanted to buy a few

3 In many more traditional Istanbul neighbourhoods, shopping-by-basket was a very convenient way of purchasing a small number of items without having to leave the house. One would lower

small items, because that way of shopping did not exist where her daughter lived, a place that, however, was “very modern, with beautiful villas everywhere”.

The symbolic struggle over what qualities characterise a liveable neighbourhood was one way in which residents challenged negative assumptions and stigmatising narratives about Tarlabası. In a similar vein, Halil Usta underlined that his barber shop might lack the design that reflected luxury and a certain type of commercialised modernity, but that he and his associate Necmi Usta offered the intimacy and the congenial atmosphere that more fashionable, and more exclusive barbers in wealthier neighbourhoods, shops that might be labelled “*kuaför*” rather than “*berber*”, did not provide. By highlighting what was good and desirable about his shop as an example for Tarlabası, Halil underlined that different values than just signs of material affluence could be important, contesting that his neighbourhood was without worth (Cairns, 2018).

Erdoğan (2007: 49) writes that the importance of goodness plays a central role in the self-identification of the poor and becomes a “weapon of the weak” that shields them against material deprivation and psychological suffering in the face of the all-pervasive poverty stigma. The struggle for recognition and agency therefore is also a struggle over moral superiority.

It is important to note that in Turkey, poverty is not framed in the same way as in the US, Canada, Australia, or many other Western European countries where aggressive neoliberal agendas and austerity policies have not only led to deepening economic and social inequalities, but where the poor have been increasingly demonised, stigmatised, and misrepresented as workshy scroungers who lack the ambition and will to improve their life circumstances (Macdonald et al. 2013; Jensen 2014; Jensen and Tyler 2015; Wright 2016; Shildrick 2018). This “poverty propaganda” can be so powerful and pervasive that even those who experience inequality and severe material deprivation adhere to this image (Shildrick and Macdonald 2013; Shildrick 2018: 785). Amongst the poorest in Turkey, Erdoğan (2007: 76) argues, the responsibility for poverty and the unjust distribution of resources is frequently laid at the feet of the state and the “selfish” rich. Excessive wealth is seen as suspicious. The difference in status between the rich and the poor is often described as unfair, and those that are rich are suspected of having attained their wealth and status in unfair ways and not “by the sweat of brow”. Put differently, the rich came by their possessions by illicit means, by stealing the belongings of others and by corruption, and therefore do not deserve what they have (Akfirat et al. 2016: 420). The poor in Turkey offset this injustice with the claim that they might be destitute, but that they are at least honest, and that they did not try to climb the social ladder with the help of immoral and illicit means. In short, they express moral agency by stressing the choice of their own self-respect over wealth, and in so doing establish moral superiority over the rich (Erdoğan 2007: 76). In the context of the urban renewal project, residents had ample ammunition to accuse project stakeholders and other powerful actors interested in the

a basket, or any other sturdy receptacle, like a bucket, from one's window or balcony, call out to either the shop owner or even some passer-by and that person would take the money in the basket and buy the requested items, and put them back in the basket (with the change). This way of shopping required a certain level of trust and familiarity in the neighbourhood and was entirely impossible in the high-rises that now dominate the suburbs of big Turkish cities.

renewal of their neighbourhood of profiteering and immoral enrichment on the backs of the poor populace.

Gossip

The barbershop of Halil and Necmi was the perfect place to listen to gossip. There I could hang out, watch the barbers at work, and listen to their interactions with their male customers, neighbours or random passers-by. As a foreign woman sitting in the relatively small shop, I was certainly not invisible, and a bit of an oddity to customers who had never met me there before. It was nevertheless a place where I could listen to hours of casual conversations. Many customers enjoyed hearing bits of news and gossip from the neighbourhood while getting a haircut, a shave, or while waiting for their face mask to dry. Political debates happened, but were rarer, and discord amongst supporters of different political camps never amounted to more than friendly teasing and squabbling. However, much of the small talk centred around people everyone involved in these conversations was acquainted with, and amounted to what could be subsumed under gossip, which historian Chris Wickham (1998: 11) defines as “talking about other people behind their backs”. Such chitchat was never malicious, not in my presence at least, with one notable exception: when speaking about the project actors and in particular Beyoğlu mayor Ahmet Misbah Demircan, people did not feel the need to hold back. James Scott (1990: 142) argues that gossip, in his words “the most familiar and elementary form of disguised popular aggression”, is “designed to ruin the reputation of some identifiable person or persons”. This is what distinguishes gossip, “a discourse about social rules that have been violated”, from rumour, its close relative (*ibid.*). And while some argue that gossip is most often used as a discursive technique of social control amongst equals, other scholars have shown that gossip, especially in the form of malicious gossip and character assassination, can be a way to attack the reputation of the powerful and help create solidary links amongst a community against more powerful outsiders (Gilmore 1987; Scott 1990). Critics have pointed out that informal and indirect demonstrations of subversion such as gossip, cynicism or humour should be re-evaluated not as acts of resistance, but of compliance, since they are risk-free, ineffective, and ultimately contribute to the continuation of domination (Fleming and Spicer 2003; Contu 2008). However, my objective here is not to argue whether the exchange of gossip in Halil Usta’s shop was a display of resistance or a meek act of compliance. Rather, I would like to show how the neighbourhood badmouthing of one of the main agents of the urban renewal project constituted a subtle shift of the frame. By undermining the credibility and respectability of the stigmatisers, these anecdotes showed that they were unreliable narrators, and that the negative stories they told about Tarlaabaşı were not to be unquestioningly trusted.

The Beyoğlu mayor came up as a topic of barber shop gossip on several occasions and were relayed with gleeful derision. Demircan was variously described as a fop, a mindless dandy [*artist*], as being under the thumb of prime minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. His outfit, his relatively long hair and demeanour during a televised neighbourhood walk, a talk show, or a press conference were regularly commented and ridiculed.

However, the juiciest piece of gossip about the local politician was that he had allegedly murdered a man as a child and on the behest of his criminal family. Demircan, the narrative went, grew up as a member of a Black Sea family clan that was part of the so-called “land mafia” [*arsa mafyası*] in Istanbul and deeply involved in illegal and illicit activities such as corruption and land theft.⁴ This allegation held a kernel of truth. The mayor’s uncle had been the well-known neighbourhood strongman, or *kabadayı*, Sultan Demircan, nicknamed “Grandfather Sultan” [*Dede Sultan*], an illustrious figure of Istanbul history who had allegedly been involved in organised crime.⁵ In 1973, he was shot in the head and killed, and the shots had reportedly been fired by his 8-year-old nephew (Hürriyet 1973). The notorious uncle’s relation to the Beyoğlu mayor was freely talked about by the Turkish press and considered common knowledge (Ay 2010). The men in the barber shop told me excitedly that Demircan, as a result of mafia rivalries, had been asked to kill a man and complied. There was no compassion for the supposed boy felon, only mockery and contempt: “And he did! You see, he is in fact a murderer, but he was a kid then, so they couldn’t put him in jail, that’s why he had to do it and not anyone else. In these families, they usually ask kids to do the murder, because they cannot be tried like adults. The stories we could tell you, you have no idea!”

Everyone present in the barber shop agreed with this story, while my ignorance of these “facts” was met with friendly incredulity. “Everybody knows this!” I was told. It was not the only bit of gossip about Demircan. Sometimes the barber shop patrons attacked the disliked mayor’s reputation by citing his father, prominent Islamic scholar Ali Rıza Demircan. He had written a book about sexuality and Islam, and regularly appeared on TV as an expert on the subject. Less ominous than the tale of gruesome murder, the gossip about the conservative man giving sex advice on television was often cause for hilarity. In a way this took aim at the seniority and gravitas of the head of the Demircan family, and by extension the seniority and gravitas of the urban politics advanced by his son.

Scott (1990: 143) writes that gossip, even in the form of character assassination, “is a relatively mild sanction against the powerful” that may never reach the ears of its victims. It is furthermore crucial, even if gossip is nothing but a blunt weapon of resistance, that those who are being targeted must have a certain social standing (*ibid.*). For an elected politician who wishes to garner support for his ideas and policies from his constituents, a good image is arguably crucial. Not only the Tarlaşaşı project, but also much of the administrative work in Beyoğlu under Demircan was focussed on a new, “cleaner”, and less stigmatised image. By symbolically tarnishing his reputation with these stories, especially before an “audience”, the gossipers in the barber shop were both ridiculing that

4 The “land” or “estate mafia” was the name for criminal groups that illegally controlled and sold land, often publicly owned, in the late 1980s and early 1990s (see Farsakoğlu: 1990).

5 Ryan Gingeras, drawing on the work of Roger Deal, writes that *kabadayı* culture stems from the elite Ottoman janissary corps, but that the name and image of the *kabadayı*, a neighbourhood strongman who used violence to keep other strongmen in check and exert control over “his” neighbourhood, was adopted by 20th-century members of organised crime (see Gingeras 2014). To this day there is a certain romanticism associated with the figure of the neighbourhood *kabadayı* as a “noble bandit” and “man of the people”.

goal and questioning the sincerity of it. In so doing they turned the stigmatisation spotlight on those who accused them of not fitting in with social norms and laws.

Despite the conviction with which these pieces of gossip were relayed, I did not have the impression that any of the men *really* thought the Beyoğlu mayor was a killer. Rather, it seemed to me that this was a *dramatization* of a counternarrative meant to throw the mayor's reputation into question – after all, he really did have at least one famously criminal uncle and a dubious family history – an illustration to prove that the mayor's word did not weigh as heavy as one might think, since he was not the respectable politician he purported to be. It was a hint that maybe his view of the neighbourhood was not to be trusted, and that it was him, not Tarlabası or its residents, that stood accused of a criminal past and unseemly behaviour.

Calling out project stakeholders

Several of the anecdotes in this book have described how residents were misled, misinformed, or lied to by project stakeholders, leading them to take disadvantageous or wrong decisions concerning their property, their legal efforts, or their tactics concerning looming evictions. Previous chapters have established that this disinformation was at least partly strategic, rooted in the territorial stigma surrounding the neighbourhood, and the related erasure of residents and their interests. It is very clear that people in Tarlabası were aware of the dishonesty of local authorities. While it was exceedingly rare that local residents verbally attacked project officials to their faces – though, as this chapter has documented, that *did* happen, too – they certainly voiced their anger “offstage”, behind the backs of powerholders (Scott 1990: 4). For example, Cemile accused the deputy mayor and the “fat lawyer” at the municipal information office of lying to her about planned demolitions. Similarly, Kurdish widow Esma explained that she had been cheated by municipal officials about her legal rights concerning her deceased husband's apartment. Esma said that she had been called into the project office on Tarlabası Boulevard after her husband's first wife had sold the apartment to the municipality in the summer of 2010. There she was asked to sign a document that Esma said she did not read beforehand because the municipal officials sitting across from her promised that nobody in Tarlabası would be victimised and that she therefore did not need to worry. When this turned out to be a lie, and she and her child were violently evicted from their home, Esma shared her frustration with her former neighbours Cemile and Alev:

I didn't read [the documents] because they said that nobody would suffer. They said that they would make everyone [in Tarlabası] a house owner. They said they would give everyone a house. But they did not do anything for us. Nothing! Nobody is doing anything for us. Now they say that we have to see how to sort ourselves out. They lied to us. I trusted them, but they are liars.

Despite the municipality's extensive publicity campaign, Tarlabası residents maintained that the entire project was unlawful, and that the motives of project stakeholders were guided only by profiteering, nepotism, and corruption. Due to the lack of transparency and information, and the suspicion of residents of being cheated, many people felt that

the municipality was throwing sand in people's eyes. Too afraid of voicing their displeasure out loud, of "speaking truth to power" (Scott 1990: 1) for fear of repercussions, such as expropriation, losing out on sales offers, or simply because the thought felt too intimidating, many residents resorted to badmouthing project stakeholders vis-à-vis their friends and neighbours.

Second-hand furniture seller Cemal, during a conversation with some of his shop neighbours in the street, aired his anger toward project stakeholders and the government, accusing them of nepotism and tricking residents out of a fair share of the profits:

[The Tarlaşaşı law] is an unjust law. Because the boss of the company who won the tender here is prime minister Erdoğan's relative. His son-in-law. Çalık Holding or something. They passed a law just for his son-in-law in parliament, for him personally. He passed a law just for himself.[...] I think the municipality is trying to be clever. They say they'll give people from here apartments in Kayabaşı, so that they'll leave [Tarlaşaşı], so that they'll go, because a big profit will be made here. Hill Street is just one street over from here. There they started building luxury boutique hotels. If they build luxury hotels there, that means something will happen here as well.

Many Tarlaşaşı residents wondered how much profit the government, the municipality and the developing company *GAP İnşaat* would make, and by how much (not if) they were being sold short. Property owners wondered if the proposed sales prices were proportionate to the actual value of their real estate. The daily *Radikal* had reported that *GAP İnşaat* foresaw eye-watering profit margins. In one case, a five-storey listed building, expropriated for a mere 761,000 TL, was projected to be sold for around 7.5 million US dollars (Ince 2012). Such news was intensely debated amongst residents, and they cemented the opinion that the renewal project was not about improving the neighbourhood, but about profiteering. In several conversations, in the teahouse, the barber shop, or on the street, I heard people telling each other that the municipality was "nothing but bunch of liars and thieves without any honour". These expressions of anger were confined to the neighbourhood, but they nevertheless showed that residents challenged the smothering claim that they were "content" with the renewal project and had "no objections". No matter how toothless these small speech acts were, shared with neighbours and researchers like me, they were a contestation of the invisibilisation and erasure of residents' voices.

Putting the blame where it belongs

Of course, some Tarlaşaşı residents at least partly internalised the stigma of their neighbourhood. While some attempted to deflect this taint onto their neighbours, others accepted the negative narrative as fact and directed the blame for the bad reputation against the neighbourhood, including themselves. However, people also called attention to how outside actors contributed to, if not downright caused, the neighbourhood stigmatisation and the victimisation of its inhabitants.

Tarlaşaşı residents often talked about various state officials' misconduct, about the widespread and visible police corruption, about nepotism, the shameless profiteering, the excessive police violence and the seemingly contradictory fact that officers turned a

blind to existing crime. Tarlabası residents, especially trans* sex workers and Kurdish men, were regularly victims of harassment and mistreatment by law enforcement officers. Alev's fiancé Özgür, a Kurdish man in his early thirties from Mardin Province, was frequently accosted by the police in Tarlabası and adjacent streets, such as the checkpoints on Tarlabası Boulevard. He was often rudely asked for his ID card and the "purpose" of his being in the neighbourhood, on the street at a certain hour, or at all. His experience with regular police checks stood in sharp contrast to the lack of police oversight and intervention when it came to drug dealers, many of whom lingered on street corners and in front of empty buildings, especially at night.

The police? All they do here is take bribes. All the police are good for here is to take bribes. They throw a few rounds of teargas, and they take money. There is not a single honourable/upstanding [namuslu] person in that police station. As long as they get their money they don't care...you know those youngsters hanging out at the corner? They are there day and night, but nobody ever asks for their IDs. If I walk down the street now, [the police] will ask for my ID, or they'll take me to the station, or they'll put me in jail. That's what they do to poor people [*gariban*] like me. They ask me for my ID all the time. [...] But down at the corner there are always four or five young boys, villagers. They sell drugs, they sell marihuana, they steal. People who live here are scared to go past them. But what do you know, [the police] cooperates with them, in the evenings they eat and drink together, they have fun together. But wherever they find a poor person at night, leaving work and going home, they'll grab them and put them in jail because they say: what business do you have here at this hour? They should deal with [the drug dealers] first! The state does not concern itself with rich people, but they can do this to poor people. That's their justice. What can you do? How can you fight back against that?

Distrust in the police was a common issue in Tarlabası (Sakızlıoğlu 2014a: 190). After a the adoption of the 2005 misdemeanour law in 2005, discriminatory "stop and frisk" tactics became very common, and they often targeted Kurdish men and trans* sex workers (Human Rights Watch 2008a; Human Rights Watch 2008b; Amnesty International 2011b). Due to his own experience of countless unpleasant encounters with the police, Özgür could only make sense of the seemingly carefree existence of drug dealers in the neighbourhood by assuming that the police did not only turn a blind eye, but actually worked together with them. I asked him if he had ever actually seen the joint police-drug dealer "fun" he described, and he said that it was "obvious" to him that it could only be so. One might argue that Özgür was particularly averse to the police (Sahin and Akboga 2019), and that his was a singularly strong opinion based solely on his own negative experience of discrimination. But this was not the case, either. Chapter four in this book has shown that many residents felt that their neighbourhood was both underserved and overpoliced. And once, I witnessed an officer of the Istanbul motorcycle police unit colloquially referred to as "dolphins" [*yunuslar*] take a money bribe from one of the drug dealers that were hanging out around Tree Street. He drove up to him and took a small wad of banknotes out of the dealer's trouser back pocket, quickly counted it, and drove on. It was an early winter evening, and it was already dark outside, but it happened only a few metres down from Halil Usta's brightly lit barber shop and in the sightline of a photographer

(who was holding his camera visibly in his hands) and me. When I told Halil Usta about what I had seen, he was not surprised at all, and said that “everybody in Tarlaabaşı” knew that the police took bribes from local drug dealers, and that it happened all the time. It had been obvious that the police officer had felt safe enough to conduct this transaction right in front of us without worrying about us or the camera.

This overt indifference to, and in the above case, cooperation with drug dealers led people to argue that the police and by extension, the Turkish state, were in large part to blame for the state and the bad reputation of the neighbourhood. Alev’s uncle Mahmut told me:

[Tarlaabaşı] is a very beautiful neighbourhood in every sense. It’s a bit run down, that’s a different matter. And that’s the state’s fault. Gangs and stuff. If they would do something against that...but they act as if any crime is ok to do, as long as it’s not political. They let [criminals] be, they even work together with them. One cannot blame the people who live here. The police are to blame. On the one hand they get a salary from the state, they live in government lodgings, they get cars, they can make use of all kinds of laws, and then they come here and walk around the streets and find ways to make money off these streets as well. Who do you think is to blame? The police of course! [...] We see it with our own eyes! But we can’t complain about this! Who would we complain about this to? Their superiors! And what would the superiors do? Nothing. You can’t change anything. [...] You cannot stand up against them. Unless you have someone very powerful behind you. That’s the only way you can stand up to them.

He made it very clear that in his eyes the fault for the crime and insecurity in Tarlaabaşı lay not with the residents, but with the police who did not do their job. Both non-resident outsiders and Tarlaabaşı residents agreed that crime and disorder were a problem in the neighbourhood. However, whereas project stakeholders turned this bad reputation into a narrative supporting the renewal argument, residents argued that the opposite was true: if the police and the authorities would do their duty and provide safety and security, the neighbourhood could reach its full potential. This was also one of Erdal Aybek’s arguments against the stigmatising narrative of the municipality. The former Tarlaabaşı Association spokesman said:

So yes, ok, there is crime in Tarlaabaşı. There are drug dealers. There are thieves and pickpockets. We all know that, it’s true. That’s what the municipality says. But you know, why would that be the residents’ responsibility? Why are the residents now being punished for the police not doing their job? That Tarlaabaşı is not very safe, that it is not all good, that is the municipality’s and the government’s fault. They do nothing against it.

Even if the accounts of widespread neglect and corruption *were* nothing but rumours, they would still provide a “counter-script to stigmatic representations” (Kirkness and Tijé-Dra 2017: 122). David Samper (2002: 23) writes that rumours “are an alternative means for people to express and gain some ownership over a perceived social problem.” The often-shared anecdotes about police misconduct and violence were one way that residents, who otherwise had no access to shaping the public narrative, participated in the claim-making process. Rumours that contest a hegemonic ideology or narrative

are a discursive tactic that gives people the opportunity to reject, and reframe, self-deprecating views and stigma. Therefore, rumours can encourage “a community to challenge hegemony at the social, everyday level” (ibid.: 20). Sharing these rumours and anecdotes, especially with an outside observer was an expression of agency. Widely shared anecdotes about police corruption and misconduct, as well as about the inability or unwillingness of the police to provide security in the neighbourhood, turned the blame away from residents and onto the authorities, providing the counternarrative that the *real* criminals were in fact the municipality, the authorities, and the private developer who occupied the sales offices on the other side of Tarlaabaşı Boulevard.

The same was true for the dominant narrative that Tarlaabaşı was a dilapidated, half-ruined neighbourhood that urgently required outside intervention and large-scale renewal. As stated in earlier chapters, parts of Beyoğlu, and all of Tarlaabaşı, were declared an urban conservation area by the Cultural Heritage Preservation Board in 1993. This meant that property owners were not allowed to renovate or modify their buildings in any way without official permission. Any infringement could mean a high fine. As a result of that regulation many property owners did not undertake necessary repair work on their buildings. Kurdish second-hand furniture dealer Maher, himself a tenant, argued that it was therefore disingenuous for the municipality and other stakeholders to frame Tarlaabaşı as neglected. He also pointed out that their alleged goodwill was not believable, since the profiteering in most large urban renewal projects in Istanbul was so obvious:

It's all so unjust...all of Istanbul requires renewal, seriously. For example, here, there are buildings that are maybe twenty years old, and down the street there are houses and shops that are more than one hundred years old. But they only demolish in places where they hope to make money. They throw out the people in them. The only places they are interested in are the ones that are profitable, everything else they don't touch, no matter how old or dilapidated. [...] They never kept [this neighbourhood] clean, they have never looked after it. It's in the centre of Istanbul and it looks like a garbage dump, like a village in the middle of nowhere. Everyone should do their own painting, their own repairs. But they never allowed that. Why? So that people would be fed up and leave.

I met residents who had been fined several hundreds of Turkish Lira for painting rusted balcony rails or the repair of a leaky roof. The Tarlaabaşı Association, in their struggle to oppose the renewal project as drawn up by the Beyoğlu Municipality and *GAP İnşaat*, repeatedly asked that homeowners should be given the opportunity to renovate their own property in order to improve the neighbourhood. In fact, during the first ever meeting at the municipality, mayor Demircan had promised to secure microcredits to do just that. For many residents it was thus both deeply cynical and unacceptable to be blamed for the bad physical state of their neighbourhood.

The same was true for the gradual dilapidation of the building stock in the time after the project announcement. With the start of demolitions in August 2010 and the acceleration of evictions and departures, single apartments and entire buildings were left abandoned as tenants began to move out. But this happened in a trickle. Many residents remained in their homes and their shops, either because they or their landlords were still fighting evictions in court, or simply because they had nowhere else to go. The

buildings and apartments that *had* been sold became the responsibility of project stakeholders. However, these buildings were largely neglected. In some cases, this meant that squatters, often very poor Syrian refugees, started to occupy these unsafe spaces. It also meant that scavengers hoping to earn a few coins ripped into these buildings, dismantling wooden, metal, and other recyclable and sellable structures. Wooden beams, stairs, floors and windows made excellent firewood. By mid-2011, foragers were hard at work in all renewal area streets, noisily breaking out everything they thought to be profitable, leaving buildings in danger of collapse.

This intense scavenging left behind rows of semi-ruins that had gaping black holes where windows and doors used to be. Some residents likened the sight to a “warzone”, complaining that this made their neighbourhood “look terrible” to passers-by on the main Tarlabası Boulevard and to passengers of taxis and the *dolmuş* who drove up Tree Street, an important arterial road that connected Dolapdere to Taksim. Many believed that the municipality was allowing this to happen, partly to put pressure on residents and accelerate the eviction process, and partly to bolster the stigmatising discourse they employed to justify renewal. Halil Usta, who at that point still spent almost every day in Tarlabası and who was watching the rapid change in the neighbourhood, was worried about safety and the image that a semi-ruined neighbourhood projected to outsiders, and the effect this negative image would have on solidarity with Tarlabası residents.

Look at this, it looks so bad. The municipality owns these buildings now, they should make sure that people don't scavenge and that it is safe for us. Children play on the streets. People are walking past these buildings. What if something falls down? It looks like a warzone here. The municipality does this to make Tarlabası look worse. Because of the project. Anyone who walks past will think: what kind of bad place is this? Everyone already thinks that Tarlabası is a bad place. They will say that it is good that they will demolish it.

At least one building did collapse as a result of the removal of the heavy metal beams and wooden structures that had stabilised it. The small three-storey house simply caved in one afternoon, only a few months after its former occupant had been evicted. Luckily nobody was hurt, but children did play on the street all the time. Many blamed the municipality for not taking care of the buildings they had bought. Project stakeholders did employ a welder who sealed apartments that were empty, but they did not pay much attention as to what happened after the welder had left.

Rumours of deliberately infrequent garbage collection in Tarlabası that had started as early as 2008 resurfaced during the time of my fieldwork. The situation had deteriorated by then. In streets where the majority of buildings lay abandoned, garbage was not collected at all anymore. Bags of refuse were piling up inside empty buildings and on the streets, and during the summer months this growing heap of debris led to an increase in vermin and a horrific stench that beleaguered those who still lived in the vicinity or who had to pass through. As garbage disposal was the responsibility of the municipality, residents interpreted the authorities' failure to clean the streets as yet another form of weaponised indifference designed to punish residents unwilling or unable to leave, and to literally turn Tarlabası into the “garbage dump” it had been described as by project

stakeholders and the mainstream media. Alev, whose family left late in 2011 when many buildings were already abandoned, put the blame squarely onto the municipality.

What is this? It's disgusting. People throw their trash into the streets, and the municipality just leaves it there. They do that on purpose. It's the municipality's responsibility to send garbage trucks. We tell them but they don't. What can we do? Is this our fault? We live here, we have to walk on these streets every day. There are rats, there are microbes, the children will get sick. They want Tarlabası to look like this, but it's not our responsibility, and not our fault. The municipality should clean the streets.

Alev knew that the garbage on nearby İstiklal Avenue was collected several times a day by the Beyoğlu Municipality. She stressed that waste management and street cleaning was the responsibility of the municipality, thereby offering a counter frame to the stigmatising narrative.

Graffiti

Graffiti, in the way of slogans, signals, or indicating labels applied with a paintbrush or a spray can or hasty scribbles applied with pens, pieces of rock or coal, were a common sight in Tarlabası. These wall writings included political statements, profanities, names of people, or sometimes signs not to drop garbage in a certain place.⁶ Twice I saw graffiti that expressed pride in the bad image of the neighbourhood: "This is Tarlabası, it's not just for anyone", and: "This is Tarlabası, not just anyone can enter". Paul Kirkness and Andreas Tijé-Dra (2017: 120) state that such hyperbolic claims, along with the performance of "being gangster" or belonging to "a ghetto", made by residents of tainted spaces, "can be perceived as small acts of affirmative transgression, appropriation and speaking back to depictions that are made outside the stigmatised neighbourhood". However, once I witnessed a very personal, very targeted version of using graffiti as a way to relay a message to those that had victimised Tarlabası.

In the end of October 2011, Alev and her family had to move out of their apartment after compulsory purchase proceedings had been finalised. Several of her cousins, uncles as well as her fiancé Özgür were helping them to carry furniture, bags, and boxes into a small lorry they had rented for the move. It was hard work, and while Alev and most of the men were lifting and carrying various items down the four flights of the narrow stairs, Alev's sister-in-law was cooking and serving lunch, tea, and coffee to the group of men who had come to help.

6 These signs very often aimed to shame those that did not comply with messages like: "Those that throw their garbage down here are bastards" etc.

Moving out of Tree Street

Photo by Jonathan Lewis

Alev was visibly emotional. Flitting through the apartment, she directed the move and paid attention that everything was being wrapped and handled appropriately. As room after room was emptied, Alev began to write slogans across the now bare walls of her former home. She used pencils and pens since she had nothing else at her disposal. For a moment, she also took to the walls with an electric screwdriver she had used to dismantle the furniture. She was only able to inflict limited damage using this tool, to the mocking laughter of her younger male cousins who said she should use a drill in order to cause more serious destruction, and soon joined her to scribble onto the walls. She was both sad and angry about being forced out of her home despite the legal fight she had put up. Inflicting this damage, limited and as it was, was both an outlet for that anger and a way to send the message to the municipality that she did not leave the house to them voluntarily.

The graffiti were all written in large font and included the crossed-out initials of then prime minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, “RTE”, the statement “I am Alev”, and the strong curses “May the hand of those that deny our rights break” and “May you get no benefit from it” [*Haram olsun*]. I will elaborate on the significance of this latter statement further down in this section. One of these slogans, written in Kurmanji Kurdish (It’s enough! [*Edi bese!*]), was a well-known political slogan of revolt, and by using it, Alev connected her personal grievance to the larger Kurdish political movement against state discrimination and for minority rights. In this sense, the political meaning could be read as a double protest that only a limited public, those that understood Kurmanji Kurdish and were familiar with the Kurdish rights movement, was able to fully understand.

However, the use of the Kurdish language is in itself an act of protest (Clark, 2016: 250). A Turkish monolingual audience would understand that a certain text object, like Alev’s slogan, was Kurdish, but they would not necessarily understand the intended (po-

litical) indexicality of that text object. Choosing to write in Kurdish “does the actual work of establishing boundaries that limit the access available to a bystander public gaze, while also ensuring that bystanders can register those boundaries, notice their lack of access-to-meaning and sense their exclusion” (ibid.). Alev had no way of knowing who, if anyone, would ever see what she had written. It was unclear to me whether she thought that Kurdish construction workers would see the graffiti before the demolition of the building, or whether she thought that any officials or executives from the municipality or *GAP İnşaat* would read what she had to say.

Research has shown that political graffiti as a communicative tool is especially important for those who have been marginalised, excluded from structures of social, economic, and political power and who do not have access to institutionalised forms of political participation, or who do not believe that mainstream politics will bring about the desired change. As such, political graffiti can function as a discursive form of political activism and of resistance to prevailing systems of power and control (Jaffe et. al. 2012: 3; Waldner and Dobratz 2013: 387; Li and Prasad 2018: 496).

Alev chose to write these slogans across the walls of her former apartment because she was angry, but also because she was not able to communicate these thoughts elsewhere. She wanted to convey a message that the addressee had otherwise refused to hear, and she chose to use political language to bring her criticism of the renewal project and those responsible for it across.

Graffiti, as a transgressive performance in space, have often been interpreted as public text objects. Some scholars distinguish between public and private graffiti, defining the latter as anonymous inscriptions indoors, such as inside prisons or universities (Abel and Buckley 1977; Schwartz and Dovidio 1984). However, the prevailing assumption is that all graffiti, public or private, aims to be read. In that sense, it did not matter that Alev chose to write on the walls inside the apartment and not, say, on the walls outside of the building. Bruner and Kelso (1980: 241), in their study of gendered semiotics of graffiti, allege that “although written in the privacy of a toilet stall, the writing of graffiti is an essentially social act. [...] To write graffiti is to communicate; one never finds graffiti where they cannot be seen by others”. Graffiti, therefore, “whether written by pen, spray can, or paintbrush, it is always public and displayed on someone else’s property” (Wilson 2008). Alev had no way of knowing who would see the slogans she wrote, or if anyone would see them at all. However, she made her voice heard in a context where those in power refused to hear and listen to her. With the graffiti, some of which literally asserted her presence, Alev “writes herself into existence” (Carrington 2009: 420).

The evening of the same day, after all the furniture had been unloaded in the new apartment on the other side of Dolapdere Street, Alev returned to the empty, old apartment with two of her male cousins, to complete and add to the writings of the afternoon. They also smashed a few windows. Alev said that she wanted to vent her anger, and maybe even more importantly, show that she had not left the apartment to the municipality voluntarily and that she did not approve of the displacement.

A teargas cartridge

In the height of summer 2011, Cemile and Ramazan lived out of cardboard boxes in their old home, waiting for someone from the municipality to take their keys from them and evict them from their house. The atmosphere was sombre. Cemile suffered from an infected toenail, and her big toe was wrapped in a bandage, making it difficult for her to walk. One day, while looking for something in her boxes, she pulled out a plastic bag. She held it up to me and her husband and started laughing.

What's in that bag? Oh look, do you remember this? It's our bomb! It's the bomb [the police] threw into our house. Let's leave it here for them, as a souvenir. They can keep that. I'll leave that behind here for them.

Inside the bag was an empty tear gas cartridge, a hollow silver cylinder that was open on one end, with blue letters on the sides. It had landed in the family's living room during 1 May demonstrations a couple of years prior, setting the living room curtains on fire and engulfing the entire room in a thick, biting fog. The police had never come to apologise for shooting the cartridge through the open living room window, and despite some neighbours urging them to do so, the family had never tried to press charges. For Cemile and Ramazan, this carelessness by the riot police had been another sign that they and their safety in the neighbourhood did not really matter. Cemile draped the open bag with the cartridge on the floor of the almost empty apartment, as "a souvenir" for the municipal delegation they were waiting for. It was not entirely clear if Cemile had kept the cartridge as a keepsake, or as potential evidence in case she did change her mind. However, with her eviction imminent and all communication with the municipality and the developers ruptured, she felt it could serve as a message she was going to leave behind for them.

Helal olmasın

One day in November 2011, second-hand furniture seller Cemal, lute maker Kerem Usta, and Kurdish real estate agent, Burhan, all came together in the barber shop on Tree Street in one of the last get-togethers that I was able to witness there. Kerem Usta had not been to the barber shop in months (he usually got his shaves in his suburb). Halil Usta was in his element, administering shaves, trims, waxing, masks and massages. The summer "heroin rice pudding"⁷ bust in the pudding shop on Tarlaşaşı Boulevard provided hilarious gossip, but in general the mood was rather low. Most of the other residents and shop owners in the street had already left, and Halil Usta only came to Tarlaşaşı intermittently now. He said that being in his shop had "lost all taste". The area around the barbershop looked desolate and ruined. While getting haircuts and shaves, the other

7 Burhan claimed that the owner of the shop had sold a "special" rice pudding that came with a serving of heroin on the side for customers in the know. The newspapers spoke of cocaine (Kaya, 2011). The shop had subsequently been shut down, and, since it was inside the renewal zone, it was going to be demolished in any case.

men wondered what would happen next. Halil Usta was angry. The municipality had victimised the neighbourhood, he said, throwing everyone out of their houses for no apparent reason, as it did not look like constructions would start anytime soon. Now, he said, the neighbourhood was left to rot, and property owners like Cemal were left without any rental income, and without a new home to move into. As a tenant, he felt like he had no recourse to any assistance from anyone, and due to evictions, he had lost most of his customers and his income, without the possibility to plan his next move. Since he had invested in and paid for a new PVC window and a door for his rental shop, he was angry that he would not get anything for either when his landlord sold the entire building to the developer. He asked the men in his shop what he should do, and Cemal replied that he should “break and take” them.

H: But I won't be able to sell them, it's worth nothing.

C: That's not the point. You should break out and take all of it, the metal [parts], too. You should take the wood and burn it.

The expression Cemal used to justify his advice, that would arguably only mean more work for Halil Usta, was *helal olmasın*: this phrase, loosely translated as “not waiving one's rights”, or “not forgiving another person's mistakes against oneself”⁸. Since Halil Usta was not able to communicate his pain and discontent directly to project stakeholders, the breaking and scavenging of parts of his shop, even if it would not provide any financial gain, would be a message to the municipality that the transaction was made without his consent and without his blessing.

Similar in meaning to the much stronger, more curse-like *haram olsun* scribbled by Alev on the empty walls of her former home, the angrily uttered *helal olmasın* was an expression I heard quite often in relation to people being evicted from their house in Tarlabası if they felt that they had been cheated, lied to, and betrayed by the municipality. Following the unannounced visit by the police at the house of Cemile and Ramazan during the month of Ramadan in 2011, Ramazan used a crowbar and a large hammer to break and pry the PVC window frames and the balcony door out of the walls. His intervention made them unusable and broke pieces out of the brick walls that lay strewn about the floors and caused hindrance while Cemile and Ramazan were still living in the apartment. But Ramazan had been angry and said that he just did not want to leave these new windows that they had bought and were still paying instalments for at the time, to the developer. Later on, he explained that he could not forgive them taking their house, and making him feel duped, and, as he said, “like an idiot”: “I swear that I want them to feel like idiots themselves. *Allah* should make them feel like idiots, too. I swear that I will not forgive them for mistakes they have committed against me! [*Yemin ederim hakkim helal olmasın onlara!*]” He and Cemile used the phrase *helal olmasın* many times during the last

8 The more commonly used expression is “*helal olsun*”, a phrase often used in a business transaction, for example meant to seal a consensual exchange. The Turkish “*helal*” is derived from the Arabic “*halal*” and refers to “legitimate”, “rightful”. The speaker is not active, which means that the outcome is dependent on something or someone outside of oneself. The expression has a deeply moral aspect.

days in their apartment, and the (self-)destruction wreaked upon the apartment was a desperate message to the municipality that had, at that point, long ceased to listen or care.

Welding shut an evicted building



Photo by Jonathan Lewis

Other residents who were evicted scavenged wood and metal as a way not to leave entirely empty handed. Kemal had rented an additional small lorry to be able to transport the stacks of firewood he took from the house when he left it: chopped up wooden floors, beams, and the old staircase that, he argued, would be more use to him in his new home where he only had a small oven for heating. Kemal also took as much of the metal appliances and plumbing as he managed to pry loose in the house that at the time did not belong to his landlord anymore, but to the municipality. Such transgressive spatial practices were a way to defy, or in the case of Kemal, make use of the invisibility that the stigmatisation of Tarlabaşı had relegated its residents to.

The stigmatisation of Tarlabaşı had an impact on the ways that Tarlabaşı residents could make themselves heard, and, as we have seen, it often made it impossible to shape and circulate their own narrative. However, residents did not just accept being silenced. As project stakeholders and the non-resident community refused to hear what they had to say about their displacement and their dispossession, they deployed various symbolic struggles to pierce through the discursive wall that smothered their voices. They used verbally expressed their anger, even if they almost never did so to the faces of project stakeholders. These struggles were speech acts that remained small and toothless, but it is nevertheless important to notice them and pull them apart in order to analyse and understand how residents reacted to territorial stigma and how they navigated their erasure. People deployed counternarratives, gossip and name calling. They also deployed material struggles, such as the inscription of messages, or leaving behind a certain object

that, at the very least, meant to express their disdain. As we have seen from the anecdote of Kemal's failed eviction, the crack in the seamless façade of the municipal discourse also revealed a highly interesting dissonance between the legal contract, the only contract that project stakeholders said they found binding, and the social contract, the social norms and expectations that underlie interactions in the neighbourhood and in Turkish society. The question of how this incongruity is impacted by stigma is one that still has to be answered.

Leaving nothing behind



Photo by Jonathan Lewis

Displaced

The last weeks in the apartment were a time of restless, anxious waiting for Cemile and Ramazan. Following the unannounced police visit, Cemile felt ill with disappointment and anger. The couple had found a small rental apartment a few streets over from Tree Street, but the place was in dire need of renovation before they were able to move. They had been given an eviction date on which they were supposed to turn over their keys to a project delegation similar to the one that had come in early July, but that day came and went without anyone from *GAP İnşaat* or the municipality showing up at their door. Ramazan commented:

They don't even call. They were supposed to come at ten thirty. When they say they don't come, they come. When they say they will come, they don't. It makes no sense. We have finally resigned to having to leave the house, and now they don't come.

Cemile did not feel “resigned”, however. As much as it was possible with her infected toe and due to the stress palpitations and the intense summer heat, she paced the apartment, opening and closing boxes, deciding what objects she would be able to take with her when the municipal lorry did finally turn up to move their things. Sinking down on the upturned sofa, she exclaimed:

Vallah, they can keep them. They can put a match to them and burn all of it. I'll leave all of it here. There is nothing I can do anymore, I am tired. I have no more tears left from all the crying. I can barely see clearly anymore. I will hand them my keys and leave all of it. They can lock it in here, or they can throw it all away. Or you know what? I can just throw it all out onto the street from the window and burn it all there. There isn't much left anyway.

One of the main objectives of this research has been to capture and describe the pain felt by Tarlabası residents facing the loss of their homes and their neighbourhood. In many ways, this pain was without recourse, and expressions of desperations like the one above shows how residents who felt helpless, utterly disenfranchised and dispossessed, expressed that pain. Psychiatrist Mindy Fullilove (2004: 11) has described the relocation of residents after the demolition of their homes as a “root shock”, defined as the “traumatic stress reaction to the destruction of all or part of one's emotional ecosystem”. It

can leave deep psychological and emotional scars. In his study of the suffering that residents of West Boston endured as a result of being forcibly evicted from the neighbourhood, Marc Fried (1969) has written about the consequences of “grieving for a lost home”. J. Douglas Porteous and Sandra E. Smith (2001) have described victims’ experiences of anxiety, stress, and desperation caused by “domicide”, the planned, deliberate destruction of homes that are in the way of corporate, political or bureaucratic projects.

A growing amount of research has focussed on various aspects of urban renewal, displacement and gentrification in Turkey in recent years (Esen and Lanz 2005; Ünsal and Kuyucu 2010; Ünsal 2013; van Dobben Schoon 2014; Sakızlıoğlu 2014b; Zengin 2014; Islam and Sakızlıoğlu 2015; Yetiskul and Demirel 2018; Rivas-Alonso 2021). This book aimed to focus on details of territorial stigmatisation, how it was exploited by powerful actors in a state-led renewal project, and how residents managed that stigma. Departing from discussions centred around the “strengths and shortcomings of the analytic concept of territorial stigmatisation” (Kirkness and Tijé-Dra 2017: 252), one of the contributions to the literature consists in expanding the focus on the symbolic consequences of territorial stigma, and the material impacts on residents in the immediate run-up to evictions and demolitions.

Cemile and Ramazan’s apartment after eviction



Photo by Jonathan Lewis

The Beyoğlu Municipality and other state and corporate actors involved in the Tarlabası renewal project promoted and fomented existing spatial stigma in the neighbourhood in order to legitimise and justify a highly controversial large-scale urban intervention, arguing that the demolition of hundreds of homes in central Istanbul would improve the district “for everyone”. Paul Kirkness and Andreas Tijé-Dra (2017: 253) point out that urban capitalism profits from everyday depictions of stigmatised neighbourhoods in the media, in advertisement, as well as through political discourse, “everyday hearsay”

that produce, maintain, fuel, and reinforce spatial disrepute. The analysis of the dominant media discourse, of marketing and PR materials, and officials' statements in this book showed how a state-led urban renewal project in Turkey exploited and fuelled state-led stigmatisation. Such dominant images and representations play a crucial role in the social construction of urban geographies of stigmatisation, which has tangible, material effects on residents. On the one hand, these representations render stigmatised neighbourhoods hyper-visible, creating urban spaces that are imagined as sensorially dirty, immoral, and dangerous no-go zones by the non-resident community. It follows that non-residents rarely if ever set foot in these areas, which leaves most image and knowledge production to "experts" (Bourdieu et al. 1994; Kirkness 2013), which fuels further marginalisation, prevents outside solidarity, and fosters consent with neoliberal urban policies. On the other hand, dominant representations of a stigmatised neighbourhood erase their residents, and makes them vanish behind a "discursive wall of negative tropes" (Carter 2010: 12–13). In the case of Tarlabaşı, this meant that residents were largely excluded from decisions of how their neighbourhood was seen and represented, as well as from decisions pertaining to the physical alterations of their homes and livelihoods. Tarlabaşı, therefore, became a neighbourhood that was hidden in plain sight, a poor district in central Istanbul that was partly, and illegally, destroyed by the municipal and state authorities while the stories and words of residents remained mostly unheard. Metaphorically speaking, territorial stigma was the curtain behind which authorities were free to abuse residents, while non-residents trusted and "knew" that this curtain was there for good reason, and the screams coming from behind it were not worth listening to.

In recent years, scholars of territorial stigmatisation have insisted that it is these voices that need to be recorded and amplified in order to understand how residents of stigmatised neighbourhoods manage and oppose this stigma (Jensen and Christensen 2012; Kirkness 2014; Kirkness and Tijé-Dra 2017; Fattah and Walters 2020). Contrary to the claims of Loïc Wacquant, Tarlabaşı residents did not uniformly internalise the stigma, and they did not all want to leave the neighbourhood. A significant number of residents expressed a deep attachment to Tarlabaşı formed through various symbolic and material bonds they had built up over time. This attachment was rooted in a Turkey-specific form of an urban social network – the *mahalle*. And while these ties did not necessarily translate into pride in the neighbourhood (though that did happen, too), residents were clear about the importance of this built social environment consisting of neighbourly relations, business ties, and access to aspects of an urban social contract that were specific to Tarlabaşı and could not be transferred elsewhere. This book concentrated on symbolic practices of managing and opposing stigma, on the manifold ways that Tarlabaşı residents questioned, distorted, or challenged their neighbourhood's bad reputation. In the context of the Tarlabaşı renewal project, struggles against stigmatisation were also struggles against the displacement that this state-led and state-produced stigma tried to justify. While these struggles remained ultimately toothless against dispossession, it is important to carefully analyse them in order to understand how territorial stigmatisation operates. This book aimed, therefore, to draw back the curtain, and train the gaze on the suffering of those hidden behind it.

Much work remains to be done. In this book I analysed the intersectionality of territorial stigma and its symbolic and material consequences for residents, which raises the

question how these aspects play out for minority groups in Tarlabası whom I did not have ethnographic access to. It would be really interesting to have the perspective from inside the sizable Romani community in the neighbourhood, but for reasons of access, that was not something I was able to do. However, I would be very curious to see how that point of view completes the picture of how territorial stigma influenced how residents dealt with the renewal project. In the same way, it would be crucial to find out how communities that found refuge in Tarlabası, such as the considerable number of migrants from various African countries, dealt with intersectionality and stigma. For residents without a legal status in Turkey, the invisibilisation of their place of residence might have provided useful cover. However, this requires a different ethnographic focus and a different methodological approach than those I have chosen to pursue in my thesis.

In 2017, the Council of State [*Danıştay*] confirmed an earlier ruling by the same court that the Tarlabası renewal was not, as the application of Law No. 5366 suggested, in the best interest of the public, and cancelled the entire project (Doğan2017). However, between the first court ruling, the appeals, and the final verdict, neither demolitions nor constructions were halted by project stakeholders. The Beyoğlu mayor dismissed earlier court orders as a formality (Can 2020: 145). As of 2021, four years after the final ruling, the project is still under construction and planned to be finalised by 2022. It would be interesting to analyse how legality, illegality, and stigma intersect in the Tarlabası Renewal Project, and how the disregard for the court order is connected to the social construction of a stigmatised neighbourhood. In the same way, it is important to analyse to what extent the stigma obscures such government practices in the eyes of the non-resident community.

During my fieldwork and my life in Tarlabası, I regularly came across urban activists involved in anti-gentrification and anti-displacement struggles elsewhere in Istanbul who expressed in various ways, such as derogatory comments or simply silence on the issue, that Tarlabası was not a neighbourhood that was “worth” fighting for. Often, they reproduced the same stigmatising discourse dominant in the mainstream media or public policies. This shows that further research is needed into how intersecting stigmas of a tainted social identity and territorial disrepute influence non-resident activism against contentious urban interventions.

My focus on intersectionality and spatial stigma in Tarlabası leads to the question how territorial stigmatisation plays out in areas where the community is not broken down into small minority groups, for example in predominantly Kurdish cities in the southeast of Turkey. Of course, those are completely different ethnographic sites, but this problematic poses an interesting question since a lot of locations in the predominantly Kurdish provinces have been subjected to state-led dispossession and violence in recent years. Between 2015 and 2016, entire urban areas were wiped off the map during sieges that the Turkish state laid to Kurdish districts and neighbourhoods as part of the violent conflict between Kurdish militants and state security forces. Some of them have subsequently been rebuilt as luxury housing sites that are out of reach for their former inhabitants. How do intersectionality and stigma play out in an area that is more uniformly Kurdish, and what are the lines along which solidarity takes shape – or not – in a situation where Kurds are not a minority group in the local community? Which fault lines exist in a majority Kurdish geography that suffers a deep territorial stigma for its

Kurdishness? How do reactions to stigmatisation play out in areas where intersectionality is not as fragmented as it was in Tarlabası, and where local residents might have the tools to reject the capacity of the Turkish mainstream discourse to distort their self-perception. Due to a focus on the collective Kurdish experience in Tarlabası, this book also opens a window into further research of trauma as a result of state repression and displacement, especially in predominantly Kurdish areas in the southeast of Turkey that have remained underrepresented both in academia and journalism.

The reason these are all important questions is because we ought to be interested in how and why people resist, and how and why people do not resist when they have been stigmatised in the name of neoliberal dispossession, something that happens all the time, and in many different contexts. What kind of conditions create the capacity to effectively resist these kinds of forces? How can people challenge, oppose, or even stop these forces? The question of how stigmatisation and the resulting invisibilisation provide cover for severe human rights abuses, hidden while in plain sight, remains in urgent need of answering.

Gone

Halil Usta and Necmi Usta were amongst the last to leave on Tree Street. By October 2012, they had found and rented another shop further down the street. The semi-basement room required a lot of repair work and some renovation, and both barbers hoped to be able to stay put in their old shop until they were finished preparing the new one. However, by that time Necmi Usta was already working in a barbershop in a military hotel [*ordu evi*] four days a week, and only came to see customers in Tarlabası on Thursdays. Halil Usta rarely came anymore at all. He felt dejected and alone in a street where all his former friends and neighbours had left. The coffeehouse at the corner had long since closed down. The chicken döner restaurant of his friends Ekin and Seray was gone, too, and they mostly spoke on the phone now, since the couple lived in Sultanbeyli, a *gecekondu* neighbourhood on the Asian side of the city. When I saw Halil Usta in early 2013, he said:

I have not come here in a very long time. I don't come here anymore, not even during the holidays [*bayram*]. What is left here? There is no café, either, and [the owner] has not opened another one. If he does open another one further down the street, that would be no use to me either. Everyone's gone anyway. And the café needs to be close to the barbershop, in case that customers come.

After that, Halil Usta took on a job as parking lot attendant in his suburb of Bostancı. Necmi Usta said that he had problems with his health and a "bad foot" and could not stand up for long times anymore.

Years later, in a 2019 visit to Istanbul, Halil Usta told me that he did not want to come to Tarlabası anymore at all, and he had not, because it made him too sad and reminded him of everything that had been lost.

View from Cemile's apartment after eviction

Photo by Jonathan Lewis

After days of waiting for the municipality to come and evict them, Cemile and Ramazan moved into a rental apartment on nearby Hill Street, a little closer to Taksim Square, in August of 2011. They had invested into repainting the small two-bedroom place, and Cemile had spent weeks scrubbing and cleaning the run-down kitchen and the toilet that doubled as a shower. For a while she continued to visit the women from her old building who now lived scattered all over Beyoğlu, but these visits trickled to a halt after a while. In June 2013, during my reporting on the Gezi Park protests in Istanbul, I met Cemile walking in the park. It was the height of the movement, and the park had been transformed into an activist campsite, filled with tents and information stands, a library, a community garden, a teahouse, medical facilities, and free food stands. Various activists and political groups sat together in discussion, there was music and a general euphoric atmosphere that had not yet been dampened by the clearance of the adjacent occupied Taksim Square earlier that week.

Despite the diversity and plurality of groups and characters in the park, Cemile looked a little out of place, but she was ecstatic.

I was curious and I wanted to come and see what Gezi Park was like now. It's really nice, isn't it? I wanted to convince the other women in my Qur'an reading group to join me, I can't wait to tell them about all this. All these kids! Can you believe this? That many people? They should have done this earlier, when the municipality came to demolish my house.

Cemile pulled a small white dust mask from her purse and held it up to me, saying that she had come prepared. Ever since the teargas cartridge had landed in her living room, she was afraid of violent police interventions. That fear was not enough to keep her away. A few years later, Cemile was evicted from her rental apartment in Hill Street by investors

who wanted to turn the entire building into an apartment hotel, a type of tourist accommodation that was shooting up all over Beyoğlu at the time, driving up prices and displacing residents. Cemile and Ramazan had to move in with their daughter, waiting for the completion of the renewal project.

Project billboards burned during 2013 Gezi protests



Photo by Jonathan Lewis

Müge left her home in Bird Street to move back with her family in Izmir for a while. The informal brothel, the teahouse, and the cobbler's workshop were all evicted. Finally, the entire street was fenced up before demolitions. When she had to leave her home in September 2011, Müge had wanted to move to Bahçeşehir, a middle class residential neighbourhood on the western outskirts of the city, where she had made a downpayment on a flat in a gated community [site]. She had to pay 310 TL every month and hoped to move into the new flat with Gülay and eventually, her mother from Izmir. However, she had problems paying her instalments on time, and for a while faced serious money issues that she struggled, and ultimately failed, to solve, which meant that she defaulted on her mortgage and had no place to live in Istanbul.

I did not see Müge for a long time, and she did not answer or return my phone calls. In 2017, I saw her on the street, but almost did not recognise her: she looked pale and emaciated, her hair was matted, and her clothes ripped and dirty. She did not recognise me and was unable to focus. Müge, who had always been so meticulous about her appearance and her manners, looked dishevelled. Gülay, who had moved into a place closer to Taksim Square together with other single women, later told me what had happened. Apparently Müge had fallen into a severe depression and started to take drugs. Gülay said that she tried to pry her friend away but failed, and Müge's mental and physical health deteriorated further. By the time I had seen her, Gülay said that "nobody was able to talk to her

anymore”, that she had gotten “violent”, and that she mostly lived on the streets. Burcu continued to work in Tarlaabaşı, on the opposite side of Tarlaabaşı Boulevard, but constant police and *zabıta* controls made this increasingly difficult. The network of trans* women in Bird Street had been dispersed.

Waiting for eviction



Photo by Jonathan Lewis

Alev married and moved with her husband Özgür into a spacious three-bedroom apartment a few streets from her parents and her brother's family in Hacıahmet, a neighbourhood very close to Tarlaabaşı where many Kurdish families live. Alev stayed in touch with the women from her old building as much as possible, and for a while both Cemile or Fikriye, her former upstairs neighbour, regularly came to visit. She kept working in the textile workshop. Her husband sold water, tissues, and other necessities on Taksim Square. They worked hard to make themselves comfortable and hoped to give her parents the opportunity to visit their old village in Mardin province. Alev and Özgür invested in new furniture, a flatscreen TV. During the Gezi Park protests, he volunteered in one of the makeshift clinics. When I visited her in 2016, she had two children, and said that they were happy. When we talked about Tarlaabaşı, the anger and the sadness about what had happened were very close to the surface:

They promised us that nobody would be victimised, but they victimised all of us. They threw all of us out into the street. What are laws in Turkey worth if they allow this? [...] First listen to the people, to what they have to say. Speak about personal freedoms, unemployment and poverty first, and then about giant construction projects.

Six days after his failed eviction, Kemal moved out. His sister had found an affordable basement apartment in the suburb of Bayrampaşa for him, and Kemal said that the local

district governor's office there would grant him some financial assistance. The municipality hired a small lorry for him that fit most of his belongings, but Kemal had to take the public bus to get to his new home in Bayrampaşa. On the way to the bus station on Tarlabası Boulevard, he hugged his neighbours and friends good-bye.

Kemal and Sarı

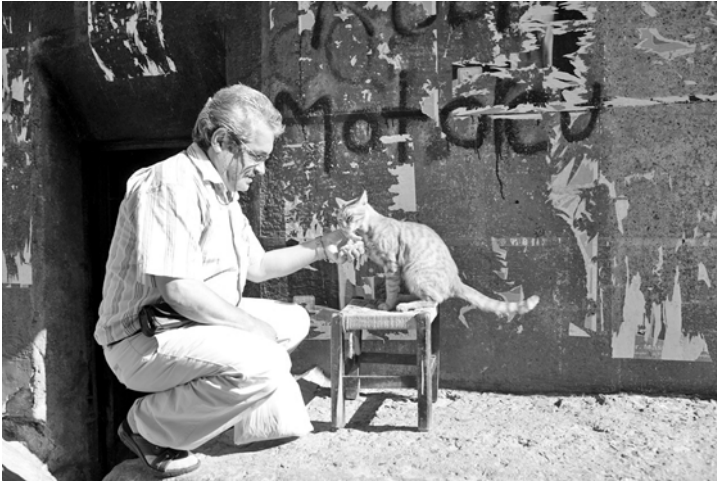


Photo by Jonathan Lewis

For a while, Kemal came to visit. In his old Tarlabası home he had looked after a gaggle of five street cats, for whom he had put out food, and, if he had a little money, pieces of meat he bought at the butcher shop. In February 2012, I met him in the teahouse where he was playing cards with Halil Usta, second-hand furniture seller Maher, and the teahouse owner. Two months later I visited him in his new apartment in one of the many high-rises in his new neighbourhood.

I knew everyone in Tarlabası, they all helped me out. Here nobody helps me. And [various charities] came to my house there, now I moved, and I have not been able to notify them. [In Tarlabası], a friend of mine registered me with them, and I don't know how to do that. [...] It's difficult here. I go to the market but can't buy anything. [...] My neighbours are good people, but I don't know them well. It's not like Tarlabası. Here, nobody knows each other's names.

As the months passed, his visits to Tarlabası trickled to a halt. Kemal was distressed to have left the cats behind, especially his favourite, "Sarı" [The yellow one], who had glued himself to Kemal's leg each time he came to visit his old street. A neighbour who had looked after the tomcat could not do so any longer as her court case against the municipality was concluded, and she had to leave. Kemal said that he felt guilty for abandoning Sarı, but his new landlord did not allow for cats in the house.

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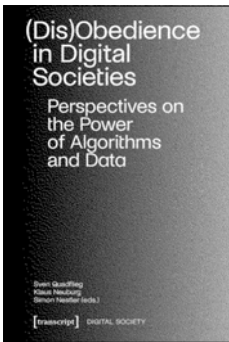
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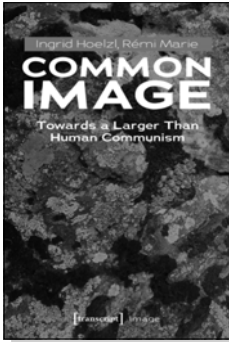
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