

## Chapter three: Judging Books by Their Covers

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Cemile, a Turkish woman in her sixties, first heard rumours about the planned renewal project in Tarlaabaşı 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.<sup>1</sup> However, to property owners like Cemile this public proposition signalled that the municipality had not forgotten about Tarlaabaşı 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 Tarlaabaşı 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 Tarlaabaşı, 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 19<sup>th</sup>-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:

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1 In 2008, the Tarlaabaşı 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 Bey<sup>2</sup> 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 m<sup>2</sup> apartment had been appraised at 83,000 TL, whereas the value 52 m<sup>2</sup> 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*<sup>3</sup>, 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

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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.<sup>4</sup> 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.<sup>5</sup> 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

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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”<sup>6</sup> 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 20,000m<sup>2</sup>. 278 buildings, 210(213)<sup>7</sup> 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:

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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 Tarlaabaşı 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: On the one hand the project will bring economic regeneration to Tarlaabaşı 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 “Tarlaabaşı 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 Tarlaabaşı 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 Tarlaabaşı street where the only visible person is an unrecognisable individual in a wheelchair who inexplicably faces a grey wall, the catalogue text reads:

“Although Tarlaabaşı 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 Tarlaabaşı

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.<sup>8</sup>

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

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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,<sup>9</sup> 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.<sup>10</sup> At that time, residents such as Cemile were told that rumours about eviction and demolition plans of the municipality were false.

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- 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 Tarlaşaşı 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 Tarlaşaşı 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.<sup>11</sup> 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 Tarlaşaşı 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 Tarlaşaşı 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 Tarlaşaşı 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 Tarlaşaşı 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 Tarlaşaşı 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 "Tarlaşaşı Association of Property Owners and Tenants for Progress and Solidarity" in March 2008. By that time Tarlaşaşı 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 Tarlaşaşı 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 Tarlaşaş 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 Tarlaşaş 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 Tarlaşaş (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 Tarlaşaş 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 Tarlaşaş (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 Tarlaşaş 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 15<sup>th</sup> 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 Tarlaşaş 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 Tarlaşaş renewal project, Özlem Ünsal (2013: 130) notes that the "juxtaposition of 'the beginning' and 'the end' held strong implications for the community members of Tarlaşaş since the experience of Sulukule provided them with a foresight as to what could happen in the future." And indeed, Tarlaşaş 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 Tarlaşaş 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).<sup>12</sup> 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.<sup>13</sup>

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. Eczacıbaşı.

13 The economic success of the AKP depended on the ability of the government to initiate projects like the one in Tarlaözü, 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 Tarlaözü 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 TOKİ, 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).<sup>14</sup>

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 catalogue<sup>15</sup>: 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 Tarlaşaşı 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 Tarlaşaşı 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 Tarlaşaşı 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.<sup>16</sup>

## 2011 catalogue: The neighbourhood

In the 2011 version of the catalogue, the first images of Tarlabaşı 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”.<sup>17</sup> 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 Tarlabaşı project. Next to four colour photographs that show traces of Levantine architecture in run-down Tarlabaşı buildings – a row of bowfront houses, an arched doorway – the catalogue text lauds the neighbourhood as one where 19<sup>th</sup>-century civil architecture can be found, the historicity of which is underlined by an image of a 1945 Pervititch map<sup>18</sup> of the area. The 2011 catalogue clearly emphasises the “heritage value” of Tarlabaşı, 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 Tarlabaşı 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 Tarlabaşı 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 Tarlabaşı – and whom they imagine will live there after the renewal – return in the 2011 catalogue. A few pictures were added, including two images of Tarlabaşı 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 Tarlabaşı 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 aid<sup>19</sup>, the uncertainty about the timeline of the project, and the developers' unwillingness to discuss either with Tarlaşaşı 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 Tarlaşaşı 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

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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.<sup>20</sup> 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.<sup>21</sup> 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.

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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.