Chapter two: Waking the Poisoned Princess

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Brief history of a stigmatised neighbourhood

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Recycling business

Photo by Jonathan Lewis

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

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

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

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

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

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

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(Creating) A place a part

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

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

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

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

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

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

Branding Beyoğlu, framing Tarlabaşı

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

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

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

Nostalgia

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

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

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

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

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

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

Exploiting the bad reputation of Tarlabaşı

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Symbolic politics and state-led stigmatisation

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

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

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

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

Place: Stigmatisation of Tarlabaşı as a dilapidated neighbourhood

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

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

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

Tarlabaşı 2009

Photo by Jonathan Lewis

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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Neither did the municipality prevent the massive looting of timber, doors, windows, and metal from pipes and stabilising structures from abandoned buildings. Most looters were Tarlabaşı residents from outside the renewal zone who hoped to sell recycled materials such as copper and other metals. Sometimes parting tenants and former house owners took out floors, stairs and railings as well as other wooden materials in order to use it for heating their new homes. Others, as I will explain in more detail in chapter nine, did not want to leave materials they had bought and paid for to the municipality out of principle. But the removal of these materials and structures led to the collapse, or partial collapse, of several buildings – by extreme chance nobody was ever killed or seriously injured – and to a rapid, and very visible, further decay of the neighbourhood. Despite these evident dangers the municipality did not prevent looting for a very long time, partly to discourage squatters to move into abandoned buildings[6], but it also fed into the useful narrative of Tarlabaşı as a "lost case", and, as mayor Demircan had called the neighbourhood, "a poisoned princess". Residents described the appearance of Tarlabaşı after 2011 as a "war zone".

Image

> "Tarlabaşı, that throughout history has been the 'in' neighbourhood of Beyoğlu, will throw off its current appearance and become a liveable place again." – *Ahmet Misbah Demircan* (Yapi.com.tr 2015)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

People: stigmatisation of Tarlabaşı residents

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

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

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

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

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

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

Kurds

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Trans*women / Trans* sex workers

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

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

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

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

In Turkey, the sex economy is regulated and legal according to laws that were originally drawn up in 1930, but sex work is heavily stigmatised and sex workers face marginalisation, discrimination, and physical violence. Brothels are allowed to operate under private ownership if they are licensed by the state, and sex workers have to apply for a permit to work there.[9] The laws pertaining to the sex work economy only cover cis women[10], which means that trans* sex workers have to work under precarious and dangerous conditions. While de jure illegal, the sex work economy in Tarlabaşı is very visible, and well established. Trans* sex work makes up a significant part of the sex economy in Istanbul but has also long been the focus of national concern and anxiety. Trans* persons and trans* sex work present a threat to Turkish heteronormative masculinity, and in extension, to the integrity and the self-image of the modern Turkish nation. It has been well established that heteronormativity is foundational to the modern nation state (Enloe, 1990; Nagel, 1998). A lot of research and work has been done to critically analyse gendered nationalism and to deconstruct the language through which nationalism reinforces and justifies sexual control and repression, and on how nation-building, heteronormative gender binaries and hegemonic masculinity intersect. Sexuality and sexual behaviour must be policed and kept under control, as "erotic autonomy signals danger to the heterosexual family and the nation […] and brings with it the potential of undoing the nation entirely" (Alexander 2005: 23). Scholars in Turkey have explored the links between militarism, nationalism and gender in the making of the modern Turkish nation state and have shown that Turkish national identity is constructed around the gendered concept of Turkey as a "military-nation", naturalising a rigid heteronormativity of Turkish nationalist masculinity (Altinay 2004; Selek 2009).

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

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

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

Trans sex worker preparing for work, Saturday night*

Photo by Jonathan Lewis

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

'*Köylüler*': rural migrants

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

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

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

Criminalising Tarlabaşı

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

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

Tarlabaşı was one of ten Istanbul neighbourhoods listed as an area with high rates of crime and a high concentration of criminals by the police (Sakızlıoğlu 2014a: 177). Police raids and highly mediatised police operations were therefore relatively frequent. The water cannon and the armoured police vehicles parked in front of the Tarlabaşı police station on the street corner of Kalyoncu Kulluk Street and Tarlabaşı Boulevard fortified the impression that the neighbourhood was criminal and dangerous. Reminiscent of Wilson and Kelling's (1982) "broken window" theory that links rising crime rates to deteriorating physical conditions in a neighbourhood[12], mayor Demircan alleged that Tarlabaşı was a security threat because of the many empty buildings in the neighbourhood. He claimed that these ruins facilitated crime by harbouring thieves and therefore threatened the safety and wellbeing of the rest of the city (Ercan 2005). Therefore, "cleaning up" Tarlabaşı would bring down the crime rate in the rest of Beyoğlu and Istanbul, because thieves and pickpockets would not be able to hide in abandoned buildings anymore.[13]

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Abandoned building

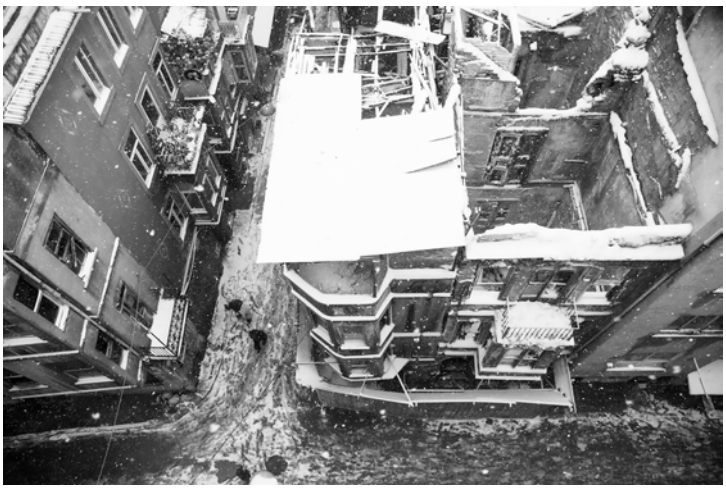

Photo by Jonathan Lewis

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

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

Forced displacement as urban colonialism and erasure

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

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

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

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

Everyday Tarlabaşı

Photo by Jonathan Lewis

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Children playing

Photo by Jonathan Lewis

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

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

Mobile poğaça seller

Photo by Jonathan Lewis

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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