

## Chapter seven: In the eye of the beholder

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In 2012, after evictions had gotten well underway, geographer and anthropologist David Harvey came to Tarlabaşı for a video interview about state-led gentrification and housing rights with our (now defunct) blog “Tarlabaşı-Istanbul” (Tarlabaşı Istanbul 2012). The videographer suggested using an abandoned row of buildings just inside the renewal zone as a backdrop for the shoot. Refuse lined the entrance of the deserted houses, and the walls were covered with scribbles and graffiti. All doors and windows had been removed, which reinforced the image of ruin. Harvey offered to sit down on the stoop of one of the buildings, behind him a gaping hole where the door had been. Scattered garbage bags thrown into the empty building were visible behind him. However, before the interview could begin, a woman who lived in an opposite building, the row of which lay outside the project area, started to shout from her window. She castigated us not only for making Harvey sit “in the dirt”, but also for choosing to portray Tarlabaşı in such a negative way:

Why do you make that old uncle [*amca*] sit in the dirt like that? Why do you have to film him in this filth? Can't you see what it looks like here? Why would you want to show this to the whole world? All this garbage, these ruined houses! What a shameful sight. Why do journalists always want to show everyone how dirty Tarlabaşı is? As if this was the only thing people want to see!

I told her that our location choice for the interview was supposed to illustrate the injustice of ongoing evictions. Still talking to us from her window, she disagreed and argued that such a frame rather perpetuated the image of Tarlabaşı as a dirty, run-down neighbourhood. After a few minutes of friendly squabbling, the woman joined us outside. There she explained how she regularly swept the street. She also threw the garbage bags that others carelessly tossed between the ruins behind the aluminium construction fence that had been erected around the renewal area. The municipality had more or less stopped to dispatch garbage collectors and street sweepers, she explained, so she took it upon herself to keep the surroundings clean. She did that not only because she still lived there and had an interest in basic urban hygiene, but also because she detested that the garbage bags, often ripped open by stray cats and other animals, made Tarlabaşı look dirty and uncared for to outsiders and passers-by.

The woman who objected to our shooting location did not simply accept the negative narrative about her neighbourhood and did not want to concede to the frame of Tarlaabaşı being a filthy, bad place. Her efforts to keep at least her own street clean and her protest over our choice of filming location were a “strategic re-scripting of place” (Nayak 2019: 928). This tactic is not dissimilar to the concept of impression management in social psychology, which is closely related to Erving Goffman’s (1959) concept of self-presentation. Goffman demonstrates that people present themselves strategically in order to try and control how others perceive them, chiefly to ward off embarrassment and loss of status. Scholars studying impression management have shown that the tactics people employ to manage their own image vis-à-vis their audience depends on context, and especially on the identity of the person or persons they are speaking to, including their race, class, gender, and their social status (Baumeister 1986; Leary and Kowalski 1990; Banaji and Prentice 1994; Tice et al. 1995; Brown 1997; Pitcan et al. 2018). This is particularly challenging for marginalised groups who are expected to align their presentation of self with the dominant, white, heteronormative, and middle class narrative in order to be accepted as respectable (Pitcan et al. 2018).

This chapter explores examples of how individual Tarlaabaşı residents tried to control outsiders’ perceptions of them through impression management of themselves and their immediate surroundings. Firstly, I establish how territorial stigma creates a backdrop of negative bias that tips interpretation of outsiders’ impressions of an individual who lives in that tainted area towards less favourable interpretations from the outset. Then I analyse the removal of dirt and the investment in one’s physical surroundings as one tactic of impression management in stigmatised Tarlaabaşı. Finally, I examine how the urgency of the successful performance of respectability in Tarlaabaşı was gendered in a particular way. The below examples of impression management do not constitute a direct challenge, or opposition to the territorial stigma, but individual attempts by individual residents to shift the negative focus away from themselves by trying to prove that the stigmatising narrative was unjustified or wrong.

## Impression management in a stigmatised neighbourhood

On August 10, 2011, the now defunct left-leaning daily newspaper *Radikal* published a reportage about the ongoing evictions in Tarlaabaşı. The piece, available online and in print, included written portraits of all the remaining inhabitants of the apartment building on Tree Street and a photo gallery that included, amongst others, pictures of Cemile and her husband Ramazan. On the day of publication, I visited them in their new rental apartment they had finally found and moved into after their eviction in July 2011. Cemile was very upset. She had received a phone call from her relatives in Antakya about the *Radikal* article, letting her know that they had seen her and her husband’s pictures. They also told her how shocked they had been to hear about the circumstances of her expulsion and the destitution that she and Ramazan apparently found themselves in. I had not yet seen the article and neither had Cemile, so I went out to buy a copy of the newspaper in a nearby *bakkal*. A picture of Cemile was at the top of the frontpage, and more pictures of her illustrated the article itself. The photograph on the cover showed her in half pro-

file, standing in her old bedroom. The bedroom floor was covered in rubble, shards, and pieces of bricks. She was looking towards the large gaps where the windows had been, but both the glass and the PVC frames were missing. The most humiliating detail of the photograph, in Cemile's eyes, was that she was not wearing her headscarf, but only the undercap that she wore to prevent slippage. Cemile was a deeply religious woman who did not even allow her own children to own or display photographs of her in their homes, therefore the fact that her semi-uncovered face was now on display for the whole nation to see horrified her. Furthermore, she was deeply ashamed that her home looked like an uncared-for ruin on the frontpage of a national newspaper. And her relatives in Antakya now thought that she had lived in such a place!

In addition to the images that Cemile felt had been published without her consent<sup>1</sup>, she was deeply offended that the accompanying article portrayed her and Ramazan as destitute. The journalist, a reporter who had worked on housing issues and urban renewal in Istanbul for years and who was sympathetic to the plight of Tarlabaşı residents, described the bad deal that Ramazan and Cemile had been forced to accept by the development company, the insurmountable debt they had incurred as a result, and the few remaining possessions they had been able to take from their old home to their new, "tiny", rental apartment. She quoted Cemile as follows: "There is no money left in our pockets. [...] We boiled eggs for iftar and ate them, we haven't eaten anything else in 16 hours. We never relied on anyone all our lives, how can we now ask anyone to buy bread for us" (Ince 2011a)? When Cemile later explained to me why she was upset about this, she argued that her comment had been framed to make her look discontented and poor, but that she had in fact only expressed a logistical problem:

Yes, I boiled some eggs in the evening. I never expected that [journalist] to do something so bad. My son called me, he was very upset that we had gone hungry. But we had not gone hungry! I simply didn't have anything else to cook that evening. You know how it was! The oven was already gone, that's why I boiled the eggs. I was so ashamed, [the article] made us look like beggars. And we never ask anyone for anything!

The journalist had wanted to show the desperation of Tarlabaşı residents to illustrate the destructiveness and injustice of the renewal project. On the day of her visit in mid-July 2011, during the month of Ramadan, Cemile and Ramazan were waiting for their eviction and lived, somewhat improvised, amongst their packed and boxed-up possessions. At the time an intense heat wave swept the city, making daytime fasting more difficult and sleep almost impossible. Cemile suffered from insomnia, extreme stress and anxiety following several altercations with project officials and the police. Ramazan, angry

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1 The photographer who had accompanied the Turkish journalist was an American woman who did not speak any Turkish. I had been in Cemile's apartment when she had taken the pictures, and it was not entirely clear to me where the miscommunication had happened. The photographer had openly and very obviously taken pictures in the house and of Cemile. I am not sure if the photographer had assumed consent for publication in the newspaper because she had been with the journalist, or if she had asked, but had not been clear about the planned publication in *Radikal*. However it had happened, Cemile would have never agreed to having her picture published like that, had she been asked to give her informed consent on the matter.

about the municipality's refusal to postpone the expulsion, had broken out all PVC window frames that the couple was still paying instalments for at the time, and given them away to recyclers. He had taken to them with a sledgehammer, which meant that pieces of brick and plaster had come off the walls and were still strewn on the floor when the photographer took the pictures.

On the day of the interview Cemile had told me, too, about the meagre *iftar* meal consisting only of boiled eggs. I knew that her despair at the time had been real. Both the description of the apartment and the quote in the article were accurate. Cemile and Ramazan *had been* destitute, and they had been, and still were, very anxious about the large amount of money they would have to pay the developer as part of the deal they had been forced to make with them. This begs the question why Cemile was this upset about the frame of the *Radikal* article. At the time of the interview, she had desperately tried to postpone the eviction from what she felt was still *her* house. Moreover, she and her husband had been forced to relocate to a small, somewhat run-down rental apartment a few streets over from her old building, since the housing market pickings had been limited and they urgently needed a place to go. This meant that they had to get rid of many of their possessions, such as pieces of furniture that would not fit in the new rental flat.

Cemile's numerous attempts to hold the municipal authorities to account for their lie – or at least consequential misinformation – that there would not be any demolitions had fallen flat. By July 2011, nobody at the Beyoğlu Municipality or GAP *Inşaat* even accepted her phone calls anymore. It had been a rare and somewhat unexpected opportunity for Cemile to be able to talk to the journalist about her situation, about her outrage, about her feelings of helplessness about the looming eviction and the difficult situation it left her and her husband in. Finally someone, and someone who was potentially able to get the attention of the authorities via the national media, was willing to listen. It was impossible for Cemile not to seize this chance when she was so full of anger and when those responsible for the project refused to listen to her.

By mentioning the boiled eggs she and Ramazan had eaten for *iftar*, she had meant to send a message to project stakeholders, shaming them for the desperation they had forced on residents, especially during Ramadan. However, it was not them who responded. Her son who lived in Istanbul with his family and who visited her often, also called Cemile about the article, distressed to hear that his mother had gone hungry and not told him about it. Her Antakya relatives, including two of her younger sisters, were distraught to hear about her debt. Cemile was afraid that neighbours and members of her Qur'an study group might also read what she had told the journalist and think of her as destitute and in need of assistance. Cemile felt that this was especially shameful because her answer in the newspaper had implied that none of them had come to help her, which was not true. Her decision to tell the journalist about the difficult situation she had been left in also potentially shamed those closest to her, especially her own children. In the end Cemile called the journalist and asked her to take down the photographs and amend the article. To the reporter's surprise and distress, she even threatened to open a court case. It was an attempt to manage the intersecting stigma of being poor and living in Tarlabaşı, and to have some control of how she, her home and her life were being represented. Instead of succeeding in her attempt to show that

it was really the fault of the renewal project and project stakeholders that they only had a few boiled eggs to eat for *iftar*, Cemile found herself having to manage the fact that her children, her sisters, and other family members or members of other groups she was a part of felt embarrassed and ashamed by the *Radikal* article.<sup>2</sup> For Cemile, it was the almost impossible balancing act of describing her destitution to accuse and shame project developers while at the same time hiding it from her family, neighbours and friends. In a way, Cemile struggled with the management of what Richard Sennett and Jonathan Cobb (1972: 196) call the “divided self”, the “[p]rotective alienation of the real person from the performing individual”, whereby this performing, socially mandated self is called into service by people who hold any kind of power over the person, such as, in Cemile’s case, strong social expectations by her family or her Qur’an study group. Necmi Erdoğan (2007: 72), in his research on the “injuries of difference” of poor people in Turkey, demonstrates that the performative self is regularly mobilised inside the home and the family. İsmet, a worker from Istanbul, conceals the fact that he cleans stairs for a living from his elderly mother and his teenage daughter, telling them that he is employed as a chef in the local municipality instead, in order to spare them the grief and preserve his own self-respect in front of his close family members (*ibid.*).

Cemile exposed her real feelings, and her private problems, to the journalist in an attempt to reach the audience that project stakeholders refused her. However, the familial guilt and the implied blame of the family’s expressed concern moved Cemile to retract her original statement, and to say that it just been a coincidence and logistical issue that they could only eat boiled eggs for *iftar*, when in fact she knew that this was really not the case – and so did the journalist who tried to convey the destitution that Tarlaabaşı residents had been abandoned to.

This effort to manage her own image did not cease after her eviction. When I visited Cemile almost a year after she had to leave her old home, she insisted on showing me a glossy brochure published by the Beyoğlu Municipality as part of a marketing campaign advertising large urban renewal projects in their district. She had first come across it in one of the municipal neighbourhood houses [*semt konakları*] and picked up a few copies after leafing through it and finding a photograph of her old building alongside a text advertising the Tarlaabaşı renewal project. One of the pictures chosen to illustrate the municipality’s plan, taken from a low angle, showed the front façade of her old apartment, with the PVC window frames and the balcony railings missing. One had to look very carefully to even notice this detail in the photograph, but Cemile had seen it right away. She was incensed:

I took this brochure because I saw our house in it. It must be a recent photograph because there is no balcony and no window. It is outrageous [*çok ayıp*] to put such a photo-

2 On one hand they were right to be embarrassed, because according to social norms in Turkey, they were responsible for their close relatives being destitute, which is also one important reason why project developers could get away with their abject treatment of Tarlaabaşı residents: people in need are not supposed to be the problem of the state, but of their families and communities. The most important part of this narrative, that they had just destroyed this community in Tarlaabaşı, remained unsaid.

graph in this magazine. They make it look as if everything was run-down, but it wasn't like that! We had washing lines, we had everything!

The picture that upset Cemile was by far not the most stigmatising in the brochure. However, because it showed her own house, the one that she had taken such pride in renovating and maintaining before being evicted from it, the manipulation at work in the marketing campaign was deeply injurious to her. Employed to illustrate the need for the renewal of a dilapidated neighbourhood, it had in fact been taken after residents had already been moved out. Furthermore, the image angered Cemile because it not only misrepresented her home, and by extension her and her family, but also because she felt that it somehow blamed her for the bad state of the area.

Parallel to Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's (1988) well-known observation that subaltern groups cannot speak, these anecdotes show that they also have very little say in how they and their environments are being represented. I have shown in chapter two that the municipality had the power to determine which representations secured hegemony and how the narrative around Tarlaşaşı and the renewal project were framed. John Beverley (1999: 66) writes that "[o]ne of the things being subaltern means is not mattering, not being worth listening to". Cemile had no control over how her neighbourhood was portrayed to a wider audience. However, she did not unquestioningly internalise the prevailing negative representations. Therefore, she picked up several more copies of the offending brochure and showed them to others, visitors like me, in order to provide a rectified narrative. She explained that the picture was a deliberate attempt by the marketing department of the Beyoğlu Municipality to manipulate the perception of the neighbourhood by using images of homes that had already been evicted. Cemile insisted that the dominant image of Tarlaşaşı as a neighbourhood of decay omitted the positive aspects of it, underlining only what was bad and glossing over the many smaller and more substantive actions that residents took in order to make it better.

These three examples show that images of and anecdotes about Tarlaşaşı in the press (or promotional material such as the catalogue Cemile picked up) operated on more than one level. The same image might be read in two different, and diametrically opposed, ways. The physical backdrop we chose for the video interview with David Harvey operated on the level of stigma that the woman across the street was worried about: she was sure that the dilapidated houses, the garbage and the rubble would reinforce the dominant negative image that the neighbourhood already had. However, the backdrop also worked on a visual level that involved contextual knowledge of why the street looked abandoned and run-down, and why the garbage was not being picked up, which was the reason that the videographer had insisted on this location and why it was valuable. The same backdrop that the woman in the window had found embarrassing was also evidence of the injustice inflicted upon the neighbourhood and that we were trying to report on.

The images and anecdotes that proved how grim and deeply injurious the entire project development process had been could equally work as something deeply embarrassing that only bolstered the existing stigma. However, the balance between the two is not even. Territorial stigma influences the interpretation towards the unfavourable explanation. Any such interpretation has to rely on an audience that is both able and willing to hear the full context surrounding an image, and the dominant narrative

surrounding Tarlabası foreclosed that option in the vast majority of cases. Most people in Istanbul did not have access to or were unwilling to find out about the full context surrounding the many Tarlabası images and descriptions that circulated, which is why the municipality had the privilege to subsequently make sure that the majority looked at only their representation of Tarlabası and agreed with its destruction.

In the same way, the photograph of Cemile's old home in the municipal marketing brochure, given the right and full context, could have been an excellent example of why the renewal project was deeply problematic. It could have illustrated how this building that had been painstakingly renovated by its occupants, with a nice balcony and new PVC frames, was destroyed and left abandoned by project stakeholders, leaving its former residents to scramble for lower quality housing wherever they could find it. The same image, robbed of its context, was used to stand in as what the house was like when Cemile still lived there, which is entirely implausible. However, this is what it was used as in the brochure. Since it was just an image that depicted a neighbourhood *known* as run-down, as ruined, and as dirty and uncared-for, it was easy for viewers to interpret it the same image by using that frame.

*"Don't litter, lan". Neighbourhood beautification*



Photo by Jonathan Lewis

While not a physical image, the story conveyed by the *Radikal* article could also be understood either way, depending on the available context. Readers could interpret Cemile's anecdote as having been failed by her own family, or they could use it as an explanation of how she and her husband had been crushed by the renewal project. In the case of the reportage, the journalist had provided background information in order to convey the injustice inflicted by project stakeholders. However, the stigmatising narrative of the municipality that there was no community or virtue in Tarlabası, making it plausible

to readers that Cemile's family abandoned her to her fate, overwrote the story the journalist had attempted to communicate. Territorial stigma here puts the burden of proof on the "victims" because the bias leans against them from the start. Even the children, despite having all the necessary background information on how Ramazan and Cemile had been deprived of their home and under what circumstances evictions had been carried out, read the article as an accusation against them, instead of an indictment of the municipality and their project partners.

### Scrubbing off stigma

Scholars have shown that low-income neighbourhoods have long been associated with filth in the middle class imagination (Douglas 1966; Stallybrass and White 1986; Skeggs 1997; Özyegin 2000; Erdoğan 2007). A perceived lack of hygiene and the apparent physical disorder in these urban areas are interpreted as signifiers of deeper character flaws, as a sign of disease, crime, and moral depravity of the poor. The accusations of uncleanness transcend mere aesthetics, and instead pass judgement on the (contemptible) moral character of poor people (Özyegin, 2000: 10).

The stigmatisation of Tarlaşaşı as "filthy" was especially injurious to women who are primarily held responsible for the upkeep of their domestic space. In Turkey, especially in rural areas and low-income urban households, inegalitarian gender relationships and deep-seated patriarchal dynamics result in a normative division of labour (Fikret-Pasa et al. 2001; Sarioğlu 2013; Kavas 2019). Housework tasks and childcare are seen as a woman's prime duty. The concern over cleanliness is therefore a strong (and gendered) marker of status. A clean and orderly home not only represents the housewife, but also her competence as a homemaker and her respectability as a woman (Gürel 2009). In her research about the identity building of working-class women in England, Beverley Skeggs (1997) underlined the way in which hygiene is a strong signifier of respectability. Mary Douglas (1966), in her work on dirt, purity and pollution, argues that many industrialised and non-industrialised societies associate cleanliness with goodness and dirtiness with badness, such that cleanliness and dirtiness take on moral connotations. "Because dirt threatens the sanctity of cleanliness, it is cast as taboo, and societies strive to separate what is clean from what is dirty" (Ashforth and Kreiner 1999: 416).

In Tarlaşaşı, the performance of domestic work was visible everywhere. Many household tasks had to be carried out in the staircases of buildings, on the stoop at the entrance, or in the street, primarily for lack of space inside homes, but also as an important opportunity for women to socialise. Many women completed their chores together with other women from the same family or with female neighbours. This included soaping down and vigorously scrubbing rugs and carpets that were spread out on the street, knitting and other needlework, and the washing and subsequent beating of sheep's wool used as upholstery in pillows and blankets. (The wool was then hung up and dried on lines hung along walls and windows.) Shared washing lines, strung between windows across the street, were ubiquitous. Many kitchen chores, such as preparing bread dough, baking bread, cleaning and cutting vegetables, were also done in shared, public, and semi-public spaces. Women who spent time outside their homes were rarely idle. This visibility of

domesticity was also a way to *show* that one kept busy. It was a way to demonstrate, and for others to witness, that a woman was “doing her job” as a respectable housewife.

As visitors could, and frequently did, drop in unannounced and at any time, this impression management included keeping the house tidy and uncluttered at all times. Cemile described her own fear to be perceived as careless by outsiders:

I am always cleaning. I get up in the morning, and I clean, it's a habit you know. Believe me, I want to wipe down everything, sweep everywhere. [...] I love cleanliness and hygiene. Everything should always be really clean and orderly. Even if it's not that clean, it should at least be orderly. I always tell my daughter and my daughter-in-law, whatever you do, after you get up in the morning you should clean up around yourselves before breakfast. Just in case. The doorbell rings, a guest arrives, and you have to make that guest wait at the door to make the beds? Would that be possible? No way. Sometimes, when you go on a visit to someone's house, there are pyjamas, socks, and other stuff [laying around]. [*Makes a disapproving noise.*] I always say: what if someone comes to visit? Your home should always be clean and orderly.

Just like Cemile, who judged if other women were deserving of respect by the state of their homes, the women in Tarlabası were constantly aware of their social positions and the judgement of real and imaginary others (Skeggs 1997: 4). This anxiety to position themselves as respectable was fed by and intersected with the “haunting shadow” of territorial stigmatisation (Pinkster et al. 2020: 526). The stakes to successfully evade being read in light of this taint were especially high during the run-up to evictions. As described in chapter two, project stakeholders insisted that the neighbourhood was “run-down” and “dirty”, and that homes were “abandoned” and buildings “about to fall down by themselves”. Women challenged this narrative by underlining how much time, money, and effort they invested not only in the daily upkeep, but also in the renovation of their homes. Alev often talked about how she, then still a teenager, had fixed up the apartment that her family had been able to afford because it had been in a state of neglect. She told me how it had taken her several months and a lot of effort to make it liveable again, and how proud she had been for, quite literally, making her own home. When she reminisced about those times, Alev got very emotional.

There was no glass in the windows, no doors, no floor. [...] When I came here, there was no toilet, there was nothing, nothing at all. You know when you enter a cave? That's what the house was like. [...] I did the entire floor, did you know? All by hand! All by myself. I carried [the materials] up the stairs. [...] I never got tired. I had one pair of pants, one jumper. I put my hair up and I pushed a handcart, for the concrete. I would get one bag, then split that bag up into two, and bring them up here. I could not bring up one bag all at once. [*cries*] Making your own house liveable with your own hands, that's great. I didn't just sign somewhere to get this house. This is why this all makes me so sad.

Alev recognised that the house *used to be* decrepit and in a very bad state, but she underlined this only to draw attention to the vast amount of labour and effort she invested to fix it, to make her home “liveable”. Alev had worked day shifts at a textile workshop in the neighbourhood and at night, she had renovated the apartment. Her mother had been

almost immobile due to an illness, her older brother had been away to do his military service, and it had taken her many months to complete the renovation. Together with her father, a kind, elderly man who spoke hardly any Turkish, Alev sold bottled water and packages of tissue paper on nearby Taksim Square to be able to buy plaster, paint, and flooring. She was very proud of what she had achieved, at that age and with such limited resources at her disposal, and proud that all the hard work had resulted in her ability to provide a comfortable home for her elderly parents.

At the time my mother was sick. [...] My only worry was to have enough food so we could eat. Oh dear...it was wonderful despite all that. There is a memory for me in every corner of this house. The electricity lines, the water pipes...I changed all of it. I brought in one or two repairmen. My father and I went out to sell water and we earned a bit of money that way. Sometimes we made five [TL], sometimes ten. I would make tea and bring in a couple of workers. And I had a few friends, I asked them to lend us a hand. There were friends I worked with. I am so grateful to them. That's how we did it. [...] I painted the doors myself because I had no money left. But that's what they say isn't it? You might buy something under difficult circumstances, but you'll keep the beautiful memories.

#### *Home decoration*



Photo by Jonathan Lewis

Alev was sentimentally invested in her house, partly because a great amount of physical and emotional labour had gone into it. To her, the family apartment was much more than just “a place to live”, or mere “brick and mortar”, as British sociologist Chris Allen (2008) claimed of how working-class respondents felt about their homes. In his study of the intersection of social class and housing consumption, Allen notes that working class informants only expressed “a basic functional attachment to where they live” and did not,

as middle class residents did, strongly identify with the home they occupied (Paton 2014: 51). But it is clear from how Alev described the many memories attached to “every corner” of her apartment, as well as from the careful choices of colour, of decoration, and of the effort that she put into the renovation, that her Tarlabası home was much more than just a roof over her head.

Cemile, too, felt a strong emotional connection her home. Both of her then still teenaged children had worked in part-time jobs in order for the family to afford the necessary renovation materials. Cemile recalled that they had to wait for each week’s salary to be able to buy another bucket of paint, plaster, or paint brushes. She and her husband Ramazan had bought the house somewhat in a rush in 1992 after they had to vacate their rental house in a nearby street. Cemile had never actually seen the inside of their future home before they bought it. The tenant at the time of the sale, a woman who rented out the rooms to foreign sex workers, was angry at her landlord for selling his property and did not want to let the new owners in. Even after Cemile and Ramazan held the title deed to the house, the woman refused to vacate the apartment. When she finally did, she left the apartment in a state of utter disrepair out of spite. Cemile said that she was so shocked when she saw the state of the flat that she initially told her husband to sell it again right away.

I remember what the house looked like then. The tenant had broken a flowerpot inside the house because she had been so angry with the landlord. She didn’t open the door when we came. We had to open a court case because she just wouldn’t leave and there was nothing we could do. [...] When she did leave, she broke the windows and filled the toilet with glass. She broke all the keys inside their locks. She also left everything in a dirty state, the whole house was so dirty! When I first saw it, I said [to my husband]: oh dear, I don’t want this [house], go and sell it immediately. When they sent the eviction notice, she just ran off. She had left the electricity and the water running, we had no idea! We were afraid to come here, she was such a vile woman! She shouted and cursed [at us], I was so ashamed. She had such a dirty mouth. She shouted at us from the balcony, she said she was going to kill us. How can you talk to such a person? So we went to court. And finally, after this whole ordeal we were finally able to move into our house...we suffered so much from this house, so much.

In addition to an immense amount of economic capital and physical labour that Cemile and her family had invested in the house, she felt that the emotional hardship – the humiliation and the insults suffered at the hands of the former tenant – had created a strong attachment to this new home. I heard similar stories from other women in Tarlabası: of how they had turned dilapidated houses into habitable, clean, and comfortable homes by investing economic capital, their labour, and their social skills. Interestingly, I was rarely told such anecdotes by men. However, the attempt to manage the stigma of being a woman in a tainted urban area by performing gendered respectability fell flat when project stakeholders refused to recognise this effort. Cemile explained:

We told [the municipality and the developer] that we renovated the house, but they didn’t believe us. I invited [deputy mayor] Fatih Bey for tea so many times, but he never came to visit to see for himself. None of them ever came to visit. If they would have

come and seen what it looks like inside [our house], they would have been amazed! And the experts go around and say that all the houses here are empty. None of them came to have tea with us.

The deputy mayor's brush-off was even more offensive because he had positioned himself as a person who took a deep interest in her and her husband's case.

This, too, was part of the "corrosive social erasure" (Carter 2010: 5) Tarlabası residents were subjected to. The voices and labour of the women who lived in the neighbourhood (were) disappeared behind "a discursive wall of negative tropes" (Carter 2010: 12–13), like the stereotypes of Tarlabası being "dirty", "run-down" and "empty", while the experiences of women like Alev and Cemile, of their constant and hard work to perform and prove their respectability, were ignored. However, despite this hyper-marginalisation women found ways to rewrite, reframe, and contest the stigmatising discourse. Cemile once told me an anecdote about how she invited a group of strangers into her house. The small group that included some foreigners had been walking around Tarlabası, engaging in conversations with local residents. Cemile had insisted on serving them food. This invitation had been an act of kindness and hospitality, but it had also presented her with the opportunity to show outsiders that her home was, contrary to dominant claims about Tarlabası, well-kept, clean, and beautiful. Since her guests had been journalists familiar with the renewal project and those responsible for it, Cemile also hoped that they might communicate their positive impressions to project stakeholders:

I saw this group walking around in the streets, and I invited them in to have breakfast. They were so hungry! They were journalists, some of them were foreigners. [One of the journalists] who came here said: 'Fatih Bey or Nilgün Hanım should talk to me whenever they want, I will go to them and give them my name and tell them that I have been to many houses in Tarlabası, but that I have never seen a cleaner, more beautiful, or bigger apartment than this one. That's what I'll tell them and that's all I'll tell them.

This desire to refute the stigmatisation by performing respectability through cleanliness transcended the effort to oppose forced displacement. While waiting for her eviction and without knowing when the police would turn up to make her turn over the keys to her house, Cemile continued to meticulously clean the entire apartment every day:

I cleaned everything. Everywhere! [My children] say: mum, are you crazy, you are leaving anyway, why are you cleaning? I am so used to it... Look, it's squeaky clean, look, not a single speck of dust anywhere in the whole house! They'll see. [...] They said they would demolish the house, I said fine, let them demolish it, but despite that I will clean things up, there were some scratches and stripes and I scrubbed them off as best I could. I painted my daughter-in-law's old room. So that it would look clean.

For many women in Tarlabası, negotiating daily life amid the looming threat of eviction while coping with the impact of stigmatisation required constant innovation and tactical impression management. Performing as a "respectable woman" and a diligent housewife was one such tactic.

However, female residents were not only concerned about physical grime, the garbage, and the dust on the streets, but also about the metaphorical "dirt" of crime and

the visibility of commercial activities that were illegal and/or deemed to be immoral. When evictions were well underway, and an increasing number of buildings and entire streets were abandoned and fell into ruin, sex work, petty crime, and drug dealing started to become more and more visible. Many of the sex workers who solicited in Tarlaşaşı during that time were non-residents who openly consumed alcohol and used drugs, which stood in stark contrast to local trans\* sex workers. Trans\* sex worker Müge was very uncomfortable with the arrival of these women. She thought that the presence and demeanour of these intoxicated sex workers not only violated an unwritten contract of how sex work was supposed to happen in the neighbourhood, but also put her and her Tarlaşaşı colleagues in a bad light and possibly in danger:

We don't know who these women are, we have never seen them before. They act badly, they behave badly. It is not how it is supposed to be, they have no respect for us and the people who live here. And the worst part is that they make us look very bad. People think that we are like them. That they work with us. People get angry at them, but they also get angry at us.

Like Müge, many residents who remained, and especially women, were left feeling unsafe and “tainted” by their deteriorating surroundings and by the increasingly visible illicit behaviours and activities. Several women I spoke to during that time expressed their discontent over the feeling that these “indecencies” reflected badly onto them, putting their respectability, already threatened by their place of residence, further into question.

Fikriye, the Kurdish woman who lived on the top floor of the building in Tree Street, described how she experienced the increased visibility of daytime sex work in the run-up to and during evictions:

It's very shameful [*çok ayıp*]. As a woman [*bayan*]<sup>3</sup> I don't want to see this, it's shameful to have to see this. There are families living here, women have to go past [the sex workers] every day, and they feel ashamed when they have to do that. And what should my [family members] think when they come to visit? They shouldn't have to see that.

Fikriye expressed her deep discomfort with having to walk past sex workers who solicited in full view of passing women and their children. She was worried what visiting family members who themselves were not Tarlaşaşı residents would think, and think of *her*, when they saw the dirt, both literal and metaphorical, in the neighbourhood she lived in. She underlined the particular shame women, and in extension, their families, experienced in the face of perceived dirtiness and vulgarity. However, and as much as it added to her own feeling of stigmatisation of living in Tarlaşaşı, as a woman Fikriye had very little influence or control over what happened on the street. While she was aware that the regulation of sex work was in no way her responsibility, she was unable to shake the fear that she would be *held responsible* for the image it projected to outsiders, a feeling of shame for living in a stigmatised space that Randol Contreras (2017: 657) calls “spatial anguish”.

3 *Bayan*, loosely translatable as “lady”, is the conservative way to refer to a woman, since it does not distinguish between *kız* [girl/virgin] and *kadın* [woman/no longer a virgin].

In order to resolve this tension of being caught up between the dominant negative imagery of the neighbourhood and a different, more positive self-image, Fikriye and other women in Tarlabası “devised tactics to preserve a sense of themselves as decent and respectable” (Reay and Lucey 2000: 415). One of the tactics available to them was to successfully *perform* domesticity, to keep their domestic space, one of the few where they wielded influence and control, meticulously clean.

A clean and well-ordered house is thought to reflect the good moral standing of the woman who lives there, and by extension, that of her husband and family. Conversely, a cluttered and dirty home is a sign not only of a woman's laziness, but also her suspected lack of morals and family values. This perceived connection between disorder and immorality “exists to such an extent that the dirt and disorder are considered to be the external manifestations of an innate flaw or moral lack, and the dirty woman [...] becomes dirt in herself” (Gallagher 2011).

### Respectability politics in a stigmatised place

Trans\* sex worker Müge once told me about a day she had spent with other trans\* women friends on one of the Princes' Islands, a popular getaway destination for Istanbul residents. Müge had been looking forward to the day away, but came back disgusted, telling me about the “scandalous behaviour” of her friends who had sunbathed topless or by pulling the straps of their bikini tops down in order to avoid tan lines. She felt that this lack of modesty had reflected badly on her, and the negative attention she thought their group had drawn had spoiled her day on the beach. Her friend and colleague Gülay, Müge's best friend and mentor<sup>4</sup>, agreed that this was unacceptable behaviour. Both women felt that trans\* women “like these” reflected badly on the entire trans\* community and were the reason that others disputed their respectability. This fear translated directly onto their life in Tarlabası.

They both lived and worked in Bird Street, a cul-de-sac that led onto Tarlabası Boulevard and that housed the informal brothel. All of the trans\* women who worked on Bird Street solicited customers at the end of the small lane and on the corner with the main boulevard, which allowed them a certain amount of control and relative security, as they could keep an eye on each other there. Both Müge and Gülay never dressed in tight or revealing clothing, not only in their off time, but also when they were soliciting customers. Müge often wore a buttoned-up short-sleeve blouse and trousers, or woollen tops and cardigans in the colder winter months. She usually wore sneakers or other flat-heeled walking shoes, or flat sandals during the summer, and always only wore a subtle amount of make-up and faint lipstick. Gülay wore a similar “office chic”- outfit when she was waiting for customers at the end of the street. When talking to others about herself, she regularly described herself as a “good Muslim woman”, and she observed fasting days.

4 Gülay had taken Müge “under her wings” after her arrival in Istanbul and taught her the ropes of the sex trade and life in the city as a trans\* woman. This system of “big sisters” (*abla*) taking on and helping those who were just entering the trans\* community was very common in Turkey (see Selek 2001; Siyah Pembe Üçgen 2012).

Müge said that she did not like the way some of the other trans\* women in their street dressed, those that preferred tight fabrics, short skirts, and high heels, dismissing them as “too flamboyant” and “unladylike”.

Müge also did not like to use flirty language when she tried to attract customers in the way that some of the other women did. Burdened with the intersecting stigmas of being trans\* women, sex workers, and Tarlaşaşı residents, both Müge and Gülay managed their image and their respectability very carefully. They sought to distinguish themselves from the hyper-feminised and explicitly sexualised self-presentation by some of their trans\* colleagues through embodied and discursive practices meant to establish themselves as respectable and *different* than other trans\* sex workers in Tarlaşaşı. Scholars have described similar processes of disidentification and distinction from the negative narratives that surround sex work in other contexts (Skeggs 1997; De Meis 1999, 2002; Blanchette and Da Silva 2011; Rivers-Moore 2010; Carrier-Moisan 2015).

Both Gülay and Müge were also very clear about the fact that they had not chosen to do sex work. In conversations with me and other researchers, journalists or other interested outsiders I accompanied, they insisted that they had been forced into that line of work due to the pervasive discrimination against trans\* persons in Turkey. Both women said that sex work was a necessity they endured in order to be able to earn a living and save enough money to buy an apartment and retire without having to fear poverty in old age. This rhetoric was a discursive pushback against the dominant, and stigmatising, assumption that trans\* women in Tarlaşaşı preferred sex work to any other type of labour, and that it was in their “nature” to sell sex. Müge sometimes reminisced on the jobs she would have liked to do – beautician, architect, computer engineer – if she would have had the chance to choose her profession. She dreamed of joining one of the vocational courses offered by the education ministry in order to get a “respectable” job.

As an unregistered sex worker, the service she offered was *de jure* illegal, and her business was not listed in any government ledgers. Sometimes she said that she would love to pay taxes like all other working citizens, but “they did not want her money”, and that the law on prostitution in Turkey did not allow for her to participate in society that way. Her identity as a trans\* woman who did sex work, combined with her place of residence in a deeply stigmatised neighbourhood, made her feel like a second-class citizen. It was important for her to discursively push back against this:

It doesn't matter if you're a prostitute [*hayat kadını*], or a transvestite. Why? Because we are all citizens of the Turkish Republic. Every single citizen holds citizenship. They might not be able to have me do my military service, but they are still relying on me. How? I buy this [*picks up a glass from the table*], so I am paying taxes for it. That's the truth. Fine, I don't pay income tax for what I earn. But I buy this, I buy that, so I still pay taxes. But many people don't know that. Many people think that I work without paying any taxes. No! You pay rent, you pay taxes. I buy food for [my cat], one kilo costs 7.50 [TL], so I pay taxes on that after all.

Müge carefully navigated the corridors of state bureaucracy and made sure that all her papers, such as court orders, filed reports or receipts for misdemeanour fines, were shipshape. Whenever a human rights researcher, a journalist, or any other person came by to talk with her about any of these issues, Müge produced a binder where she kept all her

documents. She would explain: “Everything is neatly filed away. I have proof for everything, I don’t throw anything away, not for years.”

Beverly Skeggs (1997: 3) writes that respectability is a moral discourse: it characterises a person in moral terms and accords moral authority to some but not others. Beverly Skeggs writes, “[r]espectability embodies moral authority: those who are respectable have it, those who are not do not. But only some groups were considered to be capable of being moral, others were seen to be in need of control.” Respectability is therefore a system of hierarchy and domination grounded on distinctions between the respectable and the degenerate.

Historian Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham (1993: 186) introduced “the politics of respectability” to describe how late 19<sup>th</sup>-century black Baptist women presented themselves as polite, morally upstanding, chaste and thrifty in order to reject “white America’s depiction of black women as immoral, childlike, and unworthy of respect or protection”. Since then, scholarship on respectability politics has shown how marginalised and stigmatised groups enact a sequence of attitudes and behaviours that recreate dominant norms, self-presentation strategies that aim to counter negative stereotypes that aim to disavow them of their right to full citizenship (Giles 1992; Higginbotham 1993; Harris 2003; Joshi 2012; Morris 2014; Pitcan et al. 2018). Higginbotham (1993) describes respectability politics as a successful strategy to overcome social and legal exclusion based on racist structures. However, critics of respectability politics point out that the concept both reflects and reinforces the norms of the status quo: a white middle class, cisheteronormative frame for understanding the behaviours of marginalised groups from a gendered, sexist, classist, and racist perspective (Wolcott 2013). Furthermore, the focus on the individual struggle ignores structural inequalities (Pitcan et al. 2018: 164). Others have argued that respectability politics reinforces intra-group hierarchies by ostracising those perceived as shameful and unworthy of respect, in favour of normative behaviour that is deemed respectable (Ward 2008; Wolcott 2013; Pitcan et al. 2018). This is well illustrated by the anecdotes of Müge and Gülay.

This begs the question how the stakes of successfully performing respectability varied for different Tarlaşaşı residents. What happened if the performance failed? Cemile performed respectability as a means to social safety, to avoid being ostracised from her social surroundings and her peers. Müge used it as a tactic to assure her physical (Human Rights Watch 2008a; Amnesty International 2011b; Ördem 2016) as well as her social safety. She felt that she needed to distance herself from the hyper-feminised, “flamboyant” trans\* women around her, and she needed to disassociate herself from the sex workers who arrived in the neighbourhood after evictions had started. For Müge, the successful performance of respectability really was an issue of safety, which raises the question how territorial stigmatisation can put people in danger, and if women are affected in a particular kind of way.

## **Gendered respectability politics in a stigmatised neighbourhood**

While the stakes were very different for either woman, they were high for both Müge and Cemile. Müge had to worry about a different category of personal safety and secu-

urity than Cemile, but for the older woman, the danger felt just as real. For Cemile, being perceived as “good”, as a respectable, and pious woman by others, determined her level of social acceptance. This important social capital was threatened by the neighbourhood stigma that was made more salient by the dominant narrative that surrounded the renewal project. These were different categories of consequences, but (the necessity to achieve) respectability was urgent and similar enough for both Müge and Cemile, and it was so in a gendered way.

In order to illustrate this, I would like to convey the story of Kemal. A Kurdish man in his late fifties who had migrated to Tarlabası from Urfa province in 1972, he had been very eager to talk about his dire situation and the danger of being made homeless by the renewal project. Kemal had worked in a restaurant after his arrival, and later became a *dolmuş* driver. In 2005 he developed coronary artery disease. In addition to medication, his doctor prescribed oxygen therapy, which meant that Kemal had to use an oxygen tank with a face mask three times a day. His illness fully incapacitated him for any kind of even light physical labour, and he was told that there was no chance of recovery. When I met him, he received invalidity benefits from the state, a monthly amount of 200 TL that was paid once a trimester. Social security covered the (substantial) cost for his oxygen treatment and his medication. Divorced from his wife, he had no further income. Two of his grown-up sons were in prison, one for murder and the other for aggravated assault, though Kemal never volunteered the details of their convictions, and I never asked. His third son was married and lived in an apartment above Kemal’s own. The son’s wife did not work. Kemal explained that his youngest son’s “brain angels were gone” [*beyin melekləri yerinde deęil*], by which meant to explain that he was seriously mentally disabled and had been declared unfit for employment by a government agency. Kemal had a sister who lived in a suburb close to the now defunct Atatürk Airport and who came to clean and do his laundry almost every week. Quite poor herself, she sometimes cooked for him or brought some groceries. Kemal was well-known in the neighbourhood, and many of his neighbours brought him food, or gave him small amounts of money. He was a regular [*müdavim*] in the teahouse on Tree Street where he often played cards or *okey* with barber Halil Usta, who also cut his hair and gave him regular shaves.

The house that Kemal, his son and his son’s wife lived in was a dilapidated two-storey Levantine building. While many people in Tarlabası lived in unsafe and substandard housing, Kemal’s apartment was one of the most decrepit that I had visited in the neighbourhood. The walls were cracked and crumbling, electric fixtures were broken, and his bathroom, a small nook that doubled as his toilet and his shower, was run-down and dirty. The staircase between apartments was extremely worn-down. However, Kemal spoke fondly of his landlord because he had “mercifully” kept his rent at 200 TL a month, the entirety of Kemal’s invalidity payment, despite the continuous rent increase in the Beyoęlu area. However, in June 2009, the landlord sold the building to the municipality. Kemal told me that the landlord did not tell him about the sale. For more than one year, nobody came to collect the rent and Kemal, relieved over not having to pay, never asked why. In March 2011, project officials turned up at his doorstep “out of the blue” to tell him that he was behind on his rent and therefore 35,000 TL in debt. They also said that the building would be sealed and demolished. Kemal was stunned and outraged.

I told them: You have bought [this house], but have you ever come here to consult with me? Did anyone ever come here to ask for rent and did I not give it to them? Thirty-five thousand! I have never seen such an amount of money in my life! They told me that I was squatting. Squatting! I said, no sir, I am not squatting, I have a contract, the electricity is in my name, I am registered with the *muhtar*. I am registered in Beyoğlu. I have proof.

Kemal insisted that his tenancy was legitimate because he had never refused to pay rent but had not paid because nobody had ever come to ask for it. He angrily underlined that his paperwork regarding the occupancy of his home was in order: he had registered at his address both with the district administration and with the *muhtar*, and all amenities bills were in his name.<sup>5</sup> He bristled at being called a squatter [*işgalcı*], because the term does not merely refer to someone who lives in a property without paying rent, but it is indexed as disreputable and dishonest. In the Turkish context, the term is commonly used in relation to the illegal appropriation of (mostly public) land and the construction of *gecekondu*.<sup>6</sup> In the run-up to the project and especially during the eviction period, project stakeholders, municipal officials, and the police indiscriminately labelled residents “squatters”. Contrary to other large urban renewal zones in Istanbul that predominantly targeted *gecekondu* neighbourhoods in lucrative areas of big cities, less than five percent of Tarlabaşı residents were squatters in a legal sense.<sup>7</sup> Property owners in Tarlabaşı frequently underlined their legitimacy to reside in the city in comparison to *gecekondu* dwellers perceived as having illegally “invaded” the land they occupied. (Sakızlıoğlu 2014a: 160). Kemal argued for his legitimacy by underlining that he was an officially and legally registered tenant who was subscribed to and paid his own utility bills.<sup>8</sup>

Somewhat indignantly Kemal pointed out that the only reason that he was not in gainful employment, the main reason that he was poor and in need of assistance, was not because he was workshy, but because he was incurably ill.

I have a government disability card. I have to use the [oxygen] tank in the morning, at noon, and at night. If I don't use that machine, I cannot breathe properly. I can't breathe. Without the machine I wouldn't be able to speak for more than two minutes. I cannot walk up hills because I cannot draw breath. [...] I am ill. That's why I cannot work. And this illness is forever. I have the card, and then I have a doctor's certificate for all the medication I have to take. [*He takes an assortment of pill packages out of a plastic bag.*] I

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- 5 This was not self-evident. In Turkey it is not uncommon that the electricity, water, and gas bills are registered in the name of the landlord, or previous tenants. This can make claims on outstanding bills very complicated, but also puts tenants in danger of undue demands to pay the bills of previous renters by their landlords.
  - 6 While the definition and description of *gecekondu* housing has undergone significant reanalysis and critique over the past decades, the term is generally associated with urban poverty and an inferior, threatening Other (Pérouse 2004; Erman 2001, 2013).
  - 7 In their assessment of the renewal area, the municipality-hired consultancy firm found that five percent of residents did not pay any rent. Some of these people were friends or relatives of property owners, and some were squatters in the “classic” sense (Kentsel A.Ş. 2008).
  - 8 Interestingly and somewhat ironically, *gecekondu* dwellers frequently use this tactic to establish legitimacy as well in the hope of obtaining an official title deed.

have to take these, and this, and I have to take blood pressure medication. I mean, I have to take all of these. [*He places a few more packages of medication on the table.*] All of this is medication.

One day a videographer who wanted to film a documentary about the renewal project in Tarlabası came to Kemal's home. Half an hour into the interview, Kemal suggested that he display his assembled oxygen tank with the facemask as well as the various boxes of medication that he kept in a plastic bag by his bed. That done, he insisted on being filmed while using the tank, because, he reasoned, viewers should be aware how serious his illness was, and how much the treatment impacted on his life. He hoped that this self-presentation would motivate charities and human rights NGOs, some of which he had been in touch with at the time, to support him. Kemal had an entire folder of documents, receipts, and filled-in forms that certified his illness and his resulting poverty, and that documented his applications for financial assistance at various Turkish charities and government offices.

I wrote these letters to the [Beyoğlu Municipality], and to the district governor [*kaymakam*]. In them I explain my situation. I tell them, look, here is my poverty card<sup>9</sup> that I got from the *muhtar*, where the *muhtar* confirms that I live only on assistance. [...] All I need is some help, I am still waiting to hear back from everyone. [...] I talked to all the places I was supposed to. I got registered with *Kimse Yok Mu* and with *Deniz Feneri*.<sup>10</sup> They came to my house, they had a look, made some notes, but so far nobody has come back or given me any assistance. I tried human rights [organisations]. I did interviews with journalists. Until now I have not been able to get any aid, or any offer. So, there is nothing I can do.

In contrast to Cemile, who insisted on not wanting to ask anyone even for “a piece of bread” because it would make her feel ashamed, Kemal was offended that he had so far been denied the necessary assistance to move from his home.

All I want is some help. But nobody does anything. I talked to everyone. I am still waiting to get something from them. The district governor gave me 200 Lira. But for 200 Lira you cannot rent a house, and you cannot go anywhere, *kardeşim*<sup>11</sup>.

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- 9 The “poverty card” [*fakirlik belgesi*] is a document that residents have to apply for with their local *muhtar*. The requirements to qualify for this document are to have an income below the state-specified hunger line, not to be party to any other social security coverage, such as a state pension fund, and not to own a car or real estate property. The document facilitates the application for further state assistance in healthcare, education, childcare or other material assistance.
- 10 The *Kimse Yok Mu* foundation was established in 2002 to organise poverty, and later emergency relief in Turkey and abroad. Closely affiliated with the Fethullah Gülen movement, it was shut by government decree in the aftermath of the 2016 coup attempt. The *Deniz Feneri* charity association, close to the AKP government, delivers relief and aid both in Turkey and abroad. In 2008, the association was involved in a scandal when executives in Germany were sentenced to prison terms for swindling and illegally acquiring funds.
- 11 Denotationally, the word *kardeşim* means “my brother”, but it is a word of solidarity and familiarity between men as well. Here this choice of a word indexes a certain condescension and cynicism. Other than the common address *ağbi/m* [my/brother] that is also used, mostly between men, *kardeşim* retains a lateral, rather than a hierarchical quality. Because this distinction matters, but

His attempt to acquire a TOKI apartment was rejected because he did not have the necessary 5,000 TL for a downpayment, and because the 480 TL of the monthly mortgage he would have to pay over a span of about twenty years was too high an amount for him. Kemal was not ashamed that he was too poor to afford a home in what the government provided as mass social housing. Far from it, he was justly outraged that TOKI was only available to those who had enough money to advance a large sum for a downpayment and who therefore, in his eyes, were neither really poor nor in need of state assistance.

As a destitute handicapped man, the stakes to find social acceptance and feel safe were extremely high for Kemal, just as they had been for Cemile and Müge. However, and even though Kemal was forced to prove his deservedness in order to get the assistance he was entitled to, he did not feel the need to prove his respectability. For him, that was a given.

The above anecdotes have made clear that in the context of Tarlaşaşı as a stigmatised neighbourhood under the threat of renewal, the urgency of successfully performing respectability was gendered in a very particular way. Kemal was a divorced, unemployed and impoverished man. Two of his sons were in prison for serious crimes. He was never uneasy about the disorder in his home, or worried that it might not be clean enough, not even when he was giving an interview on camera.<sup>12</sup> He was never ashamed of his living situation, or for not being able to pay back the rent he allegedly owed, because he was confident that the reasons for being unable to pay provided a satisfactory enough explanation. He never doubted that anyone would deny him the respect he deserved. Even though Kemal's material situation was arguably worse than that of both Müge and Cemile, and though he risked homelessness in case of an eviction, the stakes for his successful performance of respectability were lower. At no point did he risk physical violence like Müge or being socially ostracised like Cemile. He did not risk ceasing to exist as a person. Even if Kemal's physical living situation would change for the worse, his social status would not undergo significant changes. As a poverty-stricken, disabled man with no other recourse than charity, he nevertheless did not risk further debasement. Cemile and Müge both felt a threat of deep shame with potentially noxious consequences, and both women worked very hard, and knew they had to work hard, to achieve the respectability they hoped would offer a certain level of safety.

Stigma is as much about marginalisation as it is about power and privilege (Link and Phelan 2014; Tyler and Slater, 2018; de Souza 2019). It is "about the power to present and to represent – the power to mark, assign, stereotype, and frame issues, people, and situations in particular ways. Stigma is about the power to levy accusations, to cast suspicion, and to be heard. Stigma is the power to shut up and silence others" (De Souza 2019: 19).

The above anecdotes have shown that territorial stigmatisation meant the loss of residents' control over the narrative of themselves and their physical reality, because that reality had been prefabricated through the lens of territorial stigma. When people saw an elderly man sitting between ruins and garbage bags in Tarlaşaşı, they might readily

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is invisible in English, I retain the Turkish in my transcription where it is important to the meaning of the quote.

12 A similar observation can be made about Cemile's husband Ramazan.

interpret this as proof not of the injustice of the renewal project and the wilful negligence of the municipality in the run-up to evictions, but of the general and well-known dilapidation of the neighbourhood. In the same way, the photograph of Cemile's building included in the municipality's marketing catalogue should have been evidence of the destruction of a community, but instead it was used as proof for a fabricated counter-reality in which it was plausible that residents lived in half-ruined buildings void even of window frames and balcony railings.

Since communication and the production of images and narratives are central to the production of stigma, the power to stigmatise is a discursive privilege. It gives those who have the power to stigmatise the privilege to "to tell a story about who the Other is and who 'We' are. (ibid.)".

This means that the work of impression management for residents of stigmatised neighbourhoods is always an uphill battle, as outsiders have been steered towards the less favourable interpretation of what they see before they have even cast the first glance. Furthermore, as the above examples have illustrated, the stakes of the successful performance of respectability are gendered. While Tarlaşaşı residents were all deeply affected by the stigmatisation of their neighbourhood in various ways, the need to successfully perform respectability against that prefabricated stigma was more urgent for women, as they risked physical or social obliteration if they failed.

