Chapter four: Experiencing territorial stigma in Tarlabaşı

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Encountering everyday stigma

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Cleanliness is beautiful"

Photo by Jonathan Lewis

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Ordinary iconic figures

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

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

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

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

Intersecting stigma / everyday discrimination

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Being a trans* woman in Tarlabaşı

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

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

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

Müge in the teahouse

Photo by Jonathan Lewis

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

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

> cannot explain ourselves. When we go to the health clinic, we cannot explain ourselves. Because we are transvestites[8], they refuse to register us. Go to any health clinic and give them your ID, and the doctor will sneer.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Being Kurdish in Tarlabaşı

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Experiencing stigma while under threat of eviction

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Experiencing pending eviction as a trans* woman

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

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

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

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

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

Trans* property owners, even those who immediately agreed to sell their home to the project developers, experienced trans* stigma when trying to obtain a fair sales agreement. Cansu had bought her 30m^2 flat on Tree Street when she first arrived in Istanbul. In 2010, almost immediately after sales negotiations began, she sold her apartment to the municipality for a meagre amount several times below market value at the time, convinced that nobody else would even consider buying property from a trans* woman.

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

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

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

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

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

Experiencing pending eviction while Kurdish

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

12 Since guards were recruited for very complex and different reasons, an individuals' calibrations to Turkish nationalists or the PKK or other involved actors is complicated. Village guards might attempt to display loyalty to opposing factions. Furthermore, hundreds have been accused, and in many cases convicted, of aiding and abetting the PKK despite their role as village guards (see Letsch 2013; Acar 2019).

13 In fact, the view that one must be affiliated with the PKK if one is critical of state military action in the southeast has been used by the Turkish state since the beginning of the Kurdish-Turkish conflict. This false binary has been used as a justification for state violence, but it was also useful for the PKK who has successfully argued that the Turkish state leaves very little room outside the dichotomy of either having to assimilate or be branded a terrorist (see Marcus 2007).

14 It was not uncommon for women, often the wives of the male heads of families, to be the official owners and sole title deed holders. One explanation I was once half-jokingly given by several women was that men were "bad with money", as they were "prone to gambling" and therefore more likely to lose family property to debt collectors. Another reason I heard was that because men often owned businesses, families wanted to make sure that business debts would not endanger private family property.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Evictions as an ethnicised, gendered experience of stigmatisation

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

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

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

Esma

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Cemile

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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