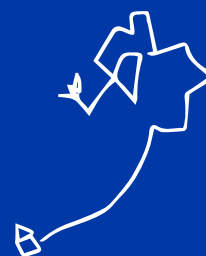


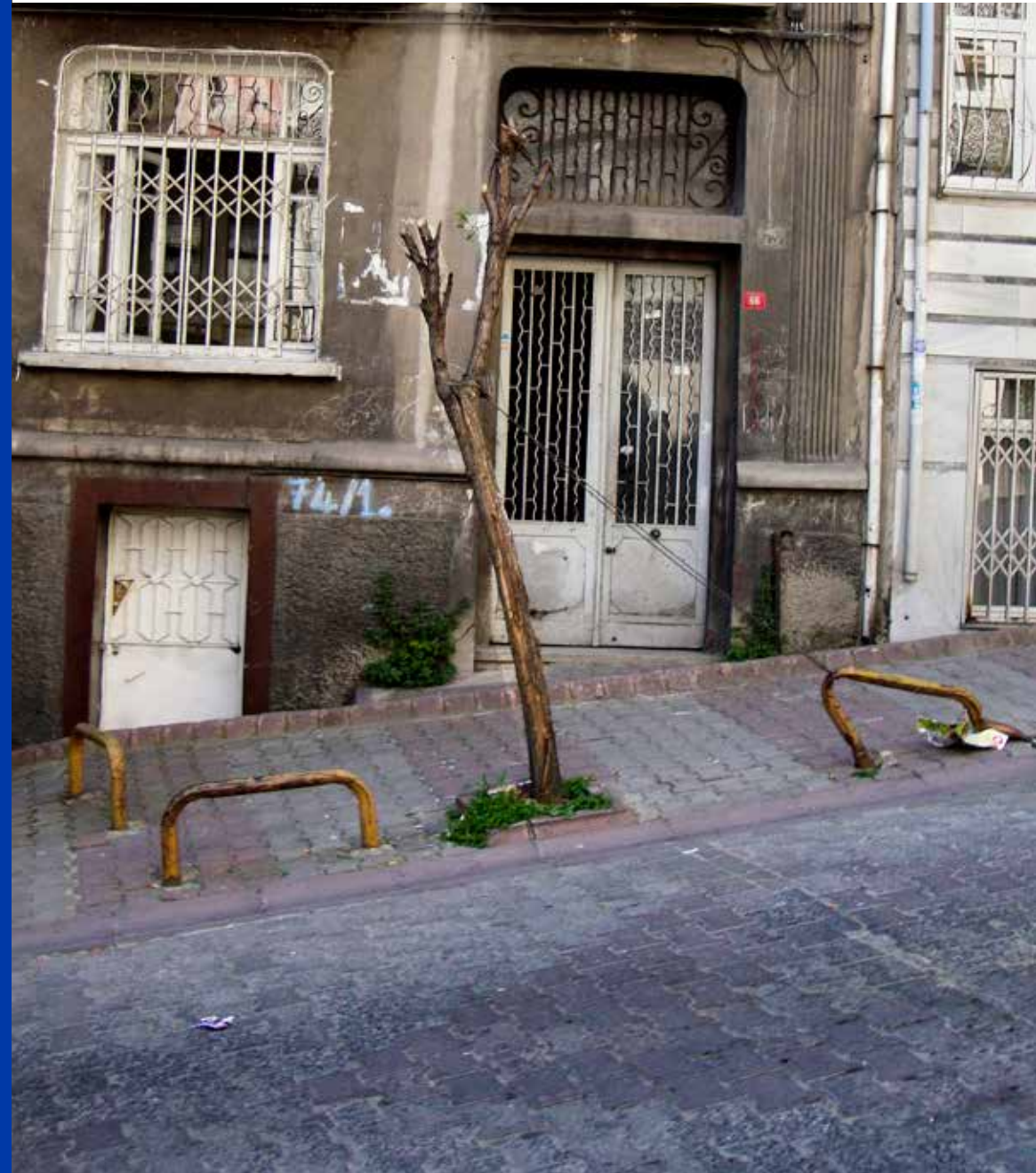
**DO YOU KNOW THIS TREE?**

**Roberley Bell**

BU AĞACI TANIYOR MUSUNUZ?



THE ALMOST-LEANING TREE ON THE  
WAY TO NUR'S HOUSE IN CIHANGIR



I was searching for the almost-leaning tree.

I walked to Nur's door (she wasn't there) then started to walk downhill, crisscrossing the streets.

The clue: the yellow bars.

I asked someone eating an ice cream. He didn't know the neighborhood. He spoke English and told me to ask the women in the store who pointed back uphill.

There were some stairs—I seemed to remember them. But then in Nur's neighborhood there are lots of stairs. I began again, crisscrossing.

Out of the corner of my eye I thought I saw the yellow bars.



I did not see the tree.



"This is the right area," I thought, and continued walking around.

The tree was there—taller, healthy, flowering, reaching up to the second floor now, no longer leaning.



This was my first find for a tree where I was not aware of its exact locale—I was totally thrilled. I honestly did not know if it would be possible.



THE BLOOMING TREE IN FRONT OF THE  
NEXTSTAR BY THE TRAM STOP IN KARAKÖY





I thought this would be an easy one.

I passed by the NextStar often—sometimes many times in a day. Since 2010 I have photographed the little tree in front of the air conditioner a few times. It was easily within my usual path hence I didn't think I needed any reference information. I just added it to a list of stops one day and walked there from the apartment straightway.

The tree was gone. But oddly there was no evidence. Because I was remembering it wrong. It didn't come out of the AC, it was in front of it on the sidewalk.

The first day it was hard to photograph what I thought was the site. There were cars on the sidewalk and a security guard who badly wanted to know what was I doing. The guy in the store did not care. He was moving in and out, having a smoke. I took some pictures but was eager to find the evidence: the stump in the sidewalk. I had to return the next day.

Because I remembered wrong, my photos were too close to the fan. They would not show the site where the little tree had been. The sidewalk had been replaced, the tree was not saved.

When I went back in the morning, the same guys were working, taking turns standing in the door to smoke. The same security guard was outside on the street. I walked into the shop, this time I had my journal with the old photograph taken in 2010. I showed the young man drinking tea what I was looking for.



He did not work there in 2010, but he remembered the tree: "The government cut it down." He was angry, I sensed, not about the tree but about the act of aggression by the government to cut the tree down and replace the sidewalk.

The blooming tree in front of the AC was one that I knew well, walking by it often, though not always taking note of its status. It had always been there in the corner of my eye, growing out of the side walk in front of the air conditioner at the NextStar.

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THE LIMBLESS TREE ON LÜLECI HENDEK  
CADDESİ, NEAR DEPO IN TOPHANE





The limbless tree by DEPO was the easiest to get to; I was staying literally next-door.

I walked out of the building and the tree was there.

I first photographed this tree coming from DEPO, an art center I would go to often. On every return trip—there have been four since I lived in Istanbul in 2010—when I am near DEPO, I make a photo of the tree. I have also been photographing the paint swatches that are in contrast to the *fifty shades of gray* the government has painted over graffiti.



I am never surprised that the limbless tree is still there and looks absolutely the same. In 2010, I photographed it many times, always trying to find it without a car next to it.



Five years later a silver car is still parked nearby.



Time has stopped for this tree—bold yet limbless and always in the company of a car.



THE LEANING TREE IN NUR'S  
NEIGHBORHOOD IN CIHANGIR







After my first success I was sure something from the image—the green door—would seep in.

I asked two men in a small fruit and vegetable stand. They wanted no part. I used both the photo and the flash card Nur had made for me:

“Bu ağacı tanıyor musunuz?” (Do you know this tree?)

I walked for many hours—with sixteen trees to locate I had to hold to a plan having structured my walks based on grouping trees in general locations.

I did not find it. I started to wonder if it was somewhere else in the city because the street is very flat and behind it is a machine shop.

I took the original photo on 7 May 2010. My calendar doesn't go back that far, I know.

Where was I that day?

In 2010, I didn't start out with the idea of making a project of photographing trees on my daily wanderings through the city. Nor did I plan to return years later to seek them out and check up on them.





THE FIRST TREE, FIVE YEARS LATER ON  
THE WAY TO GÜLLÜOĞLU IN KARAKÖY





This tree, which is really a stoic wisteria, I have photographed several times in a decade. First, against a blue wall in 2005.

The blue wall was painted orange and now it is under construction but the single stoic stalk is well protected from the construction, clearly preserved with intent.

But with all that is happening in Istanbul, it is odd to me that my landmark for which side of the street to take from the tram is still there:



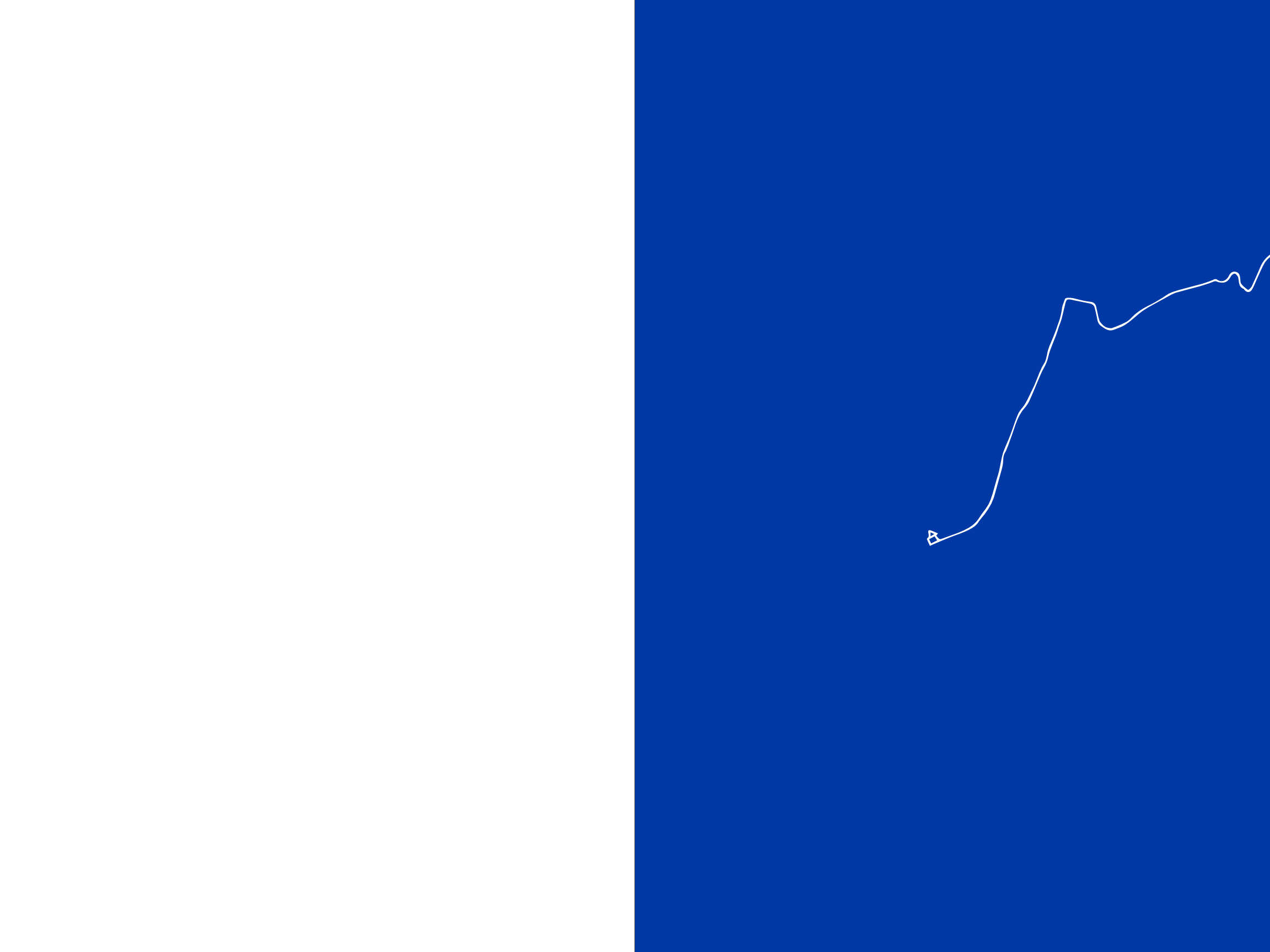


an abandoned Ottoman building with its iconic, peeling blue paint exposed to the street.

I am sure it is photographed by thousands of tourists on their way for Baklava at Güllüoğlu



They probably never see the tree growing through the stoop next door.







THE NAKED TREE ALONG DOLMABAHÇE CADDESİ  
ON THE WAY TO THE STUDIO IN BEŞİKTAŞ



I have passed this cut tree many, many times going to Gül's.

Once I stayed in her studio for a week and would walk from the last tram stop in Kabataş.

At one time the trees along the palace road were majestic. Now most have grown to lean away from the wall. This one is the only stump; it doesn't have any limbs or greenery in any season (I have seen it in all four). For years now, I have watched and wondered why it is not just cut down.



Since Gezi, the space against the wall where the trees grow had been cleaned up, planted with abundant flowers.



The wall was painted in shades of gray (likely graffiti had been written on it during the demonstrations). I am guessing that in the process the order of the photos was changed.

I found the Atatürk image that is behind the tree in the original photo now located at the start of Dolmabahçe Caddesi, just past the turn off for the road to Taksim Square by the football stadium.

But it was not the right tree.

I kept walking.

I was going to Gül's anyway.

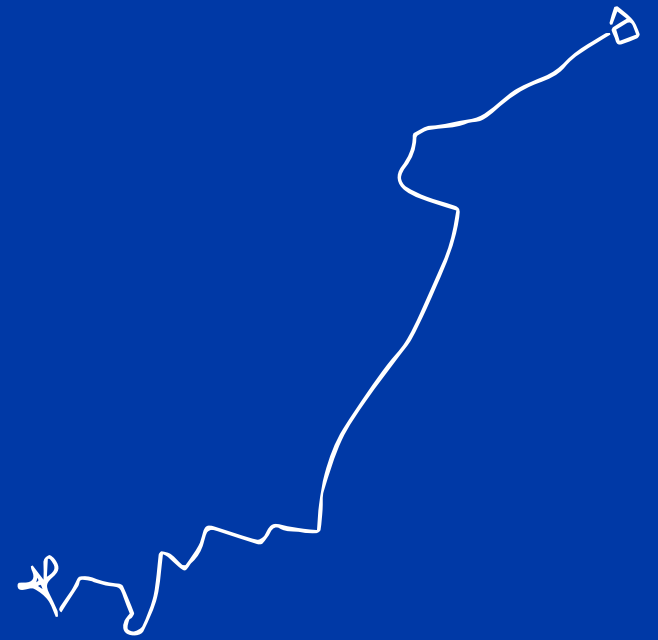


It was sunny and of course very crowded. I realized I needed to use something else from my photograph as a landmark. There was the edge of a white block 1960's building past the high walls of Dolmabahçe.

I found the tree now paired with a different Atatürk photograph.



It was exactly the same. Frozen in time from now until eternity, I suppose.





THE BARE TREE ACROSS FROM  
SÜLEYMANİYE HAMAMI IN SÜLEYMANİYE



Gül helped me locate this on the map. Actually, she looked up the hamami (I would have had to walk all the way around Süleymaniye camii, which is a huge complex behind a wall).

The camii is on a hill crossing the Haliç. It is easy to spot yet once you start uphill you no longer see the minarets.

They are lost in the mass of buildings so close together, steeply packed.

I had a basic sense of the direction where I was headed yet it was still confusing.

On the sides of building are small two-story workshops.

There are hand-painted signs everywhere for Süleymanniye camii. I followed them though I knew I was looking for the far side of the camii, for the hamami.

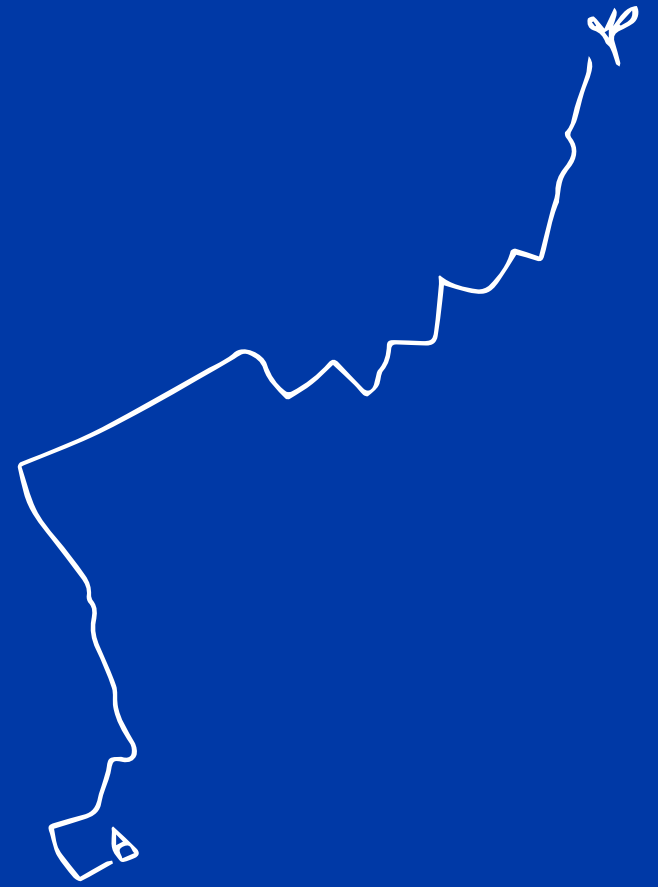
I asked two men in the street working on a car. I told them hamami, not camii. They gave me directions or pointed me up the hill I knew.

I was there before I got to the site of the tree. I could see the very tight corner against the walls of the camii complex.

This was also the street where I found the metal worker on the same trip when I made the original photograph. I was hoping to use something made by him in the exhibition, which at that time was going to be in the gallery at KHAS.



That never happened; the trees became a book instead, *visible from the corner of my eye*, and then I returned, walking to seek them out again, for what I did not know.





THE TREE WITH ITS HEAD IN THE FENCE NEAR  
ISTANBUL TECHNICAL UNIVERSITY IN TAKSIM



It was not my intention to find it. But while I was coming from Taksim parking garage in a car with Gül—the traffic horrible and slow, which was not unusual—I eyed the spot as the car crawled along.

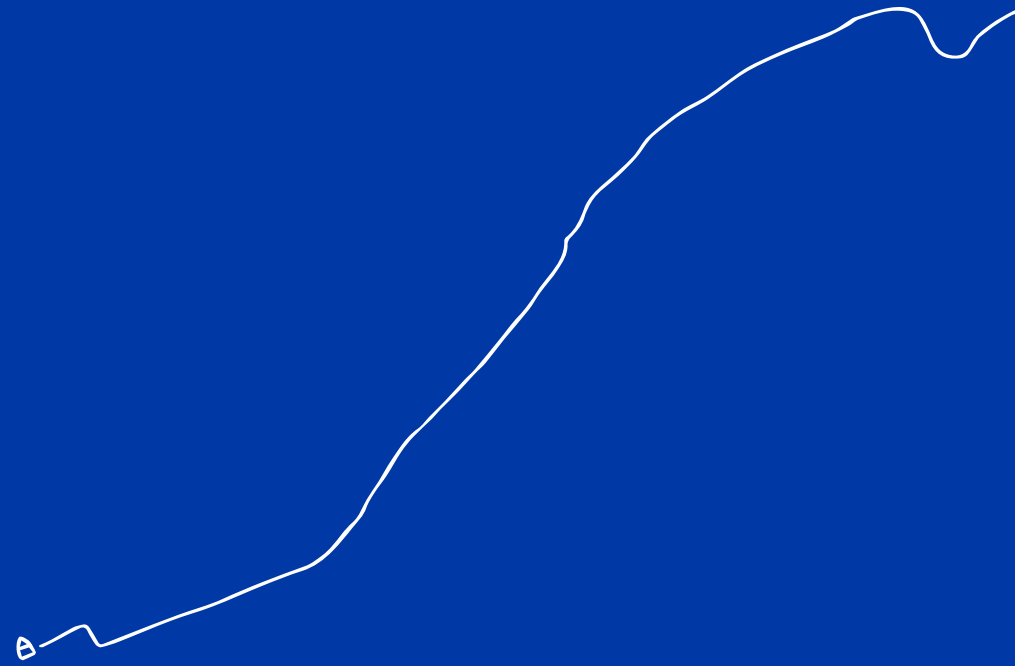
When we approached it (Gül was a very willing participant in the project), I jumped out of the car.

I was shocked, though I don't know why, to find it had been cut down. It had stood against the wall with its head in the fence for so many years.

It was considerably mature, an actual living tree, flowering through the fence, now chopped.

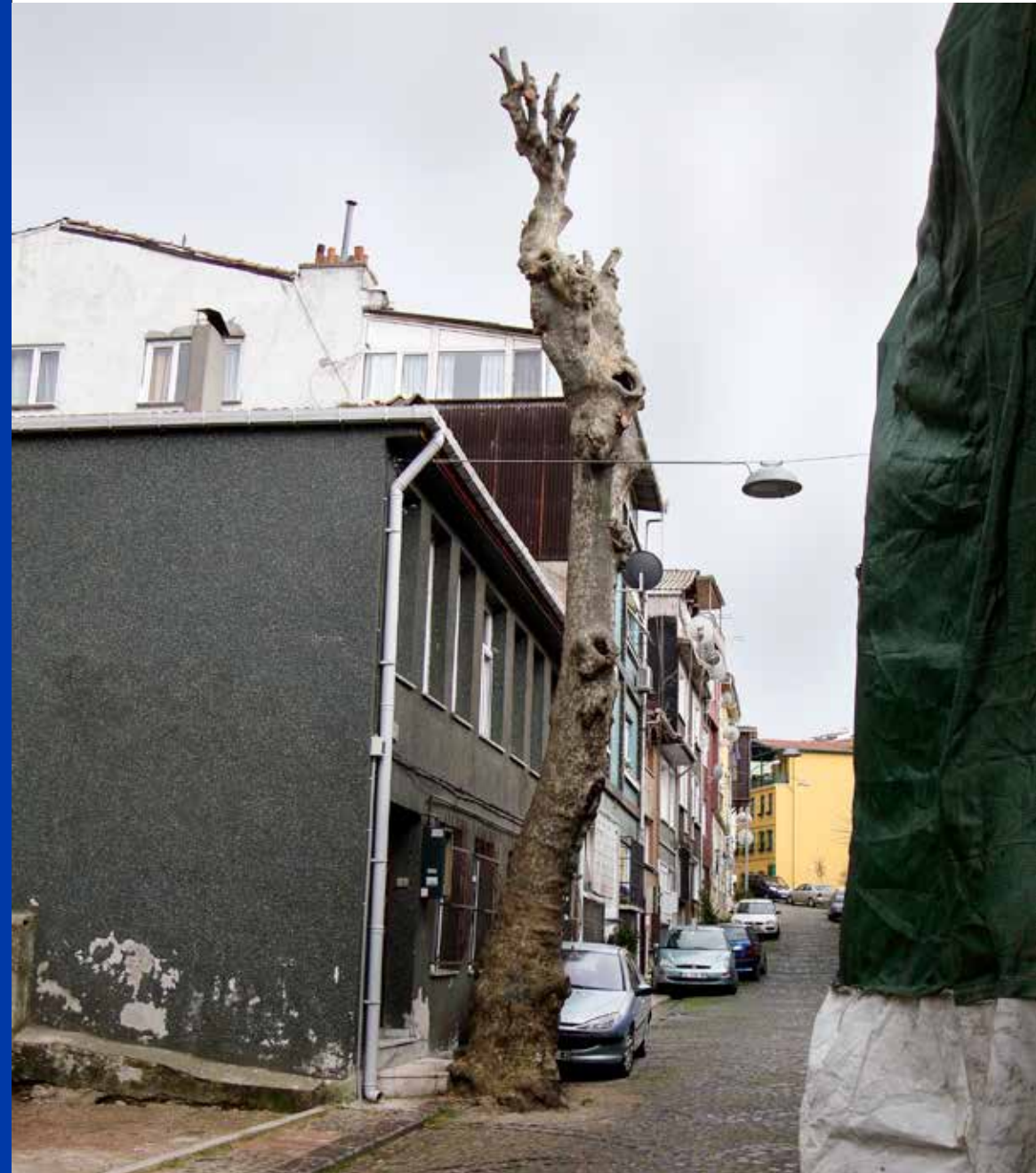
I tried to remember when I last saw the tree and remembered walking past in 2013 when I went to a gallery near Nancy's house where İz was doing a performance. I went the long way from Taksim knowing if I went past İTÜ I would get to the correct street.







THE DANCING TREE ON THE WAY TO  
AYŞE'S HOUSE ON THE ASIAN SIDE





This tree was always the dancing tree in my mind. The construction fabric reminded me of the whirling dervish.

With a need to confirm my memory after other mishaps, I asked Ayşe where it was.

I had remembered correctly. It is at the bottom of the steep stairs leading from her house into the village of Kuzguncuk.

Istanbul to Ayşe's house was an entire day. I thought we would walk past the tree coming from the domus but we took a taxi from TAK (Design Atelier Kadiköy) via the backstreets.



After arriving at her house, I walked down the hill.



Walking down the stairs, I saw the same neighborhood dog sitting on the stoop across the street, in the same place as five years prior.

The dogs, cats, and trees: they represent the humanity of this ever expanding city.

I tell stories about this dog and others. Five years ago he would run to greet you as you came down the stairs, the beginning of his territory. He used to get up, then went back to his spot. Now old, he sleeps in the doorway of the same house. He is still cared for as he always was.

Many dogs made their home in Gezi park. Dogs all over the city were hurt during the Gezi demonstrations, which is the reason people began taking them in.

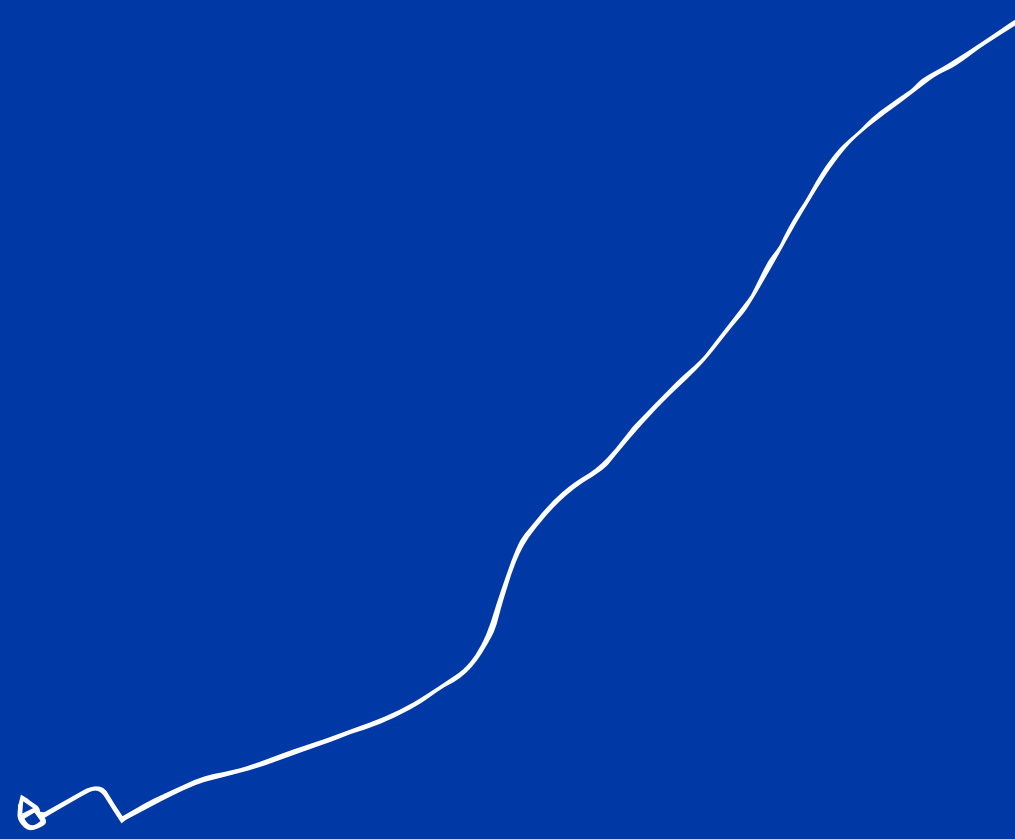
It is a very new thing to see people walking a dog on a leash and taking it into their homes.



The whirling dervish dancing tree is just fine.

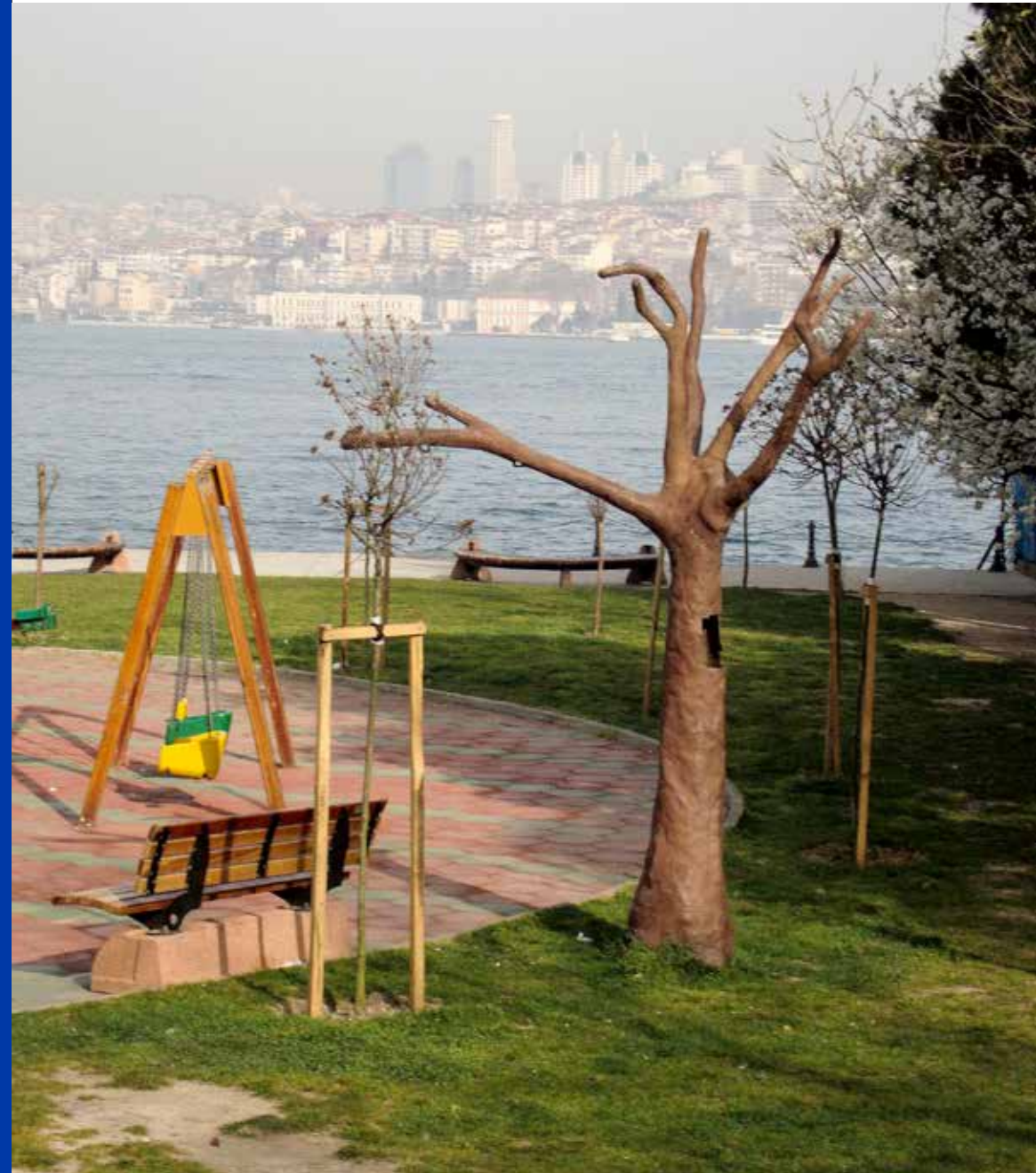


In fact, I finally saw someone use the door behind the tree—it is their front door!





THE ARTIFICIAL TREE IN THE PLAYGROUND  
AT THE FERRY TERMINAL IN ÜSKÜDAR



I did not find this tree.

Ayşe said it was gone, though she wasn't exactly sure.

I knew the park where it should be located, yet on the bus returning from her house, late at night, I could not see the tree nor the park.

I cannot confirm nor deny if the artificial tree is still *alive*.

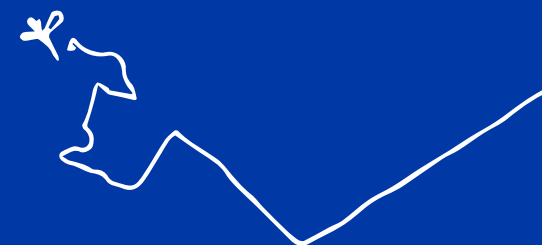
I was not able to locate it. Time was the issue.

With the landmark of the park, the view across the Bosphorus would have been enough to pinpoint the location.

From the park you look straight across the water to Dolmabahçe Sarayı with the highrises of Maçka behind it.

The site I could have identified. I just could not confirm the presence of the artificial tree.

I have asked Ayşe to take a look. Perhaps it is still there.



THE IMPOUNDED TREE IN THE PARK  
BEHIND KADIR HAS UNIVERSITY IN CIBALI





Since 2005 I have come to know this tree so well.

When I did the first UNESCO workshop at Kadir, the tree was growing out of a house, integrated into the domestic life of both the house and its inhabitants.

I have always come back to this tree inside a house to see what has changed—nothing—until now.

This morning I started out to photograph this tree. I thought it would be a quick trip.

I remembered it right behind the university, though I turned up the hill too soon and suddenly I was walking the little streets scattered on the hillside.

I went past the shoemaker who put soles on my red slippers: I knew then I was going the wrong direction.



Too many stories threaded together and memory again had lead me astray—a funny feeling because the house with the tree seemed so planted in my memory.

The trees in the little park with the blue toast truck are tall straight evergreens. Now high up on the hill I could see them beneath me—almost straight down—yet the streets weave and curve and disappear into narrow passageways in Cibali.

I knew if I stuck to the streets I would get too far away and, without a view from above, be unable to find the park.

I found a passageway between two buildings. The gate was locked but a man came out of the building and opened it for me.

Walking down steep steps, I came directly into the blue toast truck park and from there I could see the house.

Exactly the same the walls were decaying, yet there was no sign of laundry, nor the red bucket, nor the tree.

The children's playground next to the house was being torn up and rebuilt. It all seemed odd, like it did not belong. Why were they removing the park to replace it with a park?

Where did the tree go?

Why is there a sheet of metal blocking the opening where the tree once was?

What or why is all of this happening?

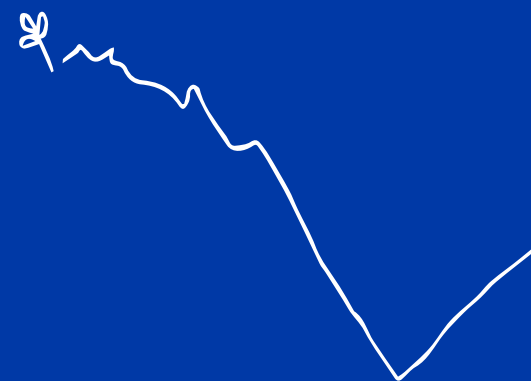
I returned to meet Nur at the café on the corner where everyone from Kadir Has had started to go (instead of the fish restaurant further down the street). I told her the tree was gone, she said "No! I photographed it only a few weeks ago!" I replied, "It is gone, the opening shuttered with a piece of metal."

We drank our apple tea in silence.

What does all of this mean?

For her, she knows it is government intervention.

For me, I am still trying to form a sense of these sweeping changes—spreading out across this city in my mind.





THE PROTECTED TREE AT THE CAFÉ IN FENER





After my unexpected struggle to find the house tree, I was sure of how to find this one.

I was on the right street, where there is a little market I would go, and at the end of it is a big tree on the corner.

I never photographed the big tree, a landmark, somehow proud, uncompromised. The surprise, as you turned the corner, of the tree inside the small protective wall was what made me photograph it, though not until 2010.

I first came to the fish restaurant right across the street in 2005, though it was a completely different group of faculty from Kadir Has then. We selected fish and they grilled it in an open pit on the street.

Several men drinking tea were watching me look for the tree. I decided to try asking them by showing them the photograph from five years before. Their immediate sense of ownership was lovely. It reminded me of an experience I had with Ashley during the Istanbul Biennial when we found the Doris Salcedo piece on exhibit. At the time, I did not know that area of the city but I came to know it well and lived in that neighborhood in 2010.



One of the men took me to the tree.

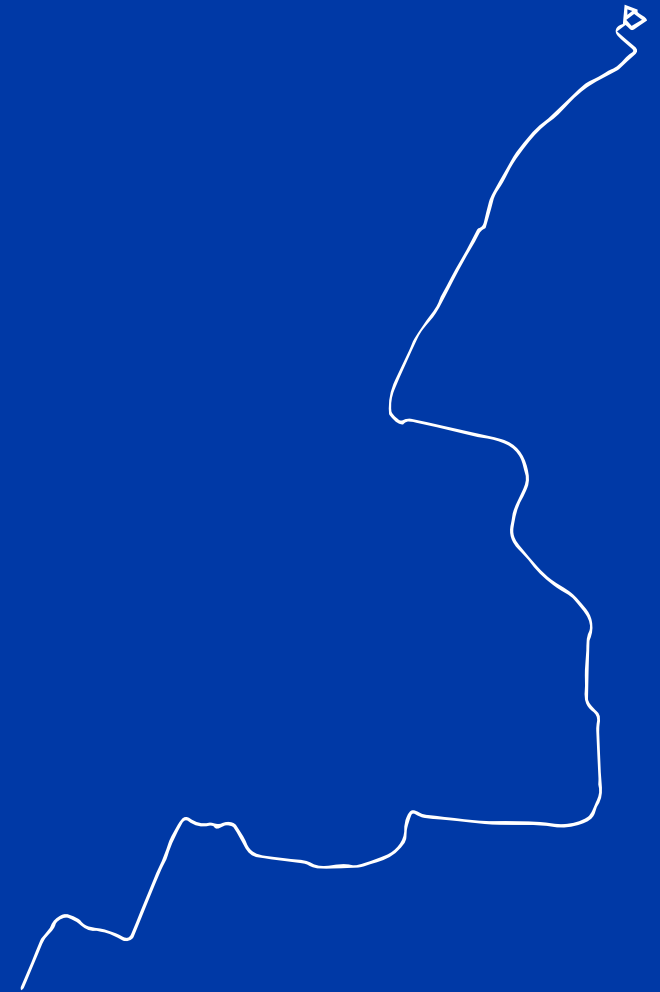
He was proud that it was still there, protected. I made a photograph of him smiling and holding his prayer beads.

I showed him a photograph of another one, the football tree. I could tell it was gone. He took me to the spot where it was. The market that had been there was also gone.



The personal encounters while seeking out the trees was not something I expected.

I would have liked more time to seek each out. They tell a story, mine and others.





THE STARK TREE IN THE PARKING LOT BEHIND  
SOKULLU MEHMET PAŞA CAMII IN SULTANAHMET  
(OR MAYBE NOT)





It was a cold and rainy Sunday, Zuhail's birthday. We had a lovely breakfast (a Sunday tradition I miss) and though cold, we walked some in Cihangir after which Nur and I took off for the two remaining trees: the stump, now the entrance to the underground ferry, and the tree in the parking lot at the bottom of the stairs at Sokullu Mehmet Paşa CAMİİ.

I was certain of its location relative to the mosque though not certain of the location of the mosque. I remembered going with Francine and Frank to see tiles at the mosque after hearing a lecture that afternoon. I found the mosque and easily remembered that the first one was not the one we wanted. But is the first one perhaps where the tree is?

Nur and I rushed further down the hill nearer to the seaside on to Sokullu Mehmet. We found the mosque and the entrance—or rather the back exit. It was exactly as I remembered it but there was no tree and no empty lot. Then, I wondered, "Was this even the mosque?" The tile did not seem that special, yet the back exit and steep stairs without a view were exactly as I remembered.

Nur asked people about the tree. We would show them the photos from my journal and have a conversation, which was something special.



The people we spoke with—a man in a cheese shop, another vendor on the street—did not know the tree. Another man on the street joined in our conversation.

He was certain we were in the wrong place. He said the small wood structure added to the second story of the building in the photograph was the key that the tree was not in the area. His shop has been in this block of Sulatnhmet for thirty-five years, he said, and he has never seen that kind of construction in this part of the city. It would be in another part of the city.

It is Anatolian, he said, it is ethnic, cultural, not something you would find in this part of the city, he was sure.

I was not. It was somehow fixed in my memory.

Had it not been cold and raining, I would have pushed on—perhaps it was the mosque close to Küçük Ayasofya?

It remains a mystery yet an adventure and encounter I had not planned for or expected, a story giving life to the tree.



THE REMNANT OF A TREE IN THE SIDEWALK COMING  
FROM A TURKISH CLASS IN SULTANAHMET





In preparation for Friday—looking for the stump—I told Gül what I remembered: walking by a yellow government building. She thought it was the tourist police station, which had moved, but the building is the same.

It was the only rainy day of the trip.

I planned to find the stump and the tree in the parking lot, both on the old European side. I felt I had a basic idea for where both were.

Nur agreed to come along and ask the question “Do you know this tree?” (in good Turkish), which was a real help.

I found the Turkish class exactly where I remembered it, then I began walking from memory the way I would leave class to go to Kadir Has.

We found what Gül thought was the yellow government building.

I remembered it, but that was not the building.

So we walked on and Nur asked someone.

It was hard to know if he had an idea or actually knew the area but he quickly told us the stump in my photo was a construction site for the building of the underground ferry.





We continued in the direction he sent us—it was familiar—by the historic Hamami and turned on to a main street at the very edge of the the spice market.

I remembered buying something there, then it was different—open. Obviously buildings had been knocked down. It was the actual station for the underground ferry.

Looking back behind me I saw the corner of the white building that five years ago was just beyond the construction site. Yet the corner of a much older building was not visible (and was also in the 2010 photograph) but perhaps it was knocked down as well?

Clearly many buildings and trees were removed to make room for the entrance to the underground ferry.

This had been a very densely packed area of tight streets and close buildings.

Nur was disappointed to have not found a tree while walking with me.

We retreated to the Viennese café at the Pera museum and to see the Giacometti show, which was spectacular.





THE BROKEN TREE AT THE BOTTOM OF BOĞAZKESEN  
CADDESI NEAR THE TRAM STOP IN TOPHANE





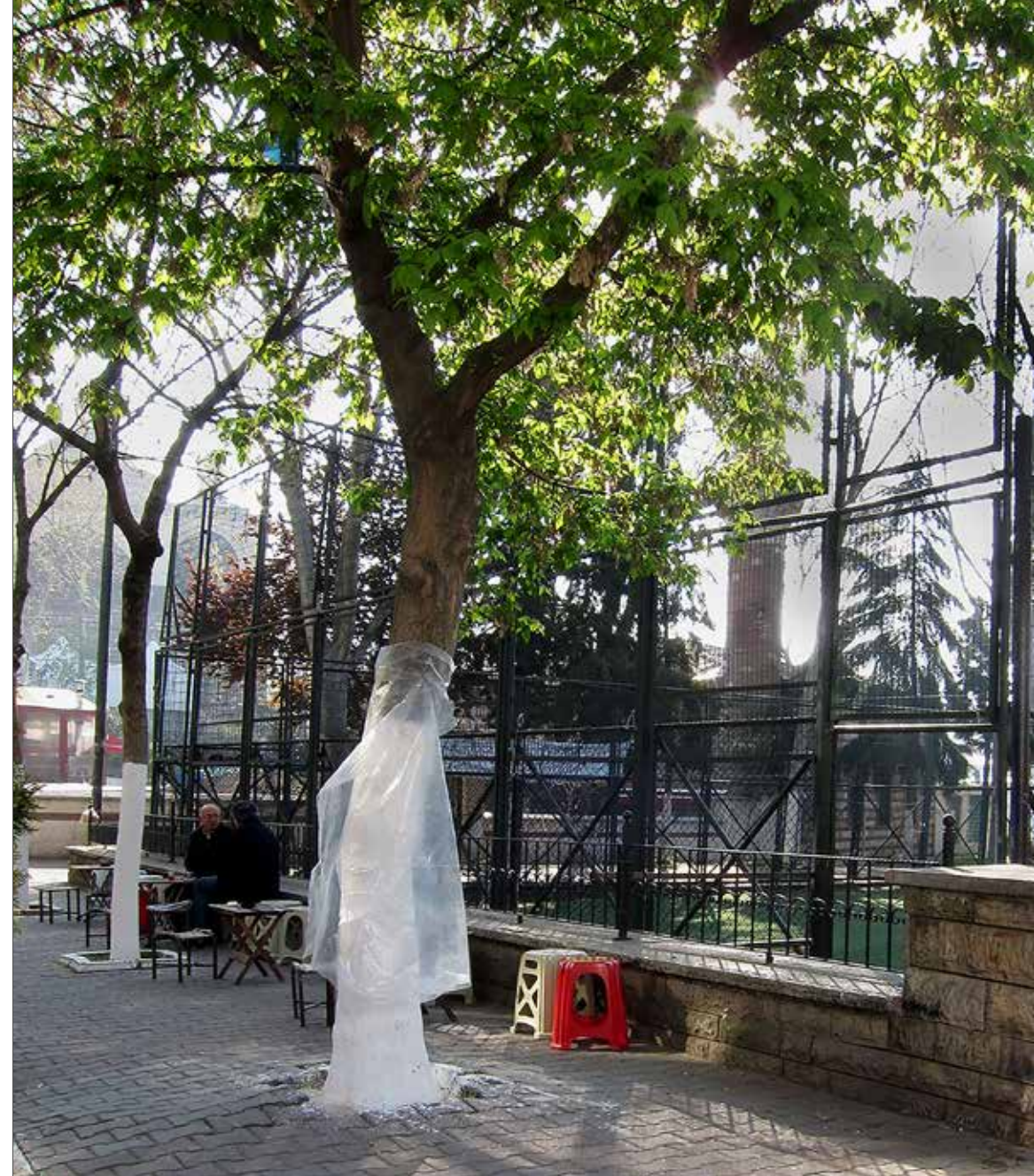
This tree is amazing. I have known it for a very long time, having walked by it often, coming from Nur's house or taking a shortcut off Kemeralti Caddesi on the way back to my apartment.

Before it was broken, I only saw it from the corner of my eye—just another sapling stuck in mud by the side of a busy street in front of a small mosque.

The day I walked by in 2010 it had been hit by a car and the men from the mosque were bandaging it together. That was when I took notice. Then came the tripod construction.

Over the years (four times now since 2010) I have stopped and photographed this tree on each return visit. Each time I expect the tree to finally be standing on its own. Instead the structure has turned into a barricade and becomes more and more pronounced as the men sit nearby taking tea. Now five years on, the small tree is completely penned in. It flowers though it has not grown much.

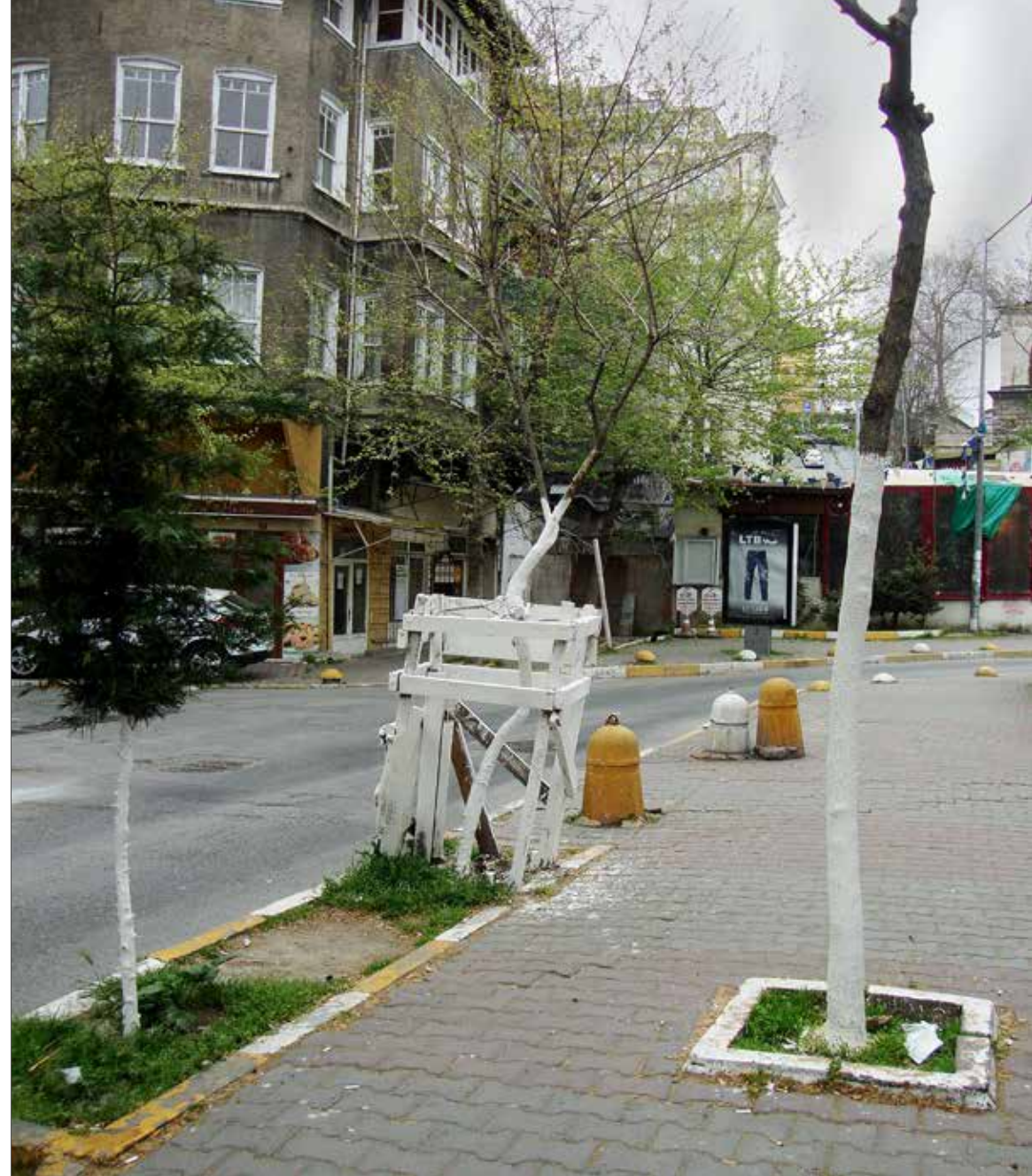
On my last day (today) the men from the mosque are painting all the trees on the street as if to stake out their space in the city.



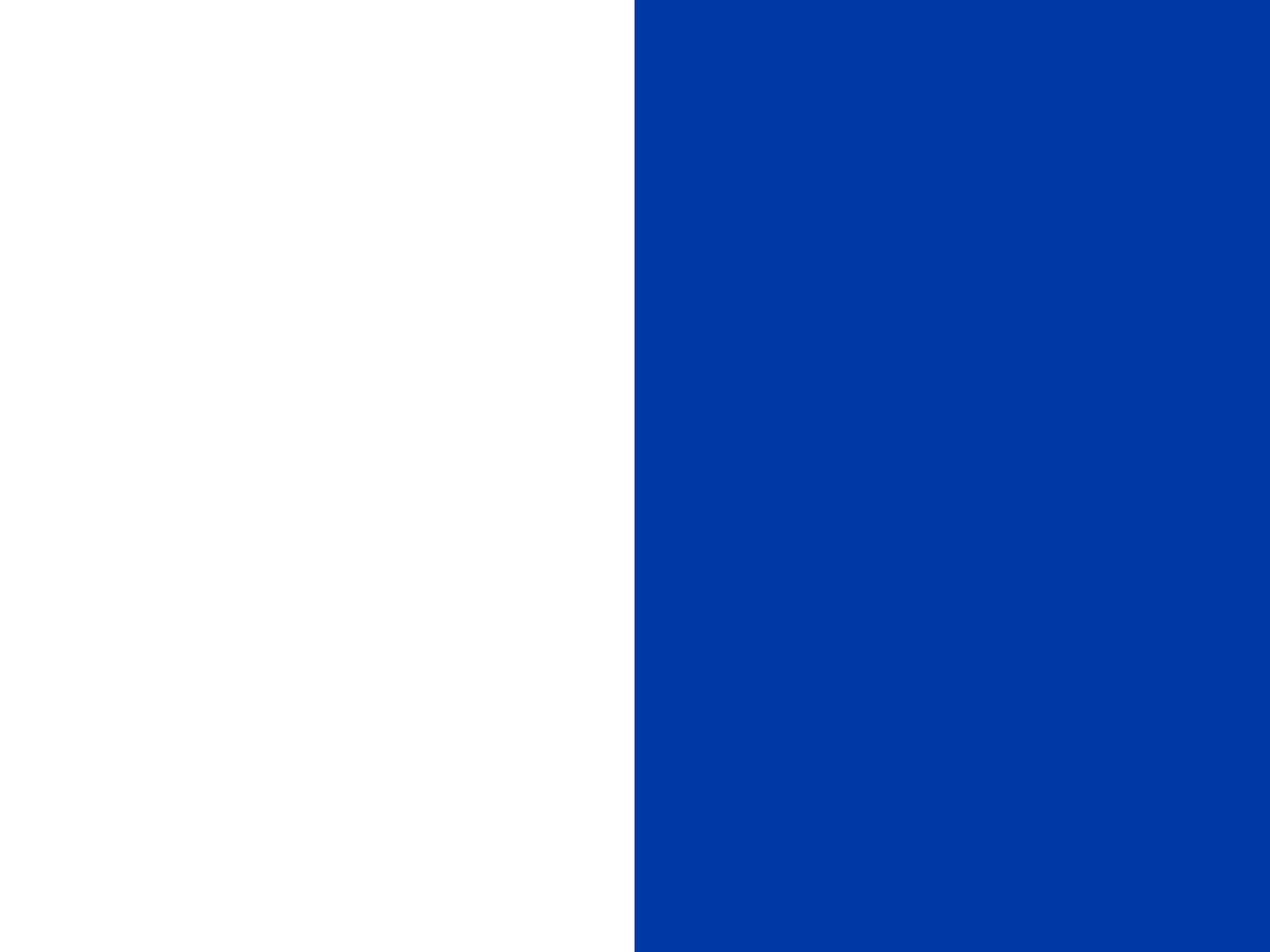
The trees become strong, heroic even.



The government will not cut them, not like what they did to the small tree growing from the air conditioner in front of the NextStar.



I know I will return to see her freed of her cage.



## THE WISHING TREE IN THE SEA OF MARMARA





I didn't go to see the wishing tree.



It is there on top of the mountain still dressed, I am sure,  
with the dreams of hundreds of women's wishes.

I almost went there on St. George's Day, the 23rd of April, but didn't plan well enough.



I would have loved to go to the festival again; to experience the threads unraveling as we climb the steep path; the colors of silk against the brilliance of the pine trees; the stillness and silence of the island shared with hundreds of women, bound by dreams.





I know the tree is still there. Of all the trees, I know this for certain. Yet it was the furthest to revisit.

The wishing tree remains a wish.

I will return.

Wishes will bring me there.





Do You Know This Tree?  
by Roberley Bell

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## Afterword

I learn a city by walking. In 2010 I lived in Istanbul and on my daily walks to the university where I was teaching, or a friend's house, or for baklava, I began to notice and started photographing certain trees. They were not iconic symbols of the beauty of nature, but rather trees that appeared compromised—yet protected, nurtured.

These are trees that, in the United States, we would consider *ugly*, or located in inconvenient places, and we would just cut them down. There, somebody was really caring for them.

On May 27, 2013, demonstrations in the city of Istanbul began in Gezi Park, which is a small, not particularly lovely concrete park with some trees, in the center of the city. I used to walk through Gezi from my apartment to Istanbul Technical University to teach. There was something about the demonstrations that really hit home for me. Also, the demonstrations were initially sparked because the government wanted to bulldoze the park and build a mall. But it really was not about the trees. Yes, that first night it was to save the trees, and maybe even the second and third day, but the demonstrations of Gezi Park became a demonstration against the government of Turkey. I did not photograph these trees, but I walked through the park often and these trees seemed at home there.

In 2015 I went back to Istanbul to try to find the trees I had photographed in 2010. The trees had become important to me and I knew the process of seeking them out would reveal something—I just wasn't sure what that would become. I wanted to go back and see if, working from memory, I could relocate these trees. This book is that set of experiences.

—Roberley Bell, 2017



## Visual Studies Workshop