

FRANCESCA BERARDI

## EPISODES TRANSLATION

### #1\_ Cities and fear

A year ago, just this time of the year, I had just moved to Lisbon and often walked along the Tejo River. My route started in *Cais do Sodré* and continued eastwards towards the part of the city where I worked.

[background sound of the banks of river Tejo]

At every mile, life along the river changed. The stretch between *Cais do Sodré* and *Praça do Comércio* was always full of tourists, on the most varied vehicles. Tuc tuc and scooters especially. But also segways, which although they have been around for twenty years, always seem to me to have just come off a spaceship.

Near the historic Alfama district, [cruise horn sound] I passed the cruise ship terminal. The ships were always there, imposing monuments to tourism that takes [click sound] and leaves.

[voice of tourists]

I felt a sense of unease every time I saw them. Especially the Disney ships.

[Disney cruise ship sound]

Today I wonder whether, after what happened on the big ships during the pandemic, this way of traveling will be reconsidered. Johns Hopkins University collects on a website updated data on the contagion, listed by country. One day, in the middle of the lockdown, scrolling down the list, I noticed that between Australia and Israel was the entry "cruise ship".

Maybe we'll all agree with Foster Wallace and see it this way:

A Supposedly Fun Thing I'll Never Do Again

[Background sound of Alfama]

Right at the terminal, in front of the Fado Museum, one afternoon I met Luis Mendes, Professor of Geography at the University of Lisbon and leading Portuguese expert on gentrification.

Mendes: How are you? Everything is alright?

Francesca: Hi!

Together we went for a walk up the streets of the historic neighborhood of Alfama, among improvised music and streams of visitors from all over the world. The iconic electric tram was moving slowly, resigned to its role as a tourist train.

[Sound tram electrico]

Mendes tells me that in Alfama, 60% of the houses are for tourist accommodation.

Mendes: Everytime you see the sign AL it means Alojamento local, tourist accommodation.

So much so that, according to him, using the term gentrification to describe what caused the housing crisis in Lisbon is no longer enough. Mendes talks about turbo-gentrification. It is a rapid, complex, disruptive process that follows the time of finance, not of life. It takes the breath away.

Mendes, panting: I think it is this way, climbing up.

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Nothing better than a climb to talk about it.

Mendes: The city has good intentions from the point of view of taking measures to mitigate this issue of touristicification and gentrification and to create affordable housing. But in practice what we see is that people continue to be evicted and there is a strong support of financial powers.

Mendes explains that the city's administration shows good intentions, and is launching programs for sustainable rents, but in practice supports the big financial powers. And the evictions continue. Every day, someone's life is turned upside down. He tells me about it by stopping in front of a small light-yellow house next to a 5-star hotel. An elderly lady lived there and after receiving an eviction letter and strong pressure from the owner, she took her own life.

Mendes: This issue of suicides and mental health is recurrent but we know about it through word of mouth because obviously the media are not covering it, because of the rules....

That image, right in the heart of the postcard neighborhood of Lisbon, stuck in my mind. As the months went by, walk after walk, I began to see this city through different lenses.

[Sound Tejo]

Along the Tejo, going east, after the tourist ship terminal, I met fewer passers-by, hardly anyone really. It is the part of the commercial port, with hundreds of containers, trucks, rails... and then rows of tents. They are home to people of different ages and ethnicities. For months I saw always the same, temporary shelters that everyday life and a zipper have turned into houses.

[Sound zip]

The neighborhood I used to work in is about half an hour from there. An area called Marvila, in the eastern part of Lisbon.

[Sound street]

Marvila is one of the 24 administrative sections into which the city is divided - *freguesias* in Portuguese. It is also a very fragmented territory, divided by social and geographical barriers, and especially by two railways, long wounds that run parallel to the river.

[Sound train]

In the upper part of Marvila, further away from the river Tejo, above the railways, there are several working-class neighborhoods, of which the best known - and perhaps the most stigmatized - is Chelas. These buildings were built since the 1960s and have two main characteristics: rows of round, porthole-shaped windows and bright colors. Water green, yellow, pink - colors used with the intention of masking something, but that actually mark what for many people is a ghetto.

[Background sound of street and people listening to hip hop music on the street].

Housing complexes in Chelas are surrounded by quiet green spaces [sound steps on the grass] that many call urban voids. In reality a large part of them are spaces that are freely used by the residents, especially as vegetable gardens. Then there are the ruins of some ancient mansion houses, the quintas, a memory of when Marvila was not yet a city.

[sound highways]

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All around, there are high-speed roads that are difficult to cross. I see these roads as if they were waterways, with a strong current. And the residential areas, like islands. [sound auto] I'm on a hill in Lisbon, and I'm moving as if I'm in an archipelago.

[Sound auto]

Below Chelas there is another area of social housing and green areas, where it is not uncommon to find sheep grazing. [sound of sheep in the background] On the side walls of the buildings there are large murals made by international artists. Nothing spontaneous, but an initiative of the municipality to improve the aesthetics and reputation of the neighborhood - and perhaps - again - to label it.

[sound steps]

Until the nineties this area was still occupied by shacks that formed the so-called Bairro Cines. Not because people of Chinese origin lived there, but because the wooden and sheet metal buildings were reminiscent of the stereotypical images of China spread by the movies. The workers of the factories in the area lived there, where wine, fabrics, matches, but above all soaps and weapons, were produced.

Now the factories are closed and only a few shacks remain, but the housing crisis in Marvila persists, albeit in a different way. Tic tic tic...

[Train sound]

Below the railways - as if it were a separate island - is Poço do Bispo. It is an area called *riberinha*, which means close to the banks of the Tejo, the destination of my walks. For some years now this is one of the most hip neighbourhoods in Lisbon, one of those destined for the so-called "creative class". In the last 12 months the cost of housing has increased by 80%, and some started talking about a Soho of Lisboa. An ideal place for lovers of art galleries, brunch and craft beer.

[Inside the bar]

Last December, I drank a beer too. I was with Gonçalo Fonseca, a Portuguese photographer I met in the kitchen of a lady who lives in an old house across the street and who lives in the limbo of eviction.

Gonçalo : For me a number five, please, small.

For months both Gonçalo and I worked on the same theme: the effects of gentrification on people's lives.

Gonçalo: One day it's going to be the same being in Lisbon, or in Madrid, the stores are going to be the same...this is a problem we are having at a European and global level, we are losing what makes us unique...I guess in Italy it's the same...

The reason why I dealt with the housing crisis precisely in Lisbon is that here we have a situation that is as emblematic as out of control. At the moment in the Portuguese capital, a city of not even 500,000 inhabitants, there are an estimated 10,000 people in a precarious housing situation. And while the old town is now sold to tourism, in the eastern part of Marvila, you can see everything: the complexity of expressions such as 'urban regeneration', the impact of airbnb and that of investments by large financial funds, the discrepancy between the average wages of the residents and the cost of rent. Above all you see the fear of losing your home, and all the feelings and behaviors that fear generates.....

FLASH FORWARD, IN TURIN WITH GIOVANNI SEMI

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Fast forward sound

I'm in my apartment in Turin, where I spent the pandemic. As I pick up the material collected in Lisbon, I wonder whether all the reflections on gentrification are still valid. Now that mass tourism is at a halt, that in big cities it is no longer so easy to rent short-term, gentrification as we have known it over the last 5-8 years already seems a thing of the past. A phenomenon in a coma. Yet addressing the issue of inhabiting, the home and the city, is more urgent than ever. I talked about it with a sociologist who lives a few blocks away from me, an expert in gentrification, Giovanni Semi. On May 6, in the first week when we could move more than 200 meters away from home, [sound steps down the staircase and door] we met in a square, above an underground parking lot. I told him that the most striking aspect of gentrification is the impact it has on people's mental health. And that's what he told me. The voice is a bit muffled because of the mask.

Giovanni Semi: Let's say that the link between mental health and urban transformation tends to be rarely touched by experts or even by literature. It almost seems that mental health is a separate field linked to individual psychology and that the social contexts that generate it are something else, should not even be considered.

Gentrification puts pressure on weaker families that tend to be poorer in many ways. From a housing point of view, with the risk of an unacceptable increase in rents and hence in the cost of living, but also with that singular situation of being surrounded so that one has the feeling of no longer being in the right place for oneself. The neighborhood changes around you, younger, better educated, prettier people arrive, but they also speak a different language from yours. The probability that you feel less in your own place is very high. Having this feeling of exhaustion of being put even more on the margins of the world in which you live and bearer of certain mental illnesses.

In situations where all these elements exist, I think of economic, housing, social uncertainty. The fact of not seeing people who give us stability for long periods, all this puts people already in trouble in a situation of further stress. It potentially increases all psychic syndromes.

Of these feelings, the sense of exclusion, fear, insecurity, but also the desire to react or to find alternative solutions - necessary but not necessarily permitted by law - I spoke at length with the people I met last year in Marvila.

Knock, knock...Ola Francesca

Semi: They're all neighbors. They live in a building where the lady in whose kitchen I met Gonçalo, lives. A large, decrepit apartment building that in recent years has been sold and bought by funds and investment companies. The residents have very different stories, but they all have one thing in common: sooner or later they will have to move out.

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## #2\_Cities and Fear

Last year I visited over several months a large building in the eastern part of Lisbon, in Marvila. A residential building that has not undergone restoration and maintenance work for about half a century. The tenants have always managed to fix it themselves.

[Ambi: Sound of steps on stairways]

It is an historic workers' residence, known as Santos Lima, named after the family of wine producers who had it built at the end of the 19th century. There are about 40 apartments, but only about 15 are occupied. Most of them have been empty for a long time, some have just been vacated.

One May morning last year, in an apartment on the first floor, Heraclito, a Brazilian artist, was waiting for me.

Francesca: Heraclito? Heraclitooo

Heraclito: Hellooooo

What used to be his place is now a pile of rubble and dust. But the memory is still alive.

Heraclito: Here there was my couch, here the kitchen...here my plants, and here...my bedroom

When Heraclito rented that space - in early 2017 - everything was missing, including the bathroom. The windows were broken, the floors covered with a layer of dirty, worn plastic.

But he didn't care: there was beautiful light, and that was enough. He worked hard to build everything, to create his home and his atelier, an intimate and welcoming place of exchange.

Heraclito: This was a way for me to contribute to the local community, not to make it a predatory occupation...something that could be given back.

His commitment and his intentions were cut short within a few months by an unexpected letter, received as well by all his neighbors.

Heraclito: the residents received a letter saying that the building was on sale. This was on the 22nd of a month I don't recall...the first day of the following month it was already sold.

The building was about to be sold to two companies for almost three million euros. A science fiction figure for the tenants of the building who by law could claim priority over the acquisition. Moreover, for years it had been unclear who their landlord was, what he looked like: in 1990 the Santos Lima family had sold the building to an offshore investment fund and the residents paid rent to an agency. In short, they had already been living in a structure that had been falling apart for decades, while the owners waited for the value to increase. That time had come. After a few weeks the new owners put the building back on sale for 7 million, advertising it as empty. It was time for Heraclito and his neighbors to leave.

Heraclito: They started to bully the residents, saying that everything was going to be destroyed, that they had to leave and accept the indemnity.

Heraclito says that to convince residents to leave, the new owners arrogantly offered ridiculous compensation and adopted aggressive methods, both physically and psychologically. These practices have become so common in Lisbon and more generally in Portugal that they have a specific name: real estate siege, or real estate bullying. In February 2019 a law came into force prohibiting this type of aggression and punishing it, but this obviously did not stop the phenomenon altogether.

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Heraclito: According to what my neighbors thought, they said, look: accept, otherwise you are going to be evicted with no compensation.

Heraclito left. The day after he returned the keys, his newly renovated apartment was completely destroyed.

Heraclito: The void that we see now is of desolation. A brutal force was used to dismantle the work and dreams of people.

The space for Heraclito's imagination and hopes has been reduced to rubble with a hammer, it has become a vacuum. However, he was not discouraged and has turned that pain into a creative force for his art.

Heraclito: They can take our homes, but they can't take our strength and integrity.

He says they may take a house away from him, but not his integrity. While he was talking to me, his eyes were wet. Not even the time for a tear, and a man came along.

[Sound of footsteps]

Hi, how are you?

Hi!

It was Mr. Nicola who lived next door. He heard movement and immediately came running. He's a retired cop, the one who fought for the rights of the residents of Santos Lima more than anyone, the one who always put his own face on it.

[Sound of Mr Nicola speaking with Heraclito]

Mr Nicola asks Heraclito where he ended up.

Heraclito: I found an apartment, but in Barreiro.  
Mr.Nicola: Ah Barreiro, I see, on the other side...

Heraclito explains that he found a house in Barreiro, on the opposite bank of the Tejo River, about 20 minutes by boat from the centre of Lisbon. Barreiro is an industrial town about which there is more and more talk, because many people, not being able to afford the rents in the Capital anymore, have turned their sights to the other side of the river, to the margem sul.

Mr Nicola: In Barrerio, passing over the bridge

Mr. Nicola understands Heraclito's choice, but explains that for an old man like him it would not be so easy, with health issues and the health care facilities he relies on all in the city where he has always lived.

Nicola: Hospital dos Capucios, Hospital Sao José...

After voicing this perplexity he left. It was lunchtime, and his wife was waiting for him.

[Sound of Heraclito and Mr. Nicola saying goodbye]

After a while Heraclito and I left too, but I knew we'd see each other again soon. I could've been in his shoes. Like him, I, too, pursued my dreams for years in cities where the cost of rent was hardly sustainable. First Rome, then New York, and once back in Europe, Lisbon, where the minimum wage is 600 euros per month and you need at least 300 to rent a room.

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Heraclito: This European policy doesn't care about the geographic characteristics of Italy, Greece, Portugal...it wants to see results. Even if that means sacrificing people's lives.

Heraclito argues that the European neoliberal policy adopted by Portugal is geared towards a type of profit that sacrifices the lives of its citizens by also selling their right to housing. A subject that following this period – during which we have all been forced to stay locked up in a house – will perhaps be dealt with more carefully. It has been an important political issue in Portugal for some time now. And it is one of the fundamental issues for the party that Heraclito actively supports, Il Bloco de Esquerda, among the most leftist forces in the Portuguese government.

[Sound of people acclaiming Bloco!Bloco!]

Out of curiosity, I accompanied him to a rally just before the elections last October.

[Bloco's leader talking to the audience]

Heraclito's political involvement has captured my interest, but there is something more unexpected that unites us and has caused us to bond, leading us to talk about home in a more intimate sense. As identity.

Heraclito voice message: France, how are you? I'm a bit late, I guess 25 minutes...

Heraclito is Italian. Not because he was born in Italy to Italian parents, but because he has believed in his "italianity" since childhood. His grandparents, from Veneto, arrived in Brazil on a ship.

Heraclito: I thought if my grandpas are Italian, I'm Italian too...

In the house where he grew up - in the heart of a working-class neighborhood of São Paulo - they no longer speak Italian. But he didn't lack the resources to study it.

Heraclito: I studied by myself...with television, Rai International, the Corriere della Sera, and then many Italian singers are famous in Brazil...Andrea Bocelli, Laura Pausini, Eros Ramazzotti...and we had a special soap opera that talked about Italian immigrants...it was called Terranostra. Then they produced another one called Rei do Gado, with two Italian families fighting all the time.

The determination of the collective ancestors he saw on TV was not much less than his own in trying to obtain Italian citizenship. He started researching his grandmother's family, Matterazzo, originally from the province of Padua, and with the help of a lawyer, he submitted the application. It took years to get a positive reply. Meanwhile, to kill time, he decided to visit Italy as a tourist.

Heraclito: I'll always remember this feeling, while walking in the streets...that it was a familiar place, not so distant from me....

In addition to seeing Padua, he spent a period in a small village near Siena, in the home of a Brazilian friend of his mother's. He loved that area, but he was in his early 20s and he was craving the city. And so he went to Rome, where another friend of friends was waiting for him: Peter, a Brazilian who moved to Italy in the eighties and welcomed him with great generosity.

Heraclito: He gave me the keys the first time he saw me. He told me: Go to my place, take something to eat....

The most beautiful gift Peter gave him was a tour of Rome with a guide named Tiberio.

Heraclito: He was blond, beautiful, with prince-like hair... the wind was moving his hair...it looked like a Disney movie!

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Heraclito felt something very strong during that tour. As he entered churches and museums, he came out of the closet.

Heraclito: I'm here, in a country far from the gazes of people I know...I can do whatever I want!

So in Italy Heraclito really found his identity. The national one and the sentimental one. We talk about that at length during our encounters. He practices Italian and I try to practice Portuguese. We even exchange a few songs from time to time. There's one in particular that he had me listen to. He talks about the reason we met, the despejos, which in Portuguese means both evictions and expulsions. In reality, despejo is also synonymous with waste, with a place intended for all that is unwanted, useless.