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Porto: Distant horizons, beside the Douro

Her heart shared between Iran and Italy, while Asma Mehan makes peace with lockdown in her current home in Porto, Portugal, her thoughts stray to those familiar places. In those distant horizons there is heartache, but also the unexpected promise of different futures.

I born and raised in Tehran, Iran's capital, and I studied my Ph.D. in Architecture in the beautiful city of Torino, in northern Italy for five years. So, I have family and friends both in Tehran and Torino. Currently, I am doing a Postdoc in the lovely Portuguese city, Porto.

During the past days, it has been difficult for me to follow the news about Coronavirus in so many different countries, but especially in Iran and Italy. My heart is divided into two between these countries. Their pain is my pain.



Photo by Asma Mehan

In Porto, the government started to respond to the pandemic in good time. The schools, universities, and gyms are closed and other social facilities are shut. People try to encourage others to remain home, but we are moving towards forced quarantine. Although I only recently started to learn Portuguese, I can see that in social media, hashtags like *#ficaemcasa* are trending now.

Since the start of lockdown measures in Porto, I only go outside to buy food or to go for a run near the Douro river. I work in front of a rock green wall, my daily view. Since quarantine kicked in, I have made writing a daily habit. I also meditate near the beautiful Douro River, preferably just before sunset. I can tell that this is the best part of these solo days. I think keeping the social distancing is going to change me. I started to pay attention to the things that I was ignoring before.

This is an unprecedentedly challenging crisis but I think the Coronavirus is creating a blank canvas for a new possible future. I talked to my mom in Tehran. She was telling me about the clean weather in Tehran - in a city that was so polluted before - and deserted streets. I talked to a friend in Torino, she was telling me stories about the increasing the potential of tele-working and lecturing through different online platforms.

Which kind of future is waiting for us after the Coronavirus?

Asma Mehan, from Tehran, Iran, is a Postdoc Fellow, at the University of Porto, Portugal.



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