"We have always been in crisis"
An ethnography of austere livelihoods in Northern Portugal
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CHAPTER 4

When Austerity and Conservation Meet: Contesting Crisis, Housing and History at a UNESCO World Heritage Site

The Eviction of Senhora Maria Clara

The old woman kicks and screams as she is half-led, half-dragged from the doorway and into an ambulance, where her son is waiting. He is trying to console her, speaking in a low, mellow voice. “The old place is not worth it. Don’t upset yourself, ma. You’re making a scene”. He could just as well have been speaking to himself. It’s only later, after the ambulance has left to take his mother to the senior residence that will be her new home and we have sat down to have a coffee on the square, that I come to understand the scene. Fernando is a kind man. Broad-shouldered and foul-mouthed in the benign fashion I came to associate with Vimaranese men of his age and class. Today is the first time I see him upset and shouting:

this house isn’t fit for human habitation. We would demolish it, if it weren’t for this mania with respecting old things the bureaucrats have. My grandmother’s old, too and no one respects her! And she worked all her life. They can tell me so many times that this is fair, I don’t buy it. All her life my ma spent maintaining this house! […] Even when I was born, it had nothing. No canalized water, nothing. My parents made it habitable on every level: fixed the roof, put the plumbing, laid the electricity lines, cut the windows so the rooms had light! […] And now they tell us we can’t fix it anymore? That we can’t do what we need to do to our own property so that we can continue living in it. We would tear the house down, and build a good, new one for her and us to live in. By our own work and with our own money.

Guimarães is is nationally known as the ‘cradle of the nation’. This epithet is displayed in huge lit-up letters on the medieval city wall that is the first thing visitors see upon arriving to the city centre. What they actually see is “Aqui Nasceu Portugal” (Here Portugal was born). In accordance with this self-perception, the
Palace of the Dukes of Braganza, the adjoining castle and the medieval city centre were all declared UNESCO world heritage sites in 2001. This designation brought with it strict regulations for the conservation and public presentation of ‘heritage’ that was applicable both to monuments and residential houses.  

In Guimarães, heritage is everywhere. Residents are confronted with it in the signs and maps directing visitors to the castle, palace and other well-preserved places; in the masses of people clogging up the tiny alleys of the medieval centre during summer time; in the national media where Guimarães is virtually always referred to as the “Berço da Nação” (“cradle of the nation”); in the local newspapers where conservation and heritage are given a regular section; and in the job advertisements for polyglot tour guides and hospitality industry workers. Heritage as a topic is also omnipresent in the discourses of local politicians, real estate developers and investors, where it functions as a key signifier for long-promised economic stimulus through increased tourism, development and diversification premised on a redemptive cultural turn (Harvey, 2008). Most importantly though, ‘heritage’ is overtly present in the local residents’ everyday lives: they must request permits to alter their inner-city homes and undergo lengthy, often negative assessments for (re)constructions as they attempt to make liveable what are often century-old houses. They are seeing tascas (snack bars) held by the same family for generations disappear to be replaced by haute cuisine restaurants, while community centres and the municipal market are banished to the peripheries.

Figure 9: Ancient City Wall of Guimarães

22 Figure 9 contains a map highlighting the inner city districts of Guimarães that was awarded UNESCO protection, as well as the surrounding districts the status of which is still under review.
In this chapter, I focus on the latter aspect of what Brumann (2014) terms “the politics of heritage production”. I will try to make sense of the eviction described above by examining the combination of the poor quality, inner-city housing, resulting from strict restoration regulations, and the severely increased tax burdens on urban centres resulting from Portugal’s austerity memorandum. The chapter builds upon several simultaneous analyses: beginning with a historical and social analysis of the conservation paradigm (Kelly, 2011) allows me to flesh out whose selective and idealized history is presented in Guimarães, and how this is done. Herzfeld's work (1991) on the discursive and material elements implied in heritage-making is useful here, because he shows how these elements enable gentrification, while also inspiring resistance to it. Taking a cue from his observations, I begin by recounting the eviction of Sra Maria Clara as a foundational moment in which inner-city residents became aware of the situation. I then place this observation alongside the historical background necessary to appreciate the conditions of possibility for rendering private housing into a heritage status. If historic city centres are gentrified, then they are, by extension, also opened up for private investment, appropriation and commodification (Harvey, 2008; Brumann, 2014). Implied in this analysis is a concern about who bears the costs of increased tourism; the social and political consequences of “branding tradition” (Babb, 2005).

From there, I scale up to display conservation's unlikely intersection with property tax hikes that were part of the MoU. I show how the combination of the MoU tax code revisions with the UNESCO regulations, produced a situation in which long-term residents could be evicted from their homes for failure to pay taxes. Austerity and conservation working together therefore, not only freed up residential housing for speculation and capital investment, but ownership of property in the city centre became a liability to families.

In the final section, I return to the eviction and describe a demonstration that developed in response to it. The two events took place within two weeks of each other and came to be—in the understanding of inner city residents—closely linked because they appear to be a result of the same power structures that people believe are working against them. In exploring the forms of contestation that emerged from the dispossession of the inner-city, I explore both the eviction and the demonstration as competing conceptions over what constitutes the city’s history and who has a right to claim and represent it. I suggest that what is at stake in this contestation is not just a socially inclusive heritage practice and policy but in fact a class politics that results in the gente à baixo conceiving of conservation and austerity are one and the same force—a force of dispossession, deliberately set up to work against them.

In terms of structure and case studies, this chapter breaks with the pattern of the previous three for several reasons: for one, it concerns the only politically and socially motivated demonstration I encountered during the 21 months I spent in Guimarães; for another, it doesn't focus on the case of a single household, considering instead the perspectives of many inner-city residents, both those who participated in the demonstration and those who had more positive feelings about the heritagization of Guimarães.
Furthermore, in terms of content, the previous chapters have highlighted the ways that home and property ownership became a strong element of security for families living under austerity, whether they were used as an asset to capitalize on for petty rent, or as collateral for business ventures. The example of Sra. Maria Clara provides a corrective contrary example, showcasing how the owning of a house in the highly sought-after city centre of Guimarães can lead to indebtedness and even become a family burden. In doing so, this chapter highlights the contradictory and often arbitrary field of power relations implied in austerity and, thus, underlines the feeling of uncertainty and anxiety that structure crisis situation. Moreover, it pinpoints the Guimarães citizens’ discontents as rooted in middle class politics and policies, and enables us to explore what means of contestation are possible in the local context.

Finally, the previous chapters have variously highlighted how households confronting the livelihood crisis capitalize on their property and homes as a critical asset for making ends meet. In this chapter however, I explore the conditions and ambivalence through which private property can also become a liability for families. The case of the eviction thus makes for an important corrective vision regarding the importance of private property for survival in the livelihood crisis. What is at stake in homes becoming a liability is the intricacies of class, family, kinship and the dispossession of the possibility of inter-generational transfers of wealth.

**Housing as Heritage: How did we get here?**

This section gives a brief overview of the history of housing in Guimarães from the time of its historical deregulation to the onset of the heavy regulation and selective enforcement of UNESCO. Like the home of Sra Maria Clara, the residential buildings now addressed under the UNESCO code were built at a time when zoning, building permits, fire safety and indoor plumbing were largely unheard of. They were first owned by the petty nobility of the 16th century but this later changed in one of two different ways: they either became worker’s homes, often owned in bulk by the owner of a nearby factory or they continued to be the property of a small nobility who gave or rented them to their workers. For many generations, these inhabitants in turn adapted and altered the houses according to their needs, using whatever means and materials happened to be available. As a result, by the end of the 18th century, the residential houses were already no longer in the pristine, original condition that the UNESCO is seeking to protect today.

Prior to the Carnation Revolution, any type or style of building could legally be erected independent of whether it conformed to the architectural norms of the area. Although the first zoning and fire safety laws were introduced in urban centres in 1951,23

23 RGEU (Regulamento Geral dos Edifícios Urbanos)—General Regulations of Urban Residential Properties, passed into law 7th August, 1951.
their effective enforcement remained limited to larger agglomerations, not least because the Salazaristic regime never defined what qualified as urban or residential. I found no indication that any inspections or regulative laws were ever instituted in Guimarães prior to the Revolution (Baroso, 2012). Given this circumstance, buildings were repaired, fixed up or rebuilt as their owners saw fit and the medieval buildings in the city centre of Guimarães were no exception to this. Moreover, the relative deregulation of industrial expansion and private construction have long been features of government policy (compare Baroso, 2012), in so far as they allowed the state to abandon families to organize for their own needs. Deregulation of housing in Guimarães thus seems to have implied leaving residents to their own devices in the organization for living space.

Those efforts that actually existed for the conservation of architectural heritage were limited to attempts at revamp the Guimarães castle in the 1950s and 60s; these attempts came about mainly through initiatives seeking to prevent local residents from stealing the castle's structure of granite blocks for their own home construction as well as crowding off the supposedly protected area from public access.

As in most other inner cities in Portugal after 1974, the buildings in Guimarães were in poor, often ramshackle condition, not least because the Salazaristic regime never invested in or legislated housing. As was the case for Sra Maria Clara, it was common for more affluent home owners to possessed a commercial-residential use designation and, for example, to rent out to a shop or café downstairs. In our case, the grandfather and father-in-law of Maria Clara had, in the decades between the 1950s and 1970s, opened extra windows in the facade, added laundry racks to the balconies and built an extra storey on top of the roof in order to accommodate the expanding family. At the time, it was common for sons to move their wives onto the family property immediately after getting married. Since the family had five sons, all of whom married and brought in wives, they needed more space and opted for the cheapest and easiest option: an extra floor on top the former roof, and splitting the floor levels to create more private rooms.

Other construction work done on surrounding houses included adding balconies, laundry racks, and floors; moving walls using cement rather than wood; and replacing granite foundations with cheap cement, timber or stone. The latter occurred mainly because ready-cut granite blocks could be profitably sold at the time.

It was only by the amendments introduced during the first post-revolutionary National Assembly in 1975 that laws were instituted that stipulated the need for building permits as well as the conditions for the issuance of such permits. The law was amended to reflect “a new standard of living space” (Rodriguez et al, 1999; Baroso, 2012), one that aimed to improve living conditions by making several basic prerequisites mandatory: minimum room size; the separation of incoming and outgoing water pipes; ventilation; and authorized window sizes. The National Assembly appointed an assessment commission to look into the status of any already existing houses that did not match these new requirements. The commission quickly returned with a proposal that would legalize the vernacular, informal structures that had resulted from two centuries of unregulated housing expansion. They argued that there
was neither time nor funds nor the necessary personnel to oversee the vast rebuildings that would be required if all the old buildings were to be held to these new requirements. The assembly quickly adopted this proposal, giving wide freedoms to city halls to begin the legalization process, as well as its monitoring and enforcement. Their only condition was that all remodelling of buildings would have to abide by the new standards. Buildings left in their old state could remain so, theoretically forever.

In Guimarães, as elsewhere, the haphazard repairs and renovations of several centuries of unregulated housing expansion were thus legalized in a single stroke. Whether or not they were built in accordance with the regulations, alterations were given preference that were seen as improving the living quality of tenants: i.e., insulation, in-door plumbing, and ventilation. Although, in theory there was a ban on any further repairs or alterations of residential houses without permits, Baroso, a scholar at the University of Minho who studies vernacular construction in the north of Portugal, comments that in the rural places of his inquiry, the fact that permits need to be obtained prior to building remains largely unknown or ignored (2016: 34).

It was therefore effectively only with the UNESCO designation that conservation and architectural building laws came to be enforced in Guimarães. Recall that virtually all heritage scholars remind us of the heavy regulation at UNESCO sites, not least because the UNESCO commission has the right to withdraw, suspend or even revoke protection statuses in case of non-compliance (Little, 2014; Franquesa, 2013, Herzfeld, 1991). In Guimarães, regulation of residential houses most frequently takes the form of licenses that home owners need to obtain every time they want to make the tiniest changes to facades, roofs, and windows, but also even for plumbing, heating, insulating and fire proofing of their homes. Not only is the assessment process lengthy and arduous, but the type of alteration that end up being allowed are few and far between. Those that were allowed, moreover, appear to have been exclusively those that did not alter the exterior appearance of the building in any way. Throughout my fieldwork, one of the most common complaints revolved around the high costs implied in renovating or refurbishing inner city housing; a task only os ricos (the wealthy) were seen to be able to do according to the regulations. As a result, there was an effective halt to renovations. This can be seen as one major reason for why some of inner-city housing in Guimarães is not fire safe and lacking basic conditions of habitability today.

In the direct aftermath of the onset of the conservation stipulations, many of the former residents moved away from the town centre; this relocation was made easier due to the fact that many new housing units had been built during the post-revolution construction boom. The wide extension of popular credit in the late 1980s and early 1990s moreover, opened the possibility to live in rental housing or buy higher quality, newly built flats and houses outside the centre. Those who could afford it opted for raising their families in self-contained flats and thereby broke with what had previously been an historical norm: the existence of large, multi-generational households that sons would take over from their fathers. Even shopkeepers and restaurant owners often abandoned the flats above shops, preferring to make the
daily commute. Thus, most of the remaining inner-city residents are of the older
generation—a trend that is changing again now in the context of touristification,
gentrification and speculation. In the next section, I will take a look at the way ‘her-
itage’ was promoted in the city by different interested parties and highlight how the
conjunction of these efforts ended up working against these long-term residents.

Heritage Making in Guimarães

After the end of the dictatorship, the heritage of the city was ‘rediscovered’ by a group
of devoted, and often young, local residents. Initially, in the late 1970s and 1980s, many
advocates for conservation came from the better families and they quickly formed a
group called “a Muralha: À Defensa do Patrimônio” (the city wall: In Defence of
the Patrimony). This group began documenting representational and residential
buildings that were built in the regional artisanal method of timber-granite mixes;
these structures later ended up being the decisive “unique factor” in the UNESCO
nomination. Almost overnight, realtors, local and regional investors and prominent
citizens—many of them in the Muralha group—began marketing Guimarães as “the
birthplace of the Portuguese nation”. Their efforts culminated in the national herit-
age commission’s official designating of Guimarães as a historical site. The city hall
jumped on board, announcing its plans to restore parts of the city centre to “public
utility” (Camara Municipal de Guimarães, 1989: 3). To their credit, the city hall took
over several abandoned ilhas,24 restoring them to habitable conditions and renting
them out to socially vulnerable citizens at controlled rent levels—a fact that becomes
relevant in the following section on authenticity and belonging. Another aspect of
this “restoration to original utility” involved banning car traffic in the main squares,
moving weekly market events outside the ancient walls, requiring street musicians to
have licenses, and, within the ancient walls, limiting many everyday practices such as
“hawking, trading, bartering and loitering” (ibid.).

From early on in the process, a wide range of people and institutions took part as
key actors in the conservation effort: city officials and bureaucrats, realtors, tourism
offices and local resident associations. While the objectives and motives varied, a ma-
jor concern was how the conservation funds could be used to counteract or reverse

24 Ilha (lit: “island”): type of workers housing common throughout the district. Ilhas were usually built
illegally, but with oral permission from the factory owners on the territory of the factory. Frequently
lacking conditions (no sewage system or running water, one-bedroom sheds), they were rented by the
factory owners to (some of) the workers, in return for which he would withhold a part of the wage.
Almost always they contain a little patch of arable land in the front or back, or included access to a com-
munal, also factory owned vegetable gardens. In the downtown of Guimarães what ilhas remain have
most have been restored and frequently provided as cheap (social) housing by the city hall, like the ilha
de Sebastião literally within the historic centre. To many people who inhabit them and have grown up
playing in and around them, ilhas are the symbol of northern Portuguese industrial urban development.

109
the slow ongoing degradation of the city centre in an attempt to “preserve the nation’s history in the city’s architecture” (UNESCO-ICOMOS, 2000: 22). As the crowning place of the First Portuguese king in 1109, Guimarães had once been the capital of the country and, although it has not served as the capital the 13th century, it continued to hold political importance throughout the Renaissance. From the 19th century on, however, the petty nobility and artisan traders who had preserved the city’s national recognition and unique architecture were displaced when Guimarães became the hot spot of the national textile industry. Since then and for the last 120 years, employment in the textile sector supplies the livelihood for the majority of the city’s population, and whatever fortunes had existed were no longer used to preserve the city, but rather for industrial expansion.
As far as the city hall, heritage commissions, *a Muralha* and others were concerned, however, the past to be remembered was decidedly that of a monarchic Golden Age: a monumental time in which Guimarães was the capital, all its inhabitants were royalty and the “dirt and dismay” of industrialization was far off in the future (Camara Municipal de Guimarães, 2010: 112). For a while, it appeared as if almost all parties could uniformly rally around the interest to resurrect the monarchic past. Franquesa’s (2013) work on *Making, Keeping and Selling* of protected buildings in Palma de Majorca does much to showcase how references to heritage can be filled with a variety of meanings and harnessed by different groups that are pursuing various agendas. Through a case study of the Temple Tower’s remodelling, Franquesa reveals how the idiom of heritage can become meaningful only when translated into practices designed to achieve economic, conservationist, political or personal outcomes. Similarly, in Guimarães, there was essentially a consensus among the groups involved that a restoration and remodelling of the city centre was necessary and even beneficial to the city from various standpoints: touristic, economic, developmental and, above all, cultural. Yet none of the parties involved paused to question what was implied in the ‘heritage’ signifier, or whether the seemingly universal ‘good’ of growth through real estate and touristic investment might have an underlying negative premise (gentrification) or potential long-term ramifications (the likely driving out of long-term residents).

It was within this climate, in 2001, that UNESCO awarded full World Heritage status to Guimarães. It effectively ended all aforementioned debates. After city officials and conservationists implemented the stipulations, the processes of change proceeded rapidly. The possibilities were perceived to be so endless, that by early 2003, local and regional newspapers were openly speculating about a ‘turn’ in the touristic landscape by which the previously intensely popular destination of Algarve would slowly be replaced by destinations in the north that offered not only the ‘Sun, Sand and Sea’ (3S) package but also history and culture as attraction points (compare Comercio de Guimarães, 02/05/2003).

This enthusiasm proved to be short lived however. A local curator, deeply involved in the *Muralha* Group at the time, summarizes the discussion: “In hindsight, the only concession made to residents was that they would be allowed to continue hanging laundry in the streets… unlike in the centres of Porto, Lagos and Lisbon” (JC, interview, 2015). A statement that she now recognizes as “deeply misjudging the interests of the local residents” (JC, interview, 2015). The same curator explains the shift from enthusiasm to dismay:

> It was as though we had unleashed a beast […] Probably we were a bit naïve and there should have been mechanisms to protect local residents… but finally, what happened was that those who suffered from Guimarães’ popularity were the very people who made the city what it was in the first place: local characters, street musicians, the elderly, the working classes and the places they frequented: tascas, the market hall and small family commerce. (JC, interview)
Joaquina’s references are telling because in the decade that followed the onset of UNESCO protection, Guimarães underwent considerable transformations: high-end restaurants, shopping centres, and fashion boutiques ballooned along the cobbled alleyways, pushing out small, family-owned establishments; whiskey, gin and wine bars replaced the pubs on the central squares; virtually all squares, streets and alleys in the protected zone were restored to what realtors and city officials—in a rare moment of unity—termed “original public utility”, often removing or restricting access to traditional activities (like markets, concerts or dances) that were held there. Most recently, the municipal market was expelled to the periphery where it was unreachable to inner city locals by foot, while its former hall become an art gallery and convention centre during the city’s year of being a European Capital of Culture in 2012.

Additionally, there was a close monitoring for adherence to the new UNESCO regulations. There were particularly strict regarding the buildings that lined the streets and squares because they were seen to comprise “the city’s unique face” (“a cara unica da cidade”, CMDG, 2000: 23). This monitoring was also to be the pitfall for the house of Sra Maria Clara described above. Her son Fernando, who had already moved to the outskirts, was busy installing water lines to the upper floor on the building’s street-facing façade at the time UNESCO protection went into effect. The reconstruction was necessary because his elderly mother had trouble walking up and down the stairs from her first floor bedroom to the ground floor bathroom, especially at night. Although he had been informed previously that his remodelling were against the conservation policy, Fernando had “heard such allegations before” and “expected to get away with ignoring them, because everyone else did, too”, not in the least part because, as he put it, “we have after all always lived here” (Fernando, interview).

Because he completed the renovations at a time that the UNESCO regulations had just begun applying and the parties involved in the conflict failed to reach an extrajudicial compromise, Fernando has now been in a legal conflict with the city’s conservation council since early 2003. The conflict has eaten away at his savings and financial resources and his wife has threatened to divorce him should he commit anymore family time and resources in waging a legal war. Fernando himself is convinced that it was decided by the gente grande (big people) of the conservation commission to make his case an example to push through to trial, in order to showcase to the city and its (reluctant) inhabitants the consequences of noncompliance with the conservation regulations. Although this reading of the situation was confirmed to me in private by several anonymous members of the commission, it is also true that the pressure applied prior to the onset of austerity was purely legal and bureaucratic. There was a paper war underway certainly, but it appeared as if neither side was eager to present their views in the open court trial that would theoretically lie at the eventual end of Fernando’s case.

Before the example or a court date could be set, however, something else happened. In May, 2011, the then government under Prime Minister Socrates signed the troika-mandated austerity memorandum. Almost exactly 4.5 years later to the day, in late November 2015, Sra Maria Clara was evicted from her home in the episode described
above. This event came to be highly symbolic for many of the working class residents still living in the city centre and, since that time, has often been described as a turning point in their understanding of what the city had become. As one informant put it during the eviction “[it] is not mine anymore. The city I know would never have kicked us out like this”. I must have looked confused for he continued “Can’t you see what is happening? We, the people who made this city—hard working, tax-paying Vimaraneses, we are no longer welcome here. They are trying to obliterate us. Even when I worked as a lowly operator, I did not feel this invisible” (Carlos, interview). The “we” in his sentence is accompanied by an inclusive gesture taking in the crowd we are both part of, while the “they” comes with a finger jabbing in the general direction of the Largo da Santa Maria—the square that houses the city hall, the regional commercial association and the conservation council’s headquarters. Affirming sounds and head-nodding from the crowd accompany Carlos’ words.

Property Tax Revision under Austerity

The Austerity memorandum of 2011 and the new, often punitive policies it instituted effect this story most directly, because they made possible, in conjunction with the UNESCO regulations, the eviction of Sra Maria Clara. To see why, we need to take a quick look at the reform to Portuguese Municipal Property Tax that the MoU put into motion. Many authors have described the immediate effects of austerity measures such as the wage cuts for public employees, income tax increases, defunding of the public health care and education sectors, as well as the freezing of pension and social security funds (Coelho, 2014; Ferrao, 2012; Lains, 2003; Lapavitsas, 2009). These interventions have in fact reinstituted endemic poverty to a level not seen in the country since before the Carnation Revolution (Rodriquez et al, 2016; Ferrao, 2012).

Much less attention has been paid in recent years however, to MoU measures designed for the mid- and long-term implementation. These mostly fell into the ‘fiscal revenue generation’ category identified as one of the three areas in which heavy intervention was necessary to secure the Portuguese state’s financial soundness. Among them is the revision of the municipal property tax code, estimated to raise national fiscal revenue by at least EUR 250 million per annum (compare MoU, 2011: 5-6). Via the dual tools of a rise in residential property tax and the reduction of the temporary exemptions for owner-occupied dwellings, the taxable value of all property should become closer to the market value. This was one of several interventions ostensibly designed to alter the tax code towards a more equitable system that would be harder to evade and falsify (Rodriquez et al, 2016) and that would result in long-term, dependable revenue (MoU, 2011: 31-32).

The IMI (Imposto Municipal sobre Imoveis) is a tax applied to the value assessment of a property as shown in the fiscal register. The tax is raised and spent by the municipality
and payable by the owner(s) of a property by the beginning of April each year. As part of the many austerity measures that have already been the topic of previous chapters, the calculation and payment methods of the IMI tax were revised in 2011 and the revisions were carried out and implemented by city halls over a three-year period until the end of 2014 (MoU, 2011). The argument advanced in favour of property tax reform was that allegedly the “fiscal” assessment of most properties was well below their “actual value”. “Actual value” is a definition taken directly from the Fiscal Stability Pact and is stated as a property’s market value. This reasoning implies that there is a lack of municipal tax income due to the allegedly undervalued properties. This is perceived as a surplus income that could, if it were had, be used to close municipal (spending) deficits and reduce debt.

We should note that, since the end of the dictatorship, there have been various property re-assessments based on the same argument, and that similar re-assessments have occurred in virtually every EU-27 country at some point since WWII, most notably in the former eastern Bloc. The taxation of property as a strategy towards generating state revenue is therefore not new.

What is new, however, is the matrix introduced by which a property’s ‘actual’ value could be adequately ascertained and then fiscalized. In it, the manner by which IMI was now to be calculated was altered. According to the matrix, a property’s fiscal value would now be assessed based on its market value, location and the standard of local services as well as their proximity to such things as transport options, local schools, health care and so on. Note that there is no category in which the condition or quality of the property is assessed. For the purposes of re-assessment, the market value is determined by taking the median square meter price of the surrounding properties sold in the last 60 months and applying it to the current property for which IMI is calculated (MoU, 2011, subsection 33.4.).

In a place like Guimarães, where new and old, restored and dilapidated buildings are directly interspersed, the shortcomings of this system are all too obvious. In the three years after the adoption of the matrix in Guimarães in 2013, municipalities were granted

25 Amounts over €250 are paid in two instalments due in April and November while, amounts over €500 are paid in three instalments in April, June and November.

26 Memorandum of Understanding from 17.05.2011, subsection 6.3 and 6.4. on fiscal measures indicates a revision of “property taxation” (33) states: “The Government will review the framework for the valuation of the housing stock and land for tax purposes and present measures to (i) ensure that by end 2012 the taxable value of all property is close to the market value and (ii) property valuation is updated regularly (every year for commercial real estate and once every three years for residential real estate as foreseen in the law). These measures could include enabling municipal officers, in addition to tax officers, to evaluate the taxable value of property and the use of statistical methods to monitor and update valuations. The Government will modify property taxation with a view to level incentives for renting versus acquiring housing. [Q4-2011] In particular, the Government will: i) limit income tax deductibility of rents and mortgage interest payments as of 01.01.2012, except for low income households. Principal payments will not be deductible as of 01.01.2012; ii) rebalance gradually property taxation towards the recurrent real estate tax (IMI) and away from the transfer tax (IMT), while considering the socially vulnerable. Temporary exemptions of IMI for owner-occupied dwellings will be considerably reduced and the opportunity cost of vacant or non-rented property will be significantly increased”.

27 See for example Poblocki’s 2012 work on the formerly state-owned blockij and their privatization after 1989 in Warsaw, Poland.
wide leverage with regard to the implementation of IMI reform. The difference is not only that this time, as the saying goes, there was real money on the line, but also that the austerity memorandum had also put extra financial responsibilities on the municipalities.

With the memorandum, municipalities were given a set of financial responsibilities that had previously been at a national or regional level. The national government legitimized these cuts by referring to the tax revenue that municipalities could expect from collecting housing tax. In being handed these financial responsibilities, municipalities were under pressure to swiftly execute the reforms in order to cover their spending. In Guimarães, beginning in 2014, the city hall put an ‘expert team’ of realtors, tax inspectors and Tax Authority employees in charge of property assessment.

Since the implementation of the new code, the National Statistical Institute has published annual reports stating that the per capita national property tax has increased by only 1.5% (Instituto Nacional da Estatística 2013, 2014, 2015)—while statistically true, the reality I witnessed in Guimarães corresponds much more with the effects reported from other parts of the country (Journal de Noticias 2013; Publico 2014). This evidence suggests that when localizing our analysis, we find an uneven distribution in the level of taxes: While property tax has remained the same in the countryside and suburbs—in a few instances even decreased—the supposed ‘fiscal value’ of urban property has risen significantly, causing a rise in property taxes to as high as ten times their previous levels. This increase is especially happening in cities that are centres of tourism and commerce, where the assessed property values are among the highest in the country. The main reason for this is because properties are highly sought-after and speculated upon in the real estate market and that drives up the comparative component of IMI calculation.

In real numbers, for the inhabitants of downtown Guimarães, the changes to the property tax amount per year often meant the difference between paying what was previously €300 and now had become €1000 a year—a massive amount for households struggling with the crisis of livelihood. For a better perspective on this, consider that minimum wage at the time of implementation was 505€/month. What is more, in the pre-2011 legislation of IMI calculation, there was a clause permitting home-owners that were in precarious positions, such as pensioners or single parents, to claim exemption from paying IMI without having to prove their neediness.

Upon its insertion in 1995, this amendment clause was considered a major victory, since it was perceived as protecting the most vulnerable members of society without being unduly burdensome to the bureaucratic process. With the MoU amendment to IMI, the clause was not retracted, but the claiming of IMI exemption was now to be a means-tested procedure in which only those households with an annual cumulative income of less than €15.295 could qualify for. What is more, the cumulative fiscal value of all the family’s properties, both rural and urban, could not exceed €66.500. When

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one is looking to buy property on online websites in Portugal, the lowest determinate figure on the “willing to the spend” scale is €50,000. The MoU amendment, in a single stroke, thus excluded multi-generational low-income families, who often had access to more than one property, from claiming IMI exemption. But, even for those few still eligible, claiming the exemption obliged applicants to divulge family finances, assets and liabilities to a bureaucratic and traditionally distrusted entity: the tax authority.

This is how property tax became yet another major expense that downwardly mobile households had to strategize for. Throughout fieldwork, fear of the moments when the letter demanding IMI would arrive was omnipresent. Households allocated, juggled and finally overstretched resources in an attempt to make ends meet, and often did so months before the payment was due, or from the moment the “property report” was handed to the local tax office. Sonia, a single working mother of two, summed it up by saying: “I was afraid to post pictures to my Facebook of the super-moon I could see from the window—fearing they might charge me more IMI for that, too!” Evident in her statement is the feeling of an arbitrariness- and wilfulness that many people associate with how taxes are determined, adding to their fear and feeling of being unfairly treated: “All I know is: I don’t understand it, I get nothing in return, but if I don’t pay, I’m in trouble!” (Carlos, interview).

Despite the relative normality of property re-assessments for taxation throughout Europe, two things are exceptional in our particular context and thus warrant closer examination. First, there seems to have been no mechanisms instituted to protect vulnerable home-owners. The lack of consideration for the financial situation of home-owners is reflected in people’s opinions: Sonia and Carlos’ statements above echo this sentiment of injustice at having their life made costlier and harder through no fault of their own.

I want to suggest that this faultlessness is crucial. The people most affected by property tax hikes during fieldwork did not move into heavily mortgaged new homes from which they could be evicted on a morally justifiable. They did not buy new cars on credit that needed to be repossessed to teach them a lesson about “overspending”. They had not “lived above their means”, “consumed senselessly” or “failed to tighten their belts” at a time of hardship—all descriptions that the national and European media used at one point or another to legitimize the punitive saving measures austerity instituted. Their only transgression was to own a property in the highly sought-after city centre of Guimarães. “I must just have been in the wrong place at the wrong time—only without changing place or time” (Fernando, interview). That they got into trouble—despite the apparent constancy of their time, place and livelihood—provides, I suggest, a crucial perspective on the importance of property in the strategizing for livelihood under austerity.

Secondly, what is new in this context is not only the faultlessness of those now required to pay much more money or their divulging family secrets to gain exemption from paying. What is exceptional is how the non-payment of property tax is handled institutionally. Maria Clara’s house was reassessed in late 2013 and the next tax report
she received "suddenly asked for an almost five-fold increase from the 200something euros" (Maria Clara, interview) she had always been paying before. The family scraped together and borrowed money and paid, albeit late and hence with a fine. However, when the same amount was due again six months later, they were unable to raise the money. As was the new norm, the back taxes were then applied as a debt against the calculated fiscal value of the property, while the fines that were levied were added to this debt. These fines rose whenever a payment was missed, accumulating with the outstanding tax payments and any outstanding fines, plus administrative fees for every missed payment. In this way, the inability to meet the tax requirements and fines led to a situation in which the debt reached mortgage-like levels.

In the last instance—presumably when the amount due is high enough to warrant such an expense—the tax authority handed over the collection of the outstanding amount off to a private collection agency. Imbued by the local state, these agencies are equipped with the authority to seize the homeowner's assets in order to meet the outstanding liabilities. Of course, the mortgage-debt is applied against the newly-assessed fiscal value of the property, not the obviously much lower amount that the house would fetch in the case of an eventual sale. In our case, Sra Maria Clara and Fernando were the legally listed homeowners, and since their only shared asset was the same house for which the fees were due, the collection agency opted to repossess the house, sell it, and then use the resulting revenue to cover the owner's liabilities. That this decision would obviously involve the eviction of the house's only resident, Maria Clara, seems to not even have been a factor.

Fernando and Maria's bargaining position was further eroded when it became clear that the flat Fernando owned and inhabited with his family was registered as their primary residence. Had the inner-city house been their registered primary residence, Maria could have applied for emergency relief and prevented the eviction. The fact that she was "erroneously registered" at her sons flat, however, constituted a finable offense, and was widely viewed as further proof of her and her son's unruly, unregenerate attitude. An accusation already made against Fernando, when he refused to halt and undo the water line construction on the house's façade. This was an accusation that would end up undermining his ability to reach an extra-judicial compromise.

It is through this seemingly blind bureaucratized process, in which conservation and austerity regulations combine together in the unholiest of unions, that Maria Clara came to be evicted from her house. At the time of this event, she had just turned 88, and had inhabited the house since her marriage to Fernando's father at the age of 16. When it became clear that the eviction was imminent and all other measures had been exhausted, Fernando tried to sell the house himself in order to raise the money to pay the debt (the backward taxes plus the fines) and hence avoid eviction. However, the local realtors he sought out to represent the sale were not interested in it for the asking price since it was not ‘market value’ for a house of that quality, i.e., a house without proper insulation, facade, or water lines to the upper floors—all alterations, of which, thanks to conservation restrictions, were impossible to cost-effectively undertake.
In other words, the fiscal value assigned to Fernando’s property by the reassessment matrix, which the Tax Authority then used as a basis for their debt-mortgaging, was so far from the amount any buyer would actually pay, that the house was effectively unsellable. The eviction was thus rendered inevitable. The absurdity of this situation is perhaps only exceeded by the words of the Tax Authority bureaucrat present at the eviction, when he said “Finally, justice has been served”.

“Next they will come for the tascas...”:
Resisting Touristification and Conservation

In the immediate aftermath of the eviction, widespread discontent rippled through the city. Everywhere, one could hear talk of “strikes” and “resistance”; from local journalists and newspapers to opposition politicians in the city hall; from local residents and neighbours as well as in the cafés and bars. Some of the most vocal were residents of the city-centre who themselves felt threatened, and it was finally among them that the only action that directly addressed the eviction was constituted. When, a mere 10 days after the eviction, a square in the downtown city was to be remodelled and, in the process, a soup kitchen [cantina social] serving free meals to poor citizens expelled to the periphery, it became the rallying point around which discontent was voiced.

On a brisk Wednesday afternoon in late September, I am in a crowd comprised mainly of inner-city residents. They are holding posters, placards, and hand-painted signs. The signs have slogans like “you took my home”, “shameful heritage”, “What about my social centre?” and “So now we are without a municipal market! Thanks, PSD [agora ficamos sem Mercado municipal! Obrigada, PSD].”

The crowd is quiet, watching the entrance of the recently rebuilt heritage-protected building, the festive inauguration of which is taking place inside—attendance by invitation only. I am standing next to José, nicknamed Zé, one of my closest friends in the city centre of Guimarães. Zé studied engineering at the university of Minho and worked for the city hall’s heritage division for a few years before “seeing the light”. He now freelances online for a basic source of income and spends the rest of his time attempting to generate funds and support for the cultural collective he co-founded in 2014. The collective is named Espera29 and offers artist studios; conference and meeting spaces; a concert venue with a solidarity bar (all profit going to the maintenance of the collective); bicycle rental and even free-of-charge sleeping spots for those who don’t mind dust and the occasional rat—all located in an abandoned building in the Couros district.

29 a deliberately ambiguous name: “espera” literally translates to the nouns “wait”, “expectation” and “hope”, and it is also the third person singular of the verb “esperar” (to wait, to hope, to expect), as well as the imperative derogation of these verbs.
Zé also spent several years abroad and often insists we speak English, lest he loose his fluency. On this day, Zé is accompanied by his 8-year-old daughter, who is riding on his shoulders and impatiently surveying the crowd, eager for the demonstration and, more importantly, the walking to start. I suspect the reason Zé is speaking to me in English has more to do with him not wanting his daughter to eavesdrop than it does with his impeccable command of the language.

Zé: And so it continues.

CL: What?

Zé: The touristification of everything here. First, they remade Toural [a square in the center], then they expelled the Municipal Market to the outskirts. A few months ago, it arrives to this square and they kicked out the social canteen that was over there, where these arches are. These ridiculous arches some historian claims were classical city decorations from the middle ages. And because of that bull****, the social canteen is now next to the municipal market, in a place no person from the city centre can walk to. A social canteen [located] where the needy aren’t. But at least this square is pretty, right?! […] And then, last week, they evicted that old lady, and today this ceremonial opening? It’s one and the same […] Next, they will come for the tascas, then the library, and then the cheap housing, like the Ilha, where I live. Anything that doesn’t look appealingly medieval has to go […] But where does it end? Maybe I have to go, too, because I [am] not old, not handsome enough?”

I was fascinated by Zé likening of the eviction to the revamping of what had, only a few months previously, been effectively a ruin that attracted many rough sleepers from the nearby soup kitchen for overnight stays. I wasn’t fully aware of it at the time, but after re-reading my fieldnotes, I realised that my astonishment was most likely due to my own preconceptions. I had, ignorantly perhaps, assumed that, as a resident of the city centre with a young daughter who roamed the streets, Zé would embrace the effective removal of drifters, beggars and homeless from his doorstep. Yet the contrary appeared to be the case. Could it be that, as much as the tascas, sport bars, street musicians and rowdy football fans, Zé embraced the presence of such people as part of the essential make-up of the city? My confusion must have been evident, for Zé continued: “They’re gente á baixo, you know. Like most here; like me, too, in a sense”.

Before I could query my assumptions or enter into a discussion however, another demonstration participant intervened. Overhearing our exchange in “foreign”, an elderly man with a cap turns around and, after a good hard look at me, shoots, “so you are a spy then, aren’t you?”. This was my first, but certainly not my last, encounter with conspiracy theories and suspicions of English-speaking foreigners in Northern Portugal. This tendency is most likely a result of the revolution, coup d’etat and the widely believed conspiracy theories that the Free Masons and Opus Dei are intertwined with big politics and big business.
Too astounded to respond, I could only stare at the demonstrator. Why would a spy attend a benign demonstration in backwater Guimarães, Portugal? And what, or rather whom would I be spying for or on, at any rate? Always good for a laugh, Zé tried to save the situation by injecting a bit of humour. Many people had turned around and were staring at us in their turn, when Zé, in his unmistakably Vimaranese accent, responded loudly for all to hear “yes, we are Soviet spies. And this here on my shoulders, this is agent Matilda—still in training and here today to learn from you!”. The crowd found it funny.

As frowns change to smiles, a hush descends over the front rows. The door to the renovated building opens and the mayor, accompanied by several dignitaries, steps out. Someone in the crowd begins lightly beating on a pinheiro\(^{30}\) drum, and someone else counts softly to four in time with the beat. On the fifth count, people across the crowd begin to sing softly and other drums pick up the beat. I see many confused faces and raised eyebrows and then hear rising voices chanting and shouting that start to compete with the song. It soon becomes clear, however, that the song will win out, on the volume and passion level, as all over the crowd, people are recognizing it and joining in.

It is an old Minhoto folk song, popularly called “Sobe, Luisinha” but, in all probability, has actually been adapted from Antonio Gedeão’s *Calcada de Carriche*.\(^{31}\) It recounts the daily routines of Luisinha, a young mother employed at a factory. While the first stanzas describe Luisinha’s morning routine of “getting up with the sunrise/ still exhausted / boiling the milk / half-hearted /waking and feeding the children/ serving the husband / dishevelled”, verses two and three highlight her work and corporal suffering: the menial but tiring repetitions implied in factory work; her lack of sleep and aching muscles; her husband taking advantage of her exhaustion; and her daughter’s dependency on her. The chorus again recalls the drudgery and exhaustion of her life by highlighting the ever same roads she walks: “climbing uphill / always climbing / to serve” her husband, her boss, and her children.

In the final verse sung at the demonstration and one that I have not been able to find in Gedeão’s original poem, Luisinha is suddenly an old woman. She is no longer fit to climb and can only sit in her armchair by the oven, in the house of her children, “crocheting or embroidering cloth/ white clothes with blue stitching/ Clothes to be given to her daughters and granddaughters/ clumsy and smooth like once Luisinha/ for their wedding day /when they too will start to climb”. The song ends with a chorus that has also been adapted from the original poem: “But Luisinha /she does not climb any longer / No more climbing for Luisinha / Her climbing days are over”.

In the second to last stanza of the adapted chorus, the name Luisinha is replaced with that of Maria-Clara. I have not been able to determine whether it is a deliberate reference to the eviction of Sra Maria Clara or not. Regardless, it appears certain that the

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\(^{30}\) pinheiro (lit: pine tree) is an annual celebration on St. Nicholas day, where a Christmas tree is brought into the central square by a bull-drawn carriage. The carriage is accompanied by a procession of drummers who are said to be chasing away the evil spirits of winter with their noise.

\(^{31}\) An original version of Gedeão’s poem can be found at this link (accessed Jan 20th, 2019): [http://www.citador.pt/poemas/calcada-de-carriche-antonio-gedeao]
song is sung in this context with overt objectives in mind. Not only has Gedeao’s poem been widely acclaimed as a critical account of working class life, but, in this instance, its recital appears to function as a deliberate reminder to the mayor and other dignitaries about the predominant working class presence in the city. Recalling the drudgery and routines of being a factory worker highlights a commonality that is shared between Luisinha and older-generation residents present at the demonstration. This is found in the routines and life structure they once had around factory work. It might then become possible to conceive of the choice of this song as a kind of self-identification of the crowd as working class. Or as what Zé and many others around me have called gente à baixo—people at or from the bottom.

A second and less direct message can be observed in the adapted last verse and chorus. Altering the song to highlight Luisinha’s/Maria-Clara’s age and her deserving of a warm place by the fire in her children’s home, posits an ideal familial relationship—one in which generational responsibility is assumed by caring for the elderly in one’s home. Moreover, that such care is possible reminds the audience of the importance of property in general, and the family house in particular: it is both a support mechanism necessary to abate the crisis of livelihood in the short run and a generational transfer of wealth in the long run. With the background story of Maria Clara’s eviction in mind, then, the importance of property and its current process of dispossession via conservation become evident. Equally thematised is the powerlessness that people feel in face of the arbitrary system of taxation and regulation, that directly jeopardizes their livelihood, homes and thereby the very possibility of assuming generational responsibility.

Contesting Competing Conceptions: Heritage as Dispossession?

To Zé’s daughter’s utter disappointment, the protestors never started walking after the song had been sung. The organizers, among whom the bespectacled man that called me a spy is a recognized figure, had planned to take a route through the city center, past several recently rebuilt monuments, and ending in front of the city hall. Instead, the crowd quickly dispersed and I ended up almost alone in a group with the “conspiracy” man, who has by now introduced himself as Luis, a 63-year-old former operator at the Fabrica da Avenida—a factory complex just outside the city centre limits, halfway to the train station, that has since been converted into a strip mall and gym since its closure in 1999. He suggests to the group that we go sit in a nearby café. During the ensuing discussion, Luis explains his need to take a stance today:

They say they do this renovation to remember. But what kind of remembering and whose? Removing the social canteen to the outskirts, removing us from the city because we live in our houses—to me, it’s violence, a violence of space and a violation of my memory. Look at what happened to Fernando! […] all my life I have been here, worked here, as have you all.
And now the city is against me. They are making laws against me and [against] our being here. But aren't we and our memories part of the city's memory, its patrimony? [...] as gente á baixo, I have a right to be in our beautiful Guimarães. And equally, our collective indignation is a voice of the city. I insist they hear it—the voice of an operario, the voice of gente á baixo.

In Luis's speech, as in Zé's statement above, conservation and austerity are presented as mutual forces, working deliberately against gente á baixo. What seems at stake here, is not merely gentrification as the effect of touristification and commodification, but a question of who has the right to occupy urban space and to decide the uses to which it can legitimately be put. I want to suggest that one way to consider these assertions of gente á baixo's “belonging to the city” and the insistence on inclusion in heritage, is not merely as a questioning of the redemptive narrative of commodification and growth through “urban transformation” (Harvey, 2012: 9). Rather, and much more profoundly, it is as an articulation of class politics. This is a class politics that is not overburdened by detailed understanding of how conservation laws work or who mandates austerity policies. But, it is a politics nevertheless that identifies very acutely the combined, unjust effects austerity and conservation regulations have on citizens and consequently rejects them tout court.

In this contesting, inner-city residents harness a notion of “social time” (Herzfeld, 1991: 110) as opposed to the monumental time the conservationists seem to be propagating. Harvey, echoing Engels, argues that “surplus absorption and extraction through urban transformation premised on the capacity of the acting elites to tear up workers housing in a manner similar to the Hausmannization of Paris” (2012: 9). Be it “from the consideration of … beautifying of the town, owing to the demand for big centrally situated business premises” (Engels quoted in Harvey, ibid.) or, for Guimarães, from the consideration of heritage protection: The houses protected under UNESCO stipulations are valued, because they reflect the “nation's history in the city's architecture” (CMdG, 2000: 22). They reflect a time both prior to and outside of industrial society, a time devoid of “scandalous alleys” (Engels, ibid.)—A time, in short, devoid of an industrial working class. In so far as the “politics of selection” always inherent in the making of heritage (Cameron, 2000) hold for Guimarães, former industrial sites were clearly not among the selected.

Following this logic, IMI hikes become measures designed to set in motion the commodification of the so-far little capitalized upon inner cities of Portugal. Taken at face value, driving out the long term local residents appears to be merely a collateral side effect. From the vantage point of Harvey’s analysis however, eviction and the making invisible of working class presence come to constitute the structuring measures designed to open up inner cities for investment. The houses of the working class residents become objects to be commodified, but not by them, through them, or for them. They are valued as objects devoid of inhabitants, devoid of working class presence.

The parallels between the processes described here and those of accumulation by dispossession in green grabs—“the appropriation of land and resources for environmental ends” (Fairhead, Leach & Scones, 2012; Corson & MacDonald, 2012)—are uncanny. Here, heritage conservation intersects particularly strongly with nature conservation due to the as-
sumed ulterior interests involved in pushing the dispossession it ends up producing (Kelly, 2011). Whether it is, on the one hand, for the sake of protecting the land from destruction by assumed local unsustainable practices (Kelly, 2011), or, on the other, for the sake of protecting age-old residential housing from destruction by allegedly ignorant, unruly inhabitants, we can see that, in both cases, higher causes than the immediate livelihood of those involved are called upon as credentials to justify appropriation (Luciano, 2017). As land and green grabs build on well-known histories of colonial and neo-colonial resource alienation, so heritage conservation builds on age-old upper-class interests (Smith, 1984, Brockington & Igoe, 2006), as the ability to pursue and ensure extraction. Both in neo-colonial and in conservation contexts, local populations experience this ‘protection’ as injustice; or as Morell has recently suggested, as “a dispossession of oeuvres” (2018: 35).

Applied to Guimarães, the class politics of city centre residents are paralleled by the vested powers and interests of a middle class able to restructure the rules and authority of access to history. Here, the middle class is able to claim the heritage narrative by imbuing it with the signifying power (Walsh, 1992) of history by calling on images of monarchic times. In the same manner that conservation credentials were first called upon by the European colonial states to create, for example, forest reserves that could later be used for both revenue and security (Scott, 1988), so residential housing has a long history of being a basis for accumulation (Palomera, 2014a). Despite its historical rootedness however, heritage as dispossession, just like green grabs, also involves novel forms of valuation, commodification, and markets.

Working class people on the other hand are not able to claim the heritage signifier in this way. In every presentation of heritage in Guimarães, the industrial age and the industrial working class are not just omitted, but are treated as never having existed at all. This representation is underlined by the fact that of the 23 museums in the city, not a single one is dedicated to the textile industry, the region’s main source of income for the last 120 years. Returning to Fernando’s quote from the beginning, we see that he effectively compares his old mother to the old houses, demanding to know who of the two requires more protection. This comparison reveals the wilfulness that citizens call upon when they face up to historical narratives of architecture, monarchic times and grandeur by narrating their own lives, work and age. Yet it is precisely this neglected, unrepresented history that residents point to when they assert their right to space and presence. They do so by supplementing these assertions with accounts of their own memories and by pointing to the remnants of that industrial era which also litter the city, for example, the chimneys of dilapidated factories visible in all directions. Thereby, they offer up competing narratives of what history and heritage are and who has a right to claim their signifying power. Their narratives not only directly oppose the “suspended historical time” (Herzfeld, 1991: 112) of monuments, but attempt to reintroduce an element of the historical process, namely, class politics and working class presence, into the heritage narrative.

I want to suggest furthermore that it is through this insistence on alternative narratives that residents make sense of the coming together of conservation, gentrification and eviction. Although liable to be dismissed as fantasy, that fact that people
refer to conspiracy in order talk about this violence needs to be taken seriously. For what is conspiracy but a situation in which larger-than-life structures of power come together to manoeuvre for the advancements of their own interests? And what sets such a power play apart from that performed by industrial interests, the conservation commission and the austerity state? Here too, distinctly non-local, non-working-class interests come together to advance an agenda that impacts negatively on the livelihood of locals in the most direct way. What people like Luis and the many like him who echo his focus on the Freemasons, Opus Dei and their ties to local, regional, and national politics seem to point to, is a system of power that operates to further its own gains. To be sure, the actual involvement of the Freemasons in the UNESCOfication of Guimarães seems unlikely, but in alleging their involvement, people are still able to make legible the recent changes to themselves.

What it more, in historical context, there have been ties between the Catholic Church, the Fascist Dictatorship and Opus Dei. For obvious reasons, people remember these and, in the case of Guimarães, associate them with the selective and arbitrary application of conservation regulations. On the surface, the selective application of regulation is less of a problem for gente grande, because they are able to delay any juridical processes so much that it ends up becoming prohibitively expensive for the tax authority to continue fighting them in court. Similarly, Fernando’s transgressions were chosen to be made an example of, and he turned out to lack both the funds and connections to prevent the eviction in the end. In summary, the fear of gente à baixo is that of being made an example of, like Fernando. A fear that transpired to be very realistic, not least because any incurrent fine is likely to result in their personal bankruptcy.

Whose City, Whose History, Whose Crisis?

In this chapter, I have considered the coming together of heritage conservation and austerity-induced tax burdens to make sense of the eviction of inner city residents of Guimarães and the protests that sought to contest these processes. First, I historicized deregulation of residential housing in Northern Portugal to show what happens when heavy regulation of the type employed by UNESCO suddenly sets in. From there, I scaled up to display the effects of heritage making, regulations, and their selective enforcement as disproportionately affecting older generation, working class, and city centre residents. Next, I introduced Portugal’s austerity memorandum and the hikes in property tax it heralded to display how the escalation described at the onset of the chapter was made possible. In the last step, I brought together these three factors by considering how they are resisted. Narrating austerity and conservation as mutual forces set up to work deliberately against gente a baixo, locals try to resist gentrification by insisting on their own, working class visibility and belonging in the
city. Moreover, I showed how those affected by dispossession make sense of their own situation and thereby partake in the construction of city history.

In terms of subjectivity, identity and a future vision, moreover, heritage and history prove to be crucial but complicated signifiers: As scholars Walsh (1992) and Franquesa (2013) remind us, heritage, when it is presented as a traditional or “original” past, is not merely a construction but also a “suspended historical time” (Herzfeld, 1991: 112). In Guimarães, suspending a place in a specific period and presenting it as such, serves to deny actual historical process. It works to mediate all pasts as ephemeral snapshots and exploits them for the purpose of embellishing decaying cityscapes. In doing so, heritage regulation ends up working to guarantee the success of capital in developing new, superfluous markets (Walsh, 1992: 129) and denies the presence and agency of those currently inhabiting the city.

Inner-city residents contest this representation by pointing to their own life and work histories and the marginalization they experience as a result of conservation and austerity. Far from an emancipatory event leading to durable presence, however, the protests against the eviction and heritagization ended up putting working class presence on the agenda for only a single day, and so, no changes to the eviction laws or the conservation policy were achieved, not did this form of contestation take hold.

Taken at face value, the heritagization of Guimarães could be a sign of economic revitalization in line with the ‘cultural turn’ so often anticipated as part of urban renewal. As a diversification effort into the tertiary economy, it is theoretically imaginable that part of the crisis of livelihood could in fact be abated by employment opportunities in the tertiary sector. When we look beyond this hopeful assertion to the materiality of heritage making and marketing, however, the picture becomes critically complicated. In their coming together, conservation and austerity mark another instance in which people’s everyday livelihood is constrained through the intervention of forces that they have no choice but contend with. Not only are houses dispossessed and intergenerational care and transfers of wealth inhibited, but owning a house in the city centre of Guimarães becomes an active liability to families. Where austerity and conservation meet, dispossession occurs. Once again, the crisis of livelihood is deepened by state-led regulation and a facet of expanded reproduction. In fact, when austerity and conservation meet, they prevent people from capitalizing on the only asset left for pursuing livelihood: their home.