

**Title:**

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# Occupy Climate Change (OCC!)

*Creative story  
entry*



FORMAS



## **A Photograph of Sidi Maafa**

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### **CONFERENCE**

“Have a good day, love! I hope you like it out there, I hear that Morocco is a warm and welcoming place!”

I read the message my husband left me as I was heading to the conference room at the University Campus of Technology and Expertise in Oujda, Morocco. It was only seconds before an usher welcomed and guided me to the main conference room. I entered the place and found my way through to my seat next to a young blonde woman, who was scanning a pamphlet of the conference. I sat and observed calmly the spacious room. I could easily distinguish the languages and accents I heard around me.

The young woman next to me seemed restless.

“I am not usually a whiner, but isn’t it way too hot in this country,” she said to me, longing for a conversation. “I was boiling outside!”

I smiled and nodded in agreement.

“It is not what I expected; there are no green spaces in here; besides, everything seems artificial and phony.” She continued. “When I go back to my town in Switzerland, I will hug the trees in my yard.”

“I guess we are living in the Wall-E world,” I responded in a humorous tone.

She looked puzzled for a moment but acted like she understood my analogy. Perhaps she was not familiar with classic environmental movies. Nobody watches movies these days. I wanted to lighten the atmosphere with a relevant fact.

“I learned that the city of Oujda has become one of the hottest cities in the Mediterranean.” I sensed that I did not express the degree of discomfort she felt, but I went on and introduced myself to her: “I’m Márcia Amaral, an environmental photographer and artist from Brazil, but my husband and I have been settling in Sweden.”

“Interesting, I never understood why real people are still doing photography jobs these days, to be honest,” she said. “AI Drones have been taking care of that for ages now!”

I felt a little offended, and I wanted to give her an idea about my art project, but she continued:

“Kate Reber from Switzerland, you can tell I’m the youngest here,” she said proudly. “I was invited here after leading a protest group in my high school about a tree they cut down in the schoolyard.” She chuckled. “People who saw my protest video called me names like the future environmental activist. Oh, look, the screen is changing!”

## **Oujda**

The large screen displayed a video about the host city, Oujda. The North-Eastern Moroccan city was chosen to hold the *Mediterranean Climate Conference* for the 2190 edition. Every year, the conference organizers selected an environmentally vulnerable city from the Mediterranean region to host the meetings. The conference had been home to politicians, policymakers, engineers, scientists, activists, artists, and scholars from different parts of the world. They came together to converse and reflect on the environmental situation of the Mediterranean region, which had warmed 30% faster than the global average.

Besides its vulnerable ecosystem, the cultural diversity and Mediterranean closeness of Oujda made it an ideal city to hold the *MCC* conference this particular year. The city is less than 60 km away from the Mediterranean basin, and it has been characterized mainly by its border position. The video put on view several sites that used to be the landmarks of the city, namely the old medina, the great mosque, Lalla Aicha Park, and Sidi Maafa Forest. The video then focused on the last site, Sidi Maafa Forest.

Moments later, the screen changed again. This time it showed two short videos with two dates, 2020 and 2190. Both dates were for the forest of Sidi Maafa, and the videos that were shown next were staggering. Some people in the audience chattered audibly after seeing them. Along with the first date, the video showed a woody green forest, rich red soils, and flocks of birds chirping on a variety of trees and plants. The second video revealed a completely lifeless desert.

The display was then followed by an IPCC report about the climate in Oujda. In 2020, the climate was generally influenced by the interior Mediterranean climate, mild with dry, hot summers. The hottest month was July, when the max temperature was about 35°C. Things,

however, changed in the last century as the report demonstrated. The inhabitants of the region experienced episodes of drought coupled with a phenomenon of desertification. Rain did not fall for the last six decades in the whole oriental region of Morocco, which made Oujda and its peripheries look deserted. The report concluded that Oujda had become the hottest city in Morocco, hitting its highest temperature ever recorded: 50.8°C.

Following other videos, images, and reports, the audience participants were invited to a field excursion at Sidi Maafa to see with their own eyes the changes that had occurred in the place.

“An excursion to the Sidi Maafa Desert? They must be kidding!” Kate Reber shook her head in disbelief. “I am heading back to the hotel,” she added before she slowly disappeared among the moving crowd.

### **SIDI MAAFA**

We boarded big, hydrogen-powered tour buses. The buses were obviously new; I wondered if they had even been used before. The passenger who sat next to me was a local resident. I learned from him that the Oujdi community did not appreciate the introduction of ecobuses. Water scarcity made them resentful towards governmental initiatives. Through the massive windows of the bus, I could see many WaterForAll signs on the walls of the buildings we passed by.

On the excursion, we were given juice and water. I put a bottle of water in my pocket and started taking photographs of the sites we passed by in Sidi Maafa. I was immersed in a photograph that captures all the visible features of the land until someone nearby asked me:

“There isn’t much here to take photographs for, is there?”

Turning to my right side, I stood up in curiosity to meet a bald, middle-aged man with a badge that said Smith Beard, a British environmental scientist. I felt the name was familiar.

“Uh, well, the extinction of a whole forest is a thing after all, isn’t it?” I replied in a friendly manner.

“Right! As scientists, I wonder what more we could give as proof of the gravity of climate change effects.” He seemed upset. “I have researched the past climate of this city; Rainfall was at least 400 mm per year. After 170 years, look what we have here, arid land with scorching temperatures and no rainfall.”

“I like your recent work on the climate of the region, Dr. Beard,” interrupted a man in a gray suit, with a self-assured smile. “Sean Harddy, with double d, a US AI investor. Friends call me Hux.”

I introduced myself in exchange, but Dr. Beard did not. He did not seem comfortable in the presence of Harddy. The two seemed to have met before.

“You like science, Mrs. Márcia?” Harddy asked me with unquestionable confidence.

“It gives us the data!” I answered in short giggles.

“Data isn’t doing anything nowadays.” Harddy reacted with a smirk. “We are on the threshold of a new century, and the environmental changes are still taking place.” He noticed a slight annoyance appearing on the face of Dr. Beard. “Science has been giving us data and facts, but data were just numbers, and facts were misled by people’s emotions and anxieties. Confirmed information that climate scientists give is nothing but climate fright to people.”

“And of course, you AI investors pursue the profit, wherever it is,” Dr. Beard responded. “I saw your company’s last ad about that app that claims its users can instantly feel environmentally optimistic and less *anxious* about world problems.”

“That’s how it works, Dr. Beard, don’t blame the investors! Look, I love trees and clean air, with pleasant weather too, but scientists in recent decades did nothing but scare people about the Earth's climate. They fed the thirst of environmental activists, politicians, and even us, the investors.”

“Are you saying we need a new approach, Mr. Harddy?” I intervened.

“I don’t think we can do anything about it,” replied Harddy. “It is those folks who think we can change that are deluded. Humans aren’t responsible for climate changes and even if they were, they could do nothing about it. What humans can do is maybe prevent pollution,

rethink resource consumption, and improve recycling. Controlling the climate opposes a true environmental sense!”

“Okay,” Dr. Beard commented. “So, every climate scientist is nothing but a scaremonger, according to Mr. Harddy, with double d.”

“Do you wanna know how many ‘the world is ending’ meetings I had to take up?” Harddy said calmly, looking at me. “I have been hearing those alarming calls backed up with numbers and reports from scientists that the signs of ecological collapse are so imminent. The warnings were basically the same in the last two centuries. Nothing happened, humanity, my friends, has been adjusting to environmental changes.”

“Harddy, or as your friends call you, Hux, aren’t you simply speaking from the playbook that the climate change deniers spoke from two centuries ago?” asked Dr. Beard with minor agitation. “While many cities in the world are having the worst summer storms in decades, wildfires destroy land on three continents and islands are being swallowed by the ocean, you say we just sit there and watch? I think you got it all wrong. You speak as if *science* spread environmental fear and terror, yet it is people’s ignorance and uncontrolled emotions that were behind that!”

“You are a photographer, right?” Harddy turned to me, ignoring Dr. Beard’s last statement. “Why don’t you take a photograph for us to commemorate the date. Beard and I have different views, but we like debating with each other, just like siblings, right, Smith?”

Dr. Beard did not respond but reluctantly agreed to take the picture. I took the photograph and promised to send them a copy.

The groups dispersed as we headed back to the hotel.

## **HOTEL**

I sat in the lobby of the hotel. It was a delight to listen to the soothing music that was mixed with the quiet murmurs of the people in the background. I sensed it was a convenient moment to type a text to my husband about all the details of my encounters today. Right after I sent the message, notifications from Kate Reber were popping up on my phone screen. She

posted several shorts expressing her support for the misfortunes of the Oujdi people who protest every day for equal water distribution.

I turned off my phone and felt a deep need to reflect on everything that happened in my day. I reviewed the data shared in the morning presentations. Then I looked at the photos I took, examined them carefully, and pondered the forest that was drastically transformed into a desert. I also thought about my conversation with Reber and the one between Beard and Harddy. The local protests came to my mind too. Unhurriedly, I tried to put it all together and connect it to see what I could learn from it all.

My moment of reflection was then interrupted when my husband called.