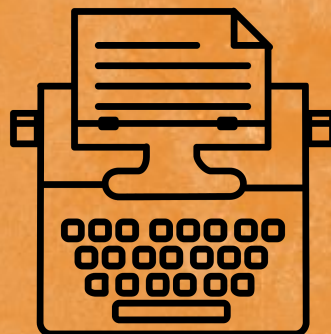


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Occupy Climate Change (OCC!)

*Creative story
entry*



FORMAS



A Privileged Witness

Domingos J. Langa

A starting point!

I am a cemetery in Pemba, Mozambique's northernmost city. I was established during the colonial era. I had been the only city cemetery for more than a half-century. I consider myself a resident of the city center. Pemba is the provincial capital of Cabo Delgado. Without me, the city would not exist. If I am not present, the city will perish. At the same time, I consider myself on the outskirts. In the municipality's strategic plans, I am virtually non-existent. When I am present, I am associated with less noble services. The locals are aware of my presence. Furthermore, they appear to understand how important I am to them. Nonetheless, everything suggests that my presence in their daily lives is fleeting; they only come to see me a few times a year. Furthermore, they are constantly gossiping about me. Nonetheless, they talk about me despite not knowing much about me.

I will begin by giving a brief overview of how I am currently organized. Beliefs, religion, urban planning, inequalities, and conflicts appear to be the elements that explain how I am organized. Within me, there are two sections: an office and a section for graves and burials. However, the burial site is further subdivided into burial sites based on religion (Christian and Muslim) and untouchables, which include the graves of soldiers from distant lands who died, I believe, in one of the great wars. Finally, there is a section for daring and mass graves. Some would say that poor souls died and were buried without being prepared! There are also trees, particularly acacias and flowers, as well as paths for people to take.

If I had to say more about myself, I would most likely emphasize more aspects. Furthermore, I am confident that I will do so. Even better, I want to do it. Where do I even begin? Being a location, I reserve the right to disregard any rigor requirements that may exist. My thoughts are racing with events from the past, present, and future. I am just going to let her roam free.

The Years of Tranquility!

"You are not permitted to make any noise in the cemetery." So say some visitors who came to see me. At times, it makes me want to laugh, but only the trees, insects, and I can hear and understand! I will keep my mouth shut. I must always keep my cool. I believe that the silence required of those who visit me on occasion has provided me with a few years of peace. In fact, it has been a little more than a half-century of peace. People were terrified of me. Some said I was well liked because I housed long-term residents. I am not sure!

My neighbors aided in the spread of fear. Nonetheless, they were unafraid of me. They might have even done so. They were, however, one of the few people who could pay me a visit, sometimes as a matter of duty, sometimes as an imposition. They visited me on a regular basis to demonstrate their bravery and courage. They came from a primarily male institution and had to prove their masculinity and bravery. They had to see me as a brave and courageous test. Damn soldiers!

There is, indeed, a beach behind me. The name is Chibwabwary. It has a fantastic breeze. When it rains, the soil becomes extremely slippery, making access to the area nearly impossible. There were only a few trees between the beach and me. Anyone wanting to go to the beach had to walk through one of my walls. They also had to pass in silence. They could run, jump, dive, and scream once they arrived at the beach. However, scream quietly so as not to annoy me. Some claimed that only fishermen had the ability to speak loudly.

It is also worth mentioning two other neighbors who, despite their remoteness, have helped my survival: the port and the airport. Colonial officers, then the national government told me, and finally the municipality, "You cannot build houses near the port or the airport." Again, I believe people did not build houses because they were afraid of me, but I am not certain that this was always the case.

Challenging times

Someone decided to build a cabin near the beach one day. The fishermen claimed that the area was dangerous at night. Nonetheless, the brave persisted. Then those people arrived. Fishermen asked them to keep an eye on their gear. The bathers claimed it was a possessed family who lived near a dangerous beach and a cemetery. The family would be relocated to a safer location,

according to the municipality. However, a larger number of people and families attended. More houses were constructed. Furthermore, more houses are still being built. Services, particularly electricity, arrived at the same time. The municipality renamed the new settlement "Unidade de Chibwabwary." It was an official acknowledgement of an unofficial unit. I began to feel threatened.

I considered protesting, but it would be futile. Who would pay attention to me? Fear of me, which had been my shield for a long time, has been shattered. Although my walls remained intact, I began to receive more visitors than usual. They are also no longer tourists, but rather my neighbors. They have electricity but no running water. They come to me for help getting access to water. The guard supplemented his income by selling water. He did, however, lose his brave and courageous status. My neighbors have shown me that I had nothing to be afraid of in me, that I was simply a location. What exactly am I? My agony had only just begun.

Bidding farewell!

My visitors used to say, "Pemba is a small town with few inhabitants." On the other hand, Unidade de *Chibwabwary* demonstrated otherwise. It appears to have reflected an increase in the population. If that was the case, there was no cause for concern because the unit was designed to be a peripheral. Furthermore, some politicians and elites believed that peripheral issues were not urgent. Nevertheless, as a neighbor, are my concerns also considered peripheral? I pondered.

The gravediggers, who were once thought to be far braver than the guard, the military, and my new neighbors, performed miracles: they always made room for a new burial. A sidewalk, a road for dividing graves, a road for hearses, under trees, or even exhuming abandoned graves could be used. However, space is not infinite. I am not infinite. The wonder has ended. Who, on the other hand, would say, "The cemetery is overflowing!" Was I stuffed?

The leader who authorizes the construction of a new cemetery is widely assumed the first permanent inhabitant of that new cemetery. There are not many willing volunteers to take on the role of the lamb. After much debate, conflict, and promise, the *Cemitério de Muxara* was built and inaugurated. I started to have a rival. More importantly, I was no longer in business.

The future of the place: what future?

Even though I am officially closed, I cannot be abandoned. My new neighbors keep me occupied. In addition, I was only closed for new burials. As a result, people continue to come to see me and take care of their loved ones. I, on the other hand, am complete. Anyone who takes care of the trees and the walls while ignoring the insects and birds takes care of me. Maybe I will be here in a few years. Maybe not.

In any case, I am scarred by rapid change, poor urban planning, rapid population growth, unplanned city expansion, unprecedented natural disasters, and accelerated erosion. Most importantly, I am proof of how the residents handled these issues and challenges. I am a bystander. My mind is packed with events. Perhaps I am nothing more than a memory. If I had to choose my fate, I would rather be a memory than a monument. Wind, rain, and sun are all visible, audible, and palpable to me. Plants, animals, and people can also be seen, heard, and felt. I keep track of and update events and phenomena. I interact with other people. I may have been inactive, but I am now more active than ever.