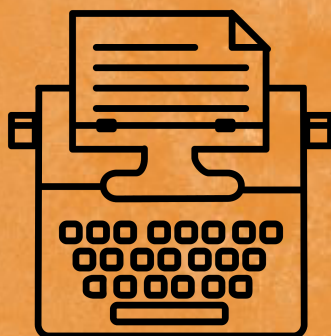


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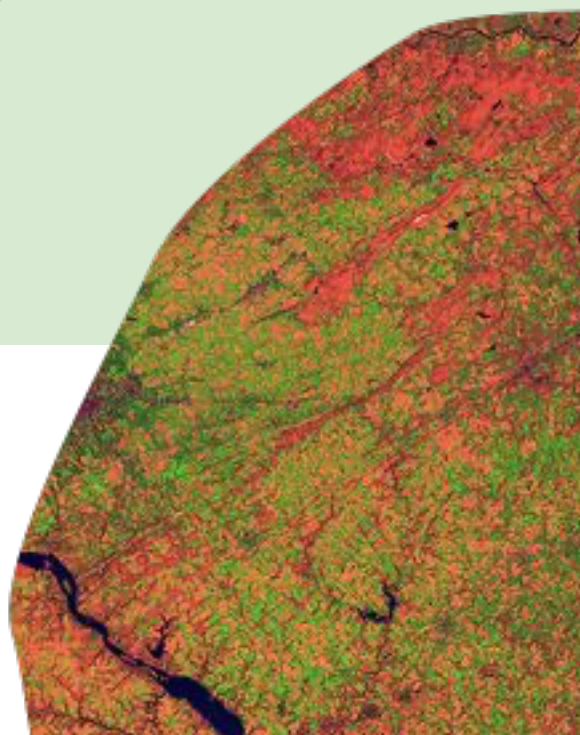
Author:

Occupy Climate Change (OCC!)

Creative story entry



FORMAS



Oasis

Marta Bordons Martínez

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Sunu created imaginary lines with their arms and legs, extending them, crossing them, raising them to the rhythm of the music, with a smile on their face and agitated breathing. The drums rested between Antonio's legs, who played with dexterity despite his advanced age. He had been playing for years, ever since Sunu's grandfather came to Andalusia fleeing one desert to find another. At that time, the policies of the different governments had given free rein to intensive irrigation, golf courses, and luxury housing developments in an increasingly dry and withered landscape, greened only in private plots surrounded by fences.

Antonio remembers that summer, he was barely twenty years old. He had always considered summer in Sevilla as an oven that was lit in May and someone forgot to turn it off until well into October. To face it, those people with homes on the beach or money to leave the city began their own migration, leaving behind a land that became uninhabitable. Antonio was not that lucky. His family had always lived in a neighbourhood where the walls were so thin that the neighbours could ask each other for salt without leaving the house, and power outages were a daily nightmare during periods of extreme temperatures.

Like now, in July 2142. Without fan, air conditioning, refrigerator... the food was always at risk of rotting, and the electrical appliances gave up after so many blackouts. In their house, they were lucky: no one needed a respirator or a crane, but this was not the case with Juana, the grandmother on the 2nd floor, or José on the 5th floor. Faced with the danger of death--every summer hundreds of people lost their lives in the heat waves--, the neighbours began years ago to occupy the municipal civic centers to cope with the torrid hours. Antonio recalls that in those times they used to ask for generators, air conditioners... Desperate no longer to achieve what they called “thermal comfort”, but at least not to die.

Those same civic centers are the ones that now, more than sixty years later, are known as Life Centers, completely bioclimatized without the need for artificial refrigeration, full of greenery, and in the hands of the neighbors. It took time, but in the face of

growing injustices, more and more people began to defend life above luxuries, profits, and frivolities.

Ana was one of the founders of the Life Centers in Sevilla, along with many people from the neighbourhood movements that organized to transform a city that had become a mere tourist showcase, where the only priority needs were to have fresh beer and magnets for tourists. Antonio and Ana have been neighbours for as long as they can remember. As children, they loved to play together in the open fields, during the summer only at night, when it was possible to go out. When they grew up, Ana became an activist and was always going from one meeting to another, with spray cans and stickers in her backpack, a denunciation in her mouth, and a proposal in her hands. She had the most honest eyes Antonio had ever seen: to look into those eyes was to look directly into her sorrow, her anger, her love, and, especially, her hope.

The Life Centers had been the salvation of the neighbourhoods. Abandoned, drowned in garbage, without electricity, and without beauty. Where the neighbours were increasingly gray, and the children grew sadder. But the Life Centers became the hearts of these neighbourhoods when desperation was such that people did not know where to escape, and when Sunu's grandfather arrived in Sevilla. That summer the people of the neighbourhood had again occupied the civic center to cope with the impossible temperatures. With the experience of other years, the place had been filled with comforts such as beach chairs, cushions, mattresses, gas stoves, but also toys for the children, a projector to play soap operas and movies, guitars and the flamenco box-drum, *cajón*, to resonate into those white walls. There was Ana, and there was Antonio, and there was Sunu's grandfather, Demba. Newly arrived in the city, to the neighbourhood resistance movement, to the dehydrated district, to the confinement of survival... so dignifiedly he approached and grabbed the *cajón*, which on other nights had accompanied the guitar and the tired neighbours with fandangos, tangos, and rumbas. And then he started an effervescent percussion such as had never been heard in that neighbourhood.

Ana, who knew some French, would approach Demba that same evening to ask him to animate one of those long summer evenings with Senegalese music workshops; Demba accepted and, days later, that civic center was famous for its musical jams with flamenco and mbalax fusion. Soon they also organized multilevel French-Spanish classes, and more people began to come to that civic center, bringing food and support

materials for the occupation, proposing new activities. And most importantly, speaking of transformation, of greening, of refreshing. Of tearing up the pavement and planting shade trees, of pedestrianizing streets, and of not abandoning the civic centers now that they had been taken over and returned to the citizens. Places where the main thing would be to put life in the center.

Something that began in the periphery, among the dirt and flies, spread over the years throughout the city like a spell. First, besides the reclaimed civic centers, social organizations and NGOs' hubs were handed over and transformed. There, spaces for emotional well-being were set up with therapeutic support from volunteer psychologists to manage the ravaging heat waves, and workshops were organized for repairs, electricity, plumbing, sewing, and first aid....

Then, the empty houses of the city and the illegal tourist apartments of the “vulture” funds were occupied, enabling those homeless, evicted, or migrants to have a roof over their heads and a shelter. In them, there was no lack of common spaces for meeting, leisure, work, and gathering. Gradually, golf courses were taken over, turned into edible community gardens, and the wastelands and dumps -neglected by the authorities- were replanted, after much effort to clean and regenerate the dead land. With workshops where farmers shared their cultivation and permaculture techniques, vertical gardens were set up on balconies and in all the Life Centers. The first self-managed and self-produced neighbourhood solar panels were also installed, with an equitable distribution of energy to cover the needs of the most vulnerable during power outages. With more effort and insistence, the city council donated batteries to store energy, in order to have a source always available in case of emergencies. Likewise, health posts were set up to decongest hospitals, focusing on prevention and wellness.

For several years, muralist brigades also filled the buildings inside and outside with beautiful images of Sevilla's past, present, and future. Their legacy is maintained by young and not-so-young artists, and especially by a small group that emerged from the grief management workshop, with the initiative to maintain the memory of the neighbourhood by painting the neighbours who were no longer there doing what they most liked to do.

Finally, the day came when the first shopping center closed for lack of use, and rapidly became the largest Life Center on the other side of the river. The inauguration party was

memorable: Antonio would not forget the date because it was the same week that Sunu was born, and everybody was exultant. They had many motives to celebrate. The large skeleton, the infrastructure, the abandoned furniture from the shopping center... everything was given a second life. The stores that once glorified fast fashion became permanent spaces for free clothing swapping and consumption-free leisure areas for all ages, with discos, libraries, games... Some other shops turned into daycare centers and friendly spaces for breastfeeding and co-parenting, and the gymnasium was also open to everybody, after some reforms to make it more accessible.

Antonio's preferred area was the restaurant one: it housed the community kitchens that received constant donations due to zero food waste laws. He had always been a so-so cook, but loved to taste new flavours and dishes, which was guaranteed thanks to the weekly intercultural gastronomy workshops. Ana used to say that he was improving his cooking skills... Her favourite part was the central corridor of the former shopping center, open to the sky. It was transformed into a park of orange blossom-scented trees, with a playground for children. Eventually, an entire floor of shared housing was set up for the elderly, and became Ana's, Demba's and Antonio's new home. Especially for the older people, the traditional idea of the patio "*pa' tomar el fresco*" was maintained, where they could sit on their chairs outside their homes after dusk to gossip, people-watch and fan themselves.

If anything, there was music, movement, and celebration in this oasis. Like the joints of a spider's web, the Life Centers connected the city. A city that had become the caretaker of those who cared for it, and that made it easier for people to care for each other. And it was created by all of them.

The song ended, and the fingers on the drum stopped. His wrinkled hands tingled. A week ago, Ana passed away at 81 years old. It was hard to imagine her in the past tense. Many of the people who loved her so much had gathered at the civic center where it all began, in her childhood neighbourhood. Where Demba, who was no longer among them either, picked up the *cajón* and began to play. It was the same room, even if it was unrecognizable. Antonio looked around, aware that he had never even imagined that such a change could happen. And he looked at Sunu, Ana's grandchild, who was receiving a big round of applause. They danced with the strength of a young person full of the future, the same strength with which their grandmother danced.

After the song, everyone gathered in front of a large wall. Ana's mural was finished, after many hours and love dedicated by the artists, and it was time to uncover it. When the curtain fell, Ana's honest eyes were beautifully portrayed. With her heels and head adorned with flowers, dancing flamenco fusion mbalax.

Reflection

Marta Bordons Martínez

A dry city, almost uninhabitable during most of the year due to extreme high temperatures, is the scenario for this story in which marginalized communities managed to create multiple oases within a desert.

The Environmental Justice and Injustice concepts, which were discussed during the lectures and in the literature reviewed, made me reflect greatly upon the urban inequalities and the different “Sevillas”: the touristic, polished Sevilla versus the Sevilla that contains 6 out of 15 of the poorest neighbourhoods in Spain, and the top one in the whole country. Thus, inspired by Marco Armiero’s lecture about loss and damage in cities, counter-power and urban climate insurgency, I decided to write a story in which the sustainable change and improvement of life conditions did not originate in the most alternative, modern, neat spaces in the city, but in the margins. The protagonists are the neglected districts which face the most terrible aspects of the climate crisis and contest daily these experiences of loss and damage, yet will not accept being further neglected and considered disposable.

Drawing from the concept of knowledge for grassroots innovation discussed during the lectures, I wanted to propose a change centered around a community-led initiative called Life Centers, which were replicated all over the city and were built by the collective effort and experiential knowledge of epistemic communities in the periphery of the city. These fictional Life Centers are based on solidarity and environmental and social justice, and began as a way to cope with the extreme temperatures neighbours in the poorest districts had to endure without access to energy due to power outages.

One of the main characters, Ana, represents the utopian thinking-type character (Friedmann, 2000), with a powerful will to experiment and foster change within a solid frame of environmental justice, casting aside techno-fix or green capitalism solutions. Antonio joins her, understanding progressively the interdependence between environmental quality and people's everyday lives. They both know how the politics focused on fostering tourism in some parts of the city only exacerbates poverty and neglect in the other districts.

I also felt drawn to focus on the topic related to climate refugees and climate migrations. As a person who lives relatively close to North Africa and the Strait of Gibraltar, I am not indifferent to the deadly journey of thousands of people to reach Spanish shores. I always found it especially upsetting the deplorable welcome Spain would give them, and progressively, the climate would be as distressing as the one they are leaving behind, with the threat of 75% desertification by 2050 (CEAR & Greenpeace, 2023). The relationship between Ana and Demba represents how the climate crisis also has the power to erase borders and join cultures, enriching all of them. Sunu is the final symbol of that.

To conclude, this is a story where the cultural paradigm shifts from necrocapitalism to the protection of life above profits. The population is experiencing how a community-led degrowth is more desirable, as, finally, they are building a city that helps them take care of themselves and each other. There is still much more to explore and re-imagine, but with this exercise, I found myself full of excitement and possibility. There is another new Sevilla: the Sevilla that could be.

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Music recommendations

Mbalax Sénégalaise:
<https://open.spotify.com/playlist/0JhLgU0SwoBeXnuIRbDBaX?si=kVJdDBi6Rha0H79CC7hazg>

Flamenco 100 % <https://open.spotify.com/playlist/37i9dQZF1DWTfrcwZAIVH>