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CHILDHOOD, MEMORY, AND THE COLD WAR

EDITED BY MNEMOZIN



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Mnemo ZIN (eds), *(An)Archive: Childhood, Memory, and Cold War*. Cambridge, UK: Open Book Publishers, 2024, <https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0383>

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ISBN Paperback: 978–1-80511–185–6

ISBN Hardback: 978–1-80511–186–3

ISBN Digital (PDF): 978–1-80511–187–0

ISBN Digital eBook (EPUB): 978–1-80511–188–7

ISBN HTML: 978–1-80511–190–0

DOI: 10.11647/OBP.0383

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Cover design: Jeevanjot Kaur Nagpa

Rua Liga Dos Comunistas¹

José Cossa

They had just moved to the city because black Mozambicans could not live in the city before independence, but there was a new government. The earliest episode he remembers must have been when he was 4 years old, going to 5. He woke up very early as usual, perhaps around 5:30 AM, and was very excited about going out on the street, at sunrise, with his family to join the rest of the neighbors in cleaning their street named as Rua Dr. Ângelo Ferreira. He lived with his mom, dad, three siblings (he was the youngest of two boys and one elder sister), his aunt and uncle and their 10-year-old daughter, a cousin, and his paternal grandmother. He remembers carrying a broom and noticing that everyone else also carried one and this made him feel as being a part of something big and important; something that even adults were a part of. He was among the youngest children, one of the smallest bodies on the street that day, so he and other children carried child-sized brooms. This was different from where they lived before and sweeping a tarred street was different from sweeping an unpaved sand road also.

He remembers the campaigns to mobilize people to get up and clean the streets and the rationale that cleaning was their responsibility because the streets were theirs now. Yes, there was a municipality service responsible for cleaning the streets and they did clean the streets, but there was an additional responsibility expected of the citizens of a newly independent nation. The kids, the boy and his friends, even re-named their street, 'rua liga dos comunistas' (communists' league road) to counter the colonial name, 'rua dr. Ângelo Ferreira.' Anyway, he has no idea who came up with the idea, but they all agreed that such was a

1 This is a childhood memory produced as part of the Reconnect/Recollect project discussed in the introduction to this book.

suitable name. It didn't last long and was never made official, even though the kids painted the name on the sides of the street pavement/sidewalk.

He remembers that they would all wake up early and go to the streets with brooms and everyone seemed enthusiastic about the task, although in hindsight there might have been some discontent folk. The boy's street used to be very clean then and he has no idea when this mobilization and action ended, but it was still during Samora Machel's time (the first president of independent Mozambique). He was very fond of Samora and still is; he doesn't think there will be a better president with such a commitment to the country.

The boy remembers also watching people march on the streets as they were on their way to the farms in Gaza province (he was in Maputo, the capital city, and Gaza is the next province north) to harvest rice and how enthusiastic people seemed as they marched and sang. He is not sure if they went by bus, trains, or planes, but he knows they went and he knows some family members went too, but he cannot recall if both his parents or just one of them went. This was an adults-only affair. The boy holds these memories fondly because he remembers that when both the cleaning and the harvesting were no longer a thing, he started seeing dirty roads and heard that the rice was being exported to other places or not produced at all. He started seeing some garbage accumulated in various parts of the city (and became worse after Machel died and never seemed to get better) and they started eating rice from other countries, some of which felt like eating plastic because they were used to eating their home grown organic rice. Community work was important back then and people seemed to have clarity as to why they needed to work together for the country. They had cleaning days in school (kids loved it because they could hangout after school. They still got the job done because they had teachers supervising and motivating them to complete the tasks. The teachers set them examples by working with them. It was such a fun time!