**Transcription of Interview with Marisol**

Place: Popular Community Centre

Date and time: November 30, 2022, starting at 18 hrs

Duration: 41:40 mins

Additional observation notes: The interview takes place on the terrace of the popular community centre. It is already dark outside, but I can see enough to have the interview because the terrace is illuminated. Marisol tells me that she has read the information sheet, and everything looks fine to her. She agreed that we should use a pseudonym. She decided to complete a Participant Diary.

Participants: Interviewer [A] ; Marisol [M]

TRANSCRIPTION

A: If you want we can start by you telling me your name again and some information about yourself.

M: I'm Marisol, I'm 50 years old. My parents were “invaders”, that's what other people call them, invaders, on these plots of land. These plots of land were very large, very big. this area was made of almost pure volcanic rock. And my parents made their house out of cardboard. They made their house with sheets made of cardboard and oil. And that's how my parents started here.

A: So do you remember arriving with them or were they already here when you were born?

M: This neighbourhood is going to be 50 years old, so I was already here when the land was already invaded.

A: So your first memories are of how the neighbourhood was at the beginning?

M: Yes, look, my first memories of the neighbourhood were very nice. There was a lot of unevenness and a lot of volcanic rock. In my house my parents started to build what is now the front, the wall was originally left as it was and the rest, the foundations of the next building, were made of cement.

A: And of those memories, what do you remember most?

M: Seriously speaking, and now it's a bit of a paradox, it's the water. Water was a very fun part of my life here because whenever it rained puddles formed. And we would get into those puddles. There wasn't so much pollution, they weren't so dirty. In fact they weren't dirty, because the stones sort of separated what the water was bringing with it. Because the water fell hard, it poured down in torrents. We played a lot in the puddles. The water came up to here [pointing to her waist]. And the last time I went in was when I was a child.

A: So it's a nice memory...

M: Oh right, yes. It's a part of, obviously, they say that you have to make new memories, but it's a memory of the water issue, of how the whole water situation has changed here. Oh and another thing, look, in the foundations below many houses, there are caves. There are still caves. I don't know if the other neighbours have told you.

A: Yes, just today I went to a neighbour's house and she showed me that there is a cave underneath her house.

M: I didn't take you to my house, not because I didn't want to, but because I'm very busy and always in a hurry.

A: No problem, don't worry

M: Well, as I was saying, I remember when I was a child I always said, "if there's a war or revolution or something, we'll come here and hide in the caves" [laughs].

A: And that's the same house you came to, the one you're still in now?

M: I've changed houses. I have more or less blurred memories about this. When I was about eight months old my parents took me to Chiapas from here. And I stayed there until I was five years old. I didn't want to go back but, well, my parents said I had to go to school. That I couldn't stay away from them any longer. So that's when my parents brought me back.

A: So you had a chance to go to school?

M: Yes, until college. I didn't finish my degree because of life situations.

A: And what is your main occupation at the moment?

M: At the moment my daughter [laughs] and my house.

A: And going back to the subject of the neighbourhood and remembering the water issues, were there also problems because of the lack of water?

M: Not at that time. My mother had a vision that changed things for the better. In what way? We always had water. Ah well, obviously my parents tell me that before there used to be a water carrier, like someone who chopped stones and helped you clean your house. Ah well, obviously my parents tell me that before there used to be a water carrier, a stonemason, that is, someone who chopped stones and helped you clean your house. There were people who were paid to move things, stones, or even water. The water carrier in this case, my mum says that at that time he was paid fifty cents, or one peso, depending on the amount of water she needed. Because my mum says that they used to go here to what is called La Candelaria to fetch water.

A: They brought the water from there

M: Uh-huh. The water carrier did that. And obviously, that was when the neighbourhood was being invaded. Later on, my mum says that it wasn't difficult, it was actually with the neighbourhood's organisation that little by little we got electricity, water, and the streets, the paving. So my mum says that it was hard work, as everything always is when you get somewhere. But it wasn't so difficult to get water. Well, according to what they tell me.

A: And now you've started to suffer from the lack of water in the house?

M: Right now, yes.

A: And more or less when did that start and how did it come about?

M: Well, more or less it started around 2015. Ah, but let me also tell you what happened at home. As my mum is from Chiapas, she has memories of what it was like to rent rooms there. My mum brought that vision here, so in the house, there are rooms to rent. And here it began to be lacking precisely because of the same thing, because there were people who were not yet aware of the need for water, it wasn't yet a reality that it was beginning to be lacking. So there was a day in 2015 when we needed a water truck. And from then on we started to organise ourselves and at the same time, we started to get aware of the problem and to recycle. For example with the washing machine, we only use it if we need it, if not, there is no need because in the end it is not only water that you are using but in this case also electricity. And for a washing machine, there is no need until when you have a lot of clothes together. We only use it if we need it, otherwise, there is no need, because, in the end, it is not only the water that you are using but also the electricity.

And for a washing machine, there is no need at that time. But when you have a lot of clothes together, yes.

There is a beautiful thing, that sometimes it rains a lot. And on a rainy day, on a normal rainy day, you can fill up to two, three or four barrels. You fill them and that helps. Obviously, the first ones bring pollution, they bring x, y, or z. That's what we tell people to do.

Oh, and a detail is that we also have a cistern, that's the advantage we have. In other words, we are involved here not only because we lack water, but also to help the Committee. But the point is that water is not a luxury, it is a service. It is a right that we all have. That is why we are here on the Committee. Since I have been on the Committee, I have only asked for a water truck twice.

It's to wash the patio, to wash the shirts, to flush the toilets. And with the passing of the rain, you notice how the water you collect gets cleaner and cleaner. And in the end, it is completely clean. Then you can use it for your clothes, to wash them with a bit more confidence. Obviously not for washing dishes or food. But there are even two or three tenants who used rainwater even for bathing and other things.

A: But in the dry season it's the cistern that helps?

M: Oh yes, of course, completely. And it's also telling people that they have to learn to recycle. When you arrive and you rent a room, one of the instructions is that you need to recycle water.

A: Do you have many tenants?

M: Look, there are about nine. Most of them are flats with their own rooms and bathrooms. One even has a shower and they don't use it. So that's how it is.

A: And the water is enough for everyone then?

M: Oh sure, yes, now we make sure it is enough [laughs] Not even because we are the owners do we misuse the water. We are also involved in the situation, setting an example.

A: I imagine that it's already a permanent thing to be caring for the water.

M: Of course, I was even saying to Waldo the other day that we have to run campaigns to think about how we can stop this whole situation. I can tell you that maybe for the same reason in my house when we can no longer have tenants, we won't have any more. Because you have to take care of water.

Now, I'm going to tell you that I've read that water doesn't run out. In other words, it's the corporations, with their wheeling and dealing, that do things badly. They say they don't, but they do affect the water, because it doesn't come here as it should, rather it has its diversions, obviously. And the big projects. If you notice, our neighbourhood is considered a marginalised neighbourhood. It is overpopulated, so we all have to be aware that the situation can no longer continue like this. It can no longer be achieved in this way, I'm sorry. It is no longer possible.

As much as you want to do business, well, it's great that you have a very good vision, but you have to look at the other side of things. Because maybe you see it as a great investment and it does provide a good profit and source of income, but with the water problem that is coming in the future, it shouldn't be done anymore.

A: So how did you get motivated to join the Committee or what brought you into contact with it?

M: The first thing was that you are not controlled by any political party, they don't blackmail you or make you do things you don't want to do. Participating is of your own free will. And we were also motivated by the realisation that when we needed a pipe we asked for it, and the next day it was arriving. That was the first time. And the last time, because there were only two, the last time we needed a water truck it took two days but it arrived.

A: And how did you make contact? Did you already know each other on the Committee?

M: No, I didn't even know they existed. I found out because a neighbour from across the street said to me: "I'm on a water committee, and we're there because we help each other with the trucks when the water runs out". That was the first information I got and that’s how I know it existed. I went and I have been with them ever since.

A: And how did the theme come up?

M: Talking about the fact that we didn't have water. Because look, we're on high ground. All along this street, you go straight up to the wall and that's where my house is in Teocalli. So if you have a look, it's on high ground. On both sides of the house, the ground is lower. So we are in this part where it is very difficult for the water to arrive when it should. It came faster to other people. At the time it was supposed to arrive, it arrived faster to people on one side or the other, so it's not the same. It's not the same level. So that's what made this lady on the corner tell us about the truck.

A: Was it about asking each other if you had water and agreeing to ask for a water truck?

M: We were asking each other if we had water or not. Asking and saying "hey, do you have water yet?" And then she mentioned the Committee, and how they request a water truck and there is no intermediary, no political party involved. Well, that is the information that is handled there.

A: So that's how you first found out that the Committee exists.

M: Aha, exactly. And from then on, obviously, we are still there. Because you also have to be aware of your own street. I mean, you can't walk down your street without knowing that half of the street belongs to the government and your pavement also belongs to the government. In other words, you pay taxes for the street, for half of it, for the pavement. You have to know. Because tomorrow you don't know who you're going to face. And then you are in the dark, in terms of information, even about your own house.

So in this case, water does seem very serious to me, in other words, it does seem vitally important. They can't just take it away from us because the government has better interests or investments from big companies abroad that can pay.

A: What do you think is the most important thing about taking care of water? You say it's of vital importance...

M: Yes, of course. Continuing to preserve life is important. In fact, we are in an ecosystem and in a chain that is already broken. People say that when a chain breaks, the one that survives is the one that stays in the ecosystem. But survival does not mean that you have to do without certain rights that you have as a human being. And in this case one of them is water.

And of course, it's not going to be the same as before, but there's nothing wrong with that. Suddenly you get such a shock that you even say "how can it be possible that I had a bottle of water and now I have half a bottle?" Well, yes. But there are other ways to solve the problem. In this case, what I was saying is, for example, how can we do it? Well, start thinking and creating awareness about how we can filter or use rainwater. To the point that tomorrow we might have to drink it. Because you don't know, all this is unpredictable. You don't know how the future is going to turn out. Because maybe I have the desire to help. But you don't know what the road will bring. In this case, how the bureaucracy, the parties, and the government, make things difficult for us. Obviously it's not just talking about it and thinking about it, but doing it.

A: You even mentioned something about campaigning.

M: A water care campaign, of course. I tell Waldo that it's a good idea, there's still time. I have videos for you to see how rainwater is not so strong and only falls for a short time. We have to think about how we can store it, and how we can make better use of it. Because that's what plants do. Because the water that falls from the tap is not pure, it does not come from the mountains or from a reservoir. It comes from where it was also processed. In other words, it is an accumulation. So yes, I'm not a chemist or a biologist, I don't have the knowledge, but maybe I have other skills that I can contribute. I can't tell you what right now, but I have the disposition, I do. And maybe there is someone who already has the same idea, like a biologist who knows what to do when the rain falls at such and such an hour on such and such a day. And the chemist will tell you "we can add this, we can filter it in this way, and it's useful for this or that".

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A. So this issue of water, as I hear it, is it related to an environmental issue to a certain extent?

M: Yes, of course, because everything is connected. I'm going to tell you something very important. I may have a notion of what you lived in before. But I don't know anything about the future, this life is the only one I'm living. And I can be thinking about the future, but what I'm in right now is the life that I'm living. So now is when we have to do things, not in the future. I don't really believe what they say about the children of the future. Because the children are here now, that is to say, they are not of the future, they are here now. Now is when you have to do things. When you have time. I still see it like that, like we are still here.

Do what you need to do to take care of the water, and what you need to do to formalise the land. There has to be this, to get together even with people who are experts in these issues, and of course, there can be action. Yes, of course, it's going to take work, but if you want to see results you have to be constant. You have to be constant, you have to persevere. If you want to change, and if you want results, you have to be.

A: And what has the process of getting involved and participating in the Committee been like?

M: Well, it has been realising that obviously, you are not the only one with this problem. Maybe you thought you were the only one dealing with things in this way. But no, there are more people involved. And maybe your thoughts can be great, but if you are alone, your voice doesn't lead to a resonance that takes your message to where it needs to go. It takes several people so together you get to the right point or the right person to deliver the message.

A: In the committee have you had that experience?

M: Yes, because now that I've been locked up because of the pandemic, I had the opportunity, when I was in the virtual meetings, to listen. Because there were a lot of attendees, without lying to you, like a total of 120 or 180 people in the zoom.

And I can tell you that maybe that position that some older people have is fine. mean, it's good to be reminded of it. But you have to start doing something different. Do you know what I mean? In other words, it's all right to say, Jorge, "neighbours, we have to be united". Yes, of course, we have to be united, but now we have to think about what we are going to continue doing. Because they are two different things. For example, if you've noticed in the meetings we've been to, Jorge always says: "Comrades, we have to be united because it's the only way". Yes, but what else?

A: What do you think is needed to do more?

M: A meeting and start to think, to raise voices and brainstorm together. And to define which idea is real and which is not. Which is real and which can't be done. And from there you start to move on, to promote projects. And you say "look, I think I know a biologist". Or a chemist. And you talk about how you see the compounds in water and how to take advantage of rainwater, for example. In other words, it's about knowing and reaching the people you need. To be able to bring it down to earth, to be able to give it more air.

A: So what does it mean to participate in the Committee?

M: Well, first of all, for me it means that we are a giant. I see the Committee as a giant, which can have the power, if we can call it that, to be able to express and say that this can be achieved or something else can be achieved.

A: What would you say are the Committee's most important achievements?

M: Well, in this case, one achievement is to reach the authorities. The city water system for example. Because I can tell you, very quickly, that if you go alone, Andrés, nobody listens to you. You have to go through several desks, right? And maybe you pass the third desk, but from there they send you back again. They make you feel like you are in a world of giants, and you don’t know what to do and you get confused. But the Committee is another giant that represents the possibility to be able to take care of us. To be able to prevent future problems. To be able to face situations that in the future we probably won't be able to control.

A: And what has it been like for you to interact with other neighbours within the Committee? How have you had the opportunity to meet people?

M: Well, first of all, seeing people from their point of view in terms of what they are talking about, or knowing how long they have been here. There are neighbours who haven't been here since the invasion, but who arrived after the invasion, and they are interested. They are involved.

There are some who may have a misconception, like a myth, of what it's like to be successfully involved. But we see that if you are alone you will not have a chance to meet the right person.

Being involved also means getting to know other people, especially older people. Seeing things from the point of view of other people, and know them in that way, or also knowing how long they have been here.

Well, in this case, of those who are like the next rows, to ask ourselves what they can contribute so that we can continue together. And to think about what the next row is going to do, and the next row of people. That's more or less how I see it.

A: And interacting with these people is something that you also experience on a day-to-day basis?

M: I don't know many people. I know about ten or fifteen of those neighbours, at the most. And the rest, no idea. It's only through WhatsApp chatting and listening to their point of view that I get to know them. And unfortunately, my mum didn't get involved because she can't be there due to her illness. So me telling her to go and see the Committee is not the way to go. But I tell you, just like that.

A: Have you had any experience of being in a neighbourhood group before?

M: No, it's the first time I've been involved.

A: And to finish, what are your expectations for the future of the water issue here in the neighbourhood?

M: There is no other way: we have to be constant, not let our guard down. Because the government is capable of disappearing you, of getting rid of you in a certain way, of silencing you in a way that is not very pleasant. And if we continue with persistence, it is possible to make changes. You might even meet someone unexpectedly.

A: Just as your experience was, a bit unexpected...

M: Yes, exactly. I feel that's the way. To be constant. [...]. I believe that everything happens at the right time when it should. I don't doubt that there will be someone because I'm also very nervous about this, to whom I might say "you're going to help us". Well, as long as that person wants to.

A: Is there anything else you would like to add about your experience on the Committee and what it means to you?

M: I won't add much, because, at the end of the day, words are blown away by the wind. But well, I hope that we will become that big monster. But not a monster to hurt anyone, not to hurt people, but simply to walk with big steps. And firm steps. In other words, not to be so perfectionist, because I also feel that sometimes that is not going to work. Imperfections help you to recognise what you have and what you don't have, and how you are going to use it. With the passage of time, if you come again as a spectator, hopefully there will be a change. Well, that would be all.

A: Well, thank you very much for taking the time to have this conversation and to share with me what has been your experience in this journey.