**Transcription of Interview with Juan**

Place: Beni's house

Date and time: 29 January, 2023. Starts at 11:30 am

Duration: 46:18 mins

Additional observation notes:

The interview is at Beni's home. It is on a Sunday morning. It is the only day Juan can have the interview, as he tells me he is very busy the other days of the week for work reasons. After trying for several weeks to have this interview with him, we finally decided to have it on a Sunday. When I told him about the options of times and places, he suggested that it should be in the morning, and that it should be at Beni's house. In the different conversations we had, Juan did not want the interview to take place in his house or in the popular community centre, and proposed that it should take place in the house of other neighbours, so we finally decided to do it in Beni's house, who agreed to receive us for the interview. I agree on the pseudonym with Juan after the interview.

Participants: Interviewer [A] ; Juan [Juan]; Beni [Beni]

TRANSCRIPTION

A: If you want we can start with you introducing yourself, telling me your age, your name, what you do, general information about yourself. The recording has already started, and this interview will only be for the thesis.

Juan: My name is Juan, I was born on the 6th of June 1977. Here in Mexico City, I was born here in Los Reyes.

A: Well, if you want we can talk a bit, well, you told me your age, where you were born, what do you do for a living?

Juan: Well, I had an accident when I was eight years old, in primary school. I broke my leg, so I was hospitalised. Well, I went to primary school, then secondary school, and then I went to study at CONALEP, but I didn't finish, I didn't finish, I missed one semester. I was studying construction.

So that's where an architect pulled me, and I think he liked me So that's where an architect pulled me in and said to me: "look, I have a lot of work outside, do you want to do it?" I was here in San Jerónimo, there's a Home Depot, and there I worked as a supervisor with him and all that, from there he liked the work and that's when I started working with him. Then he was already old, and I didn't really know anything, but he left me everything, I didn't know if he was alive or not. But from there I started to work. But going back a bit, when I was younger, when I was 11, I used to wash cars. I used to wash cars, I was always very restless. I would go and knock on houses, like this, in the flats to see if they didn't want me to wash their cars. After that I started working with a lady, the niece of a well-known comedian, and she told me if I didn't want to help her clean her house. And as a kid you see a little money and say yes. After that, the lady sold her house, but I was there for about 6 years when she sold her house. Then I moved here to Copilco. Another lady lives there, who was her friend, and she told me "don't you want to stay there with the doctor? she'll give you work there". Well, that's where I was and I'm still there. I've stayed there, I've been there for 18 years.

So right there in that house there, the neighbours are politicians, several politicians live there. So so many people know me there that I go here and there. But I don't really do any construction work, I know how to do this, but now, as I told you, it's over, that happened when I was in Conalep. But now I'm doing other things. I'm painting, waterproofing, building repairs and all that. So that's what I'm doing now.

A: And thinking about here in the neighbourhood of Santo Domingo, how long have you lived here?

Juan: Well, always

A: Since you were born? all your life?

Juan: Well, I was born here

A: What are your memories of here? What was it like here when you were a child?

Juan: My childhood memories, of here, of the neighbourhood, well, I didn't see that there were stones and caves, everything. But I saw that the houses were still made of tin. The streets were made of earth, still made of earth, then people went to do what they called faenas (community work).

A: Oh, do you remember that? they used to do the faenas (community work)?

Juan: Well, I was more or less a kid, I was about six or seven years old. And that's where I used to go too, when I was a kid I used to go around carrying little containers of dirt like that. Then we got together with our friends from the street. What we liked was the time of April 30, because we used to get together so that the people from the DIF community centre would give us toys. That's what we liked. From the age of 10 onwards, our fun started to change. We used to do competitions with the tyres of the cars, we'd get in there and as it was downhill we'd jump and then we'd go rolling. But we were ingenious because from about 50 metres from here to the corner, for example, we would tie up some wood like this, so that we would crash, so that we wouldn't follow each other. So when we got to the downhill, we'd crash and the ride would take us out of the tyre because of the blow. And then that was the fun, then there is a community centre here where I live. So when they didn't give us something we asked for or they wouldn't let us play, we'd get 7 or 8 of us kids, and we'd go up the hill and say, "let's see who can break the most window panes". And as they were strips of glass like that, which they call glass shutters, we would climb up and break and break glass. And that was our fun. There was a man who is now dead, the watchman. One day he grabbed us and put us in a cistern, and left us there for one or two hours.

A: Really? And it was full of water?

Juan: No, it was filling up, but we liked it, we were there between the water and the cisterns filling up.

A: Oh, it was fun for them

Juan: Yes, but he covered it up, that is, he covered it up there, but we were having fun, we were still good, the age stage was getting a bit older. Afterwards there was another watchman, and it was the same thing, we were mischievous, we grabbed things, we jumped, or they cut the bars to get in there to play. We used to play what they called "coladeritas", or little football teams, and we even made basketball hoops. And we hung out with drug addicts and all that, but we were never the type to get addicted or anything. And they, the drug addicts, they used to get together and hide in the dark. They were even decent, because they said "if you're going to play, you go over there, and we'll come over here from the other side". And that's how we spent our childhood.

A: And from those childhood and teenage years, do you remember anything to do with water? Was there water? How did you get water?

Juan: Well, there was water. I remember that water trucks would arrive, we would put some water storage tanks there so that the water trucks would come and fill them up. And well, we still had to live through that, as we lived on a small slope, and the water truck came uphill, we put some drums on the slope, we put some hoses and we lived through that. But many people still had to carry water from the taps.

A: But then you didn't have to live through that any more

Juan: It didn't happen to me. But more or less we're talking about the neighbourhood being about 50 years old, right?

Beni: It's from 71. It's already 52 years old. In September it will be 52 years old.

Juan: So, I'm from '77 and I'm about 47 years old. So I've already seen a bit more improvement.

A: Have you always lived here in the neighbourhood?

Juan: Yes.

A: And have you seen how the neighbourhood has changed?

Juan: Yes, it has changed. Yes, I have seen how the neighbourhood has changed, but since this party has been here. Because with the other parties we were always the same. We were always very enslaved. We couldn't even go out. They would see us, 3 or 4 of us, and they would throw the patrol cars and everything at us, they would grab us, and even the patrol cars were thieves. Even the patrol cars were like in the Cantinflas films, they wore the helmets of the grenadiers, they didn't wear little hats like they do now.

A: They used to come for the beatings,

Juan: Yes

A: So when the political party changed, do you feel that the neighbourhood changed a bit too?

Juan: Yes, but well, before this started, when they took out the PRI, I think this Fox took it out, there was supposed to be a change. But it got worse. There wasn't much money or anything. We were always suffering. A lot of people, the old ladies, wondering "what am I going to do? I can't afford this, my children, for school". The situation was always bad. And then this one left and I think Calderón came in. And it got worse with him, with the security situation. And then the water began to run out, everything began to run out. And then the electricity company disappeared.

A: Oh yes, the electricity disappeared.

Juan: Luz y Fuerza disappeared

A: So when Calderón was there, did you notice that the water began to run out, and the electricity began to be more expensive?

Juan: Luz y Fuerza disappeared, so from then on the electricity became more expensive. We paid 180 pesos for electricity. Well, we're talking about when my parents had already died.

A: And you still live in the house

Juan: Yes, there with my brothers. So everyone had their own meter and would say "hey, well, I got that much", and the other would reply "no, well, me too". And then the CFE came and passed by, and I think they didn't even measure what they were going to measure, and then they sent the bill. It was up to 1600 or 1200, depending on how much, it varied. And that's when a group of people started collecting signatures and complaints here in the Iglesia de Colores church. About the electricity. And then I said to my sister "they say that they are helping with the electricity". And I told her to go and she signed up but she never went. So after that I started to go with the leader who was there. I started to go to him, I told him my situation, and he told me "we are going to sign a lawsuit".

A: Like a protective action (amparo) or something like that.

Juan: It's not an amparo, it's a complaint. And we signed that I was going to be responsible. From there I started going every Thursday to the electricity committee. That's where I started, but I've always liked politics.

A: Before the electricity committee, had you been in any other group?

Juan: No, none, but I always liked watching the news and I always thought that if I were a president I would do this or that. Thoughts that you think badly, when you're a kid. And then from there we started to do something about the electricity and they invited us to Avenida Aztecas. Because that's where the water was being poured. And from there I went over there. They invited us, there was a colleague who was there. And he told us, "Well, that's where they're throwing the water". And he told Waldo, who later told us "they invited us and asked us if we were going to support the water problem". And that's where we were, and from the electricity we went there.

A: So the electricity committee went to a group to support the group on Aztecas Avenue.

Juan: Yes, but before all that, we were still going, but we found out that this leader I told you about the electricity committee was corrupt. He was doing things like that underwater, getting paid. And that's when we started to get upset. So we separated from them, but then we went over there to support the water issue. And then we said "well, we are also going to form another electricity group". And we moved away from there. Some people joined us and then the group was formed. In the group there has always been Beni, Waldo, Doña Tita, Raúl, and who else has been there [asks Beni]?

Beni: You [They comment on other comrades who have or haven't been there].

Juan: Yes, but well, there are about 7 or 8 of us who have always been there. Since the struggles for electricity and water began, we have been there constantly. Many times we have been absent because of work, because of this or that, but we are there. Because I don't know if Beni explained to you that nobody gives us resources, nobody, nobody says to us "now we are going to give you 20 pesos, 50 pesos for a sandwich, for your ticket for I don't know what". Nobody gives us anything, and even though in the group there is a fund of 20 pesos that is given voluntarily, nothing has ever been taken from it and we have never asked for anything.

A: So you have to divide your time between your work and being active?

Juan: Divide, and then I've missed work or I've left. But the one who likes it is always like that. And then after that we went to the water issue. That's where we were at the sit-in. And there we also had some very bad experiences at the camp. Bad and good, the good ones, what happened was that a lot of foreign people came there too, and they supported us. Many comrades supported and all this, many. There were vigils, some stayed, others left, and that's how the sit-in was going. The next day another neighbour would arrive with a bag of food, everything, to eat there. And we would go out and others would come in, and that's how we were supporting each other. People came from various places. They came from Brazil, Argentina, the United States, I think from Germany. Then students from the UNAM also started to arrive, and then experts and graduates from the UNAM started to arrive, to make presentations and come to support us.

From there the organisation started to become stronger. Because we were sent here and there, and the commission always went. But they never attended to us, because it was a different government. When we arrived there was already a line of police, of grenadiers, of all that. And so we went, but we could never solve anything because it was impossible. Then a date came, but I don't remember. [He asked Beni] Do you remember when we were evicted?

A: It was in December

Beni: Yes, in December

Juan: Yes, we got a message telling us. I think it was just Waldo and Raúl, and another colleague. It was around 9 or 10 in the morning and I was in Copilco working. And the message arrived saying "the grenadiers are already clearing out". So I said to the lady I was working with: "look, it looks like the electricity people are here and they're cutting off my electricity, I'm going to leave because I don't know what problems there will be". And she told me they were fine. But that was a lie so that I could come here to the sit-in. We came and started to gather, but there were a lot of grenadiers, there were about 300 of them, and then they started to remove the machinery. Some of our comrades lay down there under the machines so that they wouldn't evict us.

And that's how the disaster started, the problems and all that. And there was a commander, a man who came and said "get rid of these old women", very arrogant. And then we all started to get on his nerves. But that morning they beat us, a lot of grenadiers came together. But in the afternoon there were more of us and we were superior to them. That's when we got our revenge and we started to tear down all the boards, the walls. We started to pull everything down, to pull, and they couldn't beat us. There was support from the people, but then everyone started to leave. I think because they didn't see a solution or who knows. And then the people who remained started to get together as a small group. And we said "let's ask for a well", and we kept asking for a well. That's why they evicted us from here and we started with the well.

A: They are now part of the water committee

Juan: Yes, and so that's how it was. And I'm talking about the people who are the only ones who are still here. There are people who have come in and helped, but they almost didn't have to live through the hard times like we did. And now this struggle is not just for us, it's for the whole community. So a lot of people told us "you're in the way, you dirty, stinking, lazy, you're just in the way, you don't have anything to do". And we have never, to date, we have never been quarrelsome people or anything. They insulted us, but there are the results, the well. People don't say anything about that now. They have asked me, they say "do you have water?" and I say "I have water". But I never tell them that there is water because of the well, I have never told them. But obviously they already have water every day, but it's because of the well.

A: Have you noticed that the water supply has improved since the well?

Juan: Yes, there is water every day.

A: Before the well, didn't you have no water?

Juan: There was a three-day water supply, but when it arrived there was no pressure. Well, those who had a cistern were fine, because it was good for them, and those who didn't had to fill their water tanks. It ran out and then they had to wait another 3 days for the water supply. But now there is no more, there is water every day, so I think it was a good thing that was done.

A: Before the well, when there was no water every day, did you also have to ask for water trucks or how did you do it?

Juan: No, we have a cistern. So we never, even though there was no water because of the tandeos and everything, we never had any problems with water. And to this day, because even less so now that there is water every day. But it has always given me, talking about my family, it has always given me anger because they waste a lot of water. And I used to tell them not to throw water away. And they would tell me "you're a gossip, go over there, they pay you, or what?" So even the family itself discriminates against us sometimes. But it's good for them, it's a good thing.

A: Within the family, are there some who agree and others who don't agree with saving water?

Juan: Well yes, there are five of us. Three of us agree and two don't, and I tell them "look, if you don't like it there you have a house, each of you go home and throw water away". Because they do buy water trucks there. So I tell them "if you don't agree here, then go home".

A: Even though they live on the same property, do they buy a water truck?

Juan: No, one has his house here by the Cuernavaca toll booth, the other one here somewhere else because there is no water there, I don't think.

A: I thought you all lived on the same property still?

Juan: No, we do, but they have their own houses.

A: So you never suffered from the water problem, you never had to struggle...?

Juan: No, well, I have struggled in this water issue, but for the community, because we haven't had that problem in our house.

A: So what motivates you to be involved?

Juan: The results.I like to fight, and not like with punches or anything, but to support the people. Because when my mother used to live, she used to tell us "if you are never going to help each other, you will never do anything". She always said "get organised, if you are going to make a room for one, help each other".

But it's illogical because support is not always like that between families. It's better to help a community in this way because I think you have more friends, and you gain more trust even than in your own family.

A: And being involved in this struggle has helped you to meet more people and make friends with neighbours in the community?

Juan: Yes, well, with this kind of struggle you meet a lot of people. I had never been to a city hall, I had never been to the House of Deputies or the Senate. We never had the privilege of approaching a president, a head of government, a government body, anywhere. Because, I don't know if it's because I think people were afraid of us because they used to repress us and now they don't. That's what I like and what I like about it. That is what I like and what strikes me, that we have spoken with people from the government, the head of government, deputies, the president. We have been with several and they receive us, we have been with important people and they themselves have told us, like in the Coyoacán mayor's office, a lawyer told us "I like the fact that you are a very united and hardworking group, because you do the work and you bring it to us, and we do the complement". And that's what motivates us.

A: And despite the fact that sometimes you have to miss work or you're busy, do you think it's worthwhile to defend water?

Juan: Well, water is worth it. Because without water, you'd be drinking coke [refers to a bottle of water that I've been drinking this time].

How can you sustain yourself without water?

Everything on this planet, whether it's that floor liquid [refers to a floor cleaning liquid that we can see from where we're sitting] has to be made with water. Everything with water, what product doesn't have water in it? Everything has water in it. Life is water. For example, in the north, with all the droughts, many animals die because there is no water. So part of the reason is that I like to do this, to be in the resources. I like nature a lot, I like planting trees, and everything that gives life.

A: Now when it was the water dump in Aztecas, I imagine that seeing the damage to nature was something very ugly, wasn't it?

Juan: Yes, there were millions of litres of water being dumped. And some neighbours over there tell me, they say "we took out some stones over there by the spring, stones were being broken there and they were water lagoons". And that it looked beautiful because everything up there was very green, I don't know what it's called because it looked like little lentils, but it was very green. And the water was very clear underneath, but there was a lot of water. But now, those people from before, I say they were more ignorant than now, weren't they? Because they didn't fight for water, or because there was water, I don't know.

A: They didn't have the need...

Juan: Well no, and now here there is more need, and now yes, many people do fight, but not many still. So, that would be, for me, what you have to do is fight.

A: So is it worth taking care of water, also for the sake of taking care of nature?

Juan: Well, nature, water is nature, what would happen if there was no water at all? And we have gone through it. We have gone to Oaxaca, where they have suffered from water too, there is no water where we have gone, there is no water. I have been to San Luis, it is also very dry, there is no water. So many people fight for water. Supposedly many times they say "now we are going to start fighting for water, now it's not going to be about oil, now it's going to be about water". It's going to be about life, and whoever stores more water is going to live a little longer. And whoever doesn't, won't.

A: And so the electricity committee is still going on as well?

Juan: The electricity committee does continue, but I see it as a bit separate from the water. People just want to resolve their debts and that's it. Because they are not interested in the water issue.

A: It's like two different things...

Juan: Yes, that's how I see them

A: And do you think there is a relationship between water and electricity?

Juan: Well, for me the most important thing now is water. Now with what they are doing now with technology, there are solar heaters, solar lamps, so for me water would be more important and more serious. Water is the most serious thing.

A: And now that the well is done, what are the next steps, or the next objectives for the committee?

Juan: Well, right now what we need is not to break up this core group, and to continue together. But also, and we've only been thinking about it for about 15 days, right? [He asks Beni, who only nods] To form a group to solve the problems of improvement, what is it called?

Beni: To see how to conserve the water well, because if the useful life of the well is 35 or 30 years, we are thinking about extending it more to see if we can organise ourselves and make tandeos for the water. Take care of the water ourselves.

Juan: And after the improvement, the funding, more things to have in the neighbourhood. We are thinking [turns to look at Beni].

Beni: But that's something else

Juan: But that's what I was wondering about.

A: In activities to improve, to continue supporting, to improve the neighbourhood.

Juan: That's what I was wondering about the group, that the well is done, now what do we have in mind?

A: What's next...

Beni: To see about the proportional part that they give to citizen participation.

Juan: Citizen participation

A: Yes, to be able to carry out projects

Juan: That's what we're analysing now, it's not that we're already there, we're going to analyse to see if we can get in to do those projects that would be good.

Beni: To look for benefits for the neighbourhood.

A: Yes, to continue being involved in improving the neighbourhood.

Juan: Because we ourselves, where we are, have not benefited at all. They have never given us anything, because we are not ambitious enough to be doing this. Because many people say, "I work in the mayor's office and I'm going to give you heaters", but no, that's for their people, their family, and that's what we don't want. If they are going to give us, it is for everyone, not for one person. So, we want to do a project like that. I hope that it can be done, that there are more people to support us, because I think that in this aspect we are going to need a bit more people. But also that they are trustworthy, that it's not a case of "look, if they gave you something, you give me something". Because I've had two friends come up to me and say "can't I join your group?" And I say "yes you can, just participate, but here there are no payments, here it's your decision. If you want to go here you have to join a commission, you have to go to one place or another, but here you have to put up your own money, here they are not going to give you anything, nothing, nothing, not even food, not even a ticket, not even enough credit for your mobile phone to talk". That's the situation, and I say that's what has kept us well organised to date.

A: Are there any final words you would like to say about what this group has meant to you?

Juan: Well, for me the group has meant agreements, willingness, non-corruption, that we are no longer as closed-minded as we were. We now know more or less how to defend, how to fight something, what to do, where to go. And being involved with the authorities, now that if they can't, we can also help them to solve the problems. This is the only way we can be in a group. Because in all these groups that I have seen that are going around, they are going around for something, that's why they are there, but we are not. And the group that I like is that we are always there in the struggle, we are always in the struggle. For example, if we can't resolve this, we are always looking to go somewhere else.

For example, that of the electricity, that on the 9th there is going to be a march, other groups get involved, because the groups that we had already left because they were interested and so that's what we don't like. And we know that about the electricity, who knows, we are in doubt, because we haven't discussed it yet with the people or anything, but we have said that it could be that they are not going to give us the erasure. As Beni says, maybe we have to pay, but half. Because that's where I think the situation is tougher, but that's the fight we're fighting. We have to have a purpose, and see how far we can go, so there are agreements. And if they give us the erasure, then that's great, it's another achievement. We already have one, which was achieved after years, but it was achieved. And if they give us the erasure, that's another one. The next one is already easier. So the first one is the most complicated, as they say. The first and the third, because for the third they are always going to put more obstacles. The first one has already been done, and the third one would be the e. Citizen participation, we leave it in the middle because I think it looks easier. Water and electricity are the most complicated. That would be my way of thinking about it.

A: Well, thank you very much for sharing your story

Juan: Well, there are more stories, there are still more from young people. But yes, we're taking too long, because that was further back.

A: Well, you say you've had so many stories here in the neighbourhood, your whole life.

Juan: Yes, it has happened to me here. I joined the movements for the same reason, because I like it, yes I like it. And before that I was working with a Guatemalan journalist. So I listened to him talk and talk about his country. He lived here in Copilco. He talked about his country and that's when he started to give me ideas like that. And that's when politics began to attract me.

A: He made you feel interested in it

Juan: Yes, in fact I would have liked to have been a veterinarian, or a construction engineer. But then I started to be more interested in politics. But yes, there are concerns, as long as you have a life you can do many things, not much anymore, but you can still have a life. And fight for something. And everything we are saying is no longer for oneself, but for one's children, for the next generations. And who knows what they are going to be like, because now technology is what makes them more active. So who knows what the situation is going to be like for them in the times to come, especially when the well runs out [laughs], which is for the next 30 years. Let's see what will happen to them.

A: Well thank you very much again for your time.