**Transcription of Walking interview with Waldo Valverde**

Date and time: 11 May, 2023. Starting the walking interview at 12:!5

Duration: 64 mins

Distance covered: 2.4 kms

Starting point: Paso CU, in Tetl Street

Route: From Paso CU into Flores Park, and then into a local Community Centre near where Waldo grew up, to end in the intersection of Tetl street and Cueva street.

Notes:

On the fourth of May, I arrived at the meeting point (Paso CU), as I had agreed to have an interview with Waldo Valverde. Waldo arrived, and before the interview began, he quickly met with a couple of neighbours who had come to consult him about issues related to protests associated with the payment of electricity bills. Waldo is one of the key informants I needed and wanted to have the interview with. Before starting the interview, he checks his mobile phone and tells me that we can't do the interview because he has to pick up his son. He apologises and we reschedule the interview. We will meet in a week's time at the same place and time. I tell him about the use of a pseudonym and he says he will think of one. We said goodbye and arranged to meet in a week's time.

On 11 May we meet. We have a talk about the characteristics and objectives of the interview and register the informed consent. We also confirm the pseudonym and start the walk. Waldo Valverde chooses his pseudonym for family reasons. This pseudonym mobilises and activates the history of struggle and activism that is identified with his family.

During the walk, Waldo tells me about different sites, and how they reflect the work of the organised community. The place where we start is called Paso CU, an alley that connects the neighbourhood with access to the Universidad metro, which he describes to me as a little conquest of the community. We pass through Flores Park and even arrive at a sports centre, to then leave the park and go to a community centre. In the park, he mentions to me how the space was built and transformed from a rubbish dump to a green area accessible to the whole community. He shows me and talks about the lagoons at the bottom of the quarry, which can be seen from the park. Waldo brought me here to show me the ecosystem that the neighbourhood is near to.

As we walk through all these places, Waldo tells me about his memories of the neighbourhood, and about the history of the Comité en Defensa del Agua (Water Defence Committee). We arrive at a sports centre at the end of the park, then turn around and walk back out of the park and into the neighbourhood through a gate that connects to the park. On the route, we pass a centre of the current government where social programmes are implemented.

On the way to the community centre, we pass a market and meet a family member. I am happy to have this interview and talk to Waldo about his story and his motivations, as well as his memories and feelings associated with Santo Domingo.

After the interview, we see a very tall building, more than five stories high. He tells me that these types of buildings are made by abusive people, who are only looking to make money from rent and who do not get involved or participate in community activities.

I told him of my intention to present the fruits of the fieldwork to the Committee, and we discussed possible dates. It will be on a Friday in June, which Waldo subsequently agreed to make 16 June. He tells me that he will be happy to support me with that.

Participants: Interviewer [A] ; Waldo [W]

TRANSCRIPTION

A: Okay, I'm going to record our walking route, so I'll have more or less the streets we're going through and so on. And the starting time, which is going to be 12:15.

W: Ok

A: Thank you very much. Well since it started, since I'm here with the recorded walk, I'll follow you to the places you think are important. And if there's anything on the walk that you want to point out to me, that you want to point out to me, then go ahead.

W: Well, we're at the Paso C.U. This is the pass that connects the neighbourhood Pedregal de Santo Domingo with the Universidad metro station and the National Autonomous University of Mexico. This place is important because it sums up the history of the neighbourhood.

This passage had to be fought for. In reality, this was a private property that the neighbours, when there was the invasion, the occupation of land here in Santo Domingo, they didn't occupy it. So, it was around 1980 or so, when they started to build the metro, line 3. Well, the university was already there, but this part started to get more traffic.

So, these neighbours used to put a little jar for people to throw in their coins. I didn't have to live through that. I was born in 1983. But that's how it started to be used as a passage.

What happened to me was that it was just the crossing that, in the end, the neighbours gave up that part, which is the cobblestones. And that was the only passageway, the cobblestones up to there. [gesturing to describe the part of the pavement he is referring to].

And one day we got the news that the mayor's office, and I was able to experience this, I think it must have been around 2005 or 2006, that in a court case the mayor's office lost the right of way and then we were no longer going to have a right of way.

So the people had to get together, as they had done for years, to fight for us to have this. It's not that we wanted to take something away from someone who had a use for it,

but it was totally illogical because by that time the public use of this was already more than demonstrated.

And what are we saying? We are not saying that the government should take it away from the owners, but that they should pay them what they had to pay them. Finally, the government has to look after the public benefit, not the private benefit. And they didn't do that. So we had to fight with the neighbours, we gathered signatures, we had a kind of sit-in here. And we managed to get them to not only keep the cobblestone pavement, but to extend it.

We think is that if the neighbours had not fought, like everything that has been fought for here in Santo Domingo, we would simply have nothing. The streets, the land, the markets, the schools, the water, the drainage, the electricity, everything has been the product of the neighbourhood struggle, of the different generations. I'm talking about those who arrived in 71, 72, who in my case were my parents. I am the second generation and now with my son, he would be the third generation, because we are fighting for water. This is a history of uninterrupted struggle for different issues here in the neighbourhood. And that memory unfortunately has not been inherited by everyone, or not everyone has had the interest to receive the anecdotes, everything that happened.

It's not that we are a neighbourhood that likes to be quarrelsome, because then we are branded as those who like to close streets, we like to go and protest, but it's not that we like it, it's that if we didn't do it we wouldn't have anything. And well, now I would like us to walk on this side, the only sports area that Santo Domingo has.

A: Let's go, yes.

A: So, you say you were born in 83, do you remember from those early years cases of struggle, of neighbourhood organisation?

W: At that time there was the issue of paving, drainage, and some drinking water, that was what was on the agenda of the organisations. They were already practically negotiations that only needed to be finalised, because the struggle had already taken place. It was to finalise what had been agreed, the commitments, the obligations of the government in the installation of the drainage network, the paving of the streets, that's what I remember as a child.

Well, there was also still some organisation, some solidarity from the settlers, for example, with the struggle of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN), with student movements, and others. So, practically speaking, there has been a lot of solidarity here with the different struggles happening in the central part of the country. And well, in other places, like the EZLN, because of the national and global impact it had.

A: And on the issue of water, do you remember that part of the introduction of the water network in the houses?

W: What I remember is that, that they were opening the ditches, that they were installing the pipes. That, and well, I think we're going to end the tour there, that in the DIF community centre, community washing places were also installed so that people could bathe because when the installation was there, you couldn't use the water or the drainage, because they were in the installation. So that was used for people to wash their clothes, to take a bath. What I remember is that my dad would carry buckets of water, that he would go to bathe. I asked myself, why is he going to bathe somewhere else? But I didn't really know, as a child I didn't really know what it was all about.

Later, at the end of the 90s, the Popular Community Centre published a book called Las Mil Historias del Pedregal de Santo Domingo, and there are experiences I had.

When I saw them, now that they had been put into context, I said, "Oh, wow! So all that is the history of my neighbourhood. That's where this sports centre and Flores Park come from". I studied in a primary school that was right on the edge of the sports centre. It wasn't a sports centre, it was a vacant lot, it was a dump. There were tyres, rubbish. And I remember that we knew about it because we had friends who lived on the backside of the sports ground. And sometimes in elementary school, like every year or two years, they would ask us to bring a tyre for physical education and paint it, and that's where we would go to pick it up. We would gather the tyres there. Because that's where they were thrown.

And also because you could see from the primary school to that part and often, well, you could see the police coming in and arresting gang kids. It was the time of the chavos banda (gangs), which is also reflected in the book. Finally, this place was also fought over by the people, but not just the sports centre. Now we are going to see what is known as the quarry. The quarry was part of the asphalt plant. This is where the stone was broken, dynamited. I remember because in primary school, as it was a two-storey school, at certain times they would take us all down to the playground because they were going to dynamite. It was the last thing because it was about 80 metres deep. And I think that already existed around the time the university city was built.

A: So here we are entering the park?

W: That's the park, the park and the sports centre Flores. And in this place, as they were breaking stones and digging deeper and deeper, water gushed out. There are some springs, we're going to see them now. And then the government wanted to use it as a landfill.

And they did bring in trucks of rubble. For example, there was still rubble from here on the side where Santo Domingo ends, on the side of Los Reyes, they put rubble there from the 1985 earthquake.

That is, from all the buildings that fell down and everything.

But here the people didn't let them. There were neighbours from up here in Santo Domingo who did faena (community work). Organised with the people from the popular community centre, and more neighbours, they did

more neighbours, they did faena (community work) to clean up. As they cleared the area, first it was a rubbish dump, then they began to dump rubble. And the people said, no, this is a nice place, let's take care of it.

I had a faena (community work) when I was still in primary school. In other words, there were things where the schools participated, the teachers got involved. What I'm telling you about the community centre, also the director, the director of the government community centre, they were involved in the needs of the community. That is almost all gone now. In other words, these spaces are empty today because they are separated from the community. And other government facilities that have been built are separated from the community. In other words, they no longer gave continuity to what was so valuable. Because the people collaborated in whatever way they could. Manpower, sometimes even material. In other words, they fought, but they also contributed. [I stop to take a photo of the park] Now you take photos of the spring here.

A: There was a lot of participation.

W: Yes, and I'm talking about the time when participation had already decreased. For example, the Children's Day festivals, Mother's Day, the posadas, were purely communal. Everything reflected the community.

A: What do you think it was that helped that unity to exist?

W: It was the generation that built Santo Domingo. They were used to that. To give something to make the community better off. For the children. In the end that's how they built Santo Domingo. Santo Domingo wasn't built by buying, it was built by building. And it was that generation that did that.

They grew up like that and they continued to practice it. It was no longer about marching to the Mexico City government building, the mayor's office. It was about weaving the community.

I also think that now we would have to ask those who were there, because it contrasts, but at that time it was the era of the chavos banda. I'm not going to say that it was a lost generation, but it was a generation that had complications because their parents were working, they were doing the work in the neighbourhood and those kids grew up like that. They didn't have the chance to go to those festivals, to school, to many things. And they grew up in the streets, and later they formed bands. And in the gangs, unfortunately, what happened? Drugs, fights, rivalries. In my childhood I also remember seeing gangs fighting among themselves, but it was ugly. They didn't shoot each other, but with chains, with ice picks, all that. And how there were often deaths and all that.

And that's where Santo Domingo's reputation for violence came in. For example, taxis didn't enter the neighbourhood. And even now, I've come across some taxi drivers who don't want to enter. And others say, "no, here it's the other way around, here there are hours and hours and hours of fares".

So this place is the only green area that Santo Domingo has. [referring to the park where we are] That's the Flores sports centre. And it has more things, now you're going to see more things on that side.

A: Normally people come here to walk, to run.

W: Yes, but it is also the connecting walk for the people who live up there. They don't have to cross the neighbourhood, they just walk around and get to the Universidad metro station.

A: And do you use this place sometimes? Do you come here?

W: I use it because I go to the sports centre with my son. And so, it's also very nice. Well, let's go and see this side [we walk towards the fence to see the springs]. When people who don't know the area come here, they don't believe it. The neighbourhood is the most inhabited neighbourhood in Latin America. And you see this, which is what is left of Pedregal here in Santo Domingo. Look, you see the plants, you see the stone.

A: The nopal cactus sprouting from the stone.

W: Oh, in the rainy season it's marvellous. But look, here are the springs [we look out to see the springs from the fence].

A: All that was excavated in the quarry and they found water at the bottom?

W: Uh-huh, they dug until it gushed out. That water is the same as the shallow aquifer in Aztecas 215.

A: It's the same water that comes down from the Xitle volcano, isn't it?

W: It's the same. And it gushed there too. The study they did to demonstrate the origin of the water in Aztecas 215, they took samples from here, well, from the Xitle, from here, from the town of La Candelaria, from filtrations that there were, they compared the origin, they did the studies, they said that they have the same origin, the origin is the Xitle.

Then there in Aztecas 215 it was the same, they excavated until they found the aquifer.

W: Yes, it does the same thing. It's an aquifer that, well, in that area over there it's 4 metres deep.

A: They didn't have to dig that deep.

W: No, 6 metres deep. The relevant thing is that they said that, the government itself and the company, both of them, said that it was dirty water. And that the best thing to do was to dump it down the drain.

A: Then they had to admit that they didn't.

W: And half-heartedly, eh? I mean, the previous administration never acknowledged it, never. In spite of the study, they still denied that it was water that they couldn't put in the drain.

A: Yes.

W: [referring to what we are seeing] This, that land should really belong to the community. It was already a time when the struggle was not so strong, the participation. But there was an effort to make it belong to the community.

A: So that it wouldn't be a landfill.

W: That it should be a natural area and that it should belong to the community. Then came an agreement between the UNAM university and the Mexico City government to lend them the site for a certain period of time. And UNAM kept it, but the worst thing is that it's not UNAM, it's a football club, that's the one that uses it. The security, those who do it, those who look after the place, the security, are UNAM workers, but those who enjoy it are the Pumas football club, not UNAM.

A: So it currently belongs to the university, but it is used by the Pumas club.

W: Yes, there are researchers who are allowed to carry out studies, but for example Dr Luis Zambrano, Dr Escolero, Dr Canteiro, they did their studies of the aquifer. Before Aztecas 215, they had already been monitoring the area, they were doing studies on the area covered by the aquifer, and when Aztecas 215 happened, they said that it proved what they had studied. And they got involved so that the scientific information would be useful in the case of Aztecas 215. Finally, as scientists, they said well, the scientific information is useful so that, if there is, especially at a time when water is becoming scarce, when there is an area where there are water supply problems, then the most illogical thing to do was to throw the water away and not take into account the studies that exist.

A: And this is from the Mexico City government? [passing by a community centre].

W: Aha, yes, now this administration has built these places, but they are still disconnected. I remember clearly what the connection was like between these places and the community, and it is very different from today. For example now, if we want to bring the police in, then they ask us, I'm not saying it's wrong for them to ask us, but the way they have the places is as if they were, in other words, they take them over.

A: So it didn't start out as a government community centre?

W: No, it wasn't, that's what the administration turned it into, it was an independent community centre. Those are the houses, like that, those are the ones I'm telling you, the ones we used to cross to get to the park. [showing houses next to one of the park's fences]. All this was like that, the unspoilt land, let's say, but with tyres, rubbish.

A: And here you can already see the fields where the football team practices.

W: One part, around the quarry in fact, there are three springs. There we saw one, two and three.

A: And the water that gushed out in Aztecas also looked similar?

W: Yes, in fact the same birds that come here are the ones that used to come there.

A: This now belongs to the government, is the popular community centre also now a government community centre?

W: Uh-huh. It's quite strange there, I don't know how they did it, because it's a private property. The government's strategy is to use these spaces, or the activation in the parks, to get closer to the people, and there are things that they haven't taken care of, so they should pay attention to them. For example, there are several of these centres, as they were built in facilities that already existed, in some cases they were built, but they are lands that already existed, that already belonged to the community centres, for example. When they build them, they are separated from the community centre, but they have no water supply. And if they are facilities for children, adults, young people, you need to have bathrooms, and the spaces don't have bathrooms, they don't have a water connection. They have to borrow water from the community centre. And now, fortunately, with the well that we won, they no longer have problems, but before that they didn't have water, they had to send them water trucks as well.

A: Do you remember when they started having problems, that the water was no longer coming from the mains?

W: Well, it was around 2000, around the year 2000.

A: That's when it started.

W: Yes.

A: Is this an entrance here?

W: Yes, this is an entrance.

A: And so it was around the time that you start soliciting water trucks?

W: No, no, the water trucks came later, what we asked for was water in the drinking water network. Our demand has always been for water in the pipe network, always, always. The water truck thing was just a little improvement, something to have, at least for emergencies, but not to live off of water trucks.

What several administrations did was to promote the water trucks in order to have people as political spoils. No, the water trucks were horrible. You don't have enough to supply, but when they mix it with politics it is even worse, because in addition to not being enough, you are at the mercy of whatever they want, because the neighbours were made to go to rallies of Mauricio Toledo, Valentín Maldonado, Miguel Ángel Mancera. They even confronted the neighbours themselves, those of us who organised ourselves independently, the same neighbours who have known each other for years, they attacked us because we questioned the government.

They were once very upset that what they did afterwards was to hand out water tanks. So once in a demonstration we took one of the water tanks that they gave out and we took it to the front and it had the slogan "why do we want a water tank if we don't have water". No, that really annoyed them, but very much, they even started to investigate who they had given that water tank to, like sick people, because what did they say? "Everything I give you is so that now everything I tell you to do, you're going to do.

They used water as a political weapon,

A: As a tool, to control.

W: Even the water trucks bore the deputy's or mayor's banner, and not just the water trucks, alarms, all the services they provided bore the logo of the political party.

It happened that in the same house you could see a water tank, an alarm, paint on the façade and the PRD flag. All four in one.

A: And so the committee was formed to counteract that?

W: Well, we were neighbours who said, we're not going to do that. And look at the neighbours, the older ones who are from the generation that arrived in the invasion, those were the ones who set the example and said, if we had never done that, why are we going to do that now? What's more, many of them participated in the founding of the PRD and they would say, "when we founded the PRD they persecuted us for painting PRD graffiti, they persecuted us for making PRD flyers". And I'm talking about 1997, 1996, they were persecuted. And now the PRD was persecuting the neighbours who were fighting, those who were demanding respect for the human right to water, the right to demonstrate. Those neighbours said, "no, they have forgotten their objective, we are not going to go with them, we are going to fight". So those neighbours said, "we are going to fight for the human right to water", and that's how we always stood firm on that.

They offered us water trucks to be their operators, they offered us that later, after the Quiero Casa real estate company would build the well that the neighbourhood needed, but that we would leave Aztecas 215. And we, based on the same principle that this is not how the neighbourhood was founded, we did not accept to be operators to bring people together for water trucks, nor did we accept to hand over the aquifer or the spring of Aztecas 215 in exchange for a well, which we do need, but it is not the responsibility of a real estate company, it is the responsibility of the government. That is how we always stood firm on that, and no, we did not move from there, and it is because we finally wanted the issue to be resolved at its root.

Here, well, almost at the end of the sports centre there is a pool, those pools were built by Mayor Mauricio Toledo. [referring to the space where we are at the moment].

A: This is another part of the sporting event,

W: Yes, and they did, well, there is, I remember there is a report in La Jornada by a reporter called Rocío González, about how they did several works with the objective of diverting resources, and among them were the pools, and the pool is a benefit to the community, it's very good, but, for example, they did the projects, but they didn't even have the concern to make people aware of the significance of it. Recently, when the well was being built, or when there was a lack of water, there were people who wanted to close the pool to the neighbours here, and they said "no, the pool steals the water", when the pool is treated water. I mean, they don't even know that, something so basic, and I remember that we even talked to the director, or the administrator, and she said, "help us,

help us because the neighbours themselves want to close the pool". And we would say to them, "what we are looking for is a root cause solution, and if we solve the problem of the well, we will also solve the problem here". And no, they are happy now. That's the tank over there [pointing to a building in the distance] those two tanks are the ones that receive water from the Lerma Cutzamala system.

A: Those are the ones that are here,

W: Uh-huh, that's the one. As it comes down by gravity, let's say it's the highest part, and from there it supplies. So, if water didn't reach that tank, or those tanks, the pressure couldn't reach it, it was difficult to increase the pressure. The network is very large in Santo Domingo, it needs a significant pressure, so we were always having this dispute, what level the tanks could reach. And, well, here they yield very little, when there are days, weeks, when not a drop falls in the tanks,

the water pressure in the wells was not enough, at least not in the upper zone, the central zone and the upper zone were not enough, it was not enough.

A: The central zone is like from...

W: From the C.U. pass downwards.

A: The lower zone would be from...

W: From Tochtli downwards

A: And the upper zone is from Tetl to here.

W: From the pass to here, it's the high zone,

A: What is the relationship between the general assembly and then the committee?

W: There were different struggles that arose because of different issues. For example, the struggle of the base church communities, which is one of the longest, which has lasted the longest and continues to this day. I used to go to the primary school here [referring to the building we are passing]. The struggle against gas, the imposition of Phenosa natural gas, the struggle against the ZODES (real estate projects called economic and social development zones), against the privatisation of electricity, then against Aztecas 215, against the lack of water. In other words, they were struggles that arose over different issues and in some of them we were all neighbours, not only from Santo Domingo, but also from other neighbourhoods. Aztecas 215 is the one that unites all the neighbourhoods, we all united there. Never before had Los Reyes, Candelaria, Santo Domingo and Ajusco fought together. What's more, even the kings didn't like Santo Domingo, but they fought together.

When Aztecas 215 came up, that's when different neighbours from different streets in the neighbourhood got fed up and said, "we're going to fight for water too", and so the Water Defence Committee was founded, as a parallel. In fact, an attempt was made to found a committee in each neighbourhood, but Santo Domingo was the only one that managed to maintain it. In fact, there were assemblies where people from the mayor's office participated, I mean officials, but they also brought people with them, and in Santo Domingo, with all of them and their people, we won the battle.

That's the primary school, this one here, where I studied. So from the first floor, from there we could see.

A: And you say that now you use the swimming pool,

W: The sports centre, the pool too, I bring my son here to swim. I confess that because of the way they built the pool and all that, I didn't even want to use it, but I mean, it belongs to the community.

A: And it helps people to get to know each other there too?

W: I was younger, we used to play tournaments, we used to play football tournaments, there were more football pitches down there, where the pool is there were other football pitches.

A: Is that the one down there? [referring to what we can see from where we are].

W: It's the blue one, that's the pool. And for example, politics often doesn't help the community fabric. The Mexico City government has a programme called Ponte Pila (get active), which is for people who know about sports, who train, they give them economic support in exchange for training in basketball, a sport or some physical activity. Since this space is owned by the mayor's office, Ponte Pila activities cannot take place here. When you already have the basketball court, for example. So if people from Ponte Pila come here and want to do an activity here, they are chased away, it's unbelievable.

A: It's like you say that it's been a while since these centres have been linked to the people.

W: And that has to do with it, the people who go to the government community centres, well, the same thing, they don't see the problems of the community. I have nothing against philosophy, meditation or things like that, but you see the workshops they give in these community centres, and they are not workshops that the community needs. The first thing they have to do is to see what the community needs, what the elderly need, what the young people need, and that's how it used to be, and those activities were done and people went. Now it's what they want to give and that's it.

And activities that used to be done are left, for example, Doña Martina, I don't know if she told you, she was in a Profeco group, they were there for years, this administration came in and cut them out, and they were the ones who did activities for the people, who taught them embroidery, how to make perfumes, various things. They were removed because they said, no, we are bringing our project here, and you can't occupy this space.

A: Yeah, well yeah, kind of breaking ties then.

W: Yes

A: And you say that people's involvement has been lost, why do you think that is?

W: It has to do with the fact that the people are subjugated, that they are given a card with money from the mayor's office, or from such and such. That breaks political awareness, and people are used for someone's political benefit. With that, you don't encourage organisation, you encourage political obedience, that's what you are encouraging

[We leave the park and walk down Patos Street. So there are people who don't even want to participate, because they were given such and such a thing and they say they are going to take it away, and so on. And the worst thing is that there are people who are used to this, and if you question the government, they think that you are questioning the economic support, that they are not going to receive it because of you, and they are wrong. They are wrong, because we say "be politically aware, learn why we have rights, and why we have what we have in the neighbourhood". We have it because the people fought, the elders tell you that, at the beginning, Luis Echeverría Álvarez did make people go to PRI rallies. You can see that he had his populist strategy. After Cárdenas, the person who distributed the most land was Luis Echeverría, and they count it as land distribution after the invasion of Santo Domingo, and it wasn't land for cultivation,

it was land for housing. And there were many places like that, in Iztacalco, in Ajusco, in the metropolitan area of Mexico City.

A: So now we're leaving the sports centre, and we're going to walk around the neighbourhood,

W: Yes, and I also remember a lot, because my dad used to take us to Ciudad Universitaria, and we used to come to the sports centre, so where we played sports, where we got together with our friends, it was either here, or it was in Ciudad Universitaria.

A: Yes, it served as a meeting place.

W: Yes, well, now it's true that, you could get together with friends, and when I look at the book of the thousand and one stories, I say, "I lived through this, but I didn't know the political context". I didn't know, and more. I remember that there was a theatre group called La Chinga theatre company, and they did tours, plays like that, in the streets, in schools, it was a popular theatre project, from the popular community centre. People from the left, from that time, took part,

A: That community centre was also very involved in the formation of the neighbourhood.

W: In the area over there, in the central area, but not the rest. There were different leaders. They had their own association called the Union de Colonos de Santo Domingo. And in a certain area, just close to where they are. We don't know about the Union of Santo Domingo Settlers here,

A: And how did you start to get involved in this type of struggle?

W: What happened is that my parents were teachers, and in 1989 there was a teachers' strike in Mexico City. And I remember that almost all the schools in Mexico City participated, it was in March, April. I remember that my parents got involved in the teachers' struggle, to break with the PRI bosses, with Barrios,

and then Gordillo came in. And they took us to assemblies, to meetings, and that's also where the neighbourhood committees and the founding of the PRD began, a little later on. So they participated in that and took us to some activities, painting, leafleting, and well, that's how I got to know how an assembly was held, how people got together, all that. And they also connected with other struggles, SUTAUR-100, the EZLN, a lot of them, the electricians, the peasants of Guerrero. It was a time of a lot of repression by the PRI, the early 90s, the massacres of Aguas Blancas, Acteal, El Charco. In my family we knew all that, through my parents. And well, it coincided with the fact that since this was an area where there were still remnants of the struggle, delegates from the EZLN (Zapatista Army of National Liberation) came here, when there were Zapatista consultations, and we were there. And let's say that this, this part of the struggle is what helped these neighbours to meet again when the new problems and the new struggles came. Because neighbours meet again, neighbours who maybe didn't see each other so often, who didn't have meetings anymore, well, they met again. In the fight for water, in the fight against Fenosa gas, and so on.

A: And I imagine that new people are also arriving [because of the noise we can identify that we are in a very busy market area, a tianguis (market stall)].

W: Ah, yes, the neighbourhood has grown a lot, so it happens, for example, with the gas fenosa, you can see the people who have bought land. When we fight, that's where you can distinguish that part of what is the hard core of those who have kept those who fought. When Gas Fenosa comes and wants to impose natural gas pipelines and all that, without consulting the people, without informing them, without anything, just because of an agreement with the government, assemblies are held to ask why you are doing it, right? To ask us first to inform us what it's all about, right? etc. And then the neighbours who bought, do you know what they say, as they are disconnected from the whole story, they say no. They say that yes, they are, that they are the ones who are the ones who have bought it. They say that yes, that they particularly want gas, that they want it to be put in for them, even if everyone else doesn't want it. And although they say to them, "well, but there was a history here", they reply "no, I don't care, I don't care".

[arriving at another building] Here I came to kindergarten, and they don't use this part as a kindergarten anymore, only the part down there, but before they used both, there and here. Well, I went, I was in kindergarten down there, and I finished kindergarten here, it's the same school, but it has like, let's say, two spaces.

A: Here on Patos Street.

W: Yes, this part, see, here, see [stops walking and points to something] see, these are some classrooms, where they used to do business, I don't know if you can see them.

A: [making an effort to see behind the fence] With the sheets.

W: Uh-huh. There are several, here in Tochtli there are others like that, and they were classrooms that were used for negotiations, for deeds, for water, for drainage. In other words, the government itself did those, installed those classrooms here so that the people themselves could do their paperwork.

[referring to the building in front of us] This community centre, this is where I was telling you earlier, this is where people used to come to bathe, to wash their clothes, when they were, when the services were installed here.

A: So there was water here before there was water elsewhere.

W: Well, let's say, there was a main intake, and there was the pool. So everything, that's where the washing places were. Here where you see everything there were washing places.

A: Where these classrooms are

W: Yes, now they are classrooms.

A: But the washing places are gone

W: No. There are still some in Candelaria, because in the church of La Lupita there were also washhouses.

A: And this market was already there [the tianguis where we are walking]?

W: The tianguis? Yes, well, I remember it was. Every Thursday, here.

[we meet a relative of Waldo's who greets us].

W: This is where they used to have festivals for Children's Day, Mother's Day. They were community festivals, now they are doing festivals again, but for the PRD they do one, for the Morena party they do another, each one to give water for their own mill (to look for their own interests). Or here they give dance and karate classes. And before the classes were free, now everything is charged for, so people don't come. There, the community centres of the Mexico City government are competing with them and killing them because they are free.

A: But these are also government-run?

W: From the federal government, and they get paid, because it is the teacher's salary, otherwise there is no pay for the teacher.

A: And do you remember coming too, but from the community centre?

W: Yes, my mum did dressmaking, my sister did dance, one of my brothers did karate, we did football. [as we walk and he shows me the community centre] this part is the other part that is still pre-school.

No, the neighbourhood is huge, there are so many people in the neighbourhood that many people who sell different products come from Milpa Alta, Tláhuac, Xochimilco, they come to sell their products. The people you see on the metro promenade surely sell flowers,

There are people who sell tamales, who sell mangoes, plums, people who come from here, from the neighbourhoods further south, or from the southern delegations, from here.

All of this was for a time, in the ugliest part, it was a spoil of the PRD, the worst, that's how it was. It was different, if we walked around, it was what I was telling you about, with PRD flags, the mayor's posters, the congressman's posters.

A: And do you think that the Water Defence Committee can help people to participate more, to get more involved, with more community spirit?

W: Well, yes, that's how it has been. I mean, let's see, we're not the majority of the neighbourhood, are we? But in terms of participation, we have managed to give our struggle a plus. Because we participate, that is, we are not locked up in our house, if we have to go out to the mayor's office, we go out to the mayor's office for a meeting. When we have to go out, we go out. And we make a difference with that, if we have to put pressure on the Mexico City government,

the mayor's office, we do it. And also in that, at that time, everyone agreed that the objectives were the same, that's how it coincided.

There were people who didn't, who at first said they agreed with that form of struggle, but at the first opportunity they showed the opposite and that they were looking to benefit from the people, to do business with the people. In other words, there have been divisions in the struggle as well, and one thing that distinguishes us, whether in the Water Committee, in the Electricity Committee, in the Assembly, is that we are the ones who do not use the people, neither for political benefit, nor for economic benefit.

Because there are those who say they fight for the electricity, but they only do business with the people, the only thing they are interested in is, not that the demand is resolved, but to do business with the people. And it happened to us here in the neighbourhood when the PRD comes out and Sheinbaum has to put in place a government for a few months, well, that government breaks with the PRD, which is fine. And now the PRD, who were the ones who used water as political spoils, are now looking for us to have water trucks. Because they had control for years, and when Morena no longer gives it to them, now they are looking for us to give it to them. And no, neither did they. But the bad part is that there were people from Morena who did the same thing, to use the water trucks for political gain, and we broke with that too. We are not going to go along with one or the other, just because you say the fourth transformation doesn't make you honest, there are also corrupt people there. Those who boycotted the most in the last stage of the well, those who boycotted it the most, were the Morena operators. With nonsense, they said that the water was going to go to the stadium, and that the neighbourhood was going to collapse. You saw the 80 metres of volcanic lava there, so what kind of earthquake is this?

A: And now that the well has been completed, that was the objective, to have water in the network.

W: Yes, and it is, the objective has been achieved.

A: In addition to the well, did the committee also manage to have the tandeo (water distribution) done on certain days?

W: That's another matter, I tell you, as the local government is PRD, PAN, and the central government is Morena, they refuse to meet to make a joint plan for the tandeo. They don't want to, and they give them the order. Of course, every now and then they take photos of the general coordinator of SACMEX meeting with Giovanni Gutiérrez, the mayor, to deal with water issues, but they are just photos, it is pure hypocrisy. They only meet to say "I'm working", but they don't make real agreements to work, they don't do it, they don't want to do it. We have been telling them for weeks, months, "we are going to meet to see the problem". They are confident that there is already water, but we say "if there was a clear plan about the water supply when problems arise, we could solve them more easily". The last time there was a water shortage, it was only in Llave Street, and we had to do the job, to tell them it was this area, and they fixed it. But they don't want to go any further, what if in a while it's another street, another area? The same thing, as they don't plan, they don't check, they're not going to monitor this, we're going to have to tell the neighbours, to know where the problem is. And let's see what happens now because the election season is coming up again. We'll see what happens.

A: [coming to Tetl Street] Do you want us to continue?

W: No, as you like, I don't know how long we've been going on,

A: I think we've been going on for about 50 minutes, maybe you could say something you'd like to close with, what's next for the committee, now that the well is done, what would you like for the neighbourhood as well.

W: Well, look, in the current context it is very difficult, because as the neighbourhood has grown a lot, and well, the whole city, there are problems that are going to be present all the time. I'm talking about security, drugs, informal commerce, the water problem, all these problems are going to be present, and at some point, some of them are going to explode again.

So as a community, that's what the Committee is there for, to solve the water problem, but if another problem comes up, I'm sure that the committee is going to fight it. And it is already a group of neighbours, neighbours who have spoken out, who have a firm grasp of how this well was achieved, they have that memory of how we achieved it, and so later on, if we need to organise, it will not be so difficult. We know how to organise ourselves, how to hold an assembly, how to appoint representatives, how to go and hold a rally, how to do whatever is required. So here is the seed of the organisation, and that is maintained for whatever is needed.

An important group that emerged here, for example, was the Ayotzinapa solidarity group. The first popular neighbourhood that the parents of the 43 visited was here, Santo Domingo, and it was an enormous march that took place like this. It started from here, just in front of the corner where one of the parents comes to sell bread, and that's where the march started.

A: On the corner of Tetl and Cueva here.

W: Yes, let's go that way, if you want, that's where we'll finish. That's where the march started, and people couldn't believe it. Above all, the new people couldn't believe it, they said "are they the parents of Ayotzinapa? Before it wasn't like that, the Zapatistas would arrive, the students would arrive on strike, and people would support them. I was in the strike in 1999, and one of the popular neighbourhoods that supported the strike the most was all the pedregales, but here in Santo Domingo. Here the students arrived and the people didn't call us vandals, they didn't call us "huevones" (lazy), the people gave us bread, rice, beans, tortillas, fruit. Then later they recognised us. Here there are paintings of the water struggle,

there is Ayotzinapa wall graffiti,

there are murals of the struggle for water,

A: Well, the well has been a great achievement.

W: Yes, yes, because it is breaking with all that I was talking about, putting an end to all that, guaranteeing a right, and breaking with all those bad political practices.

A: What has the Water Defence Committee meant to you?

W: Well, it has been a big effort, I mean there have been moments of anger, of tiredness, of desperation. But the satisfaction that we achieved it, and in spite of everything, and the complications that there were, we did it. We did it, and in the end it is the mayor's office itself, the government of Mexico City, that benefits. Because this was a problem they had all the time, you see the newspapers and all the time there are marches because there is no water, water trucks. I mean, I wish even they would start to analyse the problem, the problem that they got rid of thanks to the people. Because the proposal came from the people, they didn't propose the change in the tandeo, they didn't propose the well, in other words, the proposals have always come from the committee.

A: Yes, and the committee had to map,

W: Yes, everything, everything.

A: And this is the corner where they sell bread.

W: Uh-huh, here, right here,

A: This is the house of a comrade

W: Yes, of the comrade and another, may he rest in peace, he was one of those who was always there, he was in all the struggles, he was in all the struggles, and well, he's still with us.

His mother, well she is an older person, the way she tells you how, well she, her husband, she practically brought up her children on her own, how she did it, how she had to work, how she had to go back to the faenas (community work). You say "no, what they fought for is a lot". What we have fought for now is little compared to what they fought for. Most of my uncles no longer live here, but they fought for the neighbourhood, my grandmother, my father, they all fought.

A: Is this history of struggle something that you want to share to your son?

Waldo: Well, yes, for him to know that it is up to us to do something, not to be passive beings. We have to do something about our reality. Whatever you can contribute, contribute, but don't be indifferent.

A: Well, thank you very much, Waldo, for the interview, what did you think of the interview experience?

W: Well, yes it was good, it's different from sitting down. More things come out.