

RUPTURE SESSIONS (Pilot project)

Original recordings in Spanish
English translation

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Madrid

Grupo de Impacto Psicosocial
de la Comisión de la Verdad,
PAH Madrid (Psychosocial
Impact Group of the Truth
Commission, PAH Madrid)

FADE IN

INT. OFFICE SPACE DAY

An office space somewhere in Madrid. IRENE, a psychologist sits with MARILO, MANUELA, GLADYS and CHARO. It is a hot late afternoon in summer. IRENE sits to the far left, the other four women sit in a semi-circle around her. All five women are wearing "Stop Evictions" t-shirts.

IRENE begins the session.

IRENE: I am going to tell you how we were thinking about working. What we are going to do is a discussion group. During the next hour, we are going to talk about our experiences of being affected by the mortgage crisis. We intend to document, first amongst ourselves, and then later with other people affected, what has been the psychological impact of everything that has to do with eviction. This forms part of the work of the Truth Commission and also the PAH. This workshop is a test. The idea is also that after...if you want to become part of the team so that you are not just participants...to also help other people talk about their experiences, within future group discussions. The first thing, because Marilo is suffocating from today's heat, we want to do a couple of minutes where we relax a bit. Loosen your feet a bit. Your arms. Make sure you are comfortable in your seats, so that we can be a bit relaxed. Close our eyes and concentrate on a peaceful place, like a beach, where we are alone.

MARILO: We can't stay there or I will fall asleep.

Everybody closes their eyes except for Irene.

IRENE: We are not going to stay there long, you will not fall asleep. Just until we are a bit relaxed. Try to feel the stress leave your arms. Move your shoulders a bit. Feel this tension and feel how it leaves the body. Think about a place that relaxes you. Like a beach with the breeze blowing. Pay attention to your breath. The stress is going away from your arms, your hands. Okay, we'll slowly open up our eyes. A little calmer now.

Marilo, Gladys, Manuela and Charo open their eyes again.

IRENE (cont'd): Okay, the theme that we wanted to propose to you today is that we talk about how we were before.

Marilo, Gladys, Manuela and Charo look at Irene.

IRENE (cont'd): How was your life before you knew you were going to be evicted? Before you stopped paying for your mortgage? How did you feel? What ideas did you have for the future? To open up the discussion, in order to talk about this, the first question would be to say two or

three adjectives, characteristics, of what others saw in you. For example, me, Irene, I would say that two years ago my best friends saw me as a girl, student and good friend.

Irene looks at Marilo.

MARILO: Okay, I guess I will start. Truthfully I will tell you one thing. I was special, really I was. I put a lot into everything. (*Slightly smiling*) I did my university studies on a scholarship. I bought and renovated a house by myself, including the stones that I placed in the kitchen. I fought a lot for everything. I was excited, happy. I had a lot of projects. I was more accepted within the nuclear family and society because I had followed a standard that society had laid out for me. I prepared for a career. I got a stable job. I felt like a girl who was perfectly following the social ideals. Did my studies, got a house, stable work. And suddenly everything just vanished. I am not the same.

Marilo brushes hair off her face.

MARILO (cont'd): I am not the same person, because now I have to go to the bank with a red face, even though I am a young professional. Suddenly the bank hates me and does nothing but call and pressure me like I am a... My family turned their backs on me. To the point where I started to isolate myself socially. This is one of the steps into the shit...sorry for the camera that's recording this...that I myself started to feel this sense of shame that the situation generates in you. To the point where I isolate myself. But this way of isolating myself, during the time which I lived through this problem, also affected me at work. I work like before and my bosses are happy, but I am much more anti-social now, with my colleagues, than I was before.

IRENE: We're going to try to stay in the "before", okay? Try not to compare it with the "now" so it doesn't get mixed up. Try and stay in the past.

MARILO: Yes, happy, with excitement and interest in involving myself with everything. I didn't even want to watch television. Study, build up the home, all of this... But I don't recognize myself that much. I've lost a bit of happiness within my heart and soul. I have to try and bring it out again.

Irene looks at Gladys.

GLADYS: In my case, when I came to Spain in 1997, I came here with a lot of excitement. I have always been a fighter. This was the idea that I always had of myself. This was the criteria that I always had for myself as a person. I always fought. Always. Always. Although I might fall down 10 times, each of the 10 times, I would get back

up again, stronger. But before I had something more, an excitement. I had work, an income. I saw that I could restart my life here in Spain, economically speaking. In Peru, the economy was very low. Here I was improving my quality of life. Like any human being wants to do. But everything went down with this mortgage loan. This totally changed my life. Before I was happy. I have always been, like Marilo said, very considerate. I am not a professional, but I did courses, small courses. I didn't go to university, but I did courses. I have always been quite sociable. I was always the kind of person who liked to get involved in things. I adapted to whatever circle of people I found myself in. I felt good because I was accepted by other people. I got...I don't know, support, happiness. Positive responses from people. And this I passed onto my family. I was emotionally and economically well. It was a very good time for me.

Irene looks at Charo.

CHARO: When I came here, in 1999, I came with the excitement of working. To work, to have something. Before in my country, no, but here in Spain, it seemed possible to buy a house. So I said to myself, "I am going to have my own house that I couldn't have in my country." I came here, I worked, and for what? I was another person. It is not like you see me now. I was happier. Always out with friends. I had money and with the illusion of having something of my own here, and work to move the family forward. But everything ended after we took out the mortgage loan. It all went downhill. Because I wasn't like this before. I always thought about working and giving money to my daughter for her studies. But this ended. We immigrants always have the idea of moving forward, to do something here. But look at what happened. We went down.

Irene looks at Manuela.

MANUELA: Okay, I will tell you as well. I have been a fortunate person in life because I had four people working for me: my parents and two brothers. I had my house. I went on vacation. My daughter had her communion. She got married. And later the excitement of my grandson, who was my life. Economically, I have never been...But lived very well. My life was my children and grandchildren. Above all my grandson, who I cared for, and my daughter too. I was very festive. When I arrived in the village my parents would say, "We know there's a party because Manuela is here!" I could spend the entire night dancing and singing with my ex-husband. My parents gave me everything. When my parents died, I took refuge in my grandson. My two brothers died, the daughter of one of them as well. I took refuge in my grandson and daughter and overcame it. With a lot of effort, but I did. I had all my neighbours. Everybody loved me. I didn't study. I am a dressmaker. I sewed for everybody. People loved me. I think that now that I received my first eviction order, from the mortgage

that I took out with my son-in-law, I started to become more isolated from the people around me... Although I am now starting to recover a bit. I went through a very bad phase. I don't know if it was me or other people. I have this feeling that when I go out on the street, they are looking at me. I was never lacking anything, thanks to my parents, who always worked hard. I just worked at home...taking care of my children and grandchildren, like gold. Until the eviction, that made my life turn completely bad. On an economical and emotional level, and everything. It radically changed my life.

Manuela shakes her head slightly.

IRENE: What was an average day for all of you in this moment? Before getting the mortgage?

CHARO: My average day was work and being peacefully at home, with my family, without this feeling of having to think about this...Just the thought of having money to send to my daughter who was in Peru. But I lived peacefully. I slept peacefully without any disturbances, during this time.

IRENE: What was your line of work?

CHARO: In Seville, I worked as a maid. I worked and sent money to my mother and I was at peace, not with the pressure that I have now. When I came to Madrid and got involved in this mortgage, my life went downhill. It went completely downhill. I had to deal with a very hard thing. And with all the abuse I received...

Everybody in the group nods.

GLADYS: You have this lie that money gives you peace of mind. You feel at peace and get along better with the family. That it is essential. But it is superficial in the end. Until you have something happen that affects not only you, but your entire family. It's something that drags your whole family down. And on top of this, you don't know if the people around you accept you or not. Like Manuela said, you don't know if you are isolating yourself or if it is they who are rejecting you. You don't come to any conclusions. Things emerge from this problem. A moment arrives when you lose any excitement. You have to take so much medication...You have to put yourself in the hands of professionals. I could not control my mood...because of being unable to pay back the bank...I could not control my emotional state. I had to see a professional. I wanted to overcome this, but I couldn't. It was, for me, the hardest blow and the biggest mistake that I have ever made. Because you always have this guilt, even though we shouldn't have this...This feeling. You arrive at a moment where you say, "What did I do, what did I do to my family?" Why did I decide to do this? Everybody was worried even though I wanted to deal with it alone. To not

talk about it, but I couldn't avoid it. The family eventually learns about it, because they see you in such a deplorable state. I didn't put on makeup, my hair turned half gray. I didn't get dressed. I was totally depressed. I was taking pills and my family was worried to see me like this. And they suffered like I did. It is very hard to be emotionally and economically okay where everybody around you accepts you, and then make this radical change. We have to realize that we human beings are egoists. So when you are no longer this generous, communicative person, because of money, you are no longer this accepted person by those around you. For this reason you isolate yourself, because you feel rejected. It always blocks you. You have negative feelings about your life, negative ideas. You go through a few years wondering if you will ever overcome this, or, "What do I do?" Or, "I can't go on." Or, "Will I come to a moment where everything gets solved?" You are totally blocked.

CHARO: It's that sometimes we come here with the illusion of having a home. I remember that when I bought my house I said, "Wow, I can start to buy my things that I could never buy in my country." I bought a big mattress, a big bed. (*Becomes more animated*) I bought everything for the kitchen and with such excitement of setting up my own home. To see now that they are going to take it away from me. I worked really hard. Because we came to Spain with the illusion of having our own home. In Peru I couldn't have one, I lived in my parents' house. And now I had my own home. I was buying dish towels, setting up everything. This dream of having my own home. It all went down.

IRENE: You have all talked about some feelings. For example, you were talking about peace. I was at peace. How was that life?

MARILO: It's that I don't recognize that person. I have changed a lot. It has been a radical change, but this doesn't mean that everything has been bad. I have also lived through different dimensions of myself. But now I see myself and ask, "Who was that happy girl filled with excitement?" But what happens Irene...and perhaps everybody will verify this. This period when everything collapses, you experience such anxiety and fear inside you. There's such a space of fear and anxiety that's created inside of you. That is the word for it...anxiety. It's that for two full years, I would arrive home in the evening with all my things already packed in boxes. I was waiting for two years for all the court documents to arrive. I was alone, waiting, with my boxes packed. If I wanted to read a book, I had no idea which box it was in. I mean, really, look at the violence in this process. So this fear and anxiety and all the harsh feelings. It is really hard for me to remember these moments that I lived through. I am another person now. I have good moments now, with a lot of peace too...also very beautiful, but different. It's hard to recall that phase in my life. The

dream is over. To arrive at home, during those two years, with fear in your stomach, this anxiety. You disconnect from the past, and also the future. I think that what you learn from this is to live in the here and now. I am in the present and don't want more. Because what use has it been for me to think about the future?

IRENE: Did you think about the future?

MARILO: I focused on my future, of course I did. I have friends that have gotten their university degrees and then had to leave the country and work elsewhere: because there is no work here in Spain. My interest has always been stability: to create a future with my partner, my studies, my house...I wanted to make something of my life. Not sit and wait for what comes to me. I spent four years of my life studying for my career, my poor boyfriend waiting for me. Me, eating, because I was nervous and getting fat. My poor boyfriend downstairs, waiting for me. My intention was to sacrifice some of the now towards the future.

Marilo brushes hair off her face.

MARILO (cont'd): Now the future doesn't matter to me, I tell you this sincerely. And now my father is in the advanced stages of cancer. And I think about how tomorrow we won't be here and that it becomes important to live in the now and fight for my well-being, and good state of mind. So this happy girl with dreams...yes, I remember her, but I don't recognize myself in her. Because now I don't work anymore for some kind of messianic vision. I am not capable of working for a dream. Having the dream of buying something, or that in three years I can have this...I am not capable. I am just here, sharing this moment. It's like this.

Charo nods and smiles.

GLADYS: Because you are following a line. This is the dream that I had when I finally acquired the mortgage. Now I am going to have a future. And if I couldn't pay for it, then my daughter could. We would have a home. But there's this line and this line breaks. And this is when things go down. It was a dream...A dream within my ignorance. They played with our dreams and took advantage of our ignorance. For me, to have a house to share with my daughter, our intimacy, our privacy. A place where we don't have to go and knock on somebody else's door. That this is something that you know you are making for yourself. And these are the fruits of your labour. This is how I felt. Until the moment when this dream breaks and you go tumbling down. All because of some financial institution, an institution that is bleeding out the family. And you are one of them. So when I saw that my dreams were being broken, I went down, like I already said: economically, emotionally. You become so depressed.

MARILO: The mind is not ready for this.

Irene turns to Charo.

IRENE: Charo, you said that before you were at peace. What was this peace?

CHARO: My peace was that I wasn't in this situation that I am in now. I worked and sent money to my parents in Peru. I went out during the weekends because I was a maid. I went out with my friends without a worry in the world. I lived peacefully. But when you get yourself involved in such an intense thing like a mortgage...I can say now that I have this fear. Normally I am not afraid, but the bank director gives me such a fear, what a fear!

Charo clenches her fists and widens her eyes.

CHARO (cont'd): It makes my whole body shake when I have to go see him. I don't want to see him. But I have to go and talk to him. And I talk to him and he says, "No no no! You have to pay or else." And when the time comes for the appointment to see him, I don't want to go. I have such a fear. How can I face it? It was as if I had robbed him. I don't have this this calmness that I had before. I don't have this peace. This peace about going out on the weekends and going to the beach with my friends. I went to this beach in Sevilla, which is where we all went. There we went for a drink, having a nice time. But here I don't have this peace. Here it is something horrible. What is happening to me, it's horrible...I am not at ease.

IRENE: Is it an effort to think about the past?

MARILO: No, it is an effort to stay with positive images.
GLADYS: Pain, that is the word. Because it hurts so much.

IRENE: What hurts?

GLADYS: The pain. Look, when somebody hits you or causes you physical pain, you put on some ointment and it passes. But this pain that we feel. The harassment and abuse, like Charo is experiencing now.

Gladys points to Charo.

GLADYS (cont'd): By telephone, mail. Each time that you open the mailbox, it's like a blow...but an emotional one. And you say to yourself, "What do I do?" This desperation. What do I do? If I don't have any money, how am I going to pay back the bank? (*Inhales breath*) And the bank is going to take away everything until I don't have anything left. And then go after my family. This is what hurts. It's a mixture of feelings. Fear. Helplessness. Anxiety. There are days when you eat everything in the fridge, because of this anxiety. Or you go through other days without eating anything and staying in bed, watching television, but not really watching it at the same time. So these things that happened, it takes a lot out of me to remember them.

Because it is painful to have gone through all of this. Knowing all that I know now, this shouldn't have happened, not even a little bit. How the bank made us feel. It is for this reason that I say that the bank is the monster that bleeds out families. Because the first thing it does is break families apart. The only thing that banks value is the economic status of each family. If you have 1000 euros, 980 euros of it goes to the bank. And you are left with only 20 euros to resolve the rest of your issues.

MARILO: And the worst is that nobody offers you a solution. You feel responsible for having gotten involved in buying something you couldn't afford: something that you now have to fix somehow. And on top of this, during the worst moment in your life, everybody runs away. (*Sarcastic laugh*) The family runs away, your partner runs away. During my eviction, the guy I was with...we broke up. And I said to myself, "I understand that one's capacity for living through such things can sometimes be quite limited."

IRENE: Do you all remember the day that you received the foreclosure notice?

GLADYS: Very clearly.

IRENE: Do you want to tell us?

GLADYS: I was at home with my partner. I was trying to forget about my housing situation because I was undergoing recovery from an operation and was trying to be physically well again. Suddenly, there was a knock at the door. There were two people who said they were from the court: one carried a machine, the other the foreclosure notice. And I said, "What is this?" And they said that it was a mortgage foreclosure lawsuit from the court. They didn't have to explain anything to me. They said that I should get myself a lawyer, or whatever. So when I received it, I signed that I had received it, and then I went back into the living room. That was when my partner said, "Look, you will have to deal with this. You acquired a debt from the bank and now you have to pay it back. You always have to pay back the bank, regardless. There is no other solution." His words didn't affect me that much, at that time. Okay...I did start to cry, but, at that moment, I was thinking about what I should be doing. I keep hearing his same words, a year later. I am not the kind of person that harbours bitterness. Maybe he didn't want to hurt me, but until this day, I feel hurt by these words. That you are living with somebody and not feeling this support from him. You are together, day after day, but then he's acting like a banker.

IRENE: Did something like this happen to the rest of you as well?

MARILO: When I finally received the foreclosure notice, I was in a devastated state. I was living in my house, all my things in boxes, waiting for these documents to finally arrive. I didn't know anything about these social movements yet. Later on, because I didn't know if my eviction was going to be prevented or not, I moved into some crappy apartment and took all of my furniture to a storage place. And I remember that I wanted to go out one Saturday, and I had to go this storage space with an empty suitcase, in order to pick up a dress.

Gladys laughs.

MARILO: (*smiles*) I remember this clearly.

IRENE: So a house is where we have our dresses then? Where we have the clothes we want to wear?

MARILO: Yes, I remember everything, what can I tell you? Look the person that is going through an eviction...in this moment, really...the person who is living through this is in another state of mind. It's totally surreal. You are not totally aware of everything that is happening to you. But what you are completely aware of is the injustice of the situation.

IRENE: So do you think that the moment of an eviction is a particularly unjust one?

MARILO: Yes, Irene.

GLADYS: And with a lot of tension. A lot of tension.

MARILO: For me it's the most unjust moment, above all.

GLADYS: This anger. This anger that I feel. I don't see the reality. I am like...I am asleep. I really don't know what I feel. If it is pain, anguish.

IRENE: Do you remember this feeling, Marilo, of being a bit out of it? What did you feel?

MARILO: Yes, taking out my things...I think I did the right thing. I'm telling you the truth. It would have been very painful for me to open up my house and have to take out my things...Because, I tell you, this violation of having to take out everything, like I was a dog...it is a very strange feeling. So I am happy that I did it this way.

IRENE: Do you think that when you took out your things that it was no longer your house?

MARILO: (*Look of revelation*) Frankly, Irene, that's the truth. It's incredible. It's incredible. On the day of my eviction, my house was totally empty and all this. Yes, in reality you feel like...like this nakedness. I don't know,

all of this process, being evicted. It deprives you of your dignity. It deprives you of your dignity and not just a home. Your intimacy. Your dignity. You feel like you were naked in front of all these people that you don't know.

MANUELA: And we are paying our taxes for this? To pay for these people to...

MARILO: You feel these emotions. It's totally surreal. Look, on that day my door was open: people could enter and exit my house as they pleased. The commission was below and the lawyer, somewhere else. I remember that this neighbour from one floor below, who I didn't really know that well...she had to lend me two chairs. Because Feli, from the PAH...on the day of my eviction, my house was completely empty except for some stickers that said "The bank robs." So Feli told me, "If the commissioner comes up, you have to at least have some chairs." So I had to go down to the neighbour and ask if I could borrow a couple of chairs to put in my house, and she was freaking out. Then later on, I was on the terrace doing an interview with a journalist for Chinese television...so millions of Chinese people could watch some Spanish woman being evicted. So, of course, this is one of those situations where you say "Fuck, this is really surreal." I can't even define it.

IRENE: But now you can laugh about this.

MARILO: Yes, I laugh about it now. But at that moment, it was like 'open house' day. (*Laughs uneasily*) It's a very strange thing. Until the moment that I was finally evicted, I had to play two different roles. The girl that was about to be evicted with all her boxes in the house, and the girl that had to put on a dress and go to work each day. With a normal face. Like nothing was happening. Nobody at work knew that I was about to be evicted. Until they saw me on television during a "Stop Evictions" demo. That is when these two realities mixed together.

CHARO: Just like her. Nobody knows what is happening to me, at work. Just me. I go to work. Just concentrating on my thing and not talking to anybody. If somebody comes up to say something to me, I jump. My boss asks me what's wrong, because I have dark circles under my eyes. I say that nothing's wrong. There comes a time when you think you can't take it any more.

MARILO: Yes, when a human being is playing such different roles, something suffers. I remember that when I was able to stop my eviction, people sent me emails. And the first person that mailed to congratulate me was Oscar from the PAH. He said to me in the email, that when the time came, we all chose dignity. I loved what he was saying to me because I thought, "How dignified we have all been." We haven't burned up anything or killed anybody or committed suicide.

GLADYS: Yet, when I received the notice that I was about to lose my home, it was something very frustrating for me. I said to myself. "What did I do...Why did I take out this mortgage?" Look at what happened. It was very frustrating for me.

MARILO: This discredits you an awful lot.

GLADYS: This desperation. Mistaken moments. Mistaken paths. This desperation.

MARILO: As a human being, when you are being taken to the limits, to these extremes, you never know at which point you will stop being human. In reality, we have a lot of different roles. You play the role of a normal person. But then one where you need incredible support. Throughout all this you need to keep your cool. I was a cool headed woman. Afterwards, when I was going down the stairs after the eviction...me going down the stairs and being super dressed up for work. And I heard the same neighbour saying, "So she has money to buy clothes, but not to pay for the house."

CHARO: When you are no longer paying, you start to think about when this foreclosure notice is going to arrive. When is it going to arrive? This is all you think about. When is it going to arrive? And you live with that. When is it going to arrive? And when it finally arrives, you think you are already prepared. You are ready for it. But when it finally arrived, I was suddenly very afraid. (*Eyes widening in fear*) I was overcome by such fear. I received my notice and my brother's, Javier's, as well. He was the guarantor for my mortgage. I thought that my brother would call me and totally freak out. And me going, "What do I do now?" I was really afraid.

MANUELA: In my case, I wasn't afraid because I didn't even know about it. I lived with my daughter. When I separated from my husband, for spousal abuse, I rented out my flat and went to live with my daughter. (*Voice breaking*) One day, I was out with my grandson playing football, and I got a phone call from my tenant. He said to me, "Mrs. Manuela, you have a letter, a certified letter, from the court that was delivered to the flat." And I said, "What?" "Yes, from the court," he said, "from Coslada...Is it bad that I received it?" "No, not at all, thank you for doing it," I said. "I'll stop by to pick it up and see what it is." He told me not to take too long with this. He had already read it because he had to sign for it. The next day, I told my daughter that she had to take me to San Blas, or that her husband should. Her husband then said that he would take me the next day, then the next day, and then the day after that. Finally, I had to take the bus in order to pick up the letter. The letter said that on the 23rd of November at 10:45 a.m., they were going to kick me out, that I was going to be evicted. The tenant asked if I had known anything about this. And I was on a cloud,

completely on a cloud. So I told him that I would go to the court the next day. I returned to my daughter's house. (*Voice rising in anger*) I asked my daughter and her husband what was going on, but they didn't say anything. (*becoming angry*) They never told me what it was. So the next day, I went to this court...Court Number 1 of Coslada, which is on Columbia Street...and the judicial secretary asked me if I was the guarantor to my daughter's mortgage. And I nodded my head. Then they told me that my daughter was evicted from her home in April and now they were taking away mine. I totally collapsed on the floor. I fell on the floor. I totally collapsed. His name was Juan Carlos Chavales. And he said, "But ma'am, you didn't know anything?" They picked me up, sat me down on a chair. One gave me water, another a bit of air. Until I finally took a taxi to my daughter's place. And when I got back there, I told them without shame. (*Snaps her fingers*) That is when they kicked me out.

CHARO: Imagine that you help out with your daughter's mortgage and she says nothing?

GLADYS: Now that I don't have a house. Now that I am out on the street, sleeping one night here and then one night there. There are moments when I get really depressed. I try to be strong for the people around me, in the movement, in all the groups. I try to be always busy, which gives me strength. It's really hard not having a place to go to...If I need a personal item, I have no idea in which house I have stored it. So this is when I start to feel low, when I don't even have a place where I can just be.

MARILO: Yes, this is really hard.

GLADYS: When I lived through the last step of when I had to leave the home...I knew that this was it. The last definitive step of giving back the keys. That last step when I handed them over. (*Voice breaking*) Until this day, I still can't get over it. I can't get over it. That last step, I still carry it deep inside me. And Vicente behind me, telling me to keep calm. But it's hard, to try to keep calm.

IRENE: And why did you feel like this?

GLADYS: Because I knew that I would never go back to the way I lived. My happiness. It was my corner, where I was independent. (*Crying*) It was my place. It was where I could return back to...to sing or shout, or do whatever I wanted. It was my space. My space.

Marilo consoles Gladys by touching her arm.

GLADYS (cont'd): The 13 years that I was there that I know I will never return to. (*Regains composure*) That month that I went to Peru. But when I returned, I knew that I

had to go inside my house. My things were inside. My intimacy, my privacy, my memories: good or bad. Everything was inside, my daughter's development, everything. So for me, this is the thing that has stayed with me. The last step that...*(Voice breaking)*

MARILO: The truth is that there are things in your life with irreversible consequences. And I think this is one of them.

MANUELA: I remember when I met Gladys for the first time. And I saw her being super-brave, everywhere she went. I thought that with her, nothing was ever impossible. I don't know if this is why I connected with her so much. That I saw her like, I don't know...But when I started living with her, being with her and helping her store her things...And when I saw her sign it over, hand over the keys, and I saw her cry. I thought she would not overcome this. I said to myself that that person...where it seemed that nobody could break her...on that day, I didn't think that she would get over it.

CHARO: I won't get over it.

IRENE: What is it that you don't get over? What do you mean, Manuela, when you say one does not get over this?

MANUELA: What she was just saying (*points to Gladys*). What they take. Even if they give you a palace. They say that you leave your house, but you get a palace instead. It's what she is saying: that you leave your good and bad times, memories of when your daughter was born. The same with me. I got married, my brother died, we were dancing...me and my brother were dancing for my brother, who was no longer with us. And now they tell me, "Look, leave your house and we give you this really great apartment." And I say, "Look, I will stay with the shitty apartment that I have."

GLADYS: Listen, I gave all of my life to be there. I worked so hard, more than 24 hours a day, to be able to make the payments. And so you think, "Where am I going to end up? Where am I going to go?" There are periods during the whole process where you might build up a bit of strength and think that you no longer place any value in material things. It's true, but it's a mixture of things, because you are also within your experiences.

IRENE: So a house is not only four walls then? That this is not what is the most important thing about a house?

GLADYS: No, it's the experiences you had in it.

MARILO: Irene, I think that a house doesn't just represent shelter or protection, your intimacy and freedom. It represents stability...for the family. It represents stability. So when you think that you could be

destabilized, if they have been capable of destabilizing you up to that point...I think that even if we went to the greatest palace in the world, completely paid off, something inside you would remain: that they will be able to destabilize me again. This is the feeling that I have.

IRENE: Do you feel vulnerable? Do you think that they could destabilize you? Is there something that could destabilize you?

MARILO: Okay, Irene, I'll tell you something...on a conscious level, I know that I am strong and that I have a very supportive group around me. But on a subconscious level, I wonder if I would have the strength, if they ever destabilized me again.

MANUELA: It is part of your life.

MARILO: In reality, I think that this process is very malignant because...in the background, you think that...when they throw you out, you will probably not end up on the street...sleeping outside, on the sidewalk. You can probably stay at a friend's house or, after a time, you can move forward and have four more walls. But then you think, "If they have been able to destabilize me and violate my dignity and my intimacy, in such an institutional way: by the banks and government"...It's that it could happen again at any given moment. It's a very strange sensation that stays inside you.

CHARO: I see myself, that I am going to...

IRENE: You are left with a permanent fear?

MARILO: Exactly, this is it. It's the truth. It's true.

IRENE: And you, for example, Gladys, do you think you could rebuild this intimacy that you say you had in your house? Could you recreate this sense of freedom, in all the places that you live in now?

GLADYS: No, because the first thing I do when I am welcomed into somebody's home is...Okay, I am happy because somebody is lending me a hand. But what cuts me off is that I am disturbing the privacy and intimacy of this person. (*Voice rising in frustration*) I feel like I am disturbing it: her freedom and independence, her privacy and intimacy. I feel like I am disturbing it. Like I am not part of it. Like I am somebody from the outside, not part of the family. Even though they are helping me out, I don't feel like I am a free person there. I don't feel this confidence, with this situation.

MARILO: Many times...and I am not talking about us because we are super involved in these social movements...but many times I ask people, "Imagine if it happened to you. If tomorrow they took away your house and threw out your

children? How would you feel?" Well, how are you going to feel? The same as me. So people start to put themselves more in your place, when they imagine that the same thing could also happen to them.

IRENE: Do you think that this is something that another person could imagine themselves in your position, of what you had to live through?

MARILO: Yes, I think that for everybody it would be the same.

IRENE: And why? Some things are difficult to identify in others. Why is this one not that difficult?

MARILO: Because to be human there are some things that are more or less essential. And I think that having shelter is just that. Even if you live in a desert, you still look for some place to live.

MANUELA: Marilo, sorry but I don't quite agree with you. I think that until you have lived through it, or there is somebody close to you that has, nobody can imagine what it's like.

MARILO: Yes, but the question that I ask people is not if they are in agreement or aware of the situation. No, I ask them, "If you had to leave your house tomorrow with a suitcase...you and your children, in a such traumatic way...how would you feel?" A majority of the people would say, "But it's my house." You know what I am trying to say?

GLADYS: Okay, but at the same time, we are at the stage where we are also experiencing some positive things, such as learning about our rights...ones that we didn't know before. We have more weapons now, more ways of working. There are moments where we have said, "Yes we can!" which are the words of the PAH.

MARILO: But who made us feel like victims? And why did we have to be made to feel like a victims?

Marilo points to Gladys.

MARILO (cont'd): Because in the background you feel that you are the guilty one with the problem...and with this, all your disgrace and shame. And I think that in order for this to disappear, we are going to have to do a lot of internal work, at least this is clear for me.

GLADYS: Because we lived in ignorance. For this reason they stepped all over us. Because of our ignorance. We didn't know our rights. And in reality, knowing our rights is the priority that each human being should be taught in school. They teach us things like geography, which is also important, but the first thing they should teach us are

our rights, our human rights. But this doesn't interest them. It doesn't interest them because they are only interested in that we remain ignorant. We jump through this hoop, so that they can step all over us. Because it is they who created this situation. It's them. If they couldn't take it away from us peacefully, they took it away from us with violence, with police. But now that we know our rights, they can't take it away from us, not even with 70 police. They can't take it away from us, not even with two or three lawyers in front of the court. They can't do it that easily now because we got to know our rights, which makes us strong. (*More animated*) Our priority is that we develop emotionally, but for the good.

MARILO: I am going to tell you one thing. This malignant thing that has happened to us. In the end, when you see somebody that has the same problem, you always have this doubt of whether this person will be able to move ahead or not. If we get out of this, it is because of all of the social support that we receive, but also because we set our minds to overcome this problem.

GLADYS: You know what happens? The directors, the bank directors humiliate the indebted person and this humiliation makes us feel and live like guilty people.

CHARO: For me, when I received the notice, there was so much stress. All of these phone calls, these kinds of things. Also, these evictions that I am experiencing now, this month. The ones that I tried to prevent, as an activist. Like that terrible one yesterday, when they evicted that poor girl, and her two young children. I see myself in her. I see myself in these people. I think that I am going to have to live through this as well.

MARILO: What happens is that in a short time you experience so many complicated emotions. It screws up your whole world: external, internal. Of course, this changes your whole life. To this day, I have not been able to walk away from this problem with the house. I got back into my home, but I haven't been able to construct it in the same way. I don't look at it the same or feel about it in the same way.

GLADYS: You no longer live with this dream.

MARILO: There is something broken inside.

GLADYS: I don't have this dream. Just to have a roof to sleep under and not bother anybody. This is how I think: to not be an inconvenience to any family. But for me, this dream of a home? No!

MARILO: It's more. I don't think I am even capable of creating it anywhere. The concept of a home has completely changed for me. I will never create this again.

MANUELA: I don't know what feelings I have about my house, which is no longer my house. (*Voice breaking*) It's the bank's because they took it away from me. It was my father's, from the sweat of my father. Now I have this feeling that if they take away my house, I think that they will take away...My life.

MARILO: This structural violence. It totally alienates each human story. Behind every family is a human story, one that is complex. When they take away a house, it is because of the economic value tied to it. But the consequences from these actions are not just economic ones.

They are doing this to a lot of families and destroying them, and, in the end, the societal structure. (*Voice rising in anger*) So if you manage to do this to a family, then you also destroy an entire society. Because the base is the family. So one thing leads to another and these actions don't just translate into money. These actions have effects and huge consequences in the family, in destroying the families. If you destroy families, then you start with the process of being dominated.

GLADYS: Yet, I really feel that a moment is going to arrive, when we will be able to tell our grandchildren everything that we have achieved. This is what will give me the most satisfaction...to tell them this.

MARILO: You know what I would like to say, Gladys? Everything that has been achieved in terms of all of these social rights around housing: this is our doing. This is everything we have fought for.

GLADYS: Because two years ago, it was unthinkable to have been able to achieve everything that we have been able to achieve. This is the satisfaction I have for myself...that I have not just been able to overcome my own situation, but to help other people overcome theirs as well.

MARILO: To change legislation or politics concerning these issues around housing, implies, I don't know...Perhaps putting bankers into jail.

GLADYS: So what we have done is to make visible the ways they are hurting us. To make this visible, this makes us strong. It's true!

MARILO: What we have to think about is...We have to simply lend a hand, without thinking that we might be arrested. You just have to imagine if it was you. Structural violence is such a blow. Whatever solutions that we arrive at, within these social movements that we are all a part of...in the background they are only temporary patches to an immense problem of which there won't be easy solution, in the immediate future. In reality, it is a huge problem, without a easy solution...for the family.

GLADYS: I have it in my mind that they are going to have to give back everything that they have taken from all those families, even if it is just a portion of what they took away. It's a total crime.

MARILO: That's why I love the word recovery. I am going to tell you one thing. If we, as a group, are strong, then the other part of being strong is taking back everything that was taken from us.

GLADYS: It is going to be a long process.

MARILO: With lots of moral costs.

GLADYS: We are going to have to go through many hard things.

CHARO: Okay, we could get everything back...but I think, at least for me, there will never be peace.

IRENE: And what is needed in order to have the possibility of living again in peace?

GLADYS: Perhaps we can never get back any of this peace that they cheated out of us...

MARILO: But perhaps we can get this back. If other people have gone through hard things then we can too...But who is it that transmits this peace to society? We are the ones taking this one on...We are the ones doing the social work. Us! And it is they who are always destroying it.

GLADYS: But this is what we are doing... We are the ones taking this on. And now we are going to see more outbreaks of evictions, in September...It's going to start all over again and we are going to respond to this. This is our strength. This is the risk that we are willing to take.

MARILO: Yes, it's a delicate phase, but I think that we are moving forward. I hope we succeed in recovering buildings from the banks, so that we can rehouse the families who were evicted from their homes. Let's see if we succeed with this.

GLADYS: I think that the most important thing throughout this entire process is that we make all of these cases completely visible. All of them... how they cheated us. We need to make sure that all the work that we do in this social movement is visible.

MARILO: Yes, the collective is very important.

GLADYS: *(Smiles)* Now when I go into a bank, I enter it like I am entering a home. I enter so peacefully, so calmly, I don't have even one bit of fear. The words just flow out. I am not even one bit rude. I say that I am with the PAH and that I am accompanying this person because she

has trouble speaking, and she is in such a state of anxiety. The only thing that we are here for is to pick up the documents that she requested. You stop being afraid of these people.

MARILO: Irene, you asked us how we imagined ourselves in the future. I was thinking about this, and I can honestly say that I would still like to continue being an activist, to fight for human rights. At the same time, I don't want to have to always carry around this liability, this stigma for life...that I was evicted. No, truthfully, I would like to see myself moving beyond this story. Something that I lived through in my life. Something personal, that has been both good and bad. But really...to arrive at a point in my life where I am finished with this topic, not have to drag it around for the rest of my life. Above all, to not be a victim. I would like to empower myself and not always have to be a victim of everything...of the bank, of society. To not always be the victim because, in the end, it weakens you.

GLADYS: But we have to be totally aware that we are still in the middle of the process.

MARILO: Of course, Gladys, we still have a long way to go.

CONVERSATION ENDS