

Not one neighbour less: Temporalities of tenants organising in Mexico City

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**Conversation series | Pursuing Tenant International:  
Learning from struggles for home in Abya-Yala  
Edited by Ana Vilenica**

## **Not one neighbour less: Temporalities of tenants organising in Mexico City**

**06000 Plataforma Vecinal y  
Observatorio del Centro Histórico**

*in conversation with*

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**06000 Plataforma Vecinal y Observatorio del Centro Histórico** is a grassroots collective based in the Historic Center of Mexico City, dedicated to monitoring and addressing urban changes impacting local communities.

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### **Abstract**

This Conversation addresses the complexities of gentrification in Mexico City (CDMX), and examines the formation and evolution of the 06000 Plataforma Vecinal y Observatorio del Centro Histórico and its strategies for organizing against eviction. It focuses on the iconic Edificio Trevi, detailing its history, and the community's resistance to eviction and "whitewashing by dispossession." The role of social action in fostering resistance and community solidarity is also explored, alongside the group's interactions with local authorities and their efforts to negotiate.

### **Keywords**

Anti-eviction, Mexico City, networks, tenants

I met with Carlos Acuña a member of the 06000 Plataforma Vecinal y Observatorio del Centro Histórico in January 2022 in the *Centro Histórico* of Mexico City. Our extensive discussion delved into the various struggles for home and habitat within the city and the life of this group, which gained prominence during the iconic *Edificio Trevi* struggle. During that encounter, we agreed to have a conversation for the Radical Housing Journal (RHJ) to share insights about the experience of their struggle and the dynamics of informal groups in the city. This exchange was conducted with the members of the group online in November 2022.

**Figure 1**

“Not one neighbor less”: the neighbors knew that these banners would be removed shortly by the real estate staff. However, they bet on their virality on social networks. Photo by 06000 Observatorio Vecinal y Plataforma del Centro Histórico, 2019 - 2020.



**Ana:** We’ve been hearing quite a bit about the gentrification of neighborhoods in CDMX during the pandemic. There was significant frustration directed towards white urban nomads from the US, who relocated to Mexico for its comparatively cheaper rent. However, this influx is not the sole aspect of gentrification in CDMX. Some argue that this phenomenon gained visibility because it affected people from the lower middle classes who have resources and access to social media and international networks, while other struggles remain invisible and unrecognized. Others contend that attributing blame to foreigners oversimplifies and obscures other critical elements of the gentrification process, including the complicity of local inhabitants. Gentrification has been an ongoing process in central areas of the city, also driven by rising land values and touristification. Could you elaborate on these processes?

**06000:** We began to hear the term gentrification some time before the pandemic, possibly around 2014. To us, it appears that the popular classes in Centro Histórico first started using this word in the context of Barrio and the Mercado de la Merced. In 2010, the main hall of the Mercado experienced a fire, resulting in dozens of tenants and merchants losing their homes. The authorities attempted to leverage the fire to push for aggressive urban renewal. This plan aimed to displace formal and informal merchants, replacing them with new architecture designed to cater to new commercial dynamics and a tourist-oriented approach. However, the project was halted thanks to the combined efforts of various merchants’ organizations supported by local and international academics. The term gentrification was introduced by academics, urban planners, and anthropologists such as García Canclini, Víctor Delgadillo, and Ángel Mercado who collaborated with communities in the area. It was also used by collectives like Hand Left Rotation, who created significant documentation of the cultural and political resistance practices of the local residents and merchants. Concurrently, another urban development project aimed at implementing a commercial tourism project in a middle-class area, the Corredor Cultural Chapultepec, was stopped. This project involved different types of stakeholders who also started using the term gentrification. We consider ourselves successors to that

history, and some members of those collectives have assisted or participated in the debates and discussions of Plataforma 06000.

**Ana:** How is tenancy formally organized in Mexico? Who are the landlords, and how is market regulated? Are there rent controls?

**06000:** It is a complex question, as each state and city in Mexico has its own regulations and conflicts. In Mexico City, for instance, there are thousands of buildings where tenancy isn't regulated in apartments: some were inherited, others expropriated after earthquakes for the benefit of neighbors, and some are managed through housing credits for indigenous populations. There are also many tenants who, despite living in their homes for decades, lack any formal documentation or contractual support. Squatting does occur, but in Mexico City, it is often stigmatized and criminalized, making its politicization usually covert and different from its more popular character in Anglo-Saxon or European countries.

Landlords, known as *tenedores*, vary significantly. They range from aristocratic families who inherited land since the Mexican Revolution, to ecclesiastical organizations spared from government expropriations during the Reform Wars, to Chinese or Korean consortiums that acquired large buildings in the 20th century. There are also millionaires of Jewish or Arab origin who have prospered in commerce – like Carlos Slim. Additionally, much of Mexico City was built on communal land, or *ejido*, a mechanism that has been eroded through expropriations financed by political parties, among others.

There is also a large number of homeowners who managed to own their homes thanks to public policies and a more favorable financial, labor, and stock market environment, something that ended towards the end of the 20th century. The issue of tenancy is part of a complex ecosystem where paperwork or contractual relations are often violated: renting has some regulations but they are generally quite relaxed. Some groups have attempted to promote a law that more clearly regulates rentals, to regulate phenomena associated with gentrification: excessive rent hikes, high prices of renting, legal disputes with landlords, tax payments, or minimum guarantees against forced eviction. In these specific demand cases, the term gentrification doesn't always prove useful: it seems to have become somewhat detached from the more concrete struggles related to housing rights and has turned into a concept that's easily ridiculed. This is something we started discussing at 06000 since 2018.

**Ana:** How did you come together and started organizing against eviction? I understand there is a WhatsApp group. Who are the members of this group?

**06000:** The WhatsApp group for 06000 has approximately 50 members, although there has been some turnover. Our organization began when we observed the growing difficulty and sometimes impossibility of renting spaces, both residential and commercial, in the Historic Center. Our members aren't all originally from the Historic Center, nor do all have family roots there; many come from peripheral areas or other states, but most were born in Mexico City.



**Figure 2**

After an eviction and vacating the apartments were destroyed; the noise from the workers was used against the neighbors in resistance. Photo by 06000 Observatorio Vecinal y Plataforma del Centro Histórico, 2019 - 2020.

Around 2012, we started noticing changes in some residential buildings in the government records – they were being converted into hotels or commercial plazas. This coincided with the rehabilitation and beautification of the Historic Center after years of neglect, pushing it towards becoming a tourist corridor with elements of folklore and hyper-monitored spaces filled with security cameras, private guards, and a significant police presence. The police’s responsibilities extended beyond monitoring demonstrations, marches, or sit-ins; they also worked to keep the Alameda Central free of homeless people and heavily surveilled certain racial profiles.

Many of us initially discussed these transformations informally, almost passively, until we began witnessing evictions of residents and businesses that had been part of the community for decades. The formation of 06000 followed the eviction notice given to merchants and residents of the Trevi Building, informing them that they had less than a month to leave. When they chose to legally defend their right to stay, they reached out to neighbors facing similar issues and organizations from surrounding areas who had experienced similar situations. This is how they connected with the 06600 Platform in Colonia Juarez, which was addressing similar cases at the time.

We decided to create a social mechanism, mirroring the communication strategies used by the neighbors of Juarez, while improvising different organizational strategies to suit the diverse conflicts and circumstances we faced as residents of the Center.

**Ana:** Some of you used to live in an iconic building, Edificio Trevi, inhabited with 50 families that resisted eviction for more than 2 years. How did this come about? Who was the owner of that building and why and in what way did eviction take place?

**06000:** The Trevi building, an art-deco structure built in the 1940s, was originally designed as a residential building. For decades, it was owned by the Cabrera-Villoro family, of

which the writer Juan Villoro is a member. Villoro has written about the building's history, mentioning that his grandmother chose to relinquish the property, feeling embarrassed by the profits from real estate. In 2018, Banca Mifel and the owners of Público, a company specializing in purchasing and renovating old buildings to repurpose them as work centers for digital nomads and coworking spaces, acquired the Trevi. To facilitate this purchase, they established a real estate company, Interactiva, possibly in partnership with some North American companies, though full verification of this remains unclear.

The plan for the Trevi building involved its transformation into a coworking space, coupled with a “boutique hotel” accessible via Airbnb, and a performance center on the rooftop. The residents of the Trevi, while not overly optimistic about preventing evictions – acknowledging the likelihood of losing this battle – focused on highlighting and documenting the strategies used by banks to force out residents. Their fight also aimed to expose what has been termed whitewashing by dispossession: denying rights to a segment of the population, particularly those with a certain racial profile and lifestyle not associated with large-scale consumption, to favor inhabitants who have access to infrastructure, resources, surveillance devices, and urban design that effectively act as forms of segregation.

For the Trevi's residents, the 06000 group served as a crucial media tool, providing a platform for structuring their narrative, documenting their journey, challenging media representation, highlighting irregularities, and engaging the community in conversations about the legitimacy of their demands.

**Ana:** In conversation with Carlos organizing parties was mentioned as a strategy to resist eviction and a way to make assemblies more attractive to the people. Can you tell us a bit more about this party-like late-night assemblies?

**06000:** The 06000 group emerged not as a formally structured organization, but rather as a spontaneous reaction that leveraged familiar organizational forms accessible to all involved. Participants from various neighborhoods, such as those from Regina who also formed part of the 06000 Platform, organized in assemblies. However, these efforts were often circumstantial and lacked formal structure.

Our approach to organizing within different collectives was always aimed at incorporating a sense of playfulness: organizing dances, workshops, walks, poetry readings, *concursos de calevaritas literares*,<sup>1</sup> open-air *sonideros*,<sup>2</sup> *escrachés*<sup>3</sup> at public events, etc. The Trevi neighbors

<sup>1</sup> These are typically playful or humorous poetry contests where participants write short verses or poems about death in a lighthearted and satirical way, often as part of Day of the Dead (Día de Muertos) celebrations in Mexico.

<sup>2</sup> *Sonideros* refers to DJs or sound system operators in Mexico, particularly known for playing and mixing various types of Latin music such as cumbia, salsa, and other tropical genres. They are often associated with street parties or community events, where they set up large sound systems and create a festive atmosphere. The term *sonidero* comes from the Spanish word *sonido*, which means sound. These DJs are not just music players; they are an integral part of the local culture, often engaging with the community, dedicating songs, and interacting with the audience.

<sup>3</sup> *Escrachés* refers to a form of direct action or public protest originating in Argentina. The term became popular in the 1990s, to denounce and publicly shame individuals who were accused of human rights abuses during the military dictatorship but had not been legally prosecuted. An *escrache* typically involves a group of

**Figure 3**

Café Trevi: place of gathering and organizing during the struggle. Photo by 06000 Observatorio Vecinal y Plataforma del Centro Histórico, 2019 - 2020.



met regularly to make decisions about their legal process. Others organized to distribute flyers, attempt to win participatory budgets for new urban planning, or worked daily with street or indigenous populations. Some of the older members came from organizations that had long been involved in housing struggles and participated in more formal dynamics.

Social gatherings served as crucial meeting points, allowing us to share work progress, learn about happenings in different parts of the neighborhood, and offer support to neighbors facing similar issues. These events functioned as a tool for communication and information dissemination, keeping discussions alive through play, joy, and laughter. At the same time, they facilitated the building of alliances with academic communities, groups from other city areas, and activists. Quite often, these partnerships led to brief rallies, decision-making sessions, or public acts, some of which gained attention from the mass media.

**Ana:** You also tried negotiating with local authorities. How did that come about?

**06000:** It ended disastrously. It was boring and draining. When dealing with powerful business figures, the authorities lose all semblance of dignity, turning into mere supplicants incapable of challenging or even questioning their interests. We witnessed this time and again, and not just in the realm of housing. For instance, the residents of Regina have spent years attempting to halt illegal bars, drug trafficking, and the intolerable noise that has engulfed their street, only to observe the apparent collusion between the authorities and criminal organizations.

**Ana:** Are local urban groups and movements in CDMX effectively united in their fight against evictions? During the course of your struggle, who were your collaborators and how did you work together? Was there support from international communities?

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activists gathering outside the home or workplace of the accused individual to publicly expose and condemn their alleged crimes.

**06000:** This is a major issue. There are some classically structured collectives that function relatively well, though some maintain a close, somewhat clientelist relationship with the State, primarily negotiating public credits for access to popular housing; despite everything, they seem to retain validity and credibility. However, other groups, particularly the younger ones, are fragmented. Some are acquainted but rarely collaborate except in specific situations. We believe that, at one point, the 06000 platform and the events it organized served this purpose—to unite different interests and organizations from across the city. This is how we managed to forge solidarity ties with groups like ARCTZA—an organization of merchants and residents formed after the 1985 earthquake—the MUP (Movimiento Urbano Popular), the UPREZ (Unión Popular Revolucionaria Emiliano Zapata) that later occupied the National Institute of Indigenous Peoples, the Palo Alto cooperative, and the People of Xoco, who stood against the real estate corruption of Mítikah. We aimed for 06000 and the particular situation of the Trevi Building to echo these conflicts. It was a fundamental exercise with limited reach beyond that building, but it has not been replicated.

There was some international solidarity, albeit not substantial. We attempted to connect with the Tenants' Union in Madrid and some organizations in Spain, which had achieved considerable success by then. However, we couldn't devote time to developing a more significant relationship. Nonetheless, there were memorable moments. Specifically, in the Trevi process, individuals from other countries were involved: journalists Martha Pskowsky and geographer Jess Linsz, that have documented the situation for prolonged period of time; Caterina Morbiato from Italy, who became deeply involved due to her affiliation with some neighbors. Additionally, the Habitat International Coalition (HIC) in Latin America offered some support and contacts—through them, we were able to speak with Raquel Rolnik. We joined the call for changes in the Human Rights Law, which



**Figure 4**

“Festín Vecinal”: one of the events organised by the community of the Centro Histórico to visibilise conflict at Edificio Trevi. Photo by 06000 Observatorio Vecinal y Plataforma del Centro Histórico, 2019 - 2020.



established basic protocols for conducting evictions, providing minimal protection against procedural irregularities. We often received visits from activists affected by gentrification in Barcelona's Barrio Gótico and those affected by mass tourism in Cuba, among others. These were mostly sporadic interactions where solidarity was limited to sharing a drink, a hug, and mutual understanding—which is significant in its own right.

**Ana:** How would you characterize the current state of evictions and resistance? I understand that many people are reluctant to engage in battles because they fear landlords and lack the resources and time for legal disputes. Is your group still active, or have members pursued separate paths?

**06000:** 06000 is currently inactive as a group. The majority of us were forced out of the Historic Center. However, some neighbors are attempting to continue the discussions held between 2018 and 2020. Recently, a member of the Platform reached out to us, sharing that she faced threats from organized crime in La Merced. Her home was seized, and she was threatened with death. In response, 06000 is providing minimal support in recording these incidents and assisting her in the process of making official complaints. Other neighbors are initiating workshops on anarchist geography in Palo Alto. Some are organizing small cultural initiatives in apartments, aiming to create communication tools that document other local struggles. However, most members who were part of the platform have now diverged into different academic or personal ventures, many of which are not related to housing struggles. Given 06000's informal nature, this dispersal seems a natural thing.

### **About this Conversation's participants**

**The 06000 Observatorio Vecinal del Centro** is a grassroots collective based in the Historic Center of Mexico City, dedicated to monitoring, and addressing urban changes impacting local communities. Formed in response to increasing gentrification and displacement pressures, the group focuses on advocating for tenants' rights, preserving neighborhood culture, and resisting the erosion of affordable housing. Utilizing a blend of activism, research, and community engagement, the 06000 Observatorio Vecinal del Centro served as a vital voice in the struggle for equitable urban development and social justice in Mexico City's core areas.

**Ana Vilenica** is a feminist, no border and urban activist and organiser from Serbia currently living in Italy. She is a member of the Beyond Inhabitation Lab, the Radical Housing Journal Editorial collective and the Feminist Autonomous Centre for research (FAC research).

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