

Made in Tepito:
Urban Tourism and Inequality in Mexico City

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*For the people of Tepito,
for their kindness and support*

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Abbreviations

CONACULTA	Secretariat of Culture Secretaría de Cultura
IMF	International Monetary Fund
INEGI	National Institute of Statistics and Geography Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía
MXN	Mexican Peso Peso Mexicano
NAFTA	North American Free Trade Agreement
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
SEDESOL	Secretariat of Social Development Secretaría de Desarrollo Social
SEGOB	Secretariat of Interior Secretaría de Gobernación
PNPSVD	National Program for Social Prevention Programa Nacional para la Prevención Social de la Violencia y a Delincuencia.
PRD	Party of Democratic Revolution Partido de la Revolución Democrática
PRI	Institutional Revolutionary Party Partido Revolucionario Institucional
SECTUR	Secretariat of Tourism Secretaría de Turismo
SIIMT	Integral Information System on Tourism Markets Sistema Integral de Información de Mercados Turísticos
UNAM	National Autonomous University of Mexico Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México
WB	World Bank

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All images are author's unless otherwise specified under the picture.

1. Introduction: From marginalized places to tourist spaces

It was a breezy afternoon in early August 2014 and I had just arrived in Mexico City to conduct my one-year fieldwork. I was sitting in a trendy area of the city, Roma Norte, drinking coffee in a bar overlooking a large green park and was observing the joggers and dog-walkers passing by, enjoying a little tranquillity in the noisy megalopolis. A lady, who seemed to be in her early sixties, was sitting at the table next to mine. She asked me where I was from and she explained she was born and raised in Mexico City, and had lived in Roma Norte most of her life, close to the large green park we were looking at. We got into a conversation about life in the city and after talking for a while she was curious to know what I was doing in Mexico. I explained that I was doing my PhD research on Tepito. She turned to me in surprise and her smile slipped slightly: “Tepito? You are not serious!” This exclamation was followed by praising my supposed bravery for venturing into a neighbourhood which was not only known for the drug-trade and informal economy but also for delinquency and violence. In the weeks that followed such responses were not unusual.

Tepito is a centrally located, notorious neighbourhood in Mexico City that everybody has heard about. It is hardly an invisible part of the city as it is regularly in the media, particularly under sections on crime and violence. Its large informal street market is well known throughout the country, notably for selling pirated and smuggled goods. Many city residents avoid the neighbourhood and consider it to be a no-go zone, a place you enter at your own risk.

There was of course nothing brave nor exceptional about my visit to Tepito. People from all over Mexico have been going there for years in order to buy or sell at its street market. The *barrio* has also attracted a wide range of national and international journalists, artists and researchers. Yet ‘outsiders’ rarely venture inside the market streets or visit the area behind the market, particularly without a ‘guide’. Tepito, which city residents refer to as the *barrio bravo*, the fierce neighbourhood, carries a long and heavy stigma of a difficult, violence-prone and marginal area.

So how does a neighbourhood with such a reputation become a tourist attraction? Who is interested in turning a marginalized place into a tourist site, particularly in a country that tries to position itself in a global tourist market and is combating its own reputation for crime and violence?

Although Mexico is a popular tourist destination and tourism is steadily on the rise, governmental bodies, tourism policymakers and tourist agencies still have to work hard to shake off the globally circulating images of the country's insecurity and violence. In 2010, the Secretariat of Tourism of Colima State¹ renounced US warnings against travelling to Mexico as a dark campaigning strategy. Together with the Federal Government they tried to mitigate the potential negative effects of such warnings on the country's tourism by pointing to its pleasing climate, beautiful landscape and a variety of tourist activities.²

The country is not only struggling with the images of violence but also of growing inequality and poverty. Newspapers and NGO reports (Oxfam Mexico 2015) point to the increase in socio-economic gaps and the concentration of economic and political power. This is particularly visible in larger cities such as Mexico City where luxurious zones emerge next to run-down, lower-class neighbourhoods. Visual images of these inequalities often circulate in the media, exposing the growing socio-spatial fragmentation of Mexican cities.

To make the country more appealing to tourists Mexico has spent a lot of money on place promotion and marketing. Since 2013, the national Secretariat of Tourism (SECTUR) has run an international campaign Live It to Believe It,³ with an initial investment of USD thirty-six million (Granado 2015: 5) featuring images of Mexico's beaches and Aztec heritage. Mexico City has followed these steps, investing more than USD eleven million in a campaign with the same slogan, promoting cultural heritage, vibrant night life and cosmopolitan character.⁴ These marketing efforts have contributed to the growth of tourism in Mexico, registering a record number of international tourist arrivals – more than thirty-four million – in 2016 (SECTUR 2017).

As Mexico and its capital attempt to shake off images of violence and inequality to attract tourists, tourist practices have developed over the years that place these themes at the heart of their tourist offer. Instead of promoting sunny beaches and a rich cultural heritage these initiatives use inequality, poverty and violence in making and marketing a tourist

¹ Mexico is a federal state, administratively divided into 32 states.

² Denuncian campañas contra turismo en México, *Informador*, 26th October 2010:

<http://www.informador.com.mx/mexico/2010/244374/6/denuncian-campanas-contra-turismo-en-mexico.htm> (accessed 19th January 2017).

³ Vívelo para creerlo.

⁴ New Promotion Campaign of Mexico City launched, *Tourism Review*, 13th July 2017: <http://www.tourism-review.com/mexico-city-new-campaign-to-cost-116-million-news3778> (accessed 19th January 2017).

experience. One example of such tourism is a walking tour through Mexico City's notorious neighbourhood Tepito, which is the focus of this research.

These walking tours cannot be found on any tourist map and are not part of the official tourism landscape. City authorities and tourism policymakers have tended to turn away from these tours seeing them as a potential impediment to the city's image of safety and beauty. So how does Tepito become a tourist attraction?

In this thesis I seek to understand the motives, processes and effects of turning a marginalized neighbourhood into a tourist destination and I explore the ways commodification of urban poverty and violence affects the neighbourhood's urban imaginary and social relations. I question how tourism in a deprived urban neighbourhood intersects with local and global inequalities and I centre on the ways these inequalities are negotiated, contested or reproduced through the process of touristification. I examine how different actors who come together in the tourist encounter negotiate Tepito's image, place and value in the city, through various strategies and for a range of purposes. My main focus is on the residents and the ways in which they take part in urban politics, using tourism to actively engage with dominant representations of their neighbourhood, themselves, and the city. I also pay special attention to the role of the tour guide who becomes a key broker in the tourist encounter between the neighbourhood and the city.

I use tourism as a lens to explore processes of urban development and urban politics more broadly, focusing on the way restructuring cities under a neoliberal paradigm and the rise of symbolic economy impacts marginalized places. As city governments increasingly reorganize urban development around service industries such as leisure and tourism, I analyse how lower-class residents, in collaboration with national and international actors, contest and negotiate these development strategies, using them for their own agenda. I argue that while the growing commodification of urban spaces under a changing economic environment exacerbates inequalities it also opens space to challenge them.

However, these processes cannot be understood without exploring place-making practices in the neighbourhood beyond the scope of tourism. This means studying how people who are living and working in a marginalized place construct meaning into their neighbourhood and develop a sense of belonging through discourses and daily practices, and how these processes take place in relation to inequality and struggle. In the thesis I examine how negotiation of social and spatial exclusion links to identity building and meaning

making, pointing out that this is not a linear but a contested process between various actors, also among the neighbourhood residents.

I link the analysis of place-making to touristification, asking whether we can understand place-making and tourism-making as entangled, political and contested processes.

The main two questions guiding the thesis are:

- How do residents of stigmatized and marginalized urban areas negotiate inequality and their place in the world?
- What role does commodification and aestheticization of stigmatized neighbourhoods for tourism purposes play in these processes of negotiation? How are urban marginalized areas produced as a site for tourism and how the process of touristification affects the place and its residents?

I analyse these two questions through the case of slum tourism, seeking to contribute to the broader debate in urban economic anthropology. By drawing on my one-year ethnographic fieldwork and anthropological theories, as well as urban studies and geography, I attempt to deepen our understanding of the way the transformation of global economy restructures cities not only economically but also socially, culturally and politically.

Whereas urban scholars have tended to analyse shifts in urban development strategies from an economic approach (Harvey 1990; Sassen 1991; Fainstein 1994; Logan and Molotch 1987) less attention has been paid to the social, cultural and political processes of reshaping places. Yet an economic transformation cannot be studied separately from socio-cultural and political processes as economy is always socially, cultural and politically embedded. An anthropological approach to urban development and urban politics, which closely looks at the way these transformations affect and are affected by a range of actors, can deepen our understanding of urban economic development, one that goes beyond the “‘simplified’ and ‘rational’ models of formal economics” (Koenig and Matejowsky 2015: 4). Studies of urban transformation should also engage with the discourse, interests and motivations involved in people’s struggle to make a living, a term which entails not merely making a wage but also “‘indicates a whole range of everyday practices and meanings involved in making a life and making a place” (McCann 2002: 395; see also Narotzky and Besnier 2014).

With shifts in urban economic development, social relations and systems of meaning-making are also altered, as “residents make economic changes meaningful through their everyday narratives and practices” (Jaffe and Koning 2016: 86). Geographer Melissa Gilbert highlights this point, noting that people’s everyday lives shape urban processes as much as they are shaped by them (Gilbert 1999: 102). This bilateral relation suggests that urban development is not unilaterally imposed on people. Rather, it is an ambivalent process and a site of struggle among various actors, not only for economic resources but also for meaning and identity.

The way global economic changes and reorganization of urban development affect urban governance, urban space and people’s daily lives, has been an important focus of urban studies and anthropology. Scholars have looked at the way city governments and elites create urban spaces to serve their own benefits, centring on the lived experience of social exclusion by lower classes whose interests are increasingly marginalized in this process (Bourgois 2003; Goldstein 2004; Auyero and de Lara 2012; Bayat 2010).

Some of these ethnographic studies have critically engaged with the totalising and deterministic analysis of neoliberal restructuring, pointing out that neoliberalism is not a simple “package of policies, ideologies, and political interests that are mechanically applied across the globe” since ordinary people reshape these policies as they cultivate selves and subjectivities (Kanna 2011: 32). This shows that although lower class residents are affected by macro-economic and political changes, these are not unilaterally imposed on them. Rather, they also play an important role in shaping the structural and cultural contexts in which these macro-economic changes take place (Koenig and Matejowsky 2015: 9).

Although the reorganization of urban development around symbolic economy, based on cultural production and consumption for leisure and tourism, has often led to privatization of public spaces and displacement of lower-classes, urban anthropologists note that residents rarely remain passive amid these changes. Various ethnographic studies (Goldstein 2004; Bayat 2010; Little 2015; Shapiro 2016; Babb 1997, 1998) point to the way marginalized residents use different strategies to mitigate or challenge the devastating effects of urban policies.

While urban anthropologists have looked at the way lower-class residents engage in urban development and symbolic economy, detailing how they contest and negotiate them for their own interests and benefits (Angelini 2015; Sansi 2007; Collins 2015), the number of in-depth ethnographic accounts remains limited. As Gina Perez emphasized in her ethnographic

analysis of gentrification in Chicago “while it is clear that the commodification of culture and place are critical features of the economic life of cities, it is less certain how the actual people inhabiting those places are implicated in these processes of place-making” (Pérez 2002: 40). This calls for more attention to the role of ordinary city residents in shaping urban life.

Urban politics should therefore not be analysed only through the power of the elite but also through the social and political engagement of marginal and excluded groups (Cochrane 1999: 118; see also McCann 2002 395). Ethnographic analysis offers a unique and empirically based approach to urban development and urban politics, one which enables the study of the relation between macro and micro level processes. This means considering the way global transformation impacts the lives of the lower-classes but also how the processes of urban change are reshaped by them. My thesis is an endeavour to contribute to such an analysis by providing an ethnographic account of marginalized residents’ engagement with urban development, while at the same time placing these processes into a broader social, economic and political context.

This introductory chapter is divided into three parts. In the first part I provide a brief overview of the anthropological research in *barrios*, ghettos or slums. I suggest studying marginalized urban spaces through place-making theory. This approach fosters an understanding of places as heterogeneous and interconnected instead of homogenous and closed entities. In exploring how a marginalized neighbourhood is constructed in relation to inequality and struggle, attention to politics of place-making enables us to better understand place-based dynamics and power relations within and beyond the neighbourhood.

In the second part I explain shifts in urban development taking place under global economic restructuring, looking at the way these processes have been studied in urban studies and anthropology. I introduce the concept of place-branding which serves as my main conceptual tool for analysing the impact of commodification on marginalized places, on its residents and social relations. I analyse place-branding in relation to place-making.

In the third part I look at the way researchers from various disciplines have approached slum tourism, where I pay particular attention to the mobility of representations and the way these processes have been studied in tourism. I also point to the research gap which I hope to at least address in the course of this thesis.

‘Slums’ and place-making: negotiating inequality and place in the world

Before marginalized neighbourhoods become appealing to tourists, they represent no-go zones to outsiders but home to their inhabitants. Through daily uses and narratives residents develop a sense of belonging to the neighbourhood; they imbue the area with various meanings and associations, forming emotional attachment to their physical and social environment. Despite the stigma and socio-spatial exclusion not everybody strives to move away from these areas. The negative representations of marginalized neighbourhoods do not necessarily devalue residents’ sense of self, as argued by Loïc Wacquant, or make them search for ways to exit the neighbourhood (Wacquant 2008a: 116). On the contrary, as the case of Tepito shows, residents constitute a strong place-based identity⁵ and develop a variety of strategies to negotiate the stigma and its effects, aiming to challenge their personal and collective social and spatial exclusion in the city.

In the thesis I build on place-making theory in order to capture residents’ discursive and social practices of constructing Tepito as a place. Place-making refers to the social, discursive, cultural and material processes by which places are constructed by a variety of actors and means (Cresswell 2004; see also Lombard 2014). By focusing on residents’ practices and narratives of living in Tepito I analyse how they experience their social and physical environment and construct a sense of belonging to the *barrio* and the wider city. I centre on resident’s narratives and practices in order to challenge top-down understandings of informality and violence and the dominant discursive construction of the neighbourhood. The analytical lens of place-making allows us to rethink what these particular places in the city mean to those who live in them (Lombard 2014) and how they understand, construct and experience them.

Building on these ideas, a place-making approach fosters an understanding of a marginalized neighbourhood not in isolation but as part of the broader city, as well as the state and the global world. The notion of a neighbourhood, or a *barrio* in Spanish, is commonly associated with a confined and bounded entity, ‘naturally’ separated from the rest of the city (Brenner and Schmid 2015). Tepito, for example, is not an administrative unit and

⁵ I understand place-based identity as a “collective understanding about social identity intertwined with place meaning” (Harner 2001: 660). As Arturo Escobar also argues, the experience of place is important for people, making cultural identity bound up with a place (Escobar 2001: 147). Place-making lens enables exploring place-based identity not as coherent and given but as a contested and negotiated process which takes place among the people involved in a place. This is vital in order to understand that arise when various actors take up this identity to sell and promote it through tourism.

is officially divided between two delegations (a delegation is a unit which Mexico City is divided into).⁶ Where Tepito begins and ends has been a source of various interpretations with different opinions emerging among residents and between city authorities, the media and historians (Aréchiga Córdoba 2003: 42). Despite these contestations Tepito is commonly perceived in the media and in popular discourse as a bounded and homogenous community.

In anthropological research, earlier studies of ghettos or slums approached these neighbourhoods as fixed, clearly bounded and localized entities (for example Lewis 1961; Whyte 1943). In recent decades, however, anthropologists have challenged the view of places as permanent and unconnected and began to study neighbourhoods in relation to other places and scales. Anthropologists Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson argue that taking a pre-existing, localized 'community' as a starting point hinders our understanding of the processes that go into the construction of places and that we should pay more attention to how spaces are turned into places (Gupta and Ferguson 1992: 8).

The growing academic focus on mobility and globalization also challenges the association of places with the rootedness and the local, pointing to the significance of interconnectedness in the construction of places (Gupta and Ferguson 1992; Appadurai 1996; Escobar 2001). Geographers such as Doreen Massey emphasize the role of transnational networks in the production of place-based identities and meanings, cultivating a "global sense of place" (Massey 1994). Uniqueness and specificity of places, Massey argues, does not derive from the history of isolation but from the mixture of influences found in a place (Massey 1999: 22). According to Arturo Escobar, this requires studying the production of places through global constructedness and local specificity (Escobar 2001: 147). Put differently, it suggests exploring how people construct places as they participate in transnational networks (Friedman 1997: 276 in Escobar 2001: 147).

A relational approach to place-making also defies essentialist understandings of poverty, informality and violence. It allows us to study marginalized neighbourhoods within broader social and spatial hierarchies and urban inequalities, looking at how spatiality of violence and poverty are connected to broader social, economic and political structures.

Initially, anthropologists and sociologists studying *barrios* or other low-income neighbourhoods have focused on community's internal cultural and social dynamics (Jaffe and Koning 2016: 33). In his book *The Children of Sanchez* (1961), Oscar Lewis, a US

⁶ Mexico City is divided into sixteen delegations (delegación). See the website of the Government of Mexico City: <http://www.cdmx.gob.mx/gobierno/delegaciones> (accessed 1st May 2017).

anthropologist who conducted research in Tepito in the 1950s, coined the concept “culture of poverty,” arguing that the urban poor do not only live in deprived conditions but also acquire a poverty perpetuating value system (Lewis 2011 [1961]). This perspective portrayed residents as passive, poor subjects, suggesting an essentialist understanding of violence and poverty, an idea that was also promoted by politicians and policymakers.

Criticism that followed the culture of poverty as a concept resulted in new theoretical approaches which focused less on cultural factors and analysed neighbourhoods within broader socio-economic and political frameworks. In the 1970s, in her analysis of poverty in Mexico City, sociologist Susan Eckstein argued that state policies were designed in a way that maintained urban poor in their position, yet they were not passive or hopeless but creative, innovative and thus attributed with agency (Eckstein 1977). Janice Perlman who studied *favelas* in Rio de Janeiro for more than four decades concluded that *favela* residents are not marginal but marginalized, implying that they are “actively excluded by an unjust and corrupt system that is complicit in the reproduction of inequality and the production of violence” (Perlman 2005: 2). Her work showed that *favela* residents were not outside the system but were tightly integrated into it although in an asymmetrical manner (Perlman 1976; Perlman 2005).

By analysing marginalized neighbourhoods in relation to the city and other scales, these studies have questioned the understanding of violence and poverty through the cultural characteristics of its residents. Scholars began to problematise uncritical mapping of social and cultural categories into urban space, challenging the isomorphism of “space, place and culture” (Gupta and Ferguson 1992: 7). Urban researchers who shifted attention to the spatial relations in the city pointed to the role of urban space in the production of social inequality and exclusion (Harvey 1973; Low 1999, 2016; Caldeira 2000; Davis 2015). Space came to be considered significant in shaping urban hierarchy and difference. Expansive research focused on socio-spatial inequalities and highlight that slums, ghettos, *barrios* or *favelas* were not bounded and culturally different places but were actually part of discursive marginalization and social exclusion, constructing territorial stigmas (Wacquant 2008a) which reinforce and legitimate existing urban inequalities.

Urban scholars studying spaces of poverty and informality have also highlighted residents’ struggles in contesting these inequalities, and creativity in obtaining goods and services (Eckstein 1977; Perlman 1976; Bayat 2010; Goldstein 2004, Shapiro 2016).

Drawing on his research of informal communities in Iran, Asef Bayat analysed diverse ways

in which ordinary people engage in everyday to better their lives and strive for change, recognizing forms of popular agency that often remained invisible (Bayat 2010: ix). As Ananya Roy emphasizes, such writings provide accounts of slums not as an area of destitution but “as a terrain of habitation, livelihood, self-organization and politics” (Roy 2011: 223).

Roy also reminds us that the political agency assigned to urban dwellers “risks attributing them with an essentialist ‘slum habitus’” (Roy 2011: 228). This can result in ascribing deterministic identity and generalized resistance to the residents of marginalized places, without paying attention to the multiple strategies of engagement with power structures, exercised differently by a range of actors. By focusing on the social and discursive construction of places by various people and means, allows us to study low-income neighbourhoods as places of different meanings, identities and daily struggles, without portraying them as either heroic or apocalyptic. In other words, attention to place-making enables us to study places and their relation to inequality and struggle through multiple facets and scales. As Doreen Massey shows, places produced through global connections are sites of heterogeneous and not homogenous identities (Massey 1994). The same can be said for residents’ struggles and engagements with power structures.

By studying places at the nexus of local and global connections also means recognizing the role of trans-local networks in the formation of a popular agency. In his study of place-based politics and struggles, David Featherstone illustrates how agency is not restricted to the local but is networked as it operates at multiple spatial scales and is formed through various global networks (Featherstone 2008: 3). While processes of globalisation can aggravate marginalisation, they can also offer opportunities for urban poor to mediate global networks in a way that brings change to their social and physical environment (Appadurai 2001: 23).

The attention to trans-local connections in the production of places and agency also challenges the dichotomy of global domination and local resistance (Smith 2001: 104). To study places as localized and homogenous communities alludes to the local as a political space of collective resistance to globalization. Yet this leaves little room for social practices and processes which emerge not only of resistance but also of appropriation and accommodation to dominant modes of power and ideology (Smith 2001a: 10). The place-making lens enables us to study the diverse ways people engage in to construct places and struggles in relation to power structures across various scales.

In my research I pay attention to different ways residents construct places and negotiate their place in the world and the way this influences day-to-day discourses and practices. As Ursula Rao and Assa Doron highlight, discourses and practices of marginalised populations are never “simply constituted as opposition to hegemonic regimes” but are “reworked political projects of engagement with the centres of power” (Assa and Rao 2009: 425). This suggests the need to pay attention to power relations within a place or a neighbourhood, as ‘local’ struggles for change are often internally conflicted, contradictory and ambivalent, and can cause conflict not just “between members of, but also between neighbours, friends and partners” (Rao 2016: 79).

I thus argue that place-making should be understood as a political process. Attention to the process of place-making enables us to study places as the site of complex entanglements of power and takes into account power relations within the neighbourhood (Lombard 2014: 15). Places are constructed through negotiation, cooperation and conflict and as they are “constantly struggled over and reimagined” (Cresswell 2002: 25), it is important to pay attention to who is engaged in this struggle and whose voice is heard. Or put differently, by focusing on spatiality of power relations we can understand the process “whereby a space achieves a distinctive *identity* as a place” (Gupta and Ferguson 1992: 8).

I believe politics of place-making is important to understand how people in Tepito develop a strong place-based identity to negotiate their place in the world and how this is linked to a variety of strategies they develop to confront social exclusion and improve their neighbourhood (discursively, socially and materially). They are not a homogenous class united by socio-economic marginalization and they develop diverse pathways to change their lives and their neighbourhood which may cause collaborations as well as tensions. In the thesis I identify some of the tactics used and I suggest that tourism can be understood as one of these strategies. As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, I analyse tourism against the background of global economic transformation and shifts in urban development which is the focus of the next section.

From place-making to place-branding: Urban development and symbolic economy

Major shifts in economies worldwide have transformed the shape and functioning of cities. The period after the Second World War was marked by large scale, state-led urban projects, based on stimulating industrial development and mass production. This period,

referred to as Fordism after Henry Ford's introduction of the assembly line into manufacturing industries and transformation of labour division, also witnessed the rise of a relatively well-off working class, especially in the global North, who became important consumers of the new mass-produced commodities (Jaffe and Koning 2016: 72).

The economic recessions of the 1970s and early 1980s resulted in the decline of factories and industrial production, accelerating the collapse of the cities' industrial base (Basset 1993: 1779). As manufacturing jobs shifted towards the global South, the process of deindustrialization in Europe and the USA was followed by widespread unemployment and deterioration of urban infrastructure. For the countries of the global South like Mexico this was a period of growing indebtedness, which became known also as the Latin American debt crisis or the "lost decade." (Ocampo 2013: 1) Under the pressure of international organizations such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank (WB), the indebted governments of the countries in the global South – Mexico too – accepted structural adjustment programs which enforced cutbacks on governmental spending, privatization of social benefits and deregulation of national economies (Laurell 2015).

The restructuring of the global economy in the late twentieth century saw the emergence of a globally dispersed production system, removing obstacles to global economic flows and speeding transnational mobility of capital. This was facilitated by the development of new communication technologies and the ascendance of the information industry. The change in global economy also reorganized labour regimes, stimulating flexibility and adaptation to meet the constantly changing needs and desires of global consumers (Jaffe and Koning 2016: 74).

Urban scholars have studied these transformations, with notable works emerging in geography (Harvey 1989; Olds 2001), sociology (Sassen 1991; Castells 2010) and anthropology (Abu-Lughod 1999; Ferguson 1999). The global city theory developed by Saskia Sassen has been particularly influential. As she illustrated in her work, the changes in global economy entailed spatial dispersal and global integration, creating a new strategic role for cities (Sassen 1991: 3). Aside from their historical role as centres for international trade and banking, cities have also become command points in the organization of the world economy and key locations for finance and specialized services, which have replaced manufacturing as the leading economic sector (Sassen 1991: 3). Various authors have criticized her global city theory, questioning the underlying assumption which understands cities as direct products of economic globalization and which views global economic

restructuring as deterministic of the urban spatial and socio-cultural order (Smith 2001; Robinson 2002). Nevertheless, the idea of a global city continues to be widely popular and has become “the aspiration of many cities around the world” (Robinson 2002: 548).

Researchers analysing the relation between the changing global environment and urban landscape have been particularly interested in studying transformations of urban governance. This focus brought concepts such as the entrepreneurial city (Harvey 1989) and neoliberal city (Bayat 2010) to academic circles. David Harvey critically illustrates how urban governance shifted from managerialism to entrepreneurialism, with the growing emphasis on efficiency and inter-urban competitiveness (Harvey 1989). As city governments compete with other cities globally in order to attract investment, they increasingly begin to function like the private sector, reducing their role from providing public services and goods to stimulating economic growth and development. According to Costas Spirou, the entrepreneurial city “is no different from the corporation that must engage in image-building activities, promote its products and be prepared to deal with change if it wants to maintain its competitive edge and grow its market share” (Spirou 2011: 47).

With the decline of the manufacturing industry, cities in the global North and South restructured their urban economy around the service sector, particularly around leisure, tourism and entertainment. This gave rise to symbolic economy, to economic activities that centre on cultural production and consumption to generate income (Zukin 1995). Symbolic economy relies heavily on the development of cultural tourism, heritage industry, museum quarters and art galleries, food outlets and high profile mega-events (Zukin 1995; Spirou 2011; Yeoh 2005; Olds 2001). This makes cultural development an integral part of urban policy with city governments and urban elites deploying the notion of culture in various ways to contribute to the economic and physical regeneration of places and enhance their appeal (Kong 2010; Zukin 1995). As cultural politics of urban renewal enables authorities to compete, market and sell their city on the international market, urban spaces are increasingly commodified as sites of cultural consumption and experience (Zukin 1995; 2001). This is most evident in tourism where the embodied experience of a city or a neighbourhood is the main appeal to tourists.

Urban scholars have largely focused on the way urban spaces are commodified in order to cater to middle class residents and how these processes accentuate social and economic polarization displacing poorer people and gentrifying low-income neighbourhoods (Betancur 2014; Dávila 2004; Zukin 2010). Yet numerous authors have also analysed how

city residents from stigmatized neighbourhoods engage in the processes of urban development, for example, pointing to the agency of *favela* residents in the spectacular redevelopment of Rio de Janeiro (Angelini 2015); or exploring the role of African diaspora and their spiritual beliefs in the construction of Brazil's cultural identity and national heritage (Sansi 2007). Either focusing on class, race, ethnicity or identity, these studies examine the negotiated process of urban development among different political, cultural and economic actors.

My aim is to contribute to this debate, looking into the way symbolic economy becomes a terrain of urban politics. Symbolic economy is neither singular nor unchanging; rather it is a site of contestation (Cronin and Hetherington 2008: 2). Therefore, while symbolic economy and cultural politics exacerbate urban inequalities, they also open space to contest, resist and negotiate them.

By studying the commodification of poverty and violence for tourism purposes, I explore the way low-income residents experience and negotiate socio-spatial exclusion aggravated by a city's economic restructuring. I analyse the commodification process through the concept of place-branding. I use branding as a conceptual tool to examine how lower-class residents participate in urban development and how, in cooperation with a range of actors, they use tourism as a strategy to negotiate their symbolic position in the city.

Branding has become a key element of the urban development policy. City governments increasingly resort to corporate strategies such as place branding and marketing, cultural imagineering (Yeoh 2005) and aestheticization of the landscape (Yeoh 2005; Spirou 2011) to attract investors, tourists and other consumers. Branding and marketing campaigns have become particularly important in creating alluring images of cities, drawing on the ideas of uniqueness, authenticity and distinctiveness (Gotham 2007: 824). Place-branding is especially relevant for tourism, as by constructing attractive images and narratives, branding captures tourists' attention and turns residential spaces into consumable tourist experiences.

In order to build a viable brand, urban images need to be crafted in an appealing way, which inevitably means including certain elements of urban life while disregarding others. The complexity of the city needs to be simplified and packaged for symbolic consumption which requires selective politics of visibility. As Michael Silk highlights, to position them on the global market, city governments view certain areas or populations problematic for the construction of desirable images (Silk 2002: 778).

Authorities have generally tended to hide notorious neighbourhoods from sight, seeing them as having a negative symbolic capital. The process of urbanization which intensified under the neoliberal model has widened social and economic inequalities in Latin American cities and increased socio-spatial fragmentation of the urban landscape (Koonings and Kruijt 2007: 4). As violence and insecurity increasingly came to be associated with specific neighbourhoods and districts (Koonings and Kruijt 2007: 4), these no-go zones and their residents were commonly excluded from the dominant production of urban images and brands.

However, with the growing importance of symbolic economy and the diversification of urban spaces for cultural consumption, a range of actors attempt to turn slums, ghettos or *favelas* into attractive destinations and consumer experiences. From slum tourism to *favela* chic these development strategies attempt to re-signify images, meanings and value of notorious areas in the city, making urban deprivation and violence attractive for tourists and other consumers. In this light, I suggest that we study tourism in Tepito as an economic and representational practice that transforms a marginalized neighbourhood from a stigmatized place into an attractive brand.

Scholars have highlighted the way place-branding serves governmental authorities, corporate interests and powerful elites in “commodifying and rationalizing spaces for profit and economic gain” (Gotham 2007: 845; see also Evans 2003; Chatterton and Hollands 2003; Yeoh 2005). While it is important to take into account depoliticizing and exclusionary effects of branding and marketing on marginalized neighbourhoods and their residents (see for example Dávila 2004), my aim is to explore whether we can also understand branding as a political strategy, a form of “branding from below” which lower-class residents use to challenge hegemonic production of urban imaginary.

As Kevin Gotham reminds us, branding is more than just strategic place promotion and marketing aimed at selling the city. It is also a process of meaning-making and identity building which can forge a sense of belonging to a city or a neighbourhood and it shapes urban imaginary that can deepen or transform understanding a particular place (Gotham 2007: 828; Evans 2003: 420 – 421).

Following Miriam Greenberg, I understand urban imaginary as a “coherent, historically based ensemble of representations drawn from architecture and street plans of the city, the art produced by its residents, and the images of and discourse of the city as seen, heard, or read in movies, on television, in magazines, and other forms of mass media”

(Greenberg 2000: 228). It is a form of social imaginary which Charles Taylor describes as “the way ordinary people ‘imagine’ their social surroundings... social imaginary is that common understanding that makes possible common practices and a widely shared sense of legitimacy” (Taylor 2002: 106). Although this means that urban imaginary constructs a shared sense of understanding there are still diverse imaginaries which may coexist or compete (Greenberg 2000: 228).

Therefore, while branding aims to create a coherent and singular imaginary to attract consumers, imaginaries are actually “plural, conflicting, contested and power-laden” (Gotham 2007: 828). This point is also emphasized by Sharon Zukin, who stresses that urban imaginaries are not shaped solely by the government, business or media but are also negotiated and constructed by ‘ordinary’ people in the city (Zukin 2001: 4). Packaging plurality of imaginaries into a singular one thus makes branding a contested, political process and a battlefield of economic and political interests (Gotham 2007: 843; Johansson 2012: 3). Central to branding is thus the question of what is to be made visible, valued, by whom and in whose interest.

As branding is part of value creation (Foster 2013), the question is how the social and economic value of a stigmatized neighbourhood changes through the branding process. This means considering not only the way branding enables selling poverty and violence as consumer experiences, but also the way this process impacts the relation between the neighbourhood and the city, as well as social relations within the neighbourhood itself.

In this thesis I explore how a range of actors, brand and sell Tepito to attract tourists and how this negotiates the urban image of Mexico City as produced and sold by the government and the elite. Attention to the process of branding means studying the Tepito brand and how it is co-produced through the tourist encounter – through interaction between multiple actors with different cultural and social backgrounds, agendas and power – and at what is being branded and by whom. Branding is not simply a unilateral practice imposed on marginalized places and their residents by one specific actor, but multiple actors, perspectives and meanings shape the branding process. I use branding as a tool to analyse the impact of commodification on marginalized places and to explore the contested process of urban development and the symbolic economy more broadly. I examine these processes through the case of slum tourism.

Slum tourism: Commodifying urban inequality

In tourism studies inequality has been an important focus of scholarly attention, particularly in analysing the impact of tourism on social, economic and natural environments of the visited sites. On the one hand, tourism has been criticized for its negative impacts and for creating or maintaining an unequal and uneven distribution of wealth (Lyons and Wearing 2008: 8). On the other hand, it has also been praised for its contribution to social and economic development. While a large amount of academic research has focused on the way tourism contributes or alleviates socio-economic inequalities (Cole and Morgan 2010: xxvi), the way inequality is ‘sold’ through tourism has only recently become the focus of academic analysis. A theoretical framework that connects studies on urban tourism and inequality is visible in the emerging field of slum tourism.

Touring deprived neighbourhoods notorious for poverty and violence, known under the name ‘slum’, ‘ghetto’ or *favela* tourism, has become a popular, worldwide phenomenon. These tourist practices place poverty and violence at the heart of the tourist experience which provides an important space to study the relation between tourism and the range of inequalities that come together in the tourist encounter.

Slum tourism research has been approached from a variety of disciplines, with key studies emerging in the field of geography, sociology and anthropology (Frenzel 2016; Frenzel and Koens 2012, 2015; Steinbrink; 2013; Freire-Medeiros 2007, 2009; Dürr 2012). A large amount of this research was carried out in Brazil (Freire-Medeiros 2007, 2009), particularly in Rio de Janeiro, where *favela* tourism has become a popular practice and central element of the diversified tourist market. Other well-known case studies have emerged in South Africa with analysis of township tours (Rolfes, Steinbrink and Uhl 2009), the Kibera slum in Nairobi, Kenya (Kieti and Magio 2007) and the Dharavi slum in Mumbai, India (Meschkank 2011). In Mexico, however, touring sites of poverty and violence has only recently attracted tourist and scholarly attention. Aside from studies on garbage tourism in Mazatlan (Dürr 2012; 2012a) these forms of tourism have not yet been sufficiently analysed.

Commodification of poverty has been central to slum tourism research, exposing simplification, essentialization and capitalization of poverty (Freire Medeiros 2007, 2009; Frenzel and Koens 2012; Steinbrink 2013). The role of commodification already has a long history in tourism studies, emphasizing how various forms of tourism – from mass to volunteer, responsible and sustainable tourism - are also part of the neoliberal market place

(Hutnyk 1996; Simpson 2005; Vodopivec and Jaffe 2011). Several studies have emphasized the impact of commodification processes on cultures and places, analysing how these dynamics distort authenticity and the original attractiveness of visited sites (Zukin 2010). These studies critically examine the process of selling people and places, with slum tourism focusing on the ways poverty and violence are turned into commodities to be sold as a new market niche.

However, in analysing the *Mardi Gras* festival in New Orleans, Kevin Fox Gotham highlights that commodification in tourism is not uncritically accepted by actors on the ground. Rather it is a negotiated and contested process: “While the production of tourist spaces is a globalized process of commodification, the effect and meaning of commodification are expressed at the local level, where particular conflicts and struggles actually occur” (Gotham 2005: 311). Residents and tourists are thus not just passive receivers but are actively involved in the production of meaning.

Moreover, as economy is always socially, culturally and politically embedded, commodification should not be understood solely as an economic process but also a social, political and cultural one. Drawing on his research of the fish market in Japan, Theodor Bestor analyses cultural processes that shape the everyday of economic life, accentuating how markets are providers of commodities as well as generators of cultural meanings (Bestor 2004). As Igor Kopytoff also notes, “from a cultural perspective, the production of commodities is also a cultural and cognitive process: commodities must not only be produced materially as things, but also culturally marked as being a certain kind of thing” (1988: 64). It is thus vital to study cultural and social processes underlying commodification, whether of things or of places.

By approaching commodification as an economic, cultural and social process, requires studying not merely the economic value, but also the cultural and symbolic value tourism brings to deprived neighbourhoods and their residents. Several authors have pointed out that tourism can have various impacts and may lead to the empowerment of local communities in multiple – economic, social and psychological – ways (Cole 2007; Scheyvens 2003). The attention of international tourists may hold political capital for the residents and may challenge the hegemonic ideas of urban politics (Frenzel *et al.* 2015; Sanyal 2015). Hence, might we understand commodification for tourism also as a site of political struggle?

To understand these processes, we should study tourism not only as a form of consumption but also as a form of production. In order to enable certain consumption patterns

and tourist practices, places have to be produced in ways that attract tourists. But how do stigmatized neighbourhoods become tourist destinations? Many scholars have approached slum tourism through the lens of consumption, placing a strong focus on tourists' motives, attitudes and perceptions of tours and places visited (Freire-Medeiros 2007; Ma 2010; Rolfes, Steinbrink and Uhl 2009). Recently, several studies have also tried to encompass residents' views, questioning their reactions towards touristification of their neighbourhoods (Freire-Medeiros 2012; Steinbrink *et al.* 2016). However, while these studies provide a valuable insight into consumption of marginalized places, they say little about the ways a range of actors – from tour guides, tourists and residents – are actively engaged in the process of tourist production.

In this thesis I fill this gap by exploring the way Tepito is produced as a tourist destination, identifying the actors involved in this process - actors with various motives, interests and agendas. I look at how commodification of urban spaces for tourism impacts the image and value of a stigmatized neighbourhood in the city, as well as social relations within the neighbourhood itself. I examine how different actors involved in the tourist encounter mobilize and challenge circulating representations in different ways, and how performance and experience of Tepito provides a site where power relations woven in the production and circulation of representations are contested, negotiated or reproduced.

With increased attention to mobility, tourism should be studied at the intersection of physical movement of people and virtual circulation of representations. This means focusing on the ways places travel through popular and official representations and how these places are created, performed and modified by tourists and hosts (Salazar 2010; Sheller and Urry 2004). In my study I analyse globally circulating representations of Tepito preceding the tourist encounter, looking at how this impacts expectations, engagement and performance of the place. I try to understand the ways these circulating representations are negotiated, challenged and (re)produced in the tourist encounter by the various actors involved. This entails paying attention to the representations before, during and after the tourist encounter.

It is necessary to also focus on the velocity of these representations, exploring how some are more mobile (for example Tepito's violence, poverty, informal street market) than others (for example Tepito's literature and art). Representations do not traverse in the same way and reach the same audience. Noel Salazar argues that representations and imaginaries do not float around spontaneously and independently; rather, they circulate unevenly through space and time (Salazar 2010: 9). Circulation requires “material and institutional

infrastructure of movement” (Tsing 2000: 338) which means that it is important to take into account “structures and mechanisms that make that circulation possible or impossible” (Salazar 2010: 9).

But who has access to these structures and how are these distributed along the lines of class or nationality? Do residents of marginalized neighbourhoods have the same possibility to produce and circulate representations of their neighbourhood as the international and middle-class tourists, journalists and researchers visiting them? Representations and imaginaries are embedded in wider global and local inequalities which make some imaginings possible and others not (Salazar and Graburn 2014: 17).

In the research I am particularly interested in the agency of residents in engaging with circulating representations, where I focus on how they contest, reinforce and transform them. I question the role tourism plays in this process and I explore how residents use tourism to challenge the socio-spatial stigma in the contemporary urban landscape. Images have political and social potency (Dovey and King 2012: 292) which opens up questions of cultural and symbolic injustice of misrepresentation or misrecognition (Fraser 1996). To engage actively with representations therefore represents a form of politics and may be understood as a strategy for the residents to symbolically negotiate inequality and socio-spatial exclusion. Turning Tepito into a tourist product can contribute to the feeling of degradation and reproduce a stigma, but it can also inspire a sense of pride and belonging. It is important to study not only how existing power relations and inequalities that perpetuate circulation of representations are “maintained, reproduced, and reinforced, but also how they are challenged, contested, and transformed” (Salazar and Graburn 2014: 5). This is particularly important to explore in relation to global mobility as it can increase our understanding of the role transnational networks have in constructing political power and the agency of the lower-class city residents (see Featherstone’s concept of networked agency on page 12), with tourism being an example of such networks.

The agency of the residents should thus not be explored in isolation but through the tourist encounter, positioned in the interaction between residents, tourists, tour guides and other actors involved (tour agencies, governmental authorities). Salazar highlights this point, noting that the agency is “located in the dialogic space between people, rather than within individuals themselves” (Salazar 2010: 142). This requires studying the way a range of actors come together in the tourist encounter and how representations are negotiated and re-worked through this process. Through the embodied experience of places and by circulating images

of visited sites, tourists play their part in the performance of a tourist product which also makes them relevant actors in the place-making process. The narrative of the place is not produced solely by the tour guide or the residents but is co-constructed by various people interacting at a specific place and time.

Erik Cohen has described the tourist encounter as a transitory interaction between people who are not oriented towards maintaining a continuous relationship. This transitory nature of the relationship makes the interaction non-repetitive and asymmetrical as there is asymmetry in knowledge, interests and power among the participants of the encounter (Cohen 1984: 379-380). Anthropologists studying encounters emphasize that the encounter is not merely an embodied and emplaced interaction between people, but a mutually created social space where people with different cultural and social backgrounds and histories come together, with unequally positioned agendas and stakes in the relationship (Faier and Rofel 2014: 364). Encounter is an “everyday engagement across difference” (Faier and Rofel 2014: 364) through which new meanings, categories, objects and identities emerge.

This means that we also need to consider the tourist encounter as a dynamic process through which new meanings and representations are formed. Moreover, such an understanding conveys that the tourist encounter is power-laden as it is based on pre-existing class, ethnic and national inequalities. Power dynamics in the tourist encounter are present not only between residents and tourists but also between residents and the tour guide, and among residents themselves. The question therefore is who has the possibility and ability to ‘tell the story’ and how will this impact power dynamics in the encounter as well as within the neighbourhood. I therefore explore the role of the brokers (for example the tour guide, informal leaders, governmental officials) in altering representations, understandings and emotions. As representations and narratives produced in tourism stabilise meanings of places, these meanings also become a source of conflict and opposition. Who represents what and how they are often contested issues (Salazar 2010: 167). How Tepito should be represented to the wider audience reflects the political process of place-making – that is power relations within the neighbourhood and struggles over different meanings of Tepito for its residents. Struggles over representations unveil power relations and politics of a place.

I therefore connect the production of tourism to urban politics and politics of place-making, analysing the commodification of Tepito as a process of on-going negotiation for place meaning and identity, embedded in the nexus of local and global power relations.

Structure of the thesis

The thesis is divided into eight chapters. The theoretical introduction is followed by a chapter on my research methods in the field, where I discuss the challenges that emerge in ethnographic research. By pointing to the importance of walking and sensing the urban environment in creating ethnographic knowledge, I also reflect on the blurry boundaries between an anthropologist and a tourist and my own tourist experience when entering the ethnographic field.

In Chapter Three I look at the way Tepito is produced as a place, focusing on Tepito's social and historical emplacement in Mexico City, particularly on its position within shifts in urban development towards symbolic economy. As images play an increasingly important role in inter-city competitiveness I also focus on the discursive construction of the neighbourhood within Mexico City through circulating representations. I pay attention to a wide range of images produced, exploring how their unequal circulation constructs a specific urban imaginary of Tepito. I understand representations produced 'about Tepito from Tepito' as important for negotiating inequality and the residents' place in the world. I introduce tours to Tepito as a practice that aims to counter derogatory representations of the neighbourhood, as well as its imaginary of violence and poverty, striving to re-position Tepito within the city's symbolic economy.

The next two chapters look more closely into the way Tepito tours counter derogatory representations about the neighbourhood and its residents by transforming the existing stigma into a brand. Commodification of informality, poverty and violence through the tour enables Tepito's residents and other actors to negotiate a symbolic position within the city, claiming inclusion into the city's urban fabric. In Chapter Four I analyse how Tepito tours promote and sell the positive role informal spaces play in residents' lives, examining the way the stigma of informality is re-signified through the tourist encounter from criminality and delinquency to that of resistance. The resistant identity marketed and sold through the *Made in Tepito* brand aims to challenge the hegemonic understanding of informality, seeking to make visible image of a tough and resistant neighbourhood. Commodification of informality through the tours provides space for residents to negotiate the prevailing sentiment of exclusion and insecurity, aggravated by the restructuring of Mexico's economy and shifts in urban development in the 1990s.

Chapter Five explores the way the *Made in Tepito* brand, constructed and performed through the tour, also mobilizes a narrative of a globally connected and cosmopolitan *barrio*, challenging its exclusion from the touristically redeveloped Mexico City centre, as well as from the city's official cosmopolitan brand. Tours thus provide space to transform imaginary of Tepito from the immobile *barrio* to a globally interconnected place. The performance and experience of Tepito's transnational networks challenges tourists' idea of Tepito, unveiling its symbolic value for cosmopolitan Mexico City. Although this provides the opportunity to claim inclusion within the city, it does not challenge the underlying socio-spatial hierarchies and mobility gaps which are also the result of the city's redevelopment strategies and policies.

Chapter Six acknowledges the friction in Tepito that arises with the commodification of the neighbourhood for tourism. I use the example of violence(s) to illustrate tensions which surface with tourism development, bringing to light different views on what should be branded and by whom. By drawing on the tour with the tour guide Victor and the evening walk with cultural activist Mauricio, I focus on the presence and absence of different forms of violence in their narratives. Depending on the image and narrative they wish to portray, I look at the way they continuously and strategically move between the concealment and display of different forms of violence(s). The connection between the way residents negotiate the presence of violence(s) in the *barrio* and the ways violence(s) takes place and is (re)presented points to the important question of who has the right to represent violence(s) or more broadly, who has the right to broker and brand Tepito.

Chapter Seven builds on the previous one by looking at the recent governmental interest in Tepito tours, highlighting the way this has altered the dynamics, route and narrative of the tour. By building on the emblematic *barrio* culture, these governmentally backed tours provide an opportunity for stronger cultural presence and visibility of Tepito in the city. Yet as 'Tepito culture' rapidly gains attention on the city's tourist market, it also exposes the contested and elusive understanding of culture between governmental actors and Tepito residents. I suggest that although the city's symbolic economy, based on leisure and tourism, provides visibility of *barrio* culture in the city, it also brings new challenges such as how should this culture be promoted, by whom and for what purpose.

I finalize the thesis with a concluding chapter, where I synthesize my analysis and connect it to the framework posed in this introduction - using slum tourism as a lens to examine the connection between urban development and place-making.

2. Sensing Tepito: Research methods and the ethnographic encounter

Walking, not just talking

It was a hot and damp afternoon at the end of August 2014. I had arrived in Mexico City a month before so I was still getting used to the city, its size, climate and altitude. I had planned an interview with Fernanda, a social worker from Tepito working on gender issues and intra-family violence and I had placed a recorder in my backpack together with pens and a notepad, just to be sure not to miss anything out. I took the metro to Tepito and came out of the station in the middle of the street market. It was very crowded and noisy so I had difficulty orienting myself. I turned around but it all looked the same. Stalls selling shoes and clothes were everywhere. While I was standing in front of the metro entrance people were pushing passed me as I was blocking their way. After a couple of minutes, I finally managed to find the right street which was, in contrast to the market, empty of street stalls and thus less noisy and crowded. This made walking more relaxed and I felt I could breathe again. Just a few meters in front of me I saw police standing on the corner, chatting and drinking coffee. At that point I thought they were just patrolling around Tepito. Later I discovered they were at this spot everyday as the smaller street to my right was known for the drug trade and was considered a no-go zone for those who were not from the neighbourhood.

I met Fernanda in front of the *Maria Velasco* gallery, which hosts various art exhibitions, and is the only gallery in Tepito. Fernanda was a tiny middle-aged woman with a kind and gentle face. Since she had recently had an eye operation she was wearing a large patch on her eye. As she had already warned me of this before, I assumed we were going to find a place to sit down, have some coffee and talk. This would also be an opportunity for me to take out my notepad and recorder and absorb her every word. But she suggested that we first take a walk. Considering her operation, I imagined the walk to be a short one. I thus placed some pesos in my pocket while constantly looking around for possible places to sit down for a drink. After an hour I was already getting a bit tired and I looked at Fernanda for possible signs of us stopping. But she continued at the same pace and told me that there were still many places we needed to visit. The walk continued for another two hours and during this time she took me to schools, churches, houses and around the market. Just before saying goodbye, she apologized for not having more time and energy on her hands and told me to call her in three weeks when she would have fully recovered. She said there were many more

places to visit and see. I promised to call her again and waved goodbye, still with the pesos in my pocket and the recorder in my backpack.

In the first months of my fieldwork, conversations with Tepito residents frequently took place when walking around the neighbourhood. People I met insisted on showing me round the *barrio* instead of just talking about it. They took me to places they considered I would be interested in as a first-timer in Tepito, for example cultural and sport areas, churches, the market, schools and still existing *vecindades* (types of housing). They also took me to places where they grew up or went to school, where they worked and lived, or where they hung out with friends. Mauricio, a retired shoe-maker who was in his 70s but had an amazing amount of energy for walking, took me around Tepito various times, showing me the house where he had lived as a child or the park where he used to go with his family to eat ice-cream. On these walks personal memories of his childhood were intertwined with the history of Tepito, as well as with his views on current social and political problems of the neighbourhood. These walks exposed different ways through which people constructed their attachments to specific places and created meanings around them, and how they built stories and narratives around Tepito as a place.

I soon realized that these walks were as much about what I was being told as about enabling me to see and feel the area. Walking enabled a multi-sensory experience of Tepito; embodied involvement in the neighbourhood that entailed not only seeing but also hearing, smelling and touching. For Tepito residents this was important. ‘Being there’ was a path to gaining a broader, embodied experience of the place. Manuela was the one who often reminded me of this. She was a human rights activist in her thirties, and she had a sharp yet friendly face. She often told ‘outsiders’ like me that in order to understand the *barrio* you needed to walk it, which was also vital for the tourist experience of the neighbourhood. She frequently pointed out that people liked to talk about Tepito without actually taking the time to walk around it, feeling the area with their senses and emotions. Yet moving through the neighbourhood, Manuela stressed, was important in order to gain a deeper understanding of the place: only by sensing the place was it possible to make sense of the place.

Anthropologist Sarah Pink has pointed to the role of walking with others in generating ethnographic knowledge (Pink 2008). She argues that walking with others, sharing their paths, stories and gazes enables “embodied and reflexive engagement with the discourses, materiality, sociality and sensoriality of a particular way of being” in place (Pink 2008: 192 - 193).

During the first months of my fieldwork, walking with Tepito residents unexpectedly became an important element of my research methodology. Before conducting an interview, I frequently walked with people around the neighbourhood, chatting, looking and listening to where I was taken and why. Although by walking with others I could not share their thoughts and emotions, I was able to attune (Pink 2008) myself socially, materially and sensorially to different ways of being in Tepito.

As walking with others turned into my research method, I became increasingly aware of the embodied experience of ethnographic fieldwork and of the role the researcher's body plays in the production of knowledge. Donna Haraway highlights this point, arguing that the production of knowledge is embodied and partial as it always comes from somewhere and someone and is thus situated (Haraway 1988). This implies that a researcher is not a distant or a neutral observer and that there is no objective way of carrying out ethnographic research (Haraway 1988; Okely 1996). There are no pre-existing scripts, actors or spaces that are simply encountered or observed (Browne 2003: 134). The research field is thus not something 'out there' to be analysed; rather, it is a space that emerges through an ethnographic encounter.

Critical engagement with the issues of neutrality and objectivity already has a long history in anthropological research. In the 1970s scholars began to question unequal power relations in an ethnographic encounter, pointing to the intimate relationship of anthropological discipline with colonial rule (Asad 1973). This resulted in the 'reflexive turn' (Clifford and Marcus 1986; Marcus and Fisher 1986) which questioned ethnographic authority and highlighted the role of the ethnographic self in the research process. The increased awareness of the researcher's socio-cultural and personal background in the production of ethnography became of vital importance.

The call for reflexivity was not merely about observing the self but about critically engaging with the self in relation to others in the field. Judith Okely and Helen Callaway argue that the anthropologist's attention to the self does not take place in a cultural vacuum nor is it confined to the anthropologist's own culture but takes place in a cross-cultural encounter (Okely 1992: 2). This requires analysing the roles, relationships and power asymmetries in an ethnographic encounter. In other words, it means taking into consideration our own positionality in the power matrix of knowledge production as well as to that of our interlocutors.

As Leiba Faier and Lisa Rofel point out, an encounter is not contact between naturally divided and bounded cultural categories. Rather, an encounter refers to the way cultural categories are produced through unequal relationships across differences (Faier and Rofel 2014: 364). Scholars analysing encounters have placed important emphasis on the way power shapes the dynamics of these relationships, understanding power not as unidirectional but as one that involves negotiation, resistance, misunderstanding, and unexpected convergence (Faier and Rofel 2014: 365). To critically engage with the politics of the ethnographic encounter thus requires focussing on the power relations which are constantly being reworked by all the actors involved – by ourselves as researchers as well as other participants.

This chapter reflects on some of these issues by elaborating on the research methods used during my fieldwork, also looking at the way an ethnographer's embodied experience of the field can serve as a research tool, shaping the course of the research process. As I explore the importance of sensing the urban environment I also question the similarities and differences between a tourist and an anthropologist. The analysis of the methods used during fieldwork points to the blurred boundaries between the different roles we and other participants undertake during an ethnographic encounter. This also leads me to discuss the relationships in the field and my own position, trying to understand how being a middle-class white woman impacted the research and the writing process.

Encounter with Mexico City: Living in the urban jungle

I arrived in Mexico City at the end of July 2014. This was the period of morning sun and afternoon rain which made walking around the city, particularly in the early evening, relatively pleasant. I spent the first days of my fieldwork walking around the different delegations the city is divided into, observing the streets, buildings and daily movements of the people. As I wanted to get the 'feel' of the city I decided to take a couple of days to simply walk around aimlessly without having a particular purpose or goal.

Soon I became aware of the impact the size and intensity of the city had on me. Coming from a country with two million inhabitants, Slovenia, where even the capital city is full of nature and tranquillity, I found Mexico City to be quite the opposite. I could not really comprehend its vastness and the amount of concrete. Despite several parks I could not help but focus on the size of the buildings and the feeling of an endless urban jungle.

In the beginning, I literally felt the intensity of the city on my body. Being stuck in the metro during peak hours, avoiding the large number of pedestrians on the streets and the difficulties in finding a quiet place to relax initially left me very tired. For the first three months my husband and I lived close to the city centre where street sounds only really stopped late at night. We lived above a street vendor selling pirate CDs who woke us every morning with an old song *Winds of Change* by the *Scorpions*. Later during the day other vendors joined in, producing a never-ending cacophony of sounds. Tired of so much noise, I intentionally avoided crowded areas in my initial exploration of Mexico City, letting emptiness and quietness guide me through the city.

We later moved to Roma Norte, a hip and trendy area full of restaurants and bars. In comparison to many parts of the city this was a relatively green area with wide and quiet streets. Street vending was more of an exception than a rule and due to the lack of food-stalls the area smelt differently too. After I started going to Tepito, a twenty-minute walk away from the city centre and half an hour metro ride from Roma Norte, I became even more aware of the aesthetic and sensorial differences in the city. Tepito's street market in particular was a very lively place, with vendors yelling to attract customers and shoppers trying to squeeze through the narrow market streets. The smell of street food, the odour of garbage left behind by vendors and shoppers, the decaying buildings and the cacophony of market sounds were in stark contrast to the empty streets of Roma Norte, the green parks with dog walkers and the smell of *espresso* floating in the air.

These initial, corporeal impressions of the city have made me more attentive to the way senses order space and form a particular "sensuous geography" (Rodaway 1994). Sensory experience is important for our understanding of cities and plays a critical role in structuring our 'sense of place'. As illustrated above, it is through senses that we also recognize urban differences and begin to 'feel' the cities' socio-economic inequalities. Senses are socially shaped and thus connected to different social orders and ideologies (Low 2005: 398; see also Steward and Cowen 2007: 6-7). Smells of specific food, a particular physical infrastructure, the presence or absence of noise, crowded or empty spaces – these aesthetic and sensorial differences are embedded in urban hierarchy of people and places and play a role in the production of the Other.

This sensuous geography impacts how we move across the city: while we are attracted by certain infrastructure, smells and noises, there are areas where aesthetical and sensuous markers erect uncomfortable feelings of distance or fear. This is also relevant in tourism

where the way places are sensed is central to the consumption of tourist spaces. Tourists move across physical spaces and culturally constructed boundaries which also entails movement across diversity of senses and emotions. ‘Sensing the Other’ is therefore a vital element of the tourist’s experience.

My attention to the sensorial and aesthetic differences in the city was also partially connected to my daily movement between Tepito, the neighbourhood I was studying, and Roma Norte, the place I was living in. Initially, I juggled with the idea for my husband and I to find a place in Tepito as I considered this to be a necessity in order to do the research well. Living in Tepito would certainly bring out certain aspects of the *barrio* life which I was not able to grasp by going home every evening. However, as a month passed I considered the on-going movement and the different experiences of being in the city useful for comprehending the *barrio*’s emplacement in Mexico City. I do not wish to claim this would not have been possible by living in Tepito. Nevertheless, as the central theme of my research was tourism, I considered the daily mobility across physical spaces, aesthetics and senses to be important to understand the neighbourhood’s relation to the city and its tourist landscape. In other words, in order to understand the production, consumption and negotiation of Tepito’s ‘difference’ I considered it important to gain a deeper understanding of the *barrio*’s position in the city as well as the representations and networks preceding the tourist encounter.

The vastness of the urban jungle, the fast-paced environment and my daily movement among the neighbourhoods also initially impacted the tempo of my research process. During the first weeks of the fieldwork I tried to be everywhere, to remember everything and to talk to everyone. I always carried the voice recorder and notepad in my backpack just in case an opportunity for an interview would arise. At events I scribbled things on paper in order not to forget what I had seen or heard. After a couple of weeks, I realised it was impossible to keep track of every step. Moreover, I was doubtful whether this was making a good research. As Bronislaw Malinowski already stated in 1922, “it is good for the ethnographer sometimes to put aside camera, note book and pencil, and to join in what is going on” (Malinowski 1932 [1922]: 21). This not only pointed to the importance of participant observation; for me it was also a reminder to let go, to a certain extent, control over the research process.

Going to Tepito: From tourists to researchers

Multiple roles in the ethnographic encounter

I first met Victor, the Tepito tour guide, at Lagunilla metro station – the meeting point for tours. I had contacted him a couple of days before via e-mail, explaining I was doing research about tourism in Tepito and would like to attend the walking tours he conducted. Although the tours were quite sporadic I was lucky. He replied quickly, telling me that one was coming up on Saturday and that he would be at the metro station at 10am, waiting under the clock. I was afraid of being late so I came to the station fifteen minutes earlier. Metro travel in the city was quite unpredictable and during peak hours it took twice as much time to get around. Yet Victor was already there, leaning on the wall. As I discovered later he was always early – he did not like to keep tourists waiting.

I introduced myself and explained my reasons for being in Tepito. He kindly nodded to my explanation and immediately expressed his willingness to help. My fears that he would not be willing to participate – which would make the research complicated as he was the one and only tour guide – were quickly gone. His openness for the topic of my work and his experience in connecting (inter)national researchers greatly facilitated my fieldwork process. Later on, he introduced me to many residents and vendors in the neighbourhood as well as other researchers, governmental officials and journalists.

While we chatted, tourists started arriving. We were a small group of ten people – two from the USA and the rest from Mexico. After a brief introduction we left the metro station and came out in the middle of the busy market. It was already quite hot so I put sun block on my face and a hat on my head, constantly sipping a bottle of water. As we walked down the large avenue, passing street vending stalls, some of my co-tourists began to take photos. I heard a vendor behind me making a comment to his friend: “Look, tourists.” I turned around and smiled, and although I imagined myself not to be a ‘true’ member of the tourist group I was with – I was after all there to do research – this is exactly what I was: a tourist.

Despite the seemingly clear-cut differences between a tourist and an anthropologist, in practice, these categories are not always that distinct. Both tourists and anthropologists travel across physical space and culturally constructed boundaries in search of the Other. And anthropologists too are in need of a guide that brokers their access to unknown spaces. For those studying tourism as I was, the boundary between an anthropologist and a tourist was

even less clear. By attending the tours and shadowing the guide I was constantly undertaking the role of a tourist while at the same time carrying out the role of a researcher. In a way, being a tourist became a research method through which I studied the tourist encounter. Towards the end of my stay in the city I occasionally began to assist the guide with small tasks, such as translation of some phrases into English or distributing material, adding to my role of a tourist and a researcher that of a guide's assistant.

By pointing to the blurry categories of an anthropologist and a tourist I do not aim to dwell too much on commonalities as there are many differences too. Rather, the point is to highlight that during fieldwork we undertake multiple roles which we constantly need to negotiate through the ethnographic encounter. Our roles are not pre-scripted and clearly determined but are recreated through research, fieldwork and the relations these create. This is not only the case for us researchers, but also for other participants of the encounter, such as our interlocutors.

The latter became evident during the workshops that took place as part of the international project I was working on. The trilateral project *Slum Tourism in the Americas: Commodifying Urban Poverty and Violence* was a collaboration between three universities – Ludwig-Maximilians Universität München (Germany), University of Amsterdam (Netherlands) and London School of Economics (United Kingdom). Its aim was to investigate slum tourism in four cities in the Americas: Mexico City, Kingston, Rio de Janeiro and New Orleans. Each of the three researchers working on the project was responsible for organizing a five-day workshop in the city he or she was working in: I was in charge for Mexico City, my colleagues Alana for Kingston and Alessandro for Rio de Janeiro and New Orleans.

My research team and their interlocutors from Kingston and Rio de Janeiro arrived in Mexico City in September 2015. During the five days we attended tours in Tepito, met with the tour guide, informal leaders and women's groups. We explored the city centre and the neighbourhoods on the outskirts of the city. Throughout these five days I became a tour guide and a broker, transferring knowledge I had accumulated throughout my field-work. I remained an outsider in the field, as I was not part of Tepito, yet I was also an insider who acquired 'local' knowledge, developed networks, and thus gained power to broker access to the neighbourhood.

These workshops also shifted the position and the roles of the people we were working with. I travelled to Rio de Janeiro with the street vendor Esmeralda, and to Kingston

with the shoe-maker and cultural activist Mauricio and his assistant Pedro. Who to take to the workshops was not the easiest decision. I decided to ask my key interlocutors first – Victor and Mauricio - and leave the decision up to them. Mauricio chose Pedro while Victor, since he could not go himself, decided to invite street vendors Esmeralda and Gabriela.

Unfortunately, Gabriela had to cancel the trip at the very last minute so Esmeralda ended up the only one to go.

To a certain extent the workshops repositioned the roles of our interlocutors and the relations in our ethnographic encounter. Esmeralda, Mauricio and Pedro ceased to be only people from ‘our’ field by also becoming tourists and researchers themselves. In the same way as my colleagues and I, they also attended the tours, asked questions at the meetings, compared the sites with their own environment back home and expressed their observation during feedback sessions. For the five days they became active field researchers, using various methods to explore the cities such as participant observation, walking and informal conversations.

The multiple roles we and our interlocutors constructed during the field trips, reveals that an ethnographic encounter is not a static space, but a dynamic process through which its participants continuously rework and recreate their roles, positions and relations.

Hanging out: Beyond the tourist encounter

In the first weeks of my research I primarily attended Tepito walking tours, talking to the tour guide and the tourists, gradually establishing connections with the people who we visited during the tour. It was initially through the tour that I established contacts with Tepito residents. As I started to spend more time in the neighbourhood my networks expanded and I met with cultural activists, vendors, religious leaders, social workers and art collectives. This enabled me to investigate the *barrio* and the role of tourism beyond the tourist encounter.

At first, I wanted to hang out in Tepito as much as possible yet I was not sure how. After talking to my colleague Alana who was conducting fieldwork in Kingston and was struggling with the same issue, I realised that the street market provided a good excuse to go to Tepito even when I had no meetings planned. I walked around observing the dynamics of the market and absorbing the atmosphere. Yet I was quickly faced with the limitations of such a process. The high turnover of people coming to the street market rendered me rather

invisible and simply by being in the neighbourhood didn't really provide the possibility to meet the neighbourhood's residents.

For this reason, I joined a four-week course called The *Albur* Diploma⁷ which started in August 2014. This took place once a week in the *Maria Velasco* gallery, the only gallery in Tepito. The course was led by the tour guide and his friend Gabriela, a street vendor known also as the “queen of *albur*.”⁸ *Albur* is a communication in double meaning often carrying sexual undertones. The course was very difficult to follow. Although my Spanish was gradually improving I found *albur* language games almost impossible to understand. With a confused face I joined in when others were laughing without really comprehending what was being said. Yet in the initial stage of the research the course gave me a good excuse to spend more time in Tepito.

In general, I found events a good opportunity to connect with residents. This was also facilitated by Mauricio, a retired shoe-maker and one of the key *barrio* figures, whom I met in the early stage of my research. I actually got his number from my thesis supervisor so I called him and asked for a meeting. We met at one of the few open-air community spaces in Tepito, known as *El foro* (the forum) or *Martes del Arte* (Art Tuesdays, due to artistic activities which took place there on Tuesdays). This is a rather small area with colourful murals on the walls, located next to the market. Together with Pedro, a young resident in his thirties, Mauricio spends a lot of time there, organizing cultural events such as dancing, poetry reading, music performances, artist exhibitions and shoe-making workshops. As I always met Mauricio and Pedro at that exact spot I soon realised it was a good place to meet other residents, particularly artist collectives and those involved in cultural activities.

It was at *El foro* that I also met a group of young students who had been coming to Tepito for years to collaborate with Pedro and Mauricio, working mainly with children and youth groups. They refer to their activities as School for Peace⁹ and they regularly organize cultural workshops and events for violence prevention particularly in more volatile areas of the neighbourhood. Through this youth group I was able to hang out in places in which I would otherwise have no particular reason to go to, for instance housing patios and streets behind the market, considered by the residents as the ‘hotspot’ of the neighbourhood. This

⁷ Diplomado de Albur.

⁸ La reina de albur.

⁹ Escuela de Paz.

enabled me to engage with different areas of Tepito which was important for the embodied experience of the differences within the neighbourhood.

Tepito was not the only place I met and hung out with residents. I joined artists and art collectives like *Colectivo Artepito* or *Los Olvidados* who exhibited sculptures or read poetry at art events in other parts of the city. Angel and Pablo from *Colectivo Artepito* were about my age and they regularly informed me about art exhibitions. Facebook was also particularly useful for staying up to date.

I was somewhat surprised at how willing and eager Tepito residents were to talk to me. Considering the *barrio*'s stigma and its spectacle-ization in the media I expected residents to be reluctant to discuss the neighbourhood's issues with me. I had assumed that due to the representations produced and consumed through the newspapers, books, movies, social media and research, over which many residents felt they had no control, would make them suspicious and unwilling to talk. Yet most of them were really keen on explaining their perspective of Tepito and to talk about their lives. This was particularly noticeable among some of the artists who felt that art movements were constantly being obscured.

In a way, this provided a 'smooth' entry into the research process but at the same time it also posed challenges. Some interactions simply did not go beyond discussing 'the other side of the *barrio*'s stigma.' It took me a while to realise that some interlocutors tried hard to paint a prettier picture of Tepito and thus concealed (intentionally or not) information they considered could potentially distort it. I respected this, of course, and my point here is not to evaluate what people told me.

However, I wish to emphasize that I needed critical distance to understand that what I was told did not necessarily reflect people's view of the neighbourhood. It was also an image-management strategy which residents of a highly stigmatized *barrio* used to mobilize different representations of their place. This enabled them to negotiate unequal power relations behind production and consumption of circulating representations which portrayed Tepito as a marginal, violent and corrupted place. To some, I represented a figure that had the power and networks to get a different image of Tepito across and for this purpose I needed 'to be convinced'. These questions opened several personal and professional dilemmas having to do with asymmetrical power in the ethnographic encounter, unequal power relations between the researcher and the Other in the fieldwork process and in the making of ethnography (Clifford 1986). I will come back to the question of power in ethnographic writing and representation at the end of the chapter. In the next section I will briefly address

the issue of negotiating relationships in the field and power inequalities that may perpetuate them.

Negotiating relations in the ethnographic encounter

In the middle of the year my husband and I started taking salsa lessons. We met up with Gustavo and his wife Consuela, both Tepito residents, who I had previously met on other occasions. They lived in a small apartment with their four children at the limits of Tepito. Gustavo was a salsa enthusiast and had been dancing for years. Consuela was a dancer too, although as she frankly admitted did not share her husband's passion. Yet they gave salsa classes to groups and couples or pretty much anyone who was willing to learn.

Our lessons took place in their courtyard once a week. We came in the late afternoons and after some initial chit-chat they put on the music. The next-door neighbours often observed our twists and turns and laughed at our clumsiness. After two hours of intensive exercise – Gustavo's energy for dancing never seemed to run out – we had a beer or two in front of their apartment, discussing Mexico's political situation and personal views of the burning global issues of today's world. They entrusted us with their personal stories and hardships, and my husband and I also shared our personal world views and life histories with them. We talked about our life back home and our future plans, about our likes and dislikes. Although I initially took salsa lessons in order to spend more time in Tepito and talk to the residents for the research purpose, the boundary between the professional and personal ties quickly began to fade. The connection with Gustavo and Consuela gradually developed into something more than a researcher-interlocutor relationship. I soon felt I was caught somewhere in between, seeing them as my interlocutors and thinking of them as my friends.

This sentiment was reinforced by the relationship I developed with Esmeralda. Frankly, we did not have much in common. She was in her late 50s and had been a street vendor ever since she was fourteen years old. She came from a large family of fourteen children and her childhood had not been very easy. In contrast to me she was very religious and we spent hours discussing these issues as she initially found it difficult to understand how I was able to live without God. Yet despite many differences that separated us we built a personal relationship and began to confide in each other. I really enjoyed spending time with her as she was very easy to talk to. She was also a very positive person and this made us laugh a lot too. I considered our relationship to have developed into a friendship. At the same

time, it also made me feel awkward and uncomfortable. I found it difficult to separate my own roles - that of a researcher and that of a friend. It was not easy to shake off the feeling that I was in some ways exploiting her friendship for research purposes.

Anthropologists have already discussed in length the dilemmas of establishing close relationships between researchers and interlocutors (Coffey 1999; Crick 1992). Fieldwork is a personal and emotional process and it is not always possible to detach from personal ties and relationships during the research. Amanda Coffey argues that these relationships can actually be meaningful since they challenge ethnographic dichotomies of distance and intimacy, involvement and detachment. She claims that “friendships can help to clarify the inherent tensions of the fieldwork experience and sharpen our abilities for critical reflection” (Coffey 1999: 47). To a certain extent I agree that these personal relationships and emotional attachments can be helpful in making sense of the research field. Moreover, these relationships do not only affect the researcher but also the interlocutor and they can have an impact well beyond the scope of the field.

Nevertheless, these relationships are not unproblematic and should be reflected upon. As researchers we have specific motives for establishing contacts and these are connected to our professional work, besides our personal investment into the research topic. There are power imbalances between researchers and interlocutors as well as inequalities in potential gain. We therefore need to reflect on these relationships as we are continuously faced with the dilemma whether the intimate stories people entrust us with impact our research process and whether this information will be used in our analysis or not.

When Esmeralda asked me to give her computer lessons (something she rarely used) I felt somewhat relieved as this softened the feelings of guilt I sometimes felt. I thought to myself that I can finally give something back in return. It was slightly naïve to think that this would balance the power dynamics present in the research process or the confusion around the multiple roles we were in. Nevertheless, this situation reminded me that interlocutors were not powerless victims of our research process and that they also negotiate relationships they enter into. Despite the power imbalances interlocutors have agency too and they also decide how far to engage with the researcher, depending on their wishes and motives.

Nonetheless, I agree with Malcolm Crick that field-based friendships often remain ambivalent. In the analysis of his fieldwork in Sri Lanka and his connection to the interlocutor Ali, Crick stresses that “if I call Ali a ‘friend’ or ‘interlocutor’, both labels would say too much and also leave something important out” (Crick 1992: 177). Many relationships

we develop throughout the research are not that easy to classify. Moreover, as Crick points out, there are also disparities of power, culture and class that commonly separate the researcher and interlocutors. People can of course relate on personal and intimate levels despite these disparities. They may find commonalities through other life roles and personal worldviews, as I for example felt with Gustavo and Consuela and our socio-political engagement, or with Esmeralda and our roles as women. Yet these disparities can also create distance between the researcher and interlocutors and they challenge the researcher's fieldwork process and understandings of the lives of the Other. For this reason, it is crucial to reflect on the positionality from which knowledge is created.

Before going to Mexico City, I had often been reminded of my white-middle-class background. Through my previous position in the NGO sector I had worked in various socio-cultural settings (Africa and Southern Balkans) where I was constantly confronted with power inequalities perpetuating fieldwork relations and encounters. However, when I came to Mexico City I did not immediately feel or notice the socio-cultural differences set between many of my interlocutors and myself.

Reflecting back, I realise there were aesthetics of marginality I expected to see. The tin roofs, the dirty gullies, the run-down shacks – all these circulating images of slums or ghettos have shaped a specific image of a 'poor Third World' neighbourhood which I was not immune to and I somewhat expected to see in my fieldwork too. Yet Tepito was not like that at all. It was busy and loud with run-down houses but there were no shacks, gullies or dirt roads. There was a sensorial difference between the *barrio* and the rest of the city but this did not fit the image I expected to see. The absence of these visible markers associated with poverty did not mean there was no poverty in Tepito (although there were socio-economic differences in the *barrio* too) but that my own expectations initially prevented me from critically reflecting on my own middle-class position in the field.

It was not until one of the young artists made a remark about me living in Roma Norte. It was a fairly innocent remark which referred to the middle/upper-class character of the neighbourhood. Yet this made me aware that my replies to this frequently posed question were often full of apologetic excuses. I repeatedly explained that my husband and I were renting a friend's house for a friendly price and I sometimes added how expensive I found rents in Mexico City to be. This was all true but my excuses were telling. I realised how uncomfortable I felt by working in a lower-class neighbourhood and living in a middle-class area. By explaining the reasons for renting a house in Roma Norte I was unintentionally

trying to justify my living situation with the naïve hope of mitigating the class differences which lay between us. As the months passed more of these uncomfortable situations arose, pointing to the socio-economic differences between us and highlighting my own privileged position.

Awareness of my own social (and cultural) position in the ethnographic encounter is vital for understanding my approach to studying Tepito (what I found important, awkward or interesting during the fieldwork process), the representations I produce through my writing (what I write about and what I leave out) and my power in mobilizing them. Working for a recognized European university reinforces my power in producing and circulating representations about Tepito - in comparison to many of my interlocutors - which points to the asymmetrical relation between the production of academic knowledge about a specific place and the place from which this knowledge is taken from. It requires us to think about how knowledge is produced and circulated, by whom and for what purpose.

The complexity of fieldwork relations and differences in cultural, social and economic background between the researcher and the interlocutor points to the global power matrix that is at play in the ethnographic encounter. To pay attention to these power asymmetries requires a critical self-reflexive analysis of our research roles as well as of our personal impressions and feelings during fieldwork. Reflexivity may therefore serve as a tool to reveal our own politics in the knowledge production; to disclose our agenda and our professional and personal position during the research process. This requires us to also face the awkward and uncomfortable moments, feelings and relations we find ourselves in, which refers to the fieldwork as well as the writing process.

Writing ethnography

Initially this thesis did not have a chapter about violence. Since this was not my central topic and I never witnessed any violent events up close, I originally decided not to write about violence explicitly. Moreover, popular representations of Tepito were commonly connected to violence, particularly to shoot-outs, rape and torture, turning the *barrio* into a violent media spectacle. I was afraid that by writing about violence I would be reproducing these spectacular images which Tepito residents tried so hard to fight off. As I wanted to write about Tepito differently I originally decided to leave a specific chapter on violence out of my dissertation.

The question of whether and how to write about violence does not have a clear-cut answer. As ethnographers, we are critical of the more popular and spectacular representations of violence (in newspapers, movies) but our own writing can also risk falling into the reproduction of these representations. Rivke Jaffe warns us that “ethnographers, too, may be ‘rewarded’ for writing about violence” (Jaffe, forthcoming).

After I came back to Europe and began re-reading the interviews and the field diary, I realised that violent events and stories were in actual fact not that rare. Violence seldom dominated any of the interviews or conversations but it often popped-up in different places. After several months in the field when residents started to talk about violent events they had witnessed or experienced, I started to wonder whether avoiding the topic of violence completely would actually be reinforcing invisibility of the residents’ lives. Jaffe highlights this point, noting that as “no researcher wants to be accused of writing ‘violence porn’” they also do not want to be “seen as denying (or overlooking) a lived reality in which violence plays an important role” (Jaffe, forthcoming). Hence, was I not trying to downplay the presence of violence mainly out of fear of reinforcing Tepito’s stigma?

The question whether to write about violence or not was also connected to the dilemma of the representation I was constructing through my writing. Due to the stigma and spectacular media representations of Tepito, residents are sensitive and attentive to the narratives and images produced about them. Moreover, they are highly critical of the neighbourhood’s circulating representations over some of which they have no control. This inequality in production and circulation of *barrio* images made me question my own role in reproducing these unequal relations.

Ethnography itself is a form of representation and anthropologists have long been aware “of the politics of representation and of the power relations inherent in ethnographic accounts” (Reed Danahy 2001: 407). It is due to this power asymmetry in an ethnographer’s representation of the Other (Shuttleworth 2004: 47) that critics have called for the importance of critical reflexivity in the production of ethnography. This requires that researchers recognize the potential reproduction of power relations through ethnography and while this may not challenge the power imbalances, it may avoid normalizing them (Skeggs 2007: 434).

Nevertheless, the calls for reflexivity are more than about awareness of unequal power relations. Rather, they oblige us to be open to challenging some of our underlying positions and deeply rooted assumptions with which we begin our research process. To reassess our positions, previously thought as normal and self-evident, is what Walter Mignolo

calls “learning to unlearn”, a process which enables us to de-construct our thinking (Mignolo 2007) and understand better the socio-historical process and encounters that have shaped our knowledge and identities in the first place (Andreotti 2011: 229). While this still cannot equalize power relations it can nevertheless provide space to hear the voices and the perspectives of the people we talk to.

Learning from the ethnographic encounter also means to acknowledge that roles and relationships are continuously being reworked and negotiated, not only by researchers but also interlocutors. Therefore, the production of ethnography does not take place in a vacuum of the researcher but emerges through the encounter. In other words, while texts are influenced by various factors - our embodied self, our discipline and the audience we are writing for – they do not completely exclude the voices of our interlocutors. As Sherry Ortner recognizes “many things shape the text including, dare one say it, the point of view of those being written about” (Ortner 1995: 188).

In the dissertation I try to juxtapose multiple voices. By emphasizing the multivocality of Tepito I seek to avoid essentialisation and production of a totalising ethnography (Okely 1992: 21). The names behind the voices I weave together have been changed. Although giving pseudonyms is a rather standard convention in ethnographic writing, aimed to protect the privacy and confidentiality of our interlocutors, it is not entirely unproblematic. Although participants have a right to anonymity the question is whether the researcher should actually impose this ‘right’ (Browne 2003: 138). I am certain that some of my interlocutors would prefer to have their names in the thesis as this would give them and their ideas a voice and visibility. On the other hand, there were others who confined their stories to me and who prefer not to have their identities disclosed. Therefore, to give pseudonyms or not does not have a clear-cut answer and is thus certainly a choice. Although I initially juggled with the idea of using real names for some in the end I decided to use pseudonyms for everyone. I hope that even interlocutors who may not completely agree with this strategy will understand my reasons for doing so.

3. Locating the *barrio bravo*

Mexico City, the urban jungle¹⁰

Flying into Mexico City is itself a special experience. If you have the opportunity to sit next to the window and observe the landing, you are amazed by the endless landscape of buildings and concrete. The city nestles in the vast valley *Valle de Mexico* and driving out of the city, which can take up to two hours or even more on a busy day, gives a glimpse into the way the city has grown. It has bitten into the surrounding hills and spilled over to the valleys nearby. The city itself has an estimated population of almost nine million people (INEGI 2015) although the larger metropolitan area or Greater Mexico City (which consists of the Federal District and 60 municipalities from the State of Mexico and State of Hidalgo) increases the population to more than twenty million (OCDE 2015). This makes Mexico City the most populated area of the Western Hemisphere.

As every other city in the world, Mexico City has its own stigmatized neighbourhoods “situated at the very bottom of the hierarchical system of places that compose the metropolis” (Wacquant 2008: 1). These *barrio bravos*, the fierce neighbourhoods, are – similar to ghettos, slums or *favelas* - conceived as poor and deprived hotspots of violence and lawless zones, areas that are to be feared and avoided. While the continuous expansion of Mexico City sees *barrios bravos* continuously popping up,¹¹ Tepito is by far the most well-known partially owing its reputation to its pre-Hispanic origins, its informal street market and its closeness to the politically and economically important historic city centre.

The stigma hanging over Tepito strengthens its image of a bounded neighbourhood, a homogeneous entity, ‘naturally’ separated from the rest of the city. This is often (re)produced by mass media, films, books and academic research, which contributes to the urban imaginary of Tepito as the ‘always’ marginal and violent Other (Mendoza Castillo 2006). But Tepito is not a confined atomized unity of the city with a fixed and coherent informal and violent identity. Instead of looking at Tepito as a given and bounded place with its intrinsic characteristics, this chapter looks at the ways Tepito is produced as a place through

¹⁰ Part of this chapter was used for the article: *Barrio Bravo Transformed: Tourism, Cultural Politics and Image Making in Mexico City*, Vodopivec and Dürr, forthcoming in the *Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Anthropology*.

¹¹ Which areas “deserve” the label *barrio bravo* is not just the question of governmental statistics on violence and marginality but is also negotiated among the residents of Mexico City. See for example: *Barrios bravos de la Ciudad de México: la vida violenta más allá de Tepito*, *Distintas Latitudes*, 6th December 2011: <http://www.distintaslatitudes.net/barrios-bravos-de-la-ciudad-de-mexico-la-vida-violenta-mas-alla-de-tepito> (accessed 16th March 2016).

circulating representations and historical relations to the city. To capture the dynamic and complex processes of Tepito's emplacement in Mexico City, I divide the chapter into two parts, outlining various layers and scales of these processes. In the first part I focus on the social and historical construction of Tepito as the marginal, informal and violent Other. I aim to show how Tepito's marginality was historically produced in relation to other places, particularly to the city centre, where I focus on the most recent redevelopment of Mexico City at the beginning of the millennium. That is to say, I focus on Tepito's social and historical emplacement in Mexico City, highlighting the multiple historical, social and economic influences that have shaped Tepito as a place. In the second part I centre on the discursive construction of Tepito by looking at the popular and globally circulating representations produced by a range of actors. At the end I focus on touristic walks in Tepito, known under the name of Cultural Safari in Tepito¹² which aim to challenge the popular images of the neighbourhood. Although I divide this chapter into two parts I do not conceive these processes of constructing Tepito as separate. I think of them as mutually intertwined and in a constant process of production and negotiation.

Tepito in Mexico City

Beautified centre, informal Tepito

Imagine a short twenty-minute walk from the historical centre of Mexico City to the *barrio* Tepito. This imaginary walk would start in the wide main square, *Zócalo*, with the most important historical monuments and touristic attractions. It would be full of tourists taking photos but due to its size, it would still feel relatively empty and airy. The walk would continue down the wide streets, with renovated pavements and houses. The stores selling books, clothes and furniture, cafes and restaurants to tempt passers-by. After a ten-minute walk, vending stalls would appear, set up against more run-down houses or on the pavements. Streets would become narrower and the crowds of vendors, shoppers and passers-by would fill the streets. The street dynamics would become livelier and louder, with vendors calling out to attract customers and turning up the music in order to increase their sale of CDs. After some time of wending your way through the stalls and the crowds, one would arrive in Tepito.

¹² Safari Cultural en Tepito.



Figure 1: Mexico City's central square, the *Zócalo*.
Photo: Boris Prodanović.



Figure 2: Tepito's street market.

Tepito is located a good twenty-minute walk from the city centre, yet the aesthetic and sensorial differences between the two are vast. Tepito is full of street vendors and shoppers, jostling amongst the stalls, accompanied by the cacophony of sounds and smells. Although the city centre is also lively, it is mostly full of tourists sightseeing around *Zócalo* or shopping at the international stores on the wide pedestrian street leading to Alameda central, the central park. It was the revitalization of the city centre at the beginning of the millennium that has so vividly marked the landscape between Tepito and the centre.

However, Tepito's distance and difference to the centre is not only the result of the centre's revitalization but dates back further to the time of the arrival of the Spanish. After the Spanish conquest Tepito, referred to as the indigenous neighbourhood,¹³ remained outside the 'official city' (Rosales Ayala 1992: 37) and was thus excluded from Spanish organization, administration and urbanization (Aréchiga Córdoba 2003: 72). This 'spatial frontier' which did not prevent the vibrant movements of people and goods, gradually disintegrated during the last century of colonial rule and Tepito was incorporated into the internal organization of the city (Aréchiga Córdoba 2003: 72).

¹³ Barrio de los indios.



Figure 3: One of the still existing *vecindades* in Tepito.

After Mexico's independence in 1821 and increased migration to Mexico City toward the end of the 19th century, the city municipality built cheap housing in Tepito in the form of *vecindades*¹⁴ (Aréchiga Córdoba 2003: 83). People from all over Mexico settled in the neighbourhood, bringing with them crafts such as shoe-making, carpentry, tailoring and saddling. This turned Tepito into a centre of shoe production and other crafts (Enríquez Fuentes 2010: 148) with *vecindades* serving as important spaces for their production.

During the 1940s street vending began to develop as the economic activity of the neighbourhood. Residents started to work as street traders, selling used second hand goods. The authorities tried to regulate street vending in the city and the city governor Ernesto P. Uruchurtu ordered the construction of four indoor markets in Tepito in 1957. However, in the 1970s the number of vendors increased and due to the lack of capacity many vendors moved back to the streets (Maerk 2010: 535).

In 1958 the National Housing Institute described the areas around *Zócalo* as the horseshoe of hovels or slums.¹⁵ The reference to 'slums' was based mostly on the high concentration of crowded and run-down *vecindades* (Hernández Iruz 2012: 4; Connolly 2003: 14) and its relation to sanitation. In 1972 the National Institute for Community Development

¹⁴ *Vecindades* are houses with large patios and various housing units. Not all *vecindades* were built for cheap housing. Those built in the city centre at the end of the 19th century were built as individual houses and were inhabited by upper classes. At the beginning of 20th century upper classes abandoned these *vecindades* and moved to new residential areas. Today, some of these central *vecindades* have been converted into museums, restaurants and hotels (Connolly 2003: 15).

¹⁵ Herradura de tugurios.

and Popular Housing¹⁶ initiated a re-development project that aimed to transform *vecindades* into social housing. This was the launch of Plan Tepito which was met with severe resistance. Under the slogan “change of houses but not of the neighbourhood”¹⁷ various committees and groups in the neighbourhood were organized to fight off its implementation (Hernández Iruz 2012; Reyes Domínguez and Rosas Manetcón 1993).

Plan Tepito was never fully implemented and it was after the devastating earthquake in 1985 that many destroyed *vecindades* were reconstructed and transformed – under recommendation of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) – into larger housing units for nuclear family housing (Hernández 2012). The destruction of *vecindades* had a significant impact on Tepito. Because of the destroyed houses many residents moved to other areas of the city while for those who stayed the new housing, which was much smaller, brought a profound change to their daily life. This was especially the case for those who practiced their crafts like shoe-making at home. The smaller apartments, which lacked large inner patios, typical of *vecindades*, did not have enough space for such activities. Fernanda, a social worker from Tepito, stressed that this not only changed their way of living but also their way of being.

In the middle of the 1980s Mexico started to gradually open its economy, moving away from the previous import substitution industrialization.¹⁸ In 1987, President Carlos Salinas de Gortari signed the Economic Solidarity Pact which was the first formal step in this economic and political transformation (Parnreiter 2002: 10). The local manufacturing sector, previously central to the city’s economy, collapsed after signing the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in 1994 (Müller and Becker 2013: 79).

The economic recovery of the centre at the beginning of the millennium was mostly the result of real-estate development and development of service industry infrastructure, residential housing, shopping malls and touristification of the urban centre (Olivera and Delgadillo 2014: 116). Mexico City became a centre for global financial flows and by 2004 more than seventy percent of foreign companies operating in Mexico had their headquarters there (Parnreiter 2002: 100). The historic city centre became the focus of the new

¹⁶ Instituto Nacional del desarrollo de la Comunidad y la Vivienda Popular. Institution that succeeded the National Housing Institute.

¹⁷ Cambiar de casa pero no de barrio.

¹⁸ Import substitution industrialization refers to trade and economic policy in Mexico which started around 1950s and lasted somewhere until 1980s. The main idea of this policy was to protect national industries and to replace foreign imports with domestic production (Alba Villalever 2009).

redevelopment strategy. While in the 1990s, together with the surrounding neighbourhoods Tepito and Guerrero, the centre formed a no-go zone full of crime, delinquency and informal street trade, its redevelopment and beautification after the new millennium turned it into the city's most important attribute. In 1987 part of the city centre known as the Historic Centre¹⁹ was declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

The renovation of Alameda Central (central park), the main square, *Zócalo*, and pedestrianisation of Regina and Madero streets, were just some of the main projects of the redevelopment program known as the Rescue Program launched in 2001.²⁰ This programme was implemented through public-private partnership, led by the richest man in Mexico, Carlos Slim, and it had a profound impact on the image, infrastructure and experience of the city centre. In the corridor from Alameda Central to *Zócalo* houses were turned into hotels and restaurants; and famous clothing and food brands opened. Most of the restaurants and shops in the area became franchises of (inter)national chains, downsizing the number of independent businesses. While some residents criticized this renovation as the 'corporatization' of the city centre, it turned the area into the main tourist attraction and a commercial hub which the city authorities began to promote as a cosmopolitan place full of culture and heritage.

While urban interventions in the centre attracted (inter)national private investments, which further continued to revitalise the area, this has not been the case for Tepito, despite some governmental efforts. In 2007 Marcelo Ebrard, the mayor at the time, announced his effort to substitute illegal activities with legal ones by inviting one hundred companies to invest in the neighbourhood. *Sanbrons*, one of the many companies owned by Carlos Slim, announced its interest in opening franchises in Tepito.²¹ But street vendors and vending organizations resisted these attempts and under the slogan "Tepito is not for sale"²² stopped these projects from taking place.

Informal street vending represented a problem for the revival of the city centre (Cross 1998). To produce a modern, world class Mexico City, one which would attract tourism and foreign capital investment, authorities needed to promote a city image 'clean' of street

¹⁹ Centro Histórico.

²⁰ Programa de Rescate.

²¹ Invita Ebrard a empresarios a instalarse en barrio Tepito, *La Jornada*, 13th March 2007: <http://www.jornada.unam.mx/2007/03/13/index.php?section=capital&article=036n1cap> (accessed 4th April 2016).

²² Tepito no se vende. *La Jornada*, 23rd May 2007: <http://www.jornada.unam.mx/2007/03/23/index.php?section=capital&article=042n1cap> (accessed 20th April 2016).

vending (Oriard Colín 2015: 20). It was therefore under governmental discourses of ‘rehabilitation’, ‘rescue’ and ‘revitalization’, that in 2007 more than 15.000 street vendors were removed from the central streets (Oriard Colín 2015: 16).

While informal street trade has been removed from the centre this is not the case in Tepito. This has deepened the aesthetic and sensorial differences between Tepito and the centre, marking a boundary between renovated and decaying houses, between ‘formal’ and ‘informal’, between cosmopolitan and the marginal. The municipally led revitalization of the city centre has reified the marginalisation of Tepito. Its proximity and the street market setting became ever more problematic for the municipality’s promotion of a beautiful, historic and cosmopolitan city.

Safe city, violent barrio

The redevelopment of the centre was not based solely on the strategy of beautification but also securitisation. Securitisation as a process of policing and regulating urban spaces has become important in the policies of urban restructuring (Lippert and Walby 2015: 3-4). Discourses and policies of safety and security are deeply entangled with the production of tourist spaces (Seligman 2014a; Hodge and Little 2014) which makes policing instruments vital in turning a city into a safe tourist destination.

In order to become attractive, Mexico City needed to be regarded as safe for tourist consumption. During the 1990s Mexico City was stuck with a very bad reputation, transforming itself to be promoted as one of the safest cities in the country in the beginning of the 21st century. Today, it is regarded as an “island in the middle of a climate of violence pervading the rest of the country due to its more managed violence and a relative absence of cartel visibility in the capital” (Davis and Ruiz de Teresa 2013: 117). The Mexico City ‘safety bubble’ does not necessarily mean that people feel and experience the city as safe. This safety is commonly juxtaposed to violence beyond the city which, in the words of a Mexican friend of mine, does not automatically mean that Mexico City is safe. Rather, it points to the sentiment that other areas of Mexico are much more violent and dangerous. After the collapse of the city’s economy in the 1980s, central public spaces were appropriated by street vendors, street children, petty criminals and prostitutes (Müller and Becker 2013: 82). Residents from other areas of the city considered the centre and its surrounding areas to be dangerous and thus avoided them if possible. During this period networks of drug-

traffickers and arm-traders also settled in the centre and its proximity (Davis 2008; Müller and Becker 2013).

The securitization of the centre was based on displacing the ‘undesirables’ – thieves, homeless, prostitutes – from the area and confining violence and criminality to the surrounding neighbourhoods. This was achieved by importing the ‘zero-tolerance’ strategy from New York. In 2001, New York’s former mayor Rudolph W. Giuliani²³ visited Mexico City with the aim of developing a securitization proposal, based on security policies implemented in New York. His recommendations were accepted by the local authorities in 2003 and although they also included a proposal for police reform, they manifested mainly in increasing repressive measures, especially towards poorer populations (Müller and Becker 2013: 83).

With the securitization of the centre and the promotion of the ‘zero-tolerance’ security approach, Tepito became the central sticking point of this strategy (Davis 2008: 19). In 2003, Giuliani’s spectacular ride through Tepito²⁴ with 300 security guards and a helicopter aimed to ‘gate off’ key areas of the centre and create safe spaces for investment and upscale redevelopment (Davis 2008: 19). Moreover, its objective was also to illustrate the control of violence and crime in Tepito which was crucial to creating and promoting a safe city centre.

Through these strategies of securitization authorities enhanced the division between a safe, touristically attractive and investment friendly city centre, and a risky, criminal and violent Tepito. The creation of safe spaces was thus intertwined with unsafe ones. The deepening of the historical socio-spatial class inequalities and the growing urban fragmentation (Olivera and Delgadillo 2014: 111), which was the result of Mexico’s economic and political transformation, has facilitated this division. The decreased engagement across class enhanced the stigma of a violent and dangerous neighbourhood, turning crime and danger into a “device, an idiom, for thinking about the Other (Zukin 2004: 113). With renovation and the increasing economic and political importance of the city centre, Tepito has symbolically come to represent the core of the city’s problems of violence and crime.

Due to the *barrio*’s closeness to the city centre it was important to show that authorities have the neighbourhood under control. This turned Tepito into a symbolic terrain

²³ Giuliani was supposedly invited by the Mexico City’s mayor at the time Lopez Obrador and with the financial support of Carlos Slim (Davis 2008: 7).

²⁴ See for example: The zero tolerance Giuliani roadshow arrives in Mexico, *The Guardian*, 16th January 2003: <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2003/jan/16/mexico> (accessed 27th February 2016).

where authorities exercised security measures and promoted their anti-poverty programs (Aréchiga Córdoba: 280). If the renovation of the city centre focused on attracting investment and tourism and on turning Mexico City into a competitive global city, the governmental projects of urban renovation in Tepito focused on “reinforcing the social fabric”²⁵ or “rehabilitating public spaces to prevent violence.”²⁶ In the words of Ernesto, a middle-aged social activist and a photographer, this meant that Tepito was turned into a political pretext, a space where authorities promoted their anti-poverty and violence prevention programs. Therefore, although Tepito’s proximity to the centre was unfortunate for marketing a beautiful, safe and cosmopolitan city, its stigma of informality and violence also became useful for the authorities to exert their control and governability in the city.

In the next section I focus on the circulating representations of Tepito both around the city and the globe. It is important to analyse these representations in order to understand that marginal places are not just shaped by their material deprivation but are also symbolically and discursively constructed as different from the dominant society (Dürr 2012a: 709). The hierarchical ranking of places in the city occurs largely through activities of representation (Harvey 1993: 22 in Podalsky 2004: 11) and to understand how Tepito is constructed as a marginal place it is thus also important to look at its discursive production. In the next section I therefore analyse circulating representations and look at the different strategies that aim to challenge the dominant images, introducing touristic walks to Tepito as part of these strategies.

Tepito around the world: Images that travel

Reading, watching and gossiping

“Where did you study? Surely in Tepito, pinche esquincla, fucking brat.”

PRD senator Luz María Beristain Navarrete with her friend at the airport insulting a Viva Aerobus airline employee (Goldman 2014: 166).²⁷

²⁵ Fortalecimiento del tejido social. See the website of the city government: <http://www.comunicacion.cdmx.gob.mx/noticias/nota/continua-gobierno-de-cdmx-con-fortalecimiento-del-tejido-social-en-tepito-boletin> (accessed 20th April 2017).

²⁶ El rescate de los espacios públicos. For example see the presentation from the Secretariat of Interior: http://pobrezaurbana.sedesol.gob.mx/documentos/25082015/2-Seminario_Pobreza_Urbano_ERC_25.08.15_v2.pdf (accessed 20th April 2016).

²⁷ See also video on Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/LuzMariaBeristainNavarreteLadyVivaerobus/posts/494449020620887> (accessed 20th April 2016).

Tepito's reputation is strongly embedded in the urban imaginary of Mexico City. Referencing to the neighbourhood can be part of everyday conversations, gossip or even insults. Its name also circulates in jokes. A Mexican friend of mine told me a story once, in which school children in Tepito, aside from writing their names on the exams, are asked to add the name of the gang they belong too. It was the only time I heard the joke so I do not really know how popular it was. Yet it pointed to the frame in which the name Tepito most commonly circulates: gangs, violence and crime.

During my time in Mexico City I vigorously followed the presence of Tepito in the national newspapers *Milenio*, *Universal* and *La Jornada*. Aside from a few exceptions they mostly followed a common path: Tepito was in articles on the drug-trade, shoot-outs and extortion. These representations are not all that new. Already in 1899, the newspaper *El Mundo* described the neighbourhood as a “stock exchange of our nation where goods traded consist of all waste from the city and small thefts”²⁸ (Sánchez Salas 2006: 44). Mass media has thus played a historical role in shaping the urban imaginary of Tepito.

Although the neighbourhood partially owes its reputation to pre-Hispanic roots and proximity to the centre its name did not widely travel beyond Mexico before the publication of Oscar Lewis' book *The Children of Sanchez* (1961). This was an anthropological research about the *barrio's* poverty and was based on Lewis' stay with the Sanchez family. In the book, he describes Tepito as a “poor area with a few small factories and warehouses, public baths, run-down third-class movie theatres, over-crowded schools, saloons, *pulquerias*²⁹...This area ranks high in the incidence of homicide, drunkenness and delinquency” (Lewis 2011 [1961]: 18). It is through this research that Lewis coined his famous concept “culture of poverty”, which indicated that the poor do not only live in deprived conditions but also acquire a poverty-perpetuating value system (Lewis 2011 [1961]).

In Mexico, the book was not well received. The ruling party PRI criticized the image of poverty that it represented and despised the fact that it was written by a foreigner. The book was banned for many years but due to pressure from literary figures it was re-published in Mexico in 1965. Despite criticism the book popularized Tepito and carried its image of a marginalized and violent neighbourhood beyond Mexico. Its initial presence in academic

²⁸ La bolsa de nuestro pueblo, donde las mercancías que allí se cotizan se componen de todos los desechos de la ciudad y de todos los hurtos del género chico.

²⁹ Pulqueria is a traditional Mexican tavern selling pulque, alcoholic beverage made out of fermented maguey. The origin of pulque dates back to Aztec origin (Wright 2009: 1).

circles obtained wider publicity when the book was turned into a movie with the same title *The Children of Sanchez* (1978), directed by Hall Bartlett and starring the famous American actor Anthony Quinn.

As the city's marginal and violent neighbourhood, Tepito also appeared in other Mexican movies (for example *Que viva Tepito* (1981) and *El Cartel De Tepito* (2001)) which further reproduced the image of Tepito as a place of poverty, violence and the drug trade. These movies were mostly confined to national audiences and rarely obtained world-wide publicity. Unlike globally popularized slums of Mumbai (Dharavi slum) or Brazilian *favelas*, portrayed through the blockbuster movies *Slumdog Millionaire* (2008) or *The City of God* (2002), Tepito as *the* stigmatic area of Mexico City never reached such fame. Despite this limited world-wide popularity, Tepito's image of violence and poverty deeply grew roots in Mexico City. It was partially through these productions that the neighbourhood transgressed its spatial boundaries and became a symbolic space of the city's poverty, marginality, violence and crime.

Ernesto Aréchiga Córdoba states that these images were present in literary and journalistic texts already at the beginning of the 20th century. Focusing on novels like *Mexico al Dia* (1911) by Italian-Mexican historian Adolfo Dollero or *La Malhora* (1923) by Mexican novelist Mariano Azuela, Córdoba writes that these novels did not differ much from the official view of Tepito at the time and confirmed literary descriptions with what authorities expressed in numbers: the urban decay and violence. Tepito was presented as distanced and different from the rest of the city and society, appearing as the antithesis to modernization (Aréchiga Córdoba 2003: 251). These texts built an image of a modern and cosmopolitan city of palaces on the one hand and Tepito as its counter-part on the other (Aréchiga Córdoba 2003: 251). Dramatic descriptions of Tepito continued in the writings of Alfonso Lapena and Fernando Reyna, who in 1944 ventured into this "neighbourhood of the lost souls" (Aréchiga Córdoba 2003: 248) and wrote: "Life in Tepito is too dramatic to take as a joke. There are many who suffer. There are too many that cry [...] Tepito is hell! Do you hear this well? There is no need to die and go to hell after life. Hell, it is here!"³⁰ (Lapena and Reyes 1944 in Aréchiga Córdoba 2003: 249). Such writings have increasingly turned Tepito into a site of backwardness and urban deterioration, granting it almost a spectacular image.

³⁰ La vida de Tepito es demasiado dramática como para tomarla a broma. Son muchos los que sufren. Son demasiados los que lloran. [...] ¡Tepito es el Infierno! ¿Lo oyen bien? ¡No hace falta morirse y pasar a la otra vida para ir a él! ¡El infierno está aquí!

With the growing importance of Tepito's street market in the 20th century, informal street vending has become increasingly present in the representations of the neighbourhood. This has been particularly visible in academic research, where the growing number of researchers became interested in the functioning of informal trade. This has resulted in a significant number of Master and PhD theses produced at Mexico's universities, paving the way for accounts that emphasize Tepito's problems as well as its heroism and skills of survival. Tepito's market has also gained growing attention from international researchers, as the recently published international and interdisciplinary research on notorious street markets around the world titled *Informal Markets Worlds* (2015).

International journalists and writers have also showed interest in the neighbourhood, emphasizing its problematic and heroic side, commonly pointing to its 'dark' difference. In a book *True Tales from Another Mexico: The Lynch Mob, the Popsicle Kings, Chalino and the Bronx* (2001) American journalist Sam Quinones portrays Tepito as a neighbourhood full of problems but also full of resourcefulness and pride. "Tepito is a fifty-seven-block Mexican Hell's Kitchen: insulated, suspicious of outsiders, with its own speech, humour and such a wide range of social problems – alcoholism, sexual promiscuity, child abuse, mental illness - that health authorities call it 'multi-pathological'. Yet people here remain fiercely proud, and their neighbourhood owes its continued existence to their intense resistance to any change the outside world might propose for them" (Quinones 2001: 234). As the title of the book suggests, Tepito is the Other side of the city which residents and tourists rarely experience and see; a place where life is tough but where people find ways to overcome the challenges they face.

These narratives, which frame Tepito, either through its problems or survival skills, identify the neighbourhood as a place that distinguishes its inhabitants in one way or another from the rest of the city. They construct the neighbourhood as the different and distant Other, basing this difference on socio-economic status and the violent 'nature' of its inhabitants.

Virtual Tepito

It is difficult to say to what extent the above mentioned journalistic and academic studies or literary texts circulate globally. But for the internationals I met in Tepito – tourists, journalists or academics – their first information and impressions were via internet. This applies to me as well. My first contact with Tepito was a virtual one. This refers not only to

online news but also to travel blogs, forums and social media. Many people who visit Tepito today put their impressions online, either in the form of texts or pictures. Separately, these blogs and forums are scattered and small-scale, often reaching a very limited audience.³¹ Yet placed together in a sort of an online patchwork, they produce a powerful virtual imaginary that circulates around the world.

Although they are quite diverse, jointly they nevertheless produce a specific *barrio* landscape. These show Tepito as a place of danger and violence, informality and illegality but also of toughness and heroism. In one of the online blogs somebody nicknamed Lonewolf described Tepito in the following way: “A 1000 crimes are committed on its streets on a daily basis. Best be advised to stay on the safer side of the adjoining Colonias bordering its territory. Because here in the Barrio Bravo of Tepito – ASSAULT IS GUARANTEED”³² (emphasis in the original). In this description ‘outsiders’ should not even try to test the danger of the neighbourhood. Crime in the *barrio* is not merely a possibility but a daily certainty.

The online images also construct a certain form of a *barrio* body. Warnings against Tepito as a dangerous and violent place are reinforced by the tough looking, masculine bodies, whose photos circulate online. These images often show men covered in tattoos, facing the camera in a way that the viewer feels they are witnessing an arrest. Aside from these gang look-like men, online bodies are also dead bodies, implying that violent death is not that un-common in Tepito.

Despite the danger, online accounts do invite people to visit Tepito, especially its street market. On Tripadvisor, visitors depict Tepito as the “great street market shopping”, where everything is “five times cheaper than in the shops.”³³ Although a huge variety of goods can be found at the street market, many of these descriptions focus on the smuggled, stolen or pirated goods. In one online column written by journalist Ibsen Martinez and published on the *Library of Economics and Liberty* website, these are sometimes even mixed with the sales of weapons and drugs: “Tourists can also haggle over the price of illegally imported or stolen genuine Levi's and Rolexes. The price of weapons such as AK-47 assault rifles and Uzi submachine guns are listed in illustrated catalogues” (Martinez: 2005).

³¹ For a general overview, the low number of visitors can be observed in various ways: the date of the last publication, the number of comments in the comment section, (sometimes) published statistics on the website, or the position of the website among the search results in the search engine.

³² See Streetgangs (Lonewolf, June 19th, 2005): <http://www.streetgangs.com/billboard/viewtopic.php?t=97&start=64> (accessed 20th April 2016).

³³ See Tripadvisor (Oko O, 9th August 2015): https://www.tripadvisor.com/Attraction_Review-g150800-d4929780-Reviews-Tepito-Mexico_City_Central_Mexico_and_Gulf_Coast.html (accessed 5th July 2016).

Although I personally never saw such a catalogue, I do not want to deny they exist. Nevertheless, I do believe they are far less common or visible than such accounts make it seem. Whether these online accounts emphasize sales of pirated goods or weapons, they all refer to the street market in one way or another, turning it into Tepito's most important or known attribute.

To a large extent, the online photos represent Tepito's landscape through the lens of the market. The common view from above portrays hundreds of stalls which are covered in yellow-blue canvas. This look from a distance shows the density of the stalls making it seem as Tepito is nothing more than the market itself. Through this perspective Tepito becomes a flow of vendors, shoppers and goods rather than a place where people live.

Visitors, who are slightly more familiar with Mexican history and sport, also connect its violent and poor environment to the tough and heroic inhabitants. Most commonly this refers to the world renowned Mexican boxers who were born and raised in Tepito. In an online forum Quora a commentator makes this point: "It seems that the way of living, surrounded by crime and poverty, produce these tough guys, who try to canalize their anger through their fists, funny phenomenon. A few of them are Kid Azteca, Raul Raton Macias and Octavio Famoso Gomez."³⁴ However, on social media sites like YouTube, the toughness of Tepito's inhabitants is portrayed less through the boxing ring than through the protests and clashes between the neighbourhood's inhabitants and the police. In these videos, Tepito's violence gets mixed with its resistance (I develop the idea of resistance identity further in the thesis), and despite the more heroic image that they portray, Tepito is still perceived as a place of chaos and danger.

Yet Tepito's inhabitants are not just passive receivers of these representations. They are actively engaged in their production, constructing them according to their own needs, ideas, wishes and agendas.

Representing Tepito from Tepito

It was a busy Saturday afternoon and I was walking around Tepito with my colleague Cordula, a photographer, who came for a month to work on a photo-project. She carried a large and expensive camera over her shoulder, which she only took out when she really

³⁴ See Quora (Montes de Oca, 22nd April 2016): <https://www.quora.com/What-is-Tepito-really-like> (accessed 5th July 2016).

wanted to take a picture. We were walking along the main avenue next to the market, with Cordula taking a picture of a stall here and a stall there. It was not long before a young man came up to us and asked Cordula to put the camera down. A bit surprised, she asked him what for. She explained she was trying to get some photos of the market for her photo project. But he replied that too many people came there to take pictures, which they later used to talk negatively about Tepito. While he did not imply we would also do so, he still asked us to erase the picture. He waited for Cordula to do so, then thanked us and said goodbye.

It is possible that this was not so much due to the fear of bad – mouthing Tepito than due to the smuggled and pirated merchandise sold at the market which – although tolerated by the authorities – vendors still did not want circulated in photos. Either way, the story points to the importance and desire of having control over the production and circulation of the neighbourhood's images. People who live or work in Tepito want to have a say in what is being written, talked or shown about their place.

For many years Tepito residents have been very active in the production of their own - overlapping and competing - images of the *barrio*. Either in the form of a novel, poem, local newspaper, video or art (murals in particular), the residents attempt to tie their own images of Tepito into a globally circulating system of representations.

Literary and artist groups have been particularly active. Armando Ramirez, Tepito's most celebrated writer and well known throughout Mexico, took-up a number of un-known stories and personalities from the neighbourhood, including them in novels such as *Chin Chin el Teporocho* (1971), *Mil Días del Barrio de Tepito* (1972) and *Tepito* (1983), just to name a few. Most of Ramirez's main characters, usually from Tepito, are criminals, prostitutes and drunkards. To a certain extent this reinforces the stereotype of Tepito as a place of marginalized and violent dwellers, although Ramirez adds complexity to his imaginary inhabitants (Solórzano Thompson 2008: 7). The importance of Ramirez's writing lies precisely in its focus on the lives and experiences of the lower-classes (Solórzano Thompson 2008) and Tepito residents, writers in particular, consider such writings to give marginalized residents in the city important visibility.

The members of the cultural collective *Los Olvidados* which joins artists from Tepito and other areas of the city, confirm the importance of *barrio* literature for expanding the way Tepito is understood. In the introduction to the collection of stories written by various writers from the neighbourhood, published under the title *The Dark*

*Side of Tepito*³⁵, they wrote: “We believe that Art does not belong to the Academy, to the heirs of the Power [...] who believe that common people have no capacity or ability to create the unknown which is called Art [...]. The texts of this book present the richness of the possibilities to create, recreate and imagine reality from nothing” (Vasquez 2000: 7)³⁶. This statement points to the importance of framing Tepito through the lens of creativity and flourishing cultural production which does not only belong to the middle and upper-classes. The book is relevant not only for the content of the stories about *barrio* life but also for the fact that it is written exclusively by writers from Tepito. These stories not only speak differently about Tepito but also in a different language. As the editor of the book Eduardo Vasquez Uribe, a member of the collective, a philosopher and a self-taught writer, explained in our conversation, this is not the language of writers like Mario Vargas Llosa; rather, it is the language used daily by the people in the neighbourhood. Eduardo emphasized that this is relevant in order to show how working-classes also produce valuable literature on their own and in their own way. This vast literary creation challenges the negative images of the neighbourhood which portray it solely as a place of poverty and criminality and helps to promote Tepito as a place of literature and art.

These cultural productions stretch the limits of the way Tepito is known, seen and understood within the city. In the 1970s and 1980s the popular art movement *Tepito Arte Acá* also played an important role in this process. Its members made a variety of short films, critical essays and photographic exhibitions about Tepito. They took their work to city schools, universities and museums, while also placing importance in disseminating their work among the *barrio* residents. The fundamental artistic instrument of the movement’s expression became mural painting, with the painter Daniel Manrique as the lead figure (Rosales Ayala 1987: 37). With *Tepito Arte Acá*, the mural painting served to demystify the concept of art as the practice of the privileged. Manrique understood art not only through its aesthetics and art forms but mainly through daily work and everyday life. The cultural production of the movement not only tried to portray a different image of Tepito to city residents but was also very important for building the identity of the *barrio* (Rosales Ayala 1987).

³⁵ El lado oscuro de Tepito.

³⁶ Pensamos firmemente que el Arte no pertenece a la Academia, a los herederos del Poder [...] que piensan que la gente común no tiene la capacidad o habilidad para crear incógnita llamada Arte [...]. Los textos que componen este libro presentan la riqueza de posibilidades de crear, recrear e imaginar la realidad de partir de lo nada.

Today, the initiatives that try to portray a ‘different’ image of Tepito take up many forms and work in physical and virtual spaces. The cultural collectives such as *Colectivo Art Tepito*, *Red de Espacios Culturales* and *Los Olvidados*, just to cite a few, continue with the cultural legacy of *Tepito Arte Acá* and participate in art exhibitions or literary readings around the city. Recently a young enthusiastic photographer and journalist started his own on-line newspaper *La Tranza* where he focuses on writing about Tepito’s history and about the lives of the *barrio* residents. The growing importance and accessibility of the internet has increased on-line image-management, with a variety of Facebook groups aiming to transform the image of the neighbourhood, portraying its culture and its ethic of hard-work. One such example is a Facebook group *Tepito, the neighbourhood of hard working people*.³⁷ There are many other online groups, each pointing to a different yet positive image of the *barrio*.

All these initiatives – those produced by the residents and those produced by others – gain a different visibility in a global system of representations and achieve diverse publicity. The capacity to produce and circulate representations is not equally distributed (Mahtani 2009 in Jaffe 2014: 161) as those with greater financial and social capital have more opportunity to construct and mobilize them. The most widely circulating representations of Tepito are still produced from ‘outside’ the neighbourhood and the mass media in particular plays a powerful role in this process. Although the Internet has democratised media production, much of the media we consume is produced by a limited number of publishing houses and film studios (Jaffe 2014: 161). The texts and images produced by the national media, for example, have much wider visibility than the books written by Tepito writers. This makes residents very attentive to any form of production about their neighbourhood, even if it is created by residents, but even more so when it comes from the ‘outside.’

While representations are produced from specific places our experiences of places are also mediated through specific representations which instil places with meanings, understandings and emotions (Jaffe 2014: 161). Books, movies, murals, online forums and blogs, all shape the way Tepito is constructed, understood and interacted with. These representations impact the way tourists approach and experience Tepito and also the way tours capitalise, contest and negotiate them. Among various efforts to de-stigmatise the neighbourhood, walking tours to Tepito have become an important strategy for challenging

³⁷ Tepito, barrio de gente trabajadora. See Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/Tepito-barrio-de-gente-trabajadora-1615872405339389/?fref=ts> (accessed 7th July 2016).

the *barrio*'s negative reputation and in striving to construct a more positive imaginary for the (inter)national audience.

Touring Tepito

Victor is almost 70 years old but still walks fast when guiding tourists around Tepito. He knows the area very well, after all, Tepito is the place where he was born and raised. Twenty years ago, Victor moved to another part of the city after getting a job at one of the city's governmental institutions. But he always kept one foot in the neighbourhood. Years ago, he established a Centre for Tepiteño Studies³⁸ with his friend Gabriela, a street vendor and Tepito resident. The centre aims to challenge the *barrio*'s stigma through various research and cultural projects. For Gabriela, showing the cultural side of Tepito which counters the globally circulating stigma is of crucial importance: "Because I have always said that Tepito is a place that we need to clean, repair and look after [...] So I want the *barrio* is left with a good image [...] This is what happens, it is part of our work, to try to get rid of the labels."³⁹ Bringing tourists to Tepito is one of the strategies to get rid of these labels.

Victor remembers the idea for tours actually came from the tourists themselves, after an exhibition about Tepito in the National Museum of Mexico in 1997: "The exhibition about Tepito in the most important museum in the city, people wanted to know more. So, they proposed that we do the tours. This was in 1997 when the stigma of delinquency was very strong. Nobody came to Tepito. No visitors. Tepito was present exclusively as the place of delinquency, piracy, drug-trafficking and smuggling. But when people visited the *barrio* they realised it is an average everyday life."⁴⁰ These visits gave them a push to start touring on a more regular basis, although up to today tours take place sporadically and are not heavily promoted. They do not feature on any official tourist map and tourists mainly find them by word of mouth or by searching the internet.

³⁸ Centro de estudios Tepiteños.

³⁹ Porque yo siempre he dicho que, que Tepito es la parte, que debemos de, de limpiar, de arreglar, de ver por él [...] Entonces, yo lo que quiero es que el barrio se quede con una buena imagen [...] Eso es lo que, lo que sucede que... además, pues es parte del trabajo [...] Este, tratar de quitar un poco las etiquetas.

⁴⁰ Lo que detono estos recorridos a Tepito, este turismo Safaris Culturales, fue una exposición en el Museo Nacional de México en 1997. Exposición al museo más importante, en el centro, entonces la gente quisiera saber más cosas de Tepito. Y nos propusieron que hicimos visitas. En 1997 ya el estigma de la delincuencia era muy fuerte. Nadie viniera a Tepito. No visitantes. Tepito es un noto rojo...de la delincuencia, de piratería, de contrabando, de narcomenudeo. Pero cuando tú ves, visitas el barrio se das cuenta que es una cotidianidad muy normal.

Although they also attract international visitors, the majority are attended by city residents. By living in the city, tourists ‘grow up’ with the reputation of Tepito which means that they bring deeply rooted images of the neighbourhood with them. All the circulating representations impact the way tourists imagine, enter and experience Tepito. Moreover, many have been to its street market prior to the tours yet due to the countless stories of violence and assaults they preferred to stick to the main avenue, with only few daring to venture further into the *barrio*.

Having already one foot in the neighbourhood yet not going further ‘inside’ is one of the major reasons why residents decide to join the tours. This makes the street market one of the major touristic magnets. Tourists desire to explore the market in a different way – not as consumers *at* the market, buying products and goods, but consumers *of* the market, turning the market into a product itself.

They are also attracted by the *barrio*’s mystery and fame and want to discover Tepito in a different light. Rosa, a young student who came for a tour in the course of her studies was intrigued precisely for these reasons: “You imagine things that they tell you. Here in Mexico they say many things about Tepito and it is very ingrained in Mexican culture. Our Mexican cinema makes a lot of reference to Tepito [...] I have been to Tepito to shop but never in the sense to observe it beyond the shopping, [to observe it] also culturally.”⁴¹ The interest in exploring the cultural fabric of the (in)famous *barrio* is thus important for attracting tourists or as Rosa stressed Tepito “has its proper culture [...]. I believe there is much to explore.”⁴²

However, this alone does not account for the presence of tourists in Tepito. The ‘dark’ image itself is attractive and tourists are also drawn to the marginality, the violent stories and the “risky adventure”⁴³ this may offer. Tourists commenting on online forums such as Tripadvisor and Lonely Planet at the same time encourage and warn fellow tourists about

⁴¹ Porque te imaginas las cosas que, que cuentan, ¿no? O sea, aquí en México, se dicen muchísimas cosas de Tepito y, y está muy arraigado a la cultura Mexicana. Nuestro cine mexicano, hace muchísimas referencias a Tepito [...] Había, había ido a Tepito, pero con fines, pues a lo mejor de comprar alguna cosa. Pero nunca en este sentido de observar más allá de comprar. No es nada más con fines este, de comprar si no que también culturalmente.

⁴² Tiene su propia cultura [...]. Sí, creo que tiene mucho de dónde explorarse.

⁴³ See Lonely Planet forum (lake_wobegon, 2nd November 2011): <https://www.lonelyplanet.com/thorntree/forums/americas-mexico/mexico/mexico-city-tianguis-tepito-etc> (accessed 5th July 2016).

going to Tepito. They emphasize the need to be wary of potential dangers and advise tourists to “visit, but only if you are prepared.”⁴⁴

It is the entanglement of experiencing ‘authentic’, working-class culture, and the potential danger that attract tourists to Tepito. This provides them with a special experience that they are not able to find in the restored and touristic city centre. As one reviewer commented on Tripadvisor, Tepito “was different from anything else I saw in Mexico City” and anyone looking for the “real thing” should go for it.⁴⁵ Yet for reasons of safety and better understanding of the *barrio* it is important, as the reviewer added, to “have a local with you.”

⁴⁶ This is where the role of the guided tours comes in.

As Gabriela works most of the days selling at the market, Victor remains the centre’s one and only tour guide. Victor’s involvement in the centre and particularly his research on Tepito’s history has brought him the status of the neighbourhood’s chronicler.⁴⁷ Almost every delegation in Mexico City has one or more chroniclers and they cooperate together through the Association of Chroniclers.⁴⁸ These are symbolic and unpaid titles that bring with them a certain status in the making of the city’s history. Referring to himself as Tepito’s *hojaletero social*, a social tinsmith, he is an important voice of the neighbourhood. As such he participates at (inter)national conferences or co-writes academic and journalistic articles. His narrative is thus very important for image-building of Tepito not only within Mexico City but also throughout the country.

Tepito tours are flexible and have no fixed schedule yet they always take place on Saturday mornings. One reason is that for Victor, this is a day-off from work. Moreover, this is the day when the street market is particularly lively which is quite important for the narrative of the tour, as we will see in the next chapters.

Tours cost MXN 100⁴⁹ per person. They follow a general route yet as they are flexible and informal, they also adjust to the wishes of the group. The regular route takes about three hours, starting at the street market where tourists have the opportunity to briefly talk to vendors. The guide also takes tourists to religious and cultural monuments, the sport stadium

⁴⁴ See Tripadvisor (K_Mennem, 3rd September 2014): https://www.tripadvisor.com/Attraction_Review-g150800-d4929780-Reviews-Tepito-Mexico_City_Central_Mexico_and_Gulf_Coast.html#REVIEWS (accessed 5th July 2016).

⁴⁵ See Tripadvisor (MissyM_UK, 1st June 2016) https://www.tripadvisor.com/Attraction_Review-g150800-d4929780-Reviews-Tepito-Mexico_City_Central_Mexico_and_Gulf_Coast.html#REVIEWS (accessed 5th July 2016).

⁴⁶ See Tripadvisor (MissyM_UK, 1st June 2016) https://www.tripadvisor.com/Attraction_Review-g150800-d4929780-Reviews-Tepito-Mexico_City_Central_Mexico_and_Gulf_Coast.html#REVIEWS (accessed 5th July 2016).

⁴⁷ Cronista.

⁴⁸ Asociación de Cronistas de la Ciudad de México.

⁴⁹ This is approximately 5 EUR.

and to still existing *vecindades*, mostly to *Casa Blanca*, the house where the US anthropologist Oscar Lewis conducted his research. This selection of sites aims to present, as Victor emphasized in our interview, anti-stereotypes of Tepito.

For Victor this also means to challenge tourists' fears and provoke their emotions. This provocation is already implicit in the name of the tour – Cultural Safari in Tepito⁵⁰ – which caused uproar in the neighbourhood. Several residents find the name offensive, as they feel it indicates they are the animals, tourists come to see. But Victor, supported by others, argues that the name is more provocative than offensive. “Why Safari”, he says. “Who are the animals? Those who attend Safari or those who are in Tepito? Who is inside the cage? [...] When we say ‘cultural safari’ people don’t see the ‘cultural’, they only see ‘safari’. They become uncomfortable. So, there are words that make people uncomfortable. Just as they become uncomfortable about many things they become uncomfortable about Tepito. So why use this word? Because it makes people uncomfortable.”⁵¹ The name of the tour is thus part of a word game which aims to shake tourists' preconceptions and emotions even before they step into the neighbourhood.

This chapter has looked at how Tepito is socially, historically and discursively constructed as a place in relation to other areas in Mexico City, particularly to the neighbouring city centre. I have analysed the production and (unequal) circulation of representations of Tepito and the way these circulating images produce specific urban imaginary of Tepito as a place of poverty, violence and criminality. As cities are remade not only materially but also discursively, I looked at the way urban redevelopment of Mexico City has impacted the relation between Tepito and the centre.

In the next chapter I focus on the way walking tours capitalize on and negotiate these derogatory representations, particularly around informal spaces, seeking to symbolically reposition Tepito's place in the city.

⁵⁰ Safari Cultural en Tepito.

⁵¹ Eso es lo que provoca. ¿Porque safari? Quienes son los animales? ¿Los que van a Safari o los que están allí en Tepito? ¿Finalmente quien está el dentro de la jaula? [...] Pero cuando decimos safari cultural la gente no ve cultural, ve safari. Se incomoda. Entonces hay palabras que se incomodan. Como incomoda Tepito. Como incomoda muchas cosas. ¿Entonces porque esa palabra? Es incómoda.

4. Resistance made in Tepito

El Chapo comes to Town⁵²

During the summer of 2015 the most famous Mexican cartel leader El Chapo Guzman escaped from prison for the second time in fifteen years. For most of the following weeks this was *the* news. The media analysed the possibilities and strategies of his escape, filming the tunnels through which he allegedly fled, searching for his collaborators and network of briberies. While the government issued a warrant for his arrest and continued to search for him all over the country, El Chapo's face and name began to appear on clothes and accessories. Towards the fall I started noticing El Chapo's face on T-shirts at Tepito's market and after a while hats with his name on them appeared. I never actually saw anybody buying or wearing them but considering that the merchandise was expanding through the market almost on a daily basis, I figured that it must have been selling well.

I initially found this 'Chapo-mania' rather strange. In a country plagued by brutal cartel violence related to drugs, weapons and human trafficking, it felt strange to idolise such a high-level criminal. After a while, however, I realised it was not about praising his criminal activities but about his power in making his own rules. El Chapo's anti-hero figure in which he was able to play the 'state' according to his own needs fitted into the growing discontent with the corruption of the Mexican government. Although he partially owed his wealth, power and immunity to the corrupt state officials who helped him, as is well-described by a journalist Anabel Hernández in her book *Narcoland* (2014), he still embodied an anti-hero, a figure commonly understood as an archetypal manifestation of agency and self-determination (Berry 2014: 2).

In October 2015 when the presidential race in the US was already at full speed, the republican presidential candidate Donald Trump insulted Mexicans by calling them criminals and rapists (Moreno 2015). In reaction to this, El Chapo – or so the rumour went – put a \$100 million bounty on the billionaire's head. To what extent this was true or not is not really that important. The rumour spread quickly and people always spoke about it with a bit of a smile. It was not just about defying the racist statements of Donald Trump, but also about countering the imperial power of their northern neighbour.

⁵² Part of this chapter was used for the article: *Barrio Bravo Transformed: Tourism, Cultural Politics and Image Making in Mexico City*, Vodopivec and Dürr, forthcoming in the *Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Anthropology*.

Perceptions of the historically long and complicated relationship between the USA and Mexico were of course very diverse. However, many people felt that Mexico was the USA's backyard and a strategic country for their hegemonic aspirations. Paola, an elderly lady from Tepito who worked in the USA as an illegal immigrant for more than 10 years, said bluntly: "[the] USA buys Mexico but without the people."⁵³ Stepping up against Donald Trump in particular and the USA in general was something that many Mexicans wished for but also something Mexican governments never dared to do. In this context, El Chapo's figure also represented dissatisfaction with Mexican – US relations which many people felt was not benefiting everyone equally.

I found this story interesting not because El Chapo was connected to Tepito in any specific way, nor that it reflected a particular attitude of its residents towards his figure. El Chapo T-shirts were not only sold at Tepito's market and his figure did not feature highly in the conversations I had with the residents. Yet I think that it reflected two important issues taking place in Tepito, particularly among people who felt socially, economically and politically excluded: mistrust and success. There was a prevailing mistrust towards governmental institutions in that they were unable and unwilling to provide work, social protection, safety and justice for its citizens. Based on the 2015 national surveys, the study *Anatomy of Corruption in Mexico* reported a historically low level of trust in state institutions with the police, federal government, senators and deputies ranking the highest (Amapro Casa 2016: 32). This mistrust was intertwined with the high levels of corruption through the entire state system which placed Mexico in the 103rd place out of 175 countries in the Corruption Perception Index in 2014 (Transparencia Mexicana 2014). The high levels of inequality, the growing gap between rich and poor, the high-level of unemployment and the brutal violence that boomed under president Felipe Calderón's (2006-2012) war against drugs, have all contributed to the sentiment of the continuous crisis and 'state's abandonment.

Secondly, to not only survive in the midst of such a situation but to make a decent life for yourself and your family, a life where you can even accumulate wealth and power, was something admirable. In this way El Chapo embodied the figure of a successful self-made man who went from having almost nothing to having almost everything (Ayres and MacDonald 2012: 122; Abad Izquierdo 2015). Again, Chapo-mania was not so much about praising his criminal life. It was about his image of self-generated power and wealth. It was

⁵³ Estados Unidos compra a México. Pero sin gente.

about making it in a tough environment that many people in Mexico found themselves in; a situation where one has to rely on oneself to make it even though this meant bending the rules.

In Tepito both of these two issues were continuously present. There was a prevailing sentiment among Tepito residents that they were left to their own destiny and, thus, needed to take care of themselves, individually and collectively. This entailed various strategies, including those that bent the rules and entered spaces of informality and illegality. Residents negotiated the socio-spatial exclusion by emphasizing their skills of survival, resistance and autonomy of the neighbourhood.

In this chapter I focus on the way Tepito residents perceive and experience the socio-economic inequalities in their daily lives, and I explore how this contributes to the feeling of insecurity, abandonment and criminalisation. Residents negotiate these sentiments by building a narrative of a self-reliant and resistant neighbourhood. They counter the stigma and the feeling of abandonment by emphasizing their toughness, uniqueness and creativity in making it on their own.

Tours of Tepito – tour guide and the residents that take part in the tour – perform, promote and sell this resistant identity by making visible the positive role informal spaces play in people's lives. Whereas in public and policy discourse informality is stigmatized and criminalized, they (re)signify representations of informality from delinquency to resistance, turning the neighbourhood's stigma into a *barrio* brand. Rather than using informality as an analytical concept I centre on the ways informality is perceived, used and re-used in the process of developing tourism in Tepito. Although resistance identity, which is constructed and performed through the tour ties resistance identity mostly to informal spaces and the politically contested street market, which not everybody in Tepito agrees with, it still enables branding Tepito as the city's heroic and victorious neighbourhood. By touring these informal spaces, the tour guide underlines, as well as romanticizes the survival of the neighbourhood and *tepiteños*, their stubbornness, defiance and self-reliance. Commodification of informal spaces through the tour challenges dominant representations and understandings of informality and turns Tepito's stigma into a brand. This opens a window for the residents to use the tour strategically, to negotiate the sentiment of exclusion, to present themselves as an autonomous and resistant *barrio* to middle class tourists, strengthening the sense of collective identity.

Being left to your own destiny

In the middle of a large housing unit which Tepito residents refer to as *La Fortaleza*, the Fortress, there is a mural that reads: “Mexico is Tepito of the world and Tepito is the synthesis of Mexico.”⁵⁴ The mural is relatively new. It was painted in the summer of 2015 as part of the federal Secretariat of Interior’s initiative (SEGOB)⁵⁵ for the rehabilitation of public spaces and the prevention of violence. This was not the first time I had heard the phrase, I was often reminded of the symbolic power of Tepito by the people I talked to. Initially, I thought it was more of a catch phrase than something that people in the *barrio* related to. It was Pedro who explained the meaning of this phrase to me, emphasizing that it was not merely a slogan: “Tepito is a reflection of Mexico [...]. If you improve Tepito, you improve Mexico [...] because it is a flag. More than a neighbourhood, more than all the historical roots it has, Tepito is a flag.”⁵⁶ This flag refers to the resident’s view of Tepito as a container for the country’s problems: from unemployment, violence, the drug and arms trade, drug abuse to street children, corruption, extortion, etc. There is a prevailing sentiment among the residents that Tepito is a micro-space of Mexico and that the exclusion they experience daily reflects the lives of other marginalized people around the country.

This feeling of exclusion is partially related to the stigma which hangs over Tepito and portrays its residents as criminals and delinquents. But it is also the result of the severe inequality which has grown sharply after the restructuring of the country’s economic and political sectors during the 1980s, followed by the shifts in urban development of Mexico City. These structural processes impact the way people think and feel about their own socio-economic situation and the way they negotiate inequality and their place in the world. As Javier Auyero illustrates in his analysis of a *barrio* in Buenos Aires, the rising unemployment and welfare retrenchment are translated into concrete emotions and cognitions by the residents and result in a profound feeling of exclusion and abandonment (Auyero 1999: 47). This is the case for Tepito too.

In Mexico, the 1980s were marked by a move towards a liberalised trade regime, after a long period of protectionist import substitution industrialisation (see Chapter Three).

⁵⁴ México es el Tepito del mundo y Tepito es la síntesis de lo Mexicano.

⁵⁵ Secretaría de Gobernación de México.

⁵⁶ Tepito es el reflejo de México [...]. Si tú mejoras Tepito, mejoras México [...] porque es una bandera. Más que ser barrio, más que todo el arraigo que tiene histórico, actualmente Tepito es una bandera.

Following the debt crisis in 1983, Mexico's government signed the first agreement with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) which symbolised the beginning of the neoliberal structural adjustment. Mexico's then president Carlos Salinas de Gortari (1988-1994) rapidly "turned Mexico into a showcase of quick neoliberal reform" (Laurell 2015: 248), which resulted in signing the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) between Mexico, the USA, and Canada in 1994. This trade liberalisation did not benefit everyone equally. With a 30-40% decrease in salaries and 12% rise of unemployment, the process polarized society between a small group of extremely rich and a growing majority of poor (Laurell 2015: 247). Liberalization also reflected in the privatization of public services with the Mexican state's withdrawal from providing economic and social welfare, submitting it to market forces (Laurell 2015: 253).⁵⁷ This change was accompanied by rising corruption, violence and impunity, resulting in ever stronger proactive law-enforcement policies (Laurell 2015; see also Permanent People's Tribunal: Chapter Mexico 2014).

NAFTA represented an important historical moment. Although it was not the beginning of the neoliberal political and economic policy, it did contribute to its institutionalisation (Gazol Sánchez 2004: 16). The people I talked to during my research emphasized the impact NAFTA and economic liberalization had on their lives, which referred to the sentiment of economic exclusion as well the limited access to security and justice. This 'before and after' NAFTA narrative was not so much about the beautiful and non-problematic past; it mostly reflected the way people remembered the past while being confronted with an insecure present and expectations of an uncertain future.

In Tepito, people felt the consequences of the new economic policies and privatisation processes that intensified with NAFTA. Gustavo, my salsa dance teacher, moved to the USA after soaring inflation and recession in 1994⁵⁸ in hope of finding work. The recession severely affected him and his family: "It hurt us. It hurt us and we were left in debt. And we had to pay and I couldn't go on the way I did. I was desperate [...] I sold food. I went to work in the US, to mop, to sweep [...] to iron shirts. To sell sports shoes. I worked."⁵⁹

⁵⁷ This did not render the state irrelevant. Neoliberal ideology should not be thought within the dichotomy of market versus states as there is nothing 'natural' or unplanned about free markets (Polanyi 2001 [1944]: 146).

⁵⁸ This was the consequence of the devaluation of Mexican peso and it was also called the Mexican peso crisis.

⁵⁹ Nos dolió. Sí nos dolió y entonces quedamos endeudados. Y entonces, a pagar. Y entonces ya no pude seguir. Y entonces, me desesperé [...] vendí comida [...]. Me fui a trabajar a Estados Unidos, a trapear, a barrer [...] a planchar, camisas. A vender tenis deportivos. Me puse a trabajar.

After a couple of years, he returned to Mexico yet the economic situation in the country has not really improved: finding a job seemed almost impossible. Gustavo started work as a vendor on Tepito's street market, selling everything from clothes and appliances (sometimes smuggled) to CDs (pirated ones). Together with his wife Consuela, who was also a vendor, they tried all sorts of business to make a living and support their four children. Just before I left Mexico they started a new printing business (printing on T-shirts and mugs) in one of Tepito's shops. They were constantly in search of new job opportunities. With rising unemployment and ever lower salaries they had to find ways to provide for themselves.

The on-going search for employment gave people a profound feeling of economic insecurity. The profits from vending were not regular and with the influx of vendors the competition was fierce. Moreover, street vending did not provide for a pension, social security or sick leave. For those employed in other professions, as many residents were, the situation was also very precarious. A former police officer Antonio told me that despite many years of work he didn't receive a pension and at the age of seventy relied on his carpentry skills to make a living.

Some residents felt that this economic insecurity not only limited their access to basic necessities but also to cultural and spiritual realms. Rodrigo elaborated on this sentiment. He was a middle-aged writer and a member of an artistic collective *Los Olvidados* (The Forgotten) which joined artists, writers and actors from and beyond Tepito. The collective was formed decades ago, naming itself after the movie made by the Spanish filmmaker Luis Buñuel in 1950.⁶⁰ They took this name because they identified with the movie, feeling the way the youth in the movie did: forgotten. Rodrigo explained that being forgotten meant not having the means to put food on the table as well as lacking access to literature and other arts: "Because the poor have been excluded from material goods and from spiritual goods. This is important. They not only took our shoes, clothes, food, they also took everything that can form us that can fulfil us. That can deepen our spirits. That can make us return our own personal wealth."⁶¹ Rodrigo's statement should be understood somewhat symbolically. It was not necessarily about Tepito residents had literally nothing to eat.⁶² Rather, his emphasis was on the deep, emotional and spiritual consequences of the socio-economic insecurity. Due to

⁶⁰ The movie tells the story of children growing up in the marginal areas of Mexico City.

⁶¹ A los jodidos se nos excluyó de los bienes materiales, pero también de los espirituales. Esto es importantísimo. No nada más nos quitaran el calzado, el vestido, la comida, nos quitaron todo aquello que puede ampliarnos. Que puede profundizar nuestro espíritu. Que puede hacernos, que nos devuelva a nosotros mismos, nuestra riqueza.

⁶² Although as a child he was often, as he stressed, literally hungry.

the growing inequalities in the country and due to the lack of access to the labour market, pension and social security, residents felt that the governmental institutions were not doing their job properly. This resulted in the prevailing sentiment that they had been left on their own and thus needed to take care of themselves.

In the period after NAFTA entered into force, Tepito also witnessed an increase in drug dealing and the arms trade (Alba Villalever 2009: 53). With the opening of trade borders selling *fayuca* - smuggled goods from the USA which was the principal merchandise during the 1980s – ceased to be lucrative. *Fayuca* was mostly replaced by pirated goods (such as CDs and DVDs, clothing, shoes, perfumes, liquor, and jewellery, largely from China and Korea) yet there were vendors who found the drug and arms economy to be more profitable.

Gustavo emphasized that although he sold smuggled and pirated goods he never got involved in illegal economic activities like selling drugs. He considered the drug trade and drug consumption to be one of the largest problems in Tepito, which was confirmed by all the other residents I talked to. They were saddened by the extensiveness of the street-level drug trade, referred to as *narcomenudeo*,⁶³ and complained about the impact this had on their daily lives. Enrique, a resident in his fifties, described how every evening dozens of drug-selling points – *narcotienditas* – operate under his window and how this has been the source of regular violent events, fights and shoot-outs.

This not only cut into the neighbourhood's social fabric but also enhanced Tepito's stigma of violence and criminality. The spectacular and widespread media representation of the *barrio*'s criminal activities and violence upset residents and reinforced their sentiment of exclusion. Although they recognized the problems in their neighbourhood, they felt the circulating representation made them all appear as criminals and thus contributed to their criminalisation. Furthermore, the media portrayed the symptoms not the causes of the problems. Gustavo condemned the drug economy in Tepito but was also empathetic to it: "The minimum salary of a Mexican is trash, it is a joke, it is 70 Mexican pesos,⁶⁴ and this next to a salary that a deputy gains, or a senator or anyone in power [...] or the money that a drug vendor gains. So, this difference, this social difference, it makes the one selling corn, the

⁶³ It is important to note that the drug trade about which Gustavo talks about is small scale or street-level drug trade, referred to as *narcomenudeo*. Davis and Ruiz de Teresa asses that while the state undertook a national war against organized crime it was unaware of the increase in *narcomenudeo*: "By 2010 street-level drug retailing had positioned itself as one of the most profitable illegal businesses in Mexico. Figures confirm that in the last decade, problems of drug-related violence in Mexico have trickled down from the national to the urban scale in the form of *narcomenudeo*, in ways that have transformed the urban landscape" (Davis and Ruiz de Teresa 2013: 116).

⁶⁴ This is approximately 3,5 EUR per day.

one that sells chewing gum, go and sell drugs.”⁶⁵ With this statement Gustavo emphasized that the problems related to the drug-trade were not historically intrinsic to places like Tepito, as was often portrayed by the public and policy discourse. They were the result of structural inequality which increased unemployment and cut the minimum wage below the poverty limit.

The lack of trust in governmental institutions to provide for employment, security and justice did not necessarily mean that residents never resorted to governmental structures. Nor that they did not cooperate with them on programs which aimed to improve the neighbourhood. Residents often pointed to the importance of redevelopment projects that were implemented by the city and federal authorities. One of these projects was the renovation of an old dump and parking lot turning it into a sports stadium and recreation park Kid Azteca, carried out by SEGOB. The stadium was widely used by children and youth for play and exercise, and it was also a meeting point for families who used it for afternoon gatherings.

Residents also emphasized other improvements that took place over the years, for instance reduction of violence, and they considered governmental programs for violence prevention to be significant in this process. Furthermore, they not only talked about these projects but actively participated in them. Many of my interlocutors pointed to their own role in the project *Viral 13* which was conducted in 2013 as part of the National Program for Social Prevention of Violence and Delinquency (PNPSVD).⁶⁶

While residents point to the positive impact governmental projects have on Tepito, at the same time they blame state institutions for not being able or willing to reduce structural inequalities and corruption which impacts their lives. Their attitude towards the authorities is quite ambivalent: it is based on collaboration and partnership as well as struggle and conflict. This is also due to the on-going insecurity residents face daily and which has multiple facets.

In his book *The Spectacular City* Daniel Goldstein (2004) frames the multi-layered sense of insecurity, as lived and experienced in the marginal areas of the Bolivian city Cochabamba, as the economic, physical and ontological insecurity. While the first one refers to the rise of precarious employment and informal economy, the physical insecurity relates to the rising crime that accompanies structural adjustment policies and the unequal distribution

⁶⁵ El sueldo mínimo de un mexicano es una basura, es una burla, cerca de sesenta pesos, al sueldo que gana un diputado, o un senador, o cualquier hombre del poder [...] o el sueldo que gana un vendedor de droga. Entonces esta diferencia, esta desigualdad social, pues lleva a que el que vendía elotes, al que vendía chicles, se ponga a vender droga.

⁶⁶ Programa Nacional para la Prevención Social de la Violencia y a Delincuencia.

of official justice. The latter, the ontological insecurity, entails a pervasive sense of despair and uncertainty (Goldstein 2004). Tepito residents, many of whom lack employment, social security and safety, also feel and experience these layers of insecurity.

The entanglement of insecurities and on-going criminalisation shapes residents' feeling of exclusion and abandonment. Although this creates tensions in the neighbourhood as people resort to different strategies in order to provide for socio-economic security and safety, a common narrative of exclusion also works as social glue, constructing a collective identity of resistance.

Identity of resistance: We are survivors

In Tepito I often heard the phrase “Tepito exists because it resists.”⁶⁷ It was frequently referred to in conversations by most of the *tepiteños* I met. At first, I thought it was merely a catch phrase and a way to enhance Tepito's image to an outsider like me. But after a while I realised that it was also related to the way residents perceive their life in Tepito, how they construct meaning around the neighbourhood and around the socio-political situation in which they live.

Barrio residents connect this resistant identity to different forms of struggle. First, resistance is depicted as organized defence against ‘external interventions’. This, for example, refers to the protests against the use of force by militarised police towards vendors of pirated goods and drug traffickers, which was quite common in the 1990s and came to be known in the media as *tepitazos* (Aréchiga Córdoba 2003: 288-290; Davis 2014: 160). These struggles contribute to the feelings of solidarity and unity among residents.

The resistant identity is also entangled with the daily struggles for employment, justice, safety and education, which fosters a sense of autonomy and self-reliance. Enrique, a middle-aged watch-repairer told me in our conversation that “there are people who fight. Who fight to work, to study [...]. We are a *barrio* that fights [...]. We feel we are from a neighbourhood that achieves, from a *barrio triunfador*.”⁶⁸ This emphasis on a victorious neighbourhood whose residents never give up creates a sense of pride and unity, while being subjected to exclusion, stigmatization and criminalization.

⁶⁷ Tepito existe porque resiste.

⁶⁸ Que es gente que lucha. Que busca, lucha por trabajar, por estudiar [...]. Pero, somos un barrio luchón [...]. Que nos sentimos que somos de un barrio, triunfador.

Constantly pointing to resistant identity does not mean that residents are actually continuously involved in acts of resistance or that they understand their neighbourhood only through the resistance lens. We should understand the expression of toughness and resistance as a frame for identity building rather than an on-going and conscious daily act. The identity of a heroic and victorious *barrio bravo* is a strategy of self-Othering⁶⁹ which is important for residents' empowerment against exclusion and criminalisation. Through the process of self-Othering residents transform their difference from the rest of the city into something valuable, accentuating their unique identity and positive difference. Therefore, by perceiving themselves as the Other, residents do not internalize the stigma; rather, the process of self-Othering provides them with agency.

Pedro, a young man in his 30s who has been involved in Tepito's cultural activities for many years, explained that ascribing negative characteristics to Tepito residents increased his pride of being a *tepiteño*: "It happens frequently [people say] you are from Tepito so let's see if you can fight. And you say no, this is not me. I never enjoyed fighting [...] So this has generated identity. Because you are molested from all sides, from all sides you are told, 'you *tepiteños*, *tepiteños*' [...] and you say, yes, I live here but I am not as you think. This pushes you to say yes, 'I am proud to be from Tepito, because everything you are saying is not true' [...]. It gives you identity. I return to this word, this condemned word, because I believe it is magical for many changes."⁷⁰ According to Pedro, building a strong *tepiteño* identity plays a significant role in confronting the stereotypes not just for him personally but also for Tepito collectively. The strong collective identity is a way to challenge the stigma and bring the community together.

Gabriela described Tepito as a place which "taught her the most 'bitchy' career which is life."⁷¹ By living in Tepito she learned how to make it in life with the help of the *barrio*, not just in the sense of economic survival, but also in social, cultural and spiritual realms. As

⁶⁹ The concept of self-Othering is taken from Stuart Hall's discussion on colonial regime and dominant systems of representation where he notes that the West made "us see and experience ourselves as 'Other'" (Hall 2006 [1995]: 436), pointing to the internalization of Othering.

⁷⁰ También nos llega a caer de repente 'ere de Tepito, pues vamos a ver si son fregones para los golpes'. Y tú dices, 'no, o sea, yo no soy'. Nunca me ha gustado pelearme [...]. Y bueno, esto también genera identidad. Porque en todos lados te molestan, en todos lados te dicen, 'ay, los tepiteños, los tepiteños' [...] Y tú dices, 'sí, güey, yo vivo ahí y aún así, no soy como tú dices'. Pero ya te genera un arraigo de decir, 'sí, y orgullosamente soy de Tepito, porque todo lo que tú hablas no es cierto' [...]. Te da identidad. Vuelvo a esa palabrita, esa condenada palabra, creo que es mágica para hacer muchos cambios.

⁷¹ "El barrio me ha formado en la carrera más cabrona que es la vida." Taken from a leaflet produced by the project *Las siete cabronas e invisible de Tepito*, implemented by a Spanish artist Mireia Sallarès. For more information about the project see: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hPaaeYR8nds> (accessed 15th June 2017).

she liked to emphasize, it was through Tepito that she found friends, made a family and learned about the importance of informal solidarity networks. This made her strongly connected to the neighbourhood: “I am not from Tepito, Tepito is mine. It formed me, it gave me everything.”⁷² Such statements pointed to the identity making process which highlighted for the residents, that it was the people of Tepito and not the city or federal authorities that helped them ‘to make it’. The notions of self-reliance and autonomy are thus implicit in the heroic and resistant *tepiteño* identity.

At first glance the ideas of flexibility and autonomy seem to be in contradiction with that of resistance. The discourse of flexibility and self-reliance fits neatly into the neoliberal ideology which requires citizens to become responsible and self-sufficient and to generate self-help economic activities to make ends meet (Goldstein 2005: 389). However, flexibility, adaptability and self-reliance can also be viewed as defiance against insecurities and permanent crisis. This transforms the narrative of victimhood into politics of visibility and self-empowerment (Varley 2013: 11), granting recognition to the “forms of popular agency that often remain invisible and neglected” (Roy 2011: 224). While recognising the need to be flexible, creative and self-organised perpetuates neoliberal ideology of self-responsibility, it also contributes to the feeling of autonomy and collective resistant identity.

Informal spaces and networks are vital to these processes. This refers to informal economic spaces like the street market which provides a form of economic security as well as to informal religious spaces like *Santa muerte* which people turn to for spiritual protection and safety. Iranian sociologist Asef Bayat refers to this notion of resistance, connected to flexibility, self-reliance and adjustment, as the quiet encroachment of the ordinary (Bayat 2010). He understands the quiet encroachment of the ordinary not as a politics of protest but as a pragmatic politics of practice. These practices are not about large actions carried out by small groups of people; rather, they are “about *common* practices of *everyday life* carried out by *millions* of people” (Bayat 2010: 20; emphasis in the original). Through these practices people seek and negotiate autonomy to satisfy their needs, turning informal spaces into spaces of resistance and everyday politics. Yet in Mexico City, these informal spaces, like Tepito and its residents, are stuck with a negative reputation and stigma, even more so with the redevelopment of the centre which removed the vendors from the streets.

⁷² Yo no soy de Tepito. Tepito es mío. Todo lo que soy, él me lo ha dado. Ibid.

The role of informal spaces

Tepito's street market is open every day except Tuesdays. This is the day when vendors go to buy merchandise to re-sell later in the week. On Tuesdays Tepito feels almost empty as there are no vendors or shoppers bustling about. Any other day the place is packed, particularly at the weekends, which sometimes makes it difficult to walk without being shoved and pushed around. Getting out of the metro station can be difficult due to vendors and shoppers standing close to the entrance. The yellow-blue canvas covers the stalls which are positioned very tightly next to each other and which makes walking between them a special corporeal experience.



Figure 4: Vendor selling baby clothes. Photo: Cordula de Bloeme.

While during the 1970s Tepito's streets were relatively free of vending stalls, this changed significantly at the beginning of the 1990s (Alba Villalever 2009: 56). As Carlos Eduardo Alba Vilallever states, the number of street vendors in Tepito skyrocketed between 1990 and 1994 due to the economic crisis (Alba Villalever 2009: 50). People from all over Mexico came to the *barrio* looking for work, seeking vending spots on the increasingly saturated market. Today, Tepito's market is composed of more than 40.000 stalls, three 'formal' indoor markets and more than 700 official stores, extending the market over 60.000 m² of public space (Alba Villalever 2009: 27).

The high influx of vendors coming to Tepito to sell has shaped the perception among the residents that their neighbourhood is not merely a container for Mexico's problems but also its solution or a quick fix. Rodrigo's friend Alejandro, whom I met at one of the meetings of the collective *Los Olvidados*, described Tepito in the following way: "It is a socio-economic laboratory. It is a cultural laboratory, no? For this it exists [...]. If you search for it in official maps of the city, Tepito doesn't exist. But it exists in reality; it exists as a relief valve to the pressure of poverty [...]. Tepito is a solution, a solution to this permanent

crisis we live in country.”⁷³ By this solution Alejandro referred to the role of street vending and piracy in mitigating inequality, distribution of income and access to consumer goods.

First, informal street vending gives many people from and beyond the neighbourhood an opportunity to survive. Many residents proudly emphasize that in Tepito, nobody dies of hunger as there is always an opportunity for something to do. Second, by selling cheap(er) pirated or smuggled goods it also gives lower-middle or working-class consumers, the largest segment of the market’s clientele, an opportunity to buy goods that they would otherwise not be able to afford. Piracy is a social service, Rodrigo stubbornly argued, giving access not only to basic necessities but also to books, music and movies.

Tepito’s ‘solution’ is not necessarily a long-term or a strategic one. On the contrary, the word ‘laboratory’ Alejandro used highlights that it is a mix of unplanned and short-term tactics. But despite this short-sighted vision, it is not just about survival. Vendors I talked to took pride in their work, emphasizing not only how vending enables them to survive, but also pointing to friendship and solidarity networks they wove together with other vendors or the tradition street vending has in their families. Moreover, they pointed to the satisfaction vending gives them: placing the merchandise on the stall every morning and removing it in the evening; or meeting and talking to shoppers during the day. For Gabriela, street vending was a matter of survival but also “one’s life.”⁷⁴ It enabled her to put food on the table but also to make a life worth living under the conditions of constant and on-going uncertainty. Street vending enables people to make it on their own, a term which refers not only to economic dimension but also to the physical, social, spiritual, affective, and intellectual one (Narotzky and Besnier 2014: 4). This brings to light the role of social relations in making a life ‘worth living’ which goes beyond the narrow understanding of economy, involving not just paid labour but also investment in social relations and relations of trust and care (Narotzky and Besnier 2014: 4).

While for many street vendors vending represents more than just a necessity, as it is also an activity they are proud of, the governmental attitude towards the informal economy is quite ambivalent. While they tolerate it, at the same time they also criminalise and stigmatize it. In September 2014, in a protest against the criminalisation of street vending in the city centre, vendors pointed out the derogatory discourses to which they were continuously

⁷³ Es un laboratorio socioeconómico. Es un laboratorio cultural, ¿sí? Por eso es que existe [...]. Si tú buscas en los mapas, oficiales, no existe Tepito. Pero existe en la realidad, existe, como una válvula de alivio, a la presión de la, de la pobreza [...]. Porque Tepito es una solución, es una solución en este, en esta crisis permanente en la que vivimos como país.

⁷⁴ La propia vida de uno.

subjected to, shouting a slogan: “We are traders, not narco-traders.”⁷⁵ Their use of drug-traders in the slogan highlighted how strongly they felt and experienced criminalisation by the state institutions which sometimes completely blurred the line between informal and illegal economy. Aside from criminalisation, they are also stigmatised by the city residents about their supposed contamination of the city streets, tarnishing the beautiful and cosmopolitan image of the city. In her research of street vendors in Mexico City, Lila Rubí Oriard Colín describes the negative sentiments of the city residents against street vending, who express their difficulties when using sidewalks and point to the tensions they face when walking along the streets, describing street vendors as a “plague of society” (Monnet 1993 in Oriard Colín 2015: 20).

Despite these negative images the government and state officials tolerate and support street vending. For Alejandro this ambivalent attitude means that the government talks about it “as something bad but they don’t fight it because its existence is convenient. It is a necessary evil.”⁷⁶ While the governmental officials like to point to the problems of street vending they forget to mention their own role in its functioning. Alba Villalever and Cross have analysed the connections between street vending and political figures in Mexico City (Alba Villalever 2009; Cross 1998). Alba Villalever argues that Tepito’s market is a complex economic and political space, making access to vending stalls highly politicized. Leaders of vending organizations are linked to political parties and vendors are often asked to vote for a party in exchange for permission to sell on the street. Street vending is thus also beneficial for governmental institutions, which suggests that these activities are not outside the state’s control but are an integral part of it (Alba Villalever 2009; Cross 1998).

Although the official state’s discourse supposes a clear distinction between formal and informal economy, they are in fact strongly connected and dependent on each other. Pedro was very clear about this dependency, emphasizing that piracy which goes hand in hand with street vending, is not the invention of the ‘poor’, but the result of economic liberalization and the lack of employment: “When this crisis is terminated, when the country can sustain itself, to be stable, I swear that there will be no piracy [...] piracy is born from the top.”⁷⁷ Pedro’s

⁷⁵ Somos comerciantes, no narcotraficantes.

⁷⁶ Lo anuncian como algo malo, pero no lo combaten, porque les conviene que exista. Es un mal necesario, entre comillas, ¿no?

⁷⁷ “En cuanto se acabe una crisis, que un país se pueda sustentar y estar estable, te lo juro que no va a haber piratería [...] la piratería, pues nace desde allá arriba”. Pedro also told me that he would much rather buy an original CD than a pirate one but he simply could not afford it. The difference in price was extensive. In the street market he was able to get an MP3

statement supports what researchers on informality have been arguing for years – that informal economy is not in opposition to the formal sector and to the regulation by the state, but that the relationship between the two is messy (Lombard 2014: 10) and dependant (Seligman 2014: 134). Ananya Roy underlines that informality should be understood within the structure of power (Roy 2009: 84) and that the informal is in fact “produced by the state itself. It represents a deliberate suspension of formal norms, and it is the state that has the...power to determine when to enact this suspension, to determine what is informal and what is not, and to determine what forms of informality will thrive and what will not” (Roy 2005: 149). This means that informality is not only the practice of the poor but also of the elite, and that the main question is not what informality is, but who has the power to define it and control it. Furthermore, the value of informal depends on who is doing it, meaning that while elite informalities get valorised, subaltern informalities get criminalized (Roy 2011: 233).

It is precisely due to this supposedly clear but otherwise messy relationship that enables *tepiteños* to use the notion of informal and formal economy strategically, sometimes emphasizing its difference, at times pointing to its messiness. Although informal and formal are born from the same system, people use it tactically for their own advantage. As Pedro’s statement indicates, it is due to this dependency and the power relations perpetuating its distinction that people felt they have a legitimate right to use informal economic opportunities to make it in life. Furthermore, this shifts the meaning of informal street vending from a purely survival strategy, enforced by the lack of jobs, to the productive, flexible and creative way of making it on your own. The informal spaces and networks are a relevant element of Tepito’s social fabric, one that enables people to move forward, but also to take care of each other. The *Barrio* protects you or the *barrio* takes care of you, was a common expression that emphasized the importance and value of these informal networks.

Despite the essential value these spaces and networks carry for people in Tepito, they continue to be stigmatized in policy and public discourse. By taking tourists around informal spaces the guide and the residents try to make this value visible. Aside from the street market, the guide also includes other, non-official, informal spaces in the tour. Of particular relevance is the altar of *Santa muerte* which is located behind Tepito’s market and which represents the first public altar of this saint in Mexico City.

with more than 150-200 songs for 10 or 5 MXN (0,5 – 0,25 EUR); while an original CD with 25-30 songs costs around 250-300 MXN (12-14 EUR).

Devotion of *Santa muerte* has been growing ever since the 1990s and her rising popularity and visibility have been connected to the Mexican economic and social crisis (Lomnitz 2005; Flores Martos 2014; Roush 2012; Huffschnid 2012). By relating the devotion to the “abandonment of progress for all Mexicans, protagonised by the national state” (Roush 2012: 8),⁷⁸ *Santa muerte* has become an important protector for her devotees, particularly in their search for safety and protection.

Pilar Castells Ballarin argues that petitions, usually oriented towards the state, have become part of her prayers and that she has appropriated the functions of the government, such as security, employment, education and health (Pilar 2008: 19). *Santa muerte* goes public out of necessity as it provides space for people to articulate their wishes and needs.⁷⁹ Growing in a bottom-up manner and not following the pre-inscribed dogmas and gospels, she has not been recognized by the Catholic Church or by state institutions. On the contrary, her devotion is criminalised and stigmatized by the public and in policy discourse, connecting her to drug-traders and describing her as the *narco-cult*. Yet despite these negative representations many people resort to *Santa muerte* in the search for safety and justice, claiming that she protects where no other saint or institution can.⁸⁰ Similarly as informal economy, *Santa muerte* can be understood as informal space through which people search for safety and justice on their own and in their own way.

By connecting informal economic and religious spaces, tours aim to give informality legitimacy and value, strengthening Tepito’s identity of resistance. The way tours re-signify the meaning and value of informal spaces and how this contributes to forming and selling Tepito’s heroic and resistant identity is the focus of the next section.

Touring informal Tepito

It was 10am on a Saturday morning and the metro that took me to Tepito was relatively empty. Morning weekend travels were particularly pleasant as it was possible to avoid being stuck like a sardine among millions of people that travel on the metro each day.

⁷⁸ The losing credibility of the Catholic Church among the urban poor and the change of religious market in Mexico have also opened space for *Santa muerte* (Roush 2012: 8). Catholic Church has been losing its religious monopoly and in some regions in the country new Christianities, such as evangelic churches, have already attracted more than 10% of population (Huffschnid 2012: 98).

⁷⁹ This point was highlighted by David González, a master student researching *Santa Muerte* devotion in Mexico City and with whom I had conversation about *Santa muerte* in Tepito.

⁸⁰ This is based on my conversations and informal interview with *Santa muerte* devotees.

The meeting point of the Cultural Safari in Tepito was Lagunilla metro station. When I arrived Victor was already there, waiting under the clock. While we chatted, tourists started arriving. Aside from Annika, who was from Germany, everyone was from Mexico City. This was nothing unusual. Although international tourists occasionally joined the tours it was more common to have visitors from the city who were most often from middle-class neighbourhoods. Student groups were also quite regular and they came from different universities – from the largest public university in the city, National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM)⁸¹ to the most prestigious private university Iberoamericana.

This time we were a group of fifteen. Three girls from UNAM's photo club, other attendees were a mix of different ages linked through friends and family. While some of them had already been to Tepito's market (this usually referred to the stalls along the main, principal avenue Eje1), none of them had been further in "among the streets."⁸² On our way out of the metro I asked Victoria, a student and photographer, why she had decided to attend the tour. She replied that she had wanted to visit Tepito for a while but had never dared to go on her own, particularly with a camera: "Because going with a tour is a safe way to get to know the emblematic places in Tepito. This is not an easy place to enter and take photos. If you go on your own you are afraid that somebody will attack you or look at you badly."⁸³ Tours therefore provided a safe way to experience Tepito without being seen as an intruder.

After leaving the metro station we came out in the middle of the street market. It was not yet very crowded although later it got busy, as it always did. Vendors were in the process of placing their merchandise on the stalls and it was still relatively quiet. Besides a few cars crossing the large avenue, traffic was rather slow. We crossed the main avenue Eje1 and followed Victor to the seat of the Centre for Tepiteño Studies.⁸⁴ The centre is located at the premises of the Association of Street Vendors.⁸⁵ The association is made up of sixty-two vending organizations from Tepito and is in charge of organizing street trade and of negotiating with the political – decision makers (Alba Villalever 2009: 28). Victor and the leader of the association are on good terms and support each other on various projects in

⁸¹ Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México.

⁸² Meterse por las calles.

⁸³ Es una forma segura de conocer lugares emblemáticos de Tepito. Lugar que no es fácil entrar y tomar los pots. Si vas, vas con un temor que te van a asaltar, te van a ver feo.

⁸⁴ Centro de estudios Tepiteños.

⁸⁵ Asociación de Comerciantes Establecidos, Semifijos y Ambulantes del Barrio de Tepito.

Tepito. This relationship partially ties the tour to street vending giving the street market an important role in the tour's representation.

Victor gave a brief history of the neighbourhood focussing on the change of the political economy in Mexico in the 1990s. He pointed out that after signing the NAFTA agreement, Mexico started to import *chingoneira*⁸⁶ and create jobs outside the country. The remaining jobs were jobs neither formal nor legal. This meant that while everything was privatised, everything was also piratised (Alarcon 2014). It was for this reason that many people resorted to street vending and selling pirated goods, which they saw as the “child of globalization.”⁸⁷ Economy produced in the streets, or the “richness produced by the streets”⁸⁸ was, as he explained, the neighbourhood's response to the lack of governmental programs in creating employment.

After the initial introduction the group left the centre, and on the way out stopped to look at the graffiti in the front yard. The graffiti, written in big red letters, read “Tepito exists because it resists.”⁸⁹ While Victor did not explain the origin of the slogan it served as the introduction to the tour's narrative of Tepito's resistance culture. Taking photos of the graffiti was accompanied by the stories of protests against housing transformations of Plan Tepito in the 1970s and by on-going vendor's struggles against criminalization of piracy and informality. The guide connected resistance to various events emphasizing the historical defiance of *tepiteños*.

We continued our way along maze-like narrow market streets. Due to the growing number of shoppers circling around the stalls, the group had to walk fast to keep up with the guide, and in the process try to avoid the shoves and pushes of passers-by. The market was also getting louder, with vending stalls of pirated CDs and DVDs turning up the music, mixed in with people's voices. In between the discs a vendor was selling *tacos*, so the market smelt of fried oil and chilli. The market was getting livelier, louder and smellier by the minute.

⁸⁶ In this context *chingoneria* refers to something bad, crappy.

⁸⁷ Hija de globalización.

⁸⁸ La riqueza que producen las calles.

⁸⁹ Tepito existe porque resiste.



Figure 5: Touring Tepito's street market.

We continued walking through the vending stalls that portrayed the rich variety of the market and of the goods sold, with Victor drawing attention to the prices and accessibility of the (pirated) brands. The display of affordable electronic goods which Victor pointed out highlighted the role of the informal economy and piracy in creating transnational lifestyles for the lower classes. This was an important point for many people in Tepito, and it was something that was also emphasized by Gustavo, who considered pirated goods to be not merely a question of access but also a source of dignity: “My family went all the way to China. To bring goods, to try to sell them [...]. And we brought everything [...] and people liked it, people like having things, accessible to their poor salary and this is what makes the functioning of Tepito possible. Tepito goes to all directions and it brings you, it brings you shoes, it brings you dreams.”⁹⁰ This dream meant having the possibility and accessibility to consume goods otherwise accessible only to the middle and upper-classes. And although access to consumer goods obscured the inequalities that remained behind them it also served

⁹⁰ Hay familia mía que ha ido hasta a China. Sí, a traer cosas, a tratar de ver qué vendemos [...]. Y, nosotros traíamos todo [...] y eso le gusta a la gente, tener cosas que estén accesibles, a su pobre salario y eso es lo que hace funcionar a Tepito. Tepito va a todos lados, y te trae, te pone el tenis, te pone el sueño.

to counter the stigma of marginality. The importance of street vending in making the transnational lifestyle of the poor was linked to subverting dominant discourse of informality. It was not merely survival, it was a lifestyle. Victor further illustrated this point by claiming that while the government sees Tepito as full of informal economy, this “is not informal economy, it is a social fabric.”⁹¹ This semantic change that turned street vending into a social cohesion enabled visibility and recognition of residents’ agency that was otherwise invisible and neglected.

After the ‘electronics street’ we crossed a large avenue, venturing into a quieter area, leaving the market behind us. As there were no stalls on the street, it made walking easier and faster. Although the stalls were gone, the street economy was still present. Victor took us to the car mechanic who had his ‘workshop’ in the middle of a small street. When we arrived, he was just repairing a car, so his hands were black from motor oil. After seeing the group approach, he turned to us and proudly said: “I am here working and stealing taxes from the government.”⁹² While this looked very spontaneous it was actually always part of the tour. And tourists always smiled. Even if they had mixed feelings about the presence of the street economy in the city, the meagre appearance of the ‘workshop made his statement of ‘stealing’ sound quite ironic. If what he was doing was stealing, how come he was still left with so little?

Such statements and performances were an important part of the tour, because they aimed to question the unequal impacts of Mexico’s economic liberalization and the power relations perpetuating informality. Informal economy is not only the practice of the urban lower classes – it perpetuates national and world economies (Hart 2015). But while ignoring the rules from the top is celebrated as a “virtue, wrapped in neoliberal ideology” (Hart 2015: 18), bending the rules from below is criminalized and stigmatised. After signing the NAFTA agreement, multinational companies were welcomed with tax benefits and while such policies were considered as stimulating competitiveness, street economy was in contrast, portrayed as the “invisible monster”⁹³ (Contreras 2013). The statement of the car mechanic underlined the poorer classes had a legitimate right to evade taxes as much as the upper classes did. This questioning reframes informal and illegal activities in a way that takes “them off the moral register used in mainstream media and places them in a frame where agency, courage and

⁹¹ No es economía formal, es fábrica social.

⁹² Estoy aquí robando el gobierno de los impuestos.

⁹³ El monstruo invisible.

skills for survival are the qualities that count “(Roush 2012: 16). In this context Tepito residents, portrayed as thieves and delinquents by Mexico City’s residents, are turned into hard working and resistant people. This shifts the meaning of informality from a criminal activity to one that has a positive value for the people in the *barrio*.

This was recognized and appreciated by street vendors. For Margarita, a female leader of a vending organization, tours enabled this swing: “I believe that touristically it will have an impact. An impact because people know, people that come from outside they really get to know, what an informal economy is.”⁹⁴ Coming to the market as a tourist and not merely as a consumer of its goods enables one to learn and to reflect about informal street economy. This also turned the street market into more than just a survival strategy. Annika, with whom I started up a chat after waving goodbye to the car mechanic, stressed that walking around the market was a fascinating experience, because “this strong economy, the market they have, this is very *tepiteño*.”⁹⁵ The street economy thus became authentic fabric and spirit of the neighbourhood.



The group followed Victor around the corner, arriving at the famous altar of Santa muerte. The participants of our group could not stop taking pictures - they were overcome by the visual treat that the sight offered. Although Mexican tourists were very familiar with the representation of death in public spaces, as the Day of the Dead is one of the largest national holidays, this death had a slightly different look than what they were used to. Santa muerte was a large female skeleton with a long-haired wig and a long red dress.

Figure 6: *Santa muerte* altar in Tepito. Photo: Boris Prodanović.

⁹⁴ Yo creo que turísticamente tendría un impacto. Un impacto porque, la gente conoce, la gente que viene de fuera, este, conoce realmente lo que es el comercio informal.

⁹⁵ Y además tiene ese fuerte económico, el mercado que tiene ahí. Y eso es muy *tepiteño*.

She stood behind a glass window, with various small figures of *Santa muerte* in front of her feet. Yellow-red flowers were hanging above the altar and in front of the glass window, devotee's gifts were placed neatly, ranging from tequila bottles to aubergines, cigarettes, bread and flowers. One devotee was praying and another two were standing behind, waiting for their turn. While taking pictures, a tourist next to me enthusiastically exclaimed that she had never seen anything like this as she had never been so 'deep' in Tepito.

Victor disappeared for a minute, coming back with *doña* Juanita, the altar guardian. She was a small woman in her 70s, with dark black hair with a grey streak in front. At first glance she looked tough and slightly intimidating, but this changed completely when she started to talk, giving the group a big smile. She explained the importance of faith in *Santa muerte* and emphasized that while the media continued to describe her as a cult of *narcos* or a *narco-saint*, this was actually a family ritual. People of all classes and ages came here, she continued, also bringing their children along. Victor nodded and added that *Santa muerte* was becoming more popular than the Virgin of Guadalupe, by pointing to her empty altar on the other side of the street. He noted that *Santa muerte* was a "deity of crisis, through which this concept of economic crisis is translated into the concept of existential crisis."⁹⁶

He pointed to the multi-layered and daily insecurities that people in Tepito faced, and the role of *Santa muerte* in protecting them, which was something other saints (like Guadalupe) or authorities were unable to do. Moreover, as Victor pointed out, *Santa muerte* was not controlled either by the Church or the State. After all, she was the death of the *barrio*, of the popular classes, as she grew on the streets in a free and spontaneous manner.

A visit to the altar underlined people's creativity in finding access to safety and justice 'on their own'. Although many devotees who came to *Santa muerte* were not from Tepito, the visit to the altar nevertheless pointed to the positive role informal spaces have for the marginalized residents. Portraying the meaning of informal spaces and networks was crucial for re-signifying informality and the negative stigma hanging over Tepito.

At the end of the tour, while chewing on *tacos* in one of the restaurants, Victoria, who seemed completely exhausted from walking, told me that the tour had significantly changed her idea of Tepito. While she previously had only heard of violence and criminality, she realised it was much more than that. Osvaldo, another participant of the tour, joined in the

⁹⁶ Una deidad de la crisis. Ese concepto de crisis, económica, está traducido al concepto de crisis, existencial.

conversation and added that people from the city perceive the market as a very dangerous place; a place where one buys merchandise at one corner to be immediately robbed at the next one. But when you come on a tour you see that “people are here, working really hard. I consider they are hard-working people. Since early morning they bring their merchandise from the places where they keep it, set up their stalls and put out all the products they sell.”⁹⁷ Both Victoria and Osvaldo considered that the tour had shifted their understanding of street vending and Tepito, carrying their meaning beyond the negative stigma of violence and delinquency, so commonly portrayed by the media.

From stigma to brand

This excerpt from the walking tour highlights how tours strive to portray a different understanding of informality to middle-class tourists. The guide seeks to challenge the neighbourhood’s stigma by making visible the importance and value of informal spaces for the residents. This means it is possible to contest the popular discourse around informality, remaking its meaning from criminality and contamination to self-reliance and resistance. In other words, by re-signifying the meaning of informality through the tourist encounter, tours transform Tepito’s stigma into a brand. Branding thus becomes a strategy which aims to negotiate Tepito’s symbolic position, image and value in the city.

The tour guide uses branding techniques to provide tourists with an experience of the *barrio* which can alter their image and understanding of the place. Branding is a strategy that sells places but it also provides tourists with a specific destination experience, defining the identity of the place (Gotham 2007: 828). I suggest that the tour guide uses, remakes and strengthens the existing *Made in Tepito*⁹⁸ brand which provides a space to re-signify the meaning of Tepito in Mexico City.

The origin of the *Made in Tepito* slogan and logo is not completely known. Although it circulates in different settings, for example in song titles⁹⁹, the slogan and logo are most commonly printed on T-shirts, CDs and other products sold at Tepito’s street market. The *Made in Tepito* logo is taken from the official Made in Mexico logo established by the

⁹⁷ Que está ahí, trabajándole, muy duro, yo considero que es gente muy trabajadora. Que desde muy temprano, se encargan de, sacar las mercancías de los lugares donde las guardan, instalan sus puestos, montan todo el producto que vendan.

⁹⁸ Hecho en Tepito.

⁹⁹ A song titled *Hecho en Tepito* by a Mexican group *El Cartel de Santana*. See: <http://www.musica.com/letras.asp?letra=1927448>

federal's Secretariat of Economy¹⁰⁰ and is thus usually linked to the market goods and pirated brands. Yet the logo marks more than just pirated products. It symbolizes a vendor's pride in skills and creativity which are needed to make and sell them. *Made in Tepito* brand represents quality, uniqueness and resourcefulness. Moreover, by adapting the official government symbol I suggest that vendors draw continuity between trade liberalization and informal spaces and thus give the latter legitimacy.



Figure 7: *Made in Tepito* logo on one of the walls in Tepito.

As the tour guide takes tourists around Tepito, pointing to the creativity and productivity of the residents, he introduces the *Made in Tepito* brand to tourists, increasing its visibility and potential recognition in the city. Thus, the brand not only represents the street market and products sold but also the unique way of life produced on the *barrio* streets. As the tour guide wrote in an article about vending in Tepito: “Made in Tepito is a brand of the *barrio* and its streets that are seeds of artisans, champions and talents”¹⁰¹ (Hernández Hernández: 5). Branding remakes Tepito's difference into something unique, into a touristically attractive and culturally valuable difference. Throughout the tour *Made in Tepito* becomes a brand of experiences and sensations and tourists become part of the brand by listening, smelling and feeling Tepito.

The process of branding should not be understood merely as strategic place promotion and marketing. In fact, the tour guide does little of that and seems to be rather unconcerned about advertising. Tepito branding is not a straightforward or immediately visible process and the tour guide only occasionally refers to the *Made in Tepito* brand explicitly. I use the concept of branding to emphasize the ways tours commodify and sell Tepito in order to shape

¹⁰⁰ Secretaría de Economía.

¹⁰¹ Hecho en Tepito es la marca propia del barrio que se la rifa en las calles que son semillero de artesanos, de campeones y de talentos.

an image that is positively valued. Branding helps to expand and enrich understandings of a place (Gotham 2007: 845) and it provides a framework to show the presence of Tepito residents in the city in a more positive light. Simply put, branding carries power to re-signify meanings, understandings and value of Tepito, not just for city residents but also for *tepiteños*.

I argue that tours (re)construct *Made in Tepito* brand in two ways: by (re)branding informality into self-autonomy and resistance, and by transforming imaginary of Tepito from an immobile *barrio* to a globally interconnected place. Below I focus on the former while the latter will be analysed in the next chapter.

Made in Tepito: (Re)branding informality

Throughout the tour the guide and the residents included in the tour perform informal spaces in a way that makes visible the importance of informality for people's desires and needs. In other words, through the tourist encounter informality is (re)branded from a criminal(ised) activity to one of self-reliance, creativity, productivity and resistance. This shift is, first of all, made possible by the experience and performance of the street market. The enactment of walking through the market turns Tepito from a place where working class consumers come to buy products to becoming itself a tourist product for middle class tourists. The tour's itinerary at the market shifts the consumption of cheap and pirated goods to the consumption of experiences made on Tepito's streets. In short: the market becomes a space for selling not only pirated goods but also 'authentic' experiences, as noted by Annika previously. This also portrays street vendors as resourceful, resistant and active in the global economy, and it shifts the stigma of street economy into a creative tactic of the marginalized.

Second, although informal economic spaces play a crucial role in (re)branding Tepito, *Santa muerte* strengthens this process. Since residents feel excluded from economic realms as well as justice and security, tours point out that informal spaces also fill other cracks in the 'system.' The narrative of the guide and the altar guardian stress the importance of *Santa muerte* for people's sense of safety and security. By challenging her '*narco*' image they also promote the picture of a self-reliant neighbourhood where people search for their own ways to make it in life.

The *Made in Tepito* brand opens a window for a more positive representation of informality in marginalized urban spaces. By (re)branding informality into a valuable and

positive strategy of the marginalized, tours provide a terrain to circulate a different image of a low-income neighbourhood among middle class city residents. Branding becomes an opportunity for the residents to show and promote their identity of survival and resistance. Self-Othering, which highlights the creative skilfulness and uniqueness of the *barrio* residents, becomes an important part of the branding process, transforming Tepito's difference into something valuable and desirable.

The constant sensual inputs during the tour, particularly the market's cacophony of voices and smells, makes the Tepito experience an embodied one. Sensing Tepito becomes important in creating the *Made in Tepito* brand. These senses are memorized by tourists and become part of Tepito's re-made identity. Flavio, a young student who attended one of Tepito tours, was impressed by Tepito's smells and sounds: "You go to this place and you leave with your mouth wide open. It is impressive. It is like a hot spring of people [...]. People coming and going, loading, yelling, selling, fiddling, selling food. It is incredible."¹⁰² These sounds become – instead of chaos and criminality – the sounds of activity and creativity, of hard work and survival. Smells from the food stalls are turned into the smell of productivity. By following the fast-pace of the guide, tourists experience Tepito not as a place of criminality and fear but as a neighbourhood that never sleeps and is always on the move in search of new strategies of survival.

The visual intensity of the *Santa muerte* altar with its colours and gifts is part of this sensorial experience. The size of the skeleton, the murmuring of prayers and the smell of the offerings – all of this is not the 'death' middle-class tourists are familiar with but one they rarely see, as she is not visible in middle or upper-class neighbourhoods. *Santa muerte* exists and prospers among the streets of the marginalized neighbourhoods, visualising and aestheticizing class differences in Mexico City. In a way, her presence in the tour reinforces these differences but with a twist: they become part of a positive and creative difference.

The presence of informality in public spaces, which is pointed out throughout the tour, alludes to the importance of the street as the site where the needs, understandings and resistance of Tepito residents are articulated and manifested. By providing visibility and legitimacy of using public spaces in Tepito in a certain informal way, tours also portray the making of everyday informal spaces as acts of resistance. Moreover, by making visible some

¹⁰² Vaya a ese lugar, va a salir con la boca abierta. O sea, porque es impresionante. O sea, es un hervidero de gente [...]. Personas yendo, viniendo, cargando, gritando, regateando, vendiendo comida. Y es increíble.

uses of public spaces in Tepito while obscuring others tours exercise power, making tourism part of the place-making process in which informality and resistance play a fundamental role.

However, the resistance brand constructed through the tour obscures power relations behind the functioning of informal spaces, particularly the street market. The tour guide or street vendors rarely address the connection between vending organizations and political parties which fosters a relatively clear boundary between resistance and domination. Yet neither dominating nor resisting power is total, but fragmentary, uneven and inconsistent (Sharp *et al.* 2000: 20). While resisting power, “individuals or groups may simultaneously support the structure of domination that necessitates resistance in the first place” (Hollander and Einwohner 2004: 549). In the case of Tepito this means that while participating in the informal street economy contributes to the sentiment of autonomy and resistance, it also reproduces the corrupt politics behind the functioning of the market. By portraying a clear distinction between Tepito’s resistance and governmental system, tours obscure the entanglement of resistance and domination within the neighbourhood.

Moreover, residents understand the epitomized resistance identity differently and not everybody considers the street market a site of empowerment (more on this in Chapter Six). The understanding of resistance identity is therefore conflicted and ambiguous which indicates that identity is not a static and “shared understanding of a group of people about who they are” but a process of on-going construction and negotiation (Nagel 2002 in Silvey 2004: 9). The different claims to a seemingly single and coherent collective identity unveil the contested process of place-making and the multivocality (Rodman 1992) or the multi-identity (Massey 1994) of Tepito as a place.

These contested understandings are important in order to grasp Tepito’s internal dynamics and to understand tensions that arise with the branding of the *barrio*. These not only point to different meanings but also to diverse and fragmented ways people in Tepito cope with stigma and negotiate exclusion.

This chapter has analysed the ways tours commodify and sell Tepito’s resistance identity by (re)branding informality from criminality to skilfulness and resilience, pointing to the value informal spaces play in people’s lives. I have further focused on the way this resistance identity is constructed in relation to inequality and struggle, and how residents use the process of branding to negotiate their sentiments of exclusion and insecurity. In the next chapter I examine how residents face and navigate the mobility gaps they are faced with, and how tours depict residents’ global networks to transform an imaginary of Tepito from an

immobile *barrio* to a globally interconnected, cosmopolitan place, which makes possible to claim inclusion within the city's symbolic economy.

5. Being part of cosmopolitan Mexico City

James Bond flies over *Zócalo*

*Mexico City: Unique. Cosmopolitan. Authentic. Trendy. Unbelievable.*¹⁰³

It is the Day of the Dead, one of the largest national holidays in Mexico and wide central avenues in Mexico City are full of people, all of whom are wearing colourful masks representing death. Some are dancing while others are strolling around, observing the parade. This vibrant palette of people is surrounded by beautifully renovated colonial houses that overlook the festivity below. A young couple walks into an old colonial building and takes the elevator up to their room. The man is visibly in a hurry, he kisses the lady goodbye, opens the window and climbs on to the roof. He checks the house on the other side of the street and starts shooting at a man behind one of the windows. He is noticed by another armed man who begins to chase him. During the following ten minutes they run, shoot and fight in a helicopter flying over the city centre. This long scene gives a beautiful view of the city's main square, the *Zócalo*, and shows the city centre in all its splendour.

This is the opening scene of the latest James Bond movie *Spectre* (2015). Although the rest of the movie does not take place in Mexico, this short scene has drawn quite a lot of controversial attention. News reports based on hacked Sony e-mails revealed that the local Mexican government and tourism bodies supposedly paid movie producers, Sony Pictures Entertainment and Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Studios Inc., more than 20 million USD for Mexico City to appear in the movie. Moreover, according to the hacked reports money was also paid to portray the city in a more positive light, omitting corrupt police and a Mexican hit man from the original screenplay (Tuckman 2015).

Despite these controversies city officials were proud to have 'their' city in a blockbuster James Bond movie. It was excellent publicity. At the joint press conference with the country's Secretariat of Tourism Claudia Ruiz Massieu Salinas (2012-2015), which took place in March 2015, the city mayor Miguel Ángel Mancera Espinosa (from 2012 on) stated: "It makes us proud to have Mexico City form part of the opening scene because the whole

¹⁰³ This is the slogan portrayed on the official internet portal that aims to promote tourist sites and activities in Mexico City, <http://cdmxtravel.com/en/> (accessed 1.6.2016).

world will see us. Everyone knows the reach James Bond has worldwide.”¹⁰⁴ This feeling of pride was not solely about the global publicity the city would reach. The fact that the city was part of the movie was already recognition of its global reputation. The city was chosen, the mayor added, over cosmopolitan places such as New York or Singapore thereby positioning Mexico City next to cosmopolitan and touristically popular centres of the world.

This was a big success for city officials. If during the 1990s the city was notorious for its violence, criminality and pollution, even resulting in the nick-name Mex-Sicko City, this image has changed significantly since then. Today, the authorities brand the city as a global business centre and a space of tradition and cosmopolitanism, rich in international cuisine, culture and night life.¹⁰⁵

The official City in Motion ¹⁰⁶ slogan markets the city as an exciting and highly mobile place that is always on the move, providing tourists with new experiences and sensations. In 2015 the city mayor Mancera Espinosa underlined that due to its cosmopolitan character, the city’s positive reputation in the international arena was growing as well as its position in international ranks of urban competitiveness (Romero Sánchez 2015). At the beginning of 2016, *The New York Times* ranked Mexico City as the number one place to visit, promoting it as a “metropolis that has it all.”¹⁰⁷

City authorities base the city’s cosmopolitan character on the growing presence of international business, real-estate development and on the production of cultural, commercial and tourist spaces. Tourism in particular has been equated with the city’s cosmopolitan identity. Soon after taking up the position of Mexico City’s Minister for Tourism, Miguel Torruco Marqués stressed the connection between the cosmopolitan city and tourism (Ernesto Trejo 2013). This entailed creating new tourist products and improving the quality of tourist services which the minister considered to be key to attracting more tourists, particularly international ones. The growing number of international visitors and the mobility of the city within transnational financial, commercial and tourism flows are significant for constructing and branding Mexico City as a cosmopolitan capital.

¹⁰⁴ With *SPECTRE*, Whole World Will See us, Says Mexico City Mayor, NDTV, 20th March 2015: <http://movies.ndtv.com/hollywood/with-spectre-whole-world-will-see-us-says-mexico-city-mayor-748246> (accessed 3rd June 2016).

¹⁰⁵ See the website of the Secretariat of Culture (CONACULTA): http://www.cultura.gob.mx/turismocultural/destino_mes/cd_mexico/ (accessed 20th May 2016).

¹⁰⁶ Capital en Movimiento.

¹⁰⁷ 52 Place to Go in 2016, *New York Times*, 7th January 2016: <http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2016/01/07/travel/places-to-visit.html> (accessed 20th May 2016)

However, only city areas that match the image of a globally connected and mobile metropolis become part of this cosmopolitan brand. Stigmatized, lower-class *barrios* like Tepito, portrayed in the popular discourse as immobile and globally disconnected, are excluded from the city's representations in the (inter)national arena.

The image transformation of Mexico City, tied to the urban redevelopment process at the beginning of the millennium (see Chapter Three), also altered its physical landscape (Crossa 2009: 44). As city areas were increasingly turned into business spaces, cultural and tourist consumption, this excluded lower-class residents from these spaces due to their limited purchasing power and it reinforced historical class inequalities and socio-spatial divides (Olivera and Degaldillo 2014: 116; Parnreiter 2002a: 147 – 153). This impacted Tepito residents too, as many of them could not afford to consume in the expensive and refurbished city areas, thus limiting their mobility across the fragmented city. Moreover, as the authorities marketed the globally connected Mexico City, emphasizing the value and ease of transnational mobility, access to such movement was limited for many of the neighbourhood's residents. All of this pointed to the inequalities in being physically mobile across local and national boundaries.

This chapter looks at the way Tepito residents experience inequalities in local and transnational mobility and examines how they use transnational networks and encounters to negotiate their socio-spatial marginalization. By using global flows of people, goods and ideas, they claim access to transnational identities and lifestyles, pointing to their immersion within the cosmopolitan city and the global world. The guide, residents and tourists that come together in the tourist encounter, mobilize these narratives and construct the cosmopolitan *Made in Tepito* brand which transforms the imaginary of Tepito from an immobile *barrio* to a globally interconnected place. By selling and marketing transnational networks tours (re)brand this imaginary of (im)mobility and advance Tepito's inclusion into the cosmopolitan city.

Although this seeks to improve the neighbourhood's reputation in the city, adding a certain level of recognition and value among the tourists, it also reproduces the official narrative of the city as a space of cosmopolitanism, modernity, productivity and consumption. The tours' focus on Tepito's global connections does not transform the underlying socio-spatial hierarchies and mobility gaps which are also the result of the city's redevelopment strategies and policies. Moreover, when representations of Tepito, constructed through the tour, become part of tourist consumption and begin to travel through virtual

networks, *barrio* residents raise doubts over their control in creating and circulating these representations.

Mobility across transnational borders

At the beginning of September 2015, Mauricio, Pedro and I were getting ready to go to a workshop in Kingston, Jamaica, which was part of the international project I was involved in (see Chapter Two). The easiest route from Mexico to Jamaica is via the USA. Since the US does not have an international transit zone anyone who steps on American ground – even if this is just at the airport – needs to have proper documentation.

For Mexican citizens this means obtaining a transit visa even though one never leaves the airport. The process takes some time because the applicant needs to complete the online application form and attend an interview at the embassy. The online form has a lot of detailed questions, for instance details of your current and previous employers, previous and current salary, possible involvement in illegal activities etc. I filled in this online form together with Mauricio and Pedro, mainly due to the fear of making a mistake and getting rejected even before getting a meeting at the embassy. After we submitted our forms Pedro and Mauricio were scheduled for an interview. Considering Mauricio was an elderly citizen and had already previously travelled to Cuba we were convinced he would not have any problems. We were more worried about Pedro who was in his 30s and had never travelled outside Mexico. According to my NGO work experience from various African countries, young single men from the ‘global South’ had a lot of difficulties in getting permission to travel.

But in the end Pedro got the visa and it was Mauricio who was rejected. He called me after the interview sounding very upset. He was not troubled just because he wasn’t able to get a visa but also because of the staff’s attitude. He was offended by the questions they asked and by the way they treated him. Supposedly they were surprised with how little his pension was and asked him several questions about how he survived on it. They were also suspicious why somebody from a stigmatized neighbourhood like Tepito wanted to go to Jamaica. All the supporting letters stating the entire trip was paid for did not help. Once rejected it is not possible to appeal, one can only re-apply and go through the entire process all over again. This not only takes time but is also costly as a visa application costs USD 160. We therefore had to find another, longer and more costly way to go to Kingston, which was via Panama.

This story is illustrative of the different possibilities people have in physical mobility. Although globalisation is generally understood in terms of a borderless world where “borders and boundaries have become increasingly porous” (Inda and Rosaldo 2007 [2002]: 4) access and freedom to move across borders are unevenly distributed among people and countries (Neumayer 2006: 5). Even though we live in an interconnected world where goods and information rapidly travel around the globe, the ease of movement is still a privilege which not everybody has access to. Socio-economic factors, nationality or political circumstances are all part of the mobility gap that impacts people’s ability to move through space. As the case of Mauricio demonstrates, both nationality and class presented an obstacle in being able to cross borders easily.

Although signing the NAFTA¹⁰⁸ agreement in 1994 opened the border for goods and financial flows, it was not the same for people, at least not for Mexican citizens. The mobility regimes between USA and Mexico are very asymmetrical and unequal. While US citizens can travel to Mexico without a visa, Mexicans travelling to the US require one. In their report, the *North American Centre for Transborder Studies* and the *New Policy Institute* highlighted the potential of Mexican citizens for the USA tourist market and problematised the visa regimes enforced on them (2013: 4). However, the asymmetrical mobility between the two countries has so far not been seriously challenged.

This is also due to the different symbolic and economic values that are attached to diverse modes of mobilities (Bianchi and Stephenson 2014: 85). As Eveline Dürr points out in her research on tourism in Mazatlan, Mexico, mobility from Mexico to the USA is generally “framed in terms of migration in the search for job opportunities, while for those going from the US to Mexico is represented as an attractive destination of residence for North American citizens, one that actually benefits from the economic disparity between the two regions” (Dürr 2012: 343). The mobility between the US and Mexico is thus marked by different value regimes: while movement to Mexico is acceptable, valued and promoted, the one to the US is restricted, condemned and unwelcomed.

Although Pedro did not experience the same problems as Mauricio, his story also alludes to the different opportunities for crossing transnational borders. Access to travel is not only a matter of citizenship and having the ‘right’ passport but is also a matter of class. For many people in Tepito travelling is considered a privilege. I became increasingly aware of

¹⁰⁸ Neither Mexico nor Canada is part of the U.S. Visa Waiver Program, which grants citizens from 36 different countries the right to enter the United States for a maximum of 90 days without a visa.

my own privileged position when talking to Pedro. We were about the same age and while I had already travelled to many places around the world, he had never been outside Mexico. This difference was enhanced by the way we experienced our trip to Jamaica and the meaning it had for us both. While I was looking forward to go to Kingston, I was also rather tired of travelling due to the various trips I had already made that year, be it either for work or leisure. This was a privileged kind of tiredness, for sure. To be fair, I was happy to go but while for me the trip to Jamaica was one of several trips I had made in the last few years, for Pedro it was *the* trip. I realised that my ‘transnational lifestyle’ based on the constant availability of spatial mobility was something I had started to take for granted.

I was reminded of this on the day of departure. Pedro came with his parents and whilst we were having coffee at the airport his parents were continuously saying ‘thank you’ despite my insistence that I really had nothing to do with this, since it was the university that had arranged for everything. But it did not matter. The point was that Pedro’s opportunity to go to Jamaica meant a lot to the entire family, not just to him personally. I realised that my privileged ease of mobility went along with the personal and emotional meaning and value I attached to it. Although we both enjoyed our Jamaica trip and learned a great deal, there was still a difference in our emotional experience of it.

It was similar with Esmeralda who went with me to a workshop in Rio de Janeiro. On one occasion she told me that as a child she never went anywhere. She started selling at the family stall as a child and being the eldest of fourteen siblings she had to take care of them as well. “As a child I never even went to Chapultepec”¹⁰⁹, she told me one day. Going to Brazil was therefore something special: “I took it as a gift from God. Like I got it for a lot or the little I have done in the *barrio*. I feel like he gave me a gift. I never imagined that one day I will get to know something so far away, or to go on an airplane, me alone, to come and to see a country that I don’t know.”¹¹⁰

The mobility gap, however, is not present only between Tepito residents and myself but also among residents. Although many do not have an opportunity to travel there are also exceptions. The baby clothes vendor Gabriela is an enthusiastic traveller who had made various trips to Europe. And when I met Miguel, a vendor and a self-educated artist, he had

¹⁰⁹ Chapultepec is a large park in Mexico City about a 20 minute metro-ride from Tepito.

¹¹⁰ Yo lo tomé así como un regalo de Dios. Como que lo daba así por lo mucho o lo poco que he hecho en el barrio, yo me siento como que me lo dio de regalo. Porque pues en, yo jamás me imaginé, ni tenía yo de, un día conocer, así algo lejos de mí, así como, por ejemplo eso que subirme a un avión tantas horas, yo sola, y llegar y ver pues un país, que, que no lo conocía.

just returned from his holiday at Oaxaca beach. Therefore, there are residents who travel, yet it is to a lesser extent and not always across national borders. The access to transnational travel and the opportunity to be a tourist represents a range of mobility privileges which not everybody has access to.

Mobility gap in a fragmented city

The mobility gap is present across various scales. Borders are not only set up between nation-states but also throughout regional and local scales. These are not necessarily physical, although they can be, for example in the form of gated communities, which are highly popular in Mexico City. But borders are also social and economic and they constrain “ability of some to have access to leisure and to move beyond their immediate living environment” (Rivke and Koning 2016: 46). So, who has the possibility to move across socio-economic boundaries of fragmented and segregated city spaces?

I, for example, lived in a trendy area of Roma Norte, I went to Tepito on a daily basis, occasionally dined in hip areas like Condesa and the city centre, went with activist groups to stigmatized areas of Ciudad Netzahualcoyotl and Iztapalapa, had an occasional coffee in the upper-class area of Polanco, went to tour a high-end borough of Santa Fe and occasionally had meetings at universities such as UNAM, UAM or Iberoamericana university. I not only moved quite easily through different geographical places but also through different socio-economic spaces. For sure there were areas I could not access either (either due to my gender, class, danger of the area etc). Nevertheless, being a young, white, middle class woman from Europe still enabled transgressing several city boundaries, something that was not easily accessible to everyone.

For many people coming from a neighbourhood like Tepito these mobilities are not that self-evident. This of course does not mean they are confined to their *barrio*. They move across the city, some of them on a daily basis, either for work or studies, to visit friends, to participate in cultural events etc. Yet for many, their socio-economic ability to engage with different places across the city is still limited.

This was aggravated by the re-development of the city at the beginning of the millennium which opened new spaces of consumption, particularly in central areas, for instance shopping centres, transnational hotel chains and multiplex cinemas, turning houses into museums and shops, “reordering the meaning of urban life and traditional modes of

using space” (Canclini 2000: 210). Neoliberal urban politics transformed cities from centres of production and work to attractive places for investment and tourism. Tourism became increasingly important for the city’s economy, turning the city into a product to be sold, promoted and marketed (Crossa 2009: 45). The growing transformation of cities into spaces of consumption excluded and marginalized an increasing number of people who did not have enough economic power to participate as consumers in these spaces (Jayne 2005: 7). Regular mobility across the city – to go shopping, dining, partying or touring, was not as available for those from lower-class neighbourhoods.

However, inequality and mobility are intertwined not only by the lack of access to movement, but also through the force of it. The redevelopment of central city spaces resulted in displacement of working classes (and practices like street vending) from these areas. While an increasing number of middle-class residents moved to the Historic Centre, augmenting house rents and living standards, poorer residents had to move to other areas of the city (Zamorano Villarreal 2015: 304). This further reinforced the mobility gap: if those from middle-classes moved to the city centre as a choice, working classes were made mobile involuntarily.

Despite the privilege of the middle and upper classes in the freedom and control of movement across the city’s fragmented urban landscape not everybody felt that it was any easier to engage with stigmatized places like Tepito. The living ‘bubbles’ people refer to when describing life in the city is not only about difficulties in accessing high-end but also lower-class neighbourhoods. A young student Flavio, who attended the Tepito tour, said in our interview that “there are economic bubbles of the rich but there are also bubbles on the other extreme, no? Neither you or I can enter these bubbles without knowing somebody.”¹¹¹ The fear associated with the stigma of violence hinders people’s movement to the neighbourhood. These limitations in transgressing the city boundaries, together with the privatization of schools, universities, hospitals and other services, reduces the possibility of class-encounter and reinforces the distance between the class ‘bubbles’.

The tourist development of the city has exacerbated mobility gaps and the socio-spatial divides. Not everybody has the same opportunity to participate in tourism, as producers (developers of tourist spaces) nor as consumers (tourists). National tourists in the city are generally middle-class citizens, as reported by the city’s Secretariat of Tourism and

¹¹¹ Así como hay burbujas que estamos hablando de económicas muy altas, también hay burbujas cerradísimas en el otro extremo, ¿no? O sea, ni tú, ni yo podríamos entrar a esa burbuja, ¿no? A menos de que tengamos un conocido.

Higher School for Tourism (Perfil de turista que visita la Ciudad de México 2015: 12), who have time and resources to spend on tourist activities. City tours range from EUR 40-60, while a 4-hour tour around Roma Norte or Condesa amounts to EUR 100. This is a significant amount of money (and time) that not everybody can afford.

As mobility came to be strongly associated with cosmopolitanism and modernity (Szerszynski and Urry 2006), transnational mobility and diversity of people, ideas and goods became central to branding the city to attract tourists. To compete on a global tourist market, the city government began to market Mexico City as a cosmopolitan and global metropolis with a rich cultural, gastronomical and historical diversity.¹¹² While some places played a relevant role in the production of tourist spaces in the city, others were largely excluded from this process. Parts of the city, which the city government transformed at the beginning of the millennium to accommodate the financial, trade and service sectors, became the key for branding the worldly character of Mexico City.

The Historic Centre became the focus of urban competitiveness and the centre of the city's tourism and cultural consumerism. With their cultural, gastronomic and entertainment offer, boroughs such as Roma Norte, Condesa, Zona Rosa or Polanco also formed part of the tourist landscape, as reference to the city's cosmopolitan character. The presence of international hotels and multinational companies placed areas like Reforma Avenue and the business district Santa Fe into tourist guides and magazines, exposing the city's global connectedness to other parts of the world and its immersion into transnational financial and trade flows. Governmental efforts seemed to have paid off. In 2016, Forbes magazine positioned Mexico City next to New York and described it as a world-class and cosmopolitan metropolis, promoting its transnational economic activity and cultural, culinary and architectural diversity (Parish Flannery 2016).

Neighbourhoods like Tepito, stigmatized as marginal, informal and violent, were excluded from the city's tourist fabric as they presented a counter-image to the governmental ideas of cosmopolitanism, modernity and progress. In 2011, the city's Minister for Tourism at the time, Alejandro Rojas Díaz Durán (2007-2012), described the Cultural Safari in Tepito as dark tourism. According to news reports he considered these forms of tourism reflected on

¹¹² "Una metrópoli cosmopolita, incluyente y de amplia diversidad en su oferta cultural, gastronómica e histórica." A written response from the Mexico City's Secretariat of Tourism (Secretaría de Turismo) to my questions about the development of tourism in the city.

the image of the capital and the country negatively so he called for an ending to their implementation (Páramo 2011).

In contrast to the highly mobile and globally connected city centre, the *barrio* as a spatial imaginary parallels the concept of a slum or a ghetto, referring to the conditions of immobility (Dürr 2012a; Jaffe 2012). As the vignette at the beginning illustrates, being from the *barrio* impacted not only Mauricio's opportunities for movement but also the way his (im)mobility was perceived. The fact that the embassy administrator pointed to his Tepito origins when questioning his reasons for travelling, hinted to the prevailing perception over people's immobility and confinement to the marginalized neighbourhoods. Moreover, if residents were depicted as not being able to get out of the *barrio*, Flavio's remark above underlines that people also rarely dared to venture inside. This, shaped perceptions of Tepito, as an isolated space and its residents as 'localized' and rooted. The city government could hardly include this image as part of the city's cosmopolitan brand.

However, Tepito residents do not feel trapped or confined to their space. Although aware of the inequalities in physical movement, they take pride in virtual mobilities and use them to construct a globally connected *barrio* and their transnational identities. They negotiate their socio-spatial marginalization by mobilizing representations and transnational connections, pointing out they are also mobile, global and cosmopolitan. Moreover, they translate the lack of physical mobility into a sense of belonging, simultaneously building their attachment to Tepito and the world. This highlights a sense of belonging and movement is relationally produced (Escobar 2001: 148) and that residents construct their individual and collective identities in relation to the notions of fixity and mobility, challenging the dichotomy between the two (Jackson 2012: 726).

Participating in the global world

During our one-year stay in Mexico City my husband started taking carpentry lessons with a carpenter from Tepito who kindly volunteered to take my husband under his guidance. Antonio was not just a carpenter but also a painter, a poet and a former police officer. They met once a week in a small workshop in Tepito and the lessons were free of charge. After some time, I heard rumours that Antonio liked to tell others that he had an international student. Although I was never able to confirm this, I do think he felt a sense of pride and honour in having a student all the way from Slovenia. This pride was not only one sided. My

husband also felt a real sense of gratification in having the possibility to visit Tepito and observe everyday life; to participate in an encounter that would otherwise not have taken place and which after a while developed into a form of a friendship. Although this encounter exposed a mobility gap between Antonio and my husband it also brought a sense of value and honour for both of them. Neither of them focused on the lack of Antonio's transnational mobility. Rather, they both stressed the mobility and fame of Tepito and Antonio's work.

Since many residents lack access to physical mobility, they point to other forms of mobility (virtual mobility and people's relocation to Tepito) to emphasize their emplacement in the cosmopolitan city and the global world. If people are unable to move across spaces they try to be in control at least of representations in order to gain prestige (Jaffe, Klaufus and Colombijn 2012: 646). These mobilities become an asset for Tepito residents and they use them as a resource for negotiating their (im)mobile identities and the *barrio's* socio-spatial imaginary.

Partially, residents connect Tepito's 'worldly' character to the large number of migrants who moved to the neighbourhood in the early 20th century. As shoe-makers, grinders, carpenters and people with other professions moved to Tepito in order to find work in the city, elderly generations considered this important in giving the neighbourhood its open, multicultural and cosmopolitan character. In an interview for the Mexican newspaper *Proceso*, Armando Ramirez, Tepito's famous writer, described this in the following way: "There were always cosmopolitan people, Armenian and Chinese but mixed Chinese that are now Mexican. There were Spanish, Jewish, Arab, Lebanese, Turks but today the majority are Koreans and Chinese that come with their suitcase of dollars and buy a shop"¹¹³ (Ponce 2013). In this vein, people use stories of historical and present migration to the neighbourhood to stress its unique identity and global fame. While transnational mobility is part of the *barrio's* identity, this unique transnational identity is also what makes Tepito widely mobile.

This entanglement between 'local' identity and mobility was quite poetically emphasized by Tepito's writer Ronaldo. He was also a member of the collective *Los Olvidados* and although originally from Tepito, moved to another part of the city years ago. He described Tepito as "a *barrio* that has transgressed boundaries, no? It is a person, like I

¹¹³ Siempre había gente cosmopolita, armenios y chinos pero de café de chinos, que ahora son mexicanos. Había españoles, judíos, árabes, libaneses, turcos, pero ahora son mayoría los coreanos y chinos que llegan con su maletita de dólares y te compran un local. Antes no traían dinero, y mira ahora, llegan con su cofrecito de dólares y compran el local pero a la vez traen a cinco chinos más y éstos compran otro local.

said, it is a child who was born in this *vecindad* and now became famous, for wandering around as a vagabond [...] and a vagabond, what he does is to get to know its entire zone, you see? Good and bad. And it may be a thief but it is also like Robin Hood, no? It also shares with its *compañeros*. So, in this way, it has the good and the bad. And it attracts [...] it attracts women, it attracts all people, no? It becomes a lady with whom you must dance.”¹¹⁴ Being born in a *vecindad* was a symbol Ronaldo used to refer to Tepito’s uniqueness which attracted people from all places and backgrounds. It is this entanglement of uniqueness and mobility that forms the *barrio*’s identity and turns it into a place where everybody can find a piece for themselves, building a sense of solidarity and belonging.

Mobility of people to the neighbourhood is important for Tepito residents, becoming a form of social capital. This mobility provides space for cross-class encounters and sometimes also facilitates residents’ movement across Mexico City’s socio-spatial divides. In turn, it also increases resident’s pride and personal attachment to the *barrio*.

In 2009, a young Mexican artist Yutzil Cruz curated a group of projects called Stubborn Tepito (*Obstinado Tepito*), inviting various international artists to Tepito to work with residents on artistic work. One of them was a project titled *Las siete cabronas e invisibles de Tepito*, *cabrona* in this context referring to a tough, ‘bad-ass’ woman (thus translating the project into ‘Seven bad-ass and invisible women of Tepito’). The project was implemented in 2009 by Spanish artist Mireia Sallarès and it aimed to provide space for Tepito women to tell their personal, as well as collective stories. While such projects, which brought people from all over the world to Tepito, exposed mobility gaps, women who participated in them saw it as an opportunity which enhanced their own mobilities. When I talked to *doña* Juanita, the guardian of *Santa muerte* altar, she underlined that the project of *Siete cabronas* opened doors they had never imagined. They visited schools and universities where they talked about their life as women in Tepito and “where people listened to us, which was really good.”¹¹⁵ Being part of the project enabled them to engage in social spaces they previously considered completely closed to them. Not only that, international interest in Tepito was also a form of social recognition and this increased residents’ pride and

¹¹⁴ Es un barrio que ha traspasado las fronteras, ¿no? Es un persona, como te decía yo, es el niño ése, que nació en esa vecindad, que ahora se hizo famoso, por andar de vago [...] y un vago, pues lo que hace es conocer toda su zona, ¿ves? Buena y mala. Y puede ser ratero, pero también es como... este, como, eh, Robin Hood, ¿no? También le comparte a algunos compañeros. Entonces, tiene los bueno y lo malo, en ese sentido. Y atrae [...] atrae a las mujeres, porque atrae a la gente, ¿no? Se vuelve una dama con la que hay que bailar,

¹¹⁵ La gente nos escuchaba, eso fue muy bonito.

attachment to their neighbourhood. In the words of *doña* Juanita: “It lifts your spirit when you see people from Denmark or USA coming here.”¹¹⁶

These transnational collaborations and networks are also important for mobilizing residents to move forward and strive for change. This point was emphasized by Carlos, a young architect involved in garbage-reduction projects, who seeks to build an environmental conscience among residents and vendors. He has networks in several places around the world and considers them to be crucial in order to move Tepito forward: “We have contacts in Venezuela, Peru, Ecuador, Chile, Brazil. Yes, in Barcelona. For sure. To strengthen ourselves at all levels. We are putting our part of the sand [...] it costs us to move on, but we are doing it. This is to move on. This is, to begin to move on.”¹¹⁷ In 2015 Carlos established an NGO which he named From the Barrio to the World¹¹⁸, pointing to the connection between Tepito and other places, established through his work. While these networks are valuable for Tepito, the NGO’s name highlights the *barrio* also has value for the global environmental movement. The transnational networks between Tepito and the rest of the world are thus not only about receiving ideas and recognition, but also about transmitting them. In other words, they are not simply receivers in these transnational networks but also active participants, which also enhanced Carlos’s sense of pride and belonging.

These examples illustrate how residents use mobility to emphasise their participation in transnational networks and encounters while remaining largely physically immobile. As Christien Klaufus points out, “individual and collective agency can be activated both through geographical movements of people and through imagined connections between people across space” (Klaufus 2012: 690). Virtual mobilities of Tepito, which also increases movement to the neighbourhood, are important for building residents’ transnational identities and lifestyles.

Tours to Tepito mobilize residents’ narratives of a globally connected *barrio*, making them an integral part of the *Made in Tepito* brand. The tour guide and the residents perform these narratives of mobility which enables them to negotiate Tepito’s place in the city and to claim value and recognition of Tepito’s cosmopolitan identity among the visiting tourists. As these representations are transformed into a commodity for tourists’ consumption, residents

¹¹⁶ Eso te levanta el ánimo, que la gente de Dinamarca o EEUU llega aquí.

¹¹⁷ Tenemos contactos en Venezuela, en Perú, en Ecuador, en Chile, en Brasil. Sí, en Barcelona. Sí, por supuesto. Fortalecernos a todos los niveles. Estamos poniendo nuestro granito de arena [...] nos cuesta trabajo avanzar, pero lo estamos haciendo. Esto es avanzar. Esto es, empezar a avanzar.

¹¹⁸ Del barrio al mundo.

also raise questions about their role and control in circulating them. Moreover, while tours construct and mobilize imaginary of a cosmopolitan Tepito, this also turns this imaginary into a site where urban value is contested and reproduced. Before looking at these contestations I focus on the way tours produce and sell Tepito as a globally connected space and build a cosmopolitan *Made in Tepito* brand.

On the path of the worldly Tepito

It was a Saturday morning at the beginning of August 2015 and we were standing in front of the premises of the Association of Street Vendors with a group of students from University Iberoamericana, one of the most prestigious universities in Mexico City. It was not that un-common for university students to attend the tour. Usually they came in the course of their extracurricular activities, for example photo clubs (see Chapter Three), while sometimes, as on that day, the tour was part of their class. The students seemed very curious and from the beginning asked a lot of questions. Victor really enjoyed these lively dynamics since all the questions students posed pointed to their deep interest in Tepito and his work.

While we stood in the middle of the court yard, Victor guided our gaze to the mural in front of the entrance. He did not describe the story of the mural but explained that it was painted in the 1980s by a group of students from Lyon, France, who came to Tepito as part of a student exchange. Besides the mural, the result of this exchange was also the inauguration of Tepito street (*Rue Tepito*) near Lyon (in Oullins), which is still there today. He pointed to a Rue Tepito street sign hanging inside the vendor's association. These stories introduced the group to the worldly fame and global mobility of the neighbourhood.

We continued on our way to the market squeezing into the street where electronic goods are sold we stopped at a stall selling smart phones, tablets and computers. Victor asked the vendor for prices and then turned to the group to transfer the information. The goods were actually not significantly cheaper than in shopping malls (one of the results of the NAFTA agreement) yet it nevertheless pointed to the accessibility of international consumer goods and thus transnational lifestyles for lower-class city residents.

Manoeuvring among the narrow market streets, Victor took the group to various stalls to briefly talk to street vendors all of whom were born and raised in Tepito. This notion was important for two reasons. First, after the opening of Mexico's economy and increased unemployment people from surrounding cities and villages came to Tepito to sell. Due to the

lack of space this increased tensions among vendors. Those who also lived in the neighbourhood claimed to have more rights to vending to those who merely came there to sell. Telling their story during the tour emphasized this distinction and highlighted the hierarchy of rights in accessing scarce space. Second, by stopping only at vendors living in the *barrio* enabled the guide to present Tepito as a place which provides opportunities for global mobility. The mobility of residents was constructed in relation to their rootedness – by showing residents' initial immobility, mobility gained importance.

The story of Jorge illustrates this point. He was a watch seller and repairer who had a small stall in one of the market streets. Victor explained that Jorge, from this small stall in Tepito, had travelled to Europe and worked for multinational companies like Rolex. Jorge added to this story and cited all the European cities he had visited. He emphasized that his wife was from Switzerland and he also showed us photos of himself in front of the Eiffel Tower in Paris and Big Ben in London. Being able to travel to all these worldly places emphasized his global mobility in which he transgressed the role of a vendor by becoming a tourist himself. Sharing his stories and photos with a group of anonymous tourists enabled the articulation of pride and opened the possibility of tying these stories into globally circulating images of Tepito. We, as tourists, were thus important as an audience and represented potential global mobility of these new representations. Furthermore, by emphasizing his global mobility Jorge also strengthened his sense of belonging to Tepito. His movement around the world would not have been possible without selling at this small stall in the middle of the *barrio*. Informal economic spaces formed part of the global movement of goods and facilitated mobility of street vendors around the world.

This narrative of global mobility was enhanced by the story of the Marco Polos of Tepito.¹¹⁹ Before the NAFTA agreement vendors travelled to the USA to smuggle goods or *fayuca* which after the opening of economic borders ceased to be beneficial. With the economic rise of Asian Tigers vendors started travelling all the way to China and Korea to buy cheap (original and pirated) goods. The guide did not introduce any Marco Polos during the tour. Since travelling to China involves a significant amount of money and also requires engaging in illegal activities such as bribery (of police, customs), Marco Polos often prefer to remain anonymous. Yet telling their story reinforced the narrative of Tepito as a globally

¹¹⁹ Mexican anthropologist Sandra Alarcón González has written extensively about Marco Polos of Tepito. As she notes in her thesis, the origin of the name is difficult to locate. She asserts the possibility that it is the guide himself who coined this term (Alarcon 2013: 29).

connected space. While NAFTA enabled Mexican markets to be filled with US and Chinese goods, the agreement did not facilitate the mobility of people. By referring to Marco Polos, the tour positioned street vendors as globally mobile actors who managed to cross existing restrictive boundaries.

After crossing the main avenue and moving away from the market area, a man on a bicycle selling caramelized fruit stopped at our group. Victor explained that this man, born and raised in Tepito, had been selling caramelized fruit for the last thirty-two years. He was up every day at five in the morning and was out selling until all the fruit was sold. The man proudly added that people from all over the world, from Cuba to Japan, came to Tepito to buy his fruit. Some time ago, he continued, an owner of a Mexican restaurant in Japan was so thrilled by this fruit, that he even called his restaurant Tepito¹²⁰ and hung a picture of this fruit seller on the restaurant's wall. Even a street vendor without a stall – in the hierarchy of street vending having a stall represented a privilege not everybody had access to – was able to form transnational connections and 'travel' all the way to Japan.

We started walking again, moving towards one of the more well-known houses in Tepito, a former *vecindad* referred to as *Casa Blanca*, the White House. Inside its courtyard Victor explained that to a large extent *Casa Blanca* owed its fame to Oscar Lewis, an American anthropologist who came to live there to do a study on urban poverty in the 1950s. Lewis popularized *Casa Blanca* beyond Tepito through a book titled *The Children of Sanchez* which was also later turned into a movie (see Chapter Three). But the house was also known for Cuban boxers who stayed there when they came to Mexico City for boxing matches in the 1960s. As they brought Cuban music with them, the house became known for music and dance events, which later became popular throughout Tepito. These stories emphasized the historical fame of the neighbourhood as well as its historically global connections.

¹²⁰ I check the website later to find the restaurant Tepito in Japan and I find it on Tripadvisor: http://www.tripadvisor.com/Restaurant_Review-g1066455-d1679721-Reviews-Tepito-Setagaya_Tokyo_Tokyo_Prefecture_Kanto.html (accessed 15th August 2016).



Figure 8: Tourist group at *Casa Blanca*. Photo: Boris Prodanović.

Back at the market, Victor introduced the group to two female vendors, Gabriela and Esmeralda. Gabriela had just returned from Europe where she had been travelling with her fifteen-year old daughter. While students were taking pictures, Victor stressed that this was not the first time she had visited Europe. To emphasize this point, he named various countries Gabriela had visited, highlighting that Tepito residents were tourists too. In a similar way, Esmeralda's trip to Rio de Janeiro, which took place within our research project, also became part of the tour. Before the trip to Brazil, Victor introduced her as one of the women who participated in the project of *Siete cabronas*. After, she became a woman who went to Brazil and *even* visited the *favelas*. Transgressing national borders and taking on the role of tourist increased Gabriela's and Esmeralda's visibility and their social capital. In addition, the guide's emphasis on Esmeralda's visit to the *favelas* brought her closer to the tourists visiting Tepito: they all shared a certain amount of boldness for venturing into the city's 'no-go' areas.

After the tour, one of the students Flavio told me how amazed he was by Tepito's place in transnational networks. He imagined it to be a relatively closed and immobile space located on the margins of the cosmopolitan city centre. But tours challenged these preconceptions as he discovered that Tepito and its residents were much more mobile than he imagined: "For example in the case of the watch seller, to go to study in Switzerland? Or the other lady who sent her daughter to Spain for her 15th birthday? You are talking about Tepito

of the world. I would have never imagined. And all of this due to hard work. [...] So, you begin to understand, that it is not only informal trade and that's it, no? But that it is about history, about forms of business, of people who without studies are able to make import and exports from China, no? This is something very impressive.”¹²¹ The tour not only transformed Flavio's ideas about Tepito as an immobile space but also his understandings of who can be mobile and how mobility can be achieved. The stories he listened to during the tour highlighted that people from marginalized areas were also part of global processes and that these were not exclusive to the middle and upper-classes. This shift from 'localized' Tepito to 'Tepito of the world' constituted a *Made in Tepito* brand which constructed the urban imaginary of Tepito as a mobile and cosmopolitan place.

Made in Tepito: A cosmopolitan brand

The experience and performance of Tepito as a globally connected and worldly place, which Flavio pointed to in his statement above, is significant for potential transformation of the neighbourhood's imaginary among the tourists. By focusing on the narratives of mobility, the *Made in Tepito* brand becomes more than just a brand of resistance (see previous chapter) but also a cosmopolitan brand of transnational lifestyles and identities. Through the branding process that shapes the imaginary of Tepito as a mobile and cosmopolitan space, residents are able to claim inclusion of their neighbourhood into the city's tourist and cosmopolitan fabric.

The tour guide uses global flows of goods, people and representations to re-brand Tepito from a 'localized' and confined space to one that is globally embedded and connected. The mobility of Tepito and *tepiteños* becomes a resource to counter the stigma of immobility and confinement. Access to consumer goods sold at the street market highlights residents participation in the arena of global consumption and the physically mobile street vendors, who go all the way to China, becoming significant players in the world of global economy. This mobility facilitated by the transnational networks of informal economy points to Tepito's immersion in the global world and depicts *tepiteños* as globally connected agents.

¹²¹ Por ejemplo, en el caso del relojero, para ir a estudiar a Suiza, ¿no? O en el caso de la otra señora para, para festejarle los quince años de su hija en España, ¿no?. O sea, estás hablando de Tepito para el mundo. O sea no me hubiera imaginado. Y eso nada más se da, con base en el trabajo duro. [...] Entonces, como que vas entendiendo mucho, la estructura que tiene ese lugar, ¿no? Que no nada más se trata de comercio informal y ya, ¿no? Si no que se trata de una historia, o sea de la forma de negocio, de personas que sin estudios pueden hacer importaciones, exportaciones desde China, ¿no? O sea, es algo impresionante.

The *Made in Tepito* brand gives visibility to Tepito's integration into globalization from below (Alba Vega, Lins Ribeiro and Gordon 2015; Appadurai 2000), contesting hegemonic understandings of globalization as a process in which lower-classes have no active role. Through the stories of Esmeralda, Jorge and Gabriela, the tour guide shows that Tepito residents also lead transnational lifestyles (as tourists, students, vendors) and that they are in no way different from the cosmopolitan tourists visiting them. This challenges their individual social positions and constructs them as cosmopolitan subjects, which helps to (re)shape Tepito's image of confinement. By branding globally connected spaces and residents' transnational lifestyles, tours produce an imaginary of Tepito that enables it to (re)negotiate its marginalized place in the city.

Tourists visiting Tepito also come to play an important role in this process. The guide depicts tourists as agents who contribute – with their own mobility – to the creation of Tepito's transnational spaces and representations of mobility and cosmopolitanism. For example, I was always introduced as a person from Slovenia doing my doctoral thesis in Germany. Coming all the way to Tepito to do research and attend the tours was not so much about my personal physical mobility as it was about virtual mobility of the neighbourhood.

This range of mobilities constitutes an important part of the *Made in Tepito* brand which enables its inhabitants to present themselves as different from others - unique, special and resistant - but also identical - mobile and cosmopolitan. Tours mobilize the *barrio's* difference (see previous chapter) as well as its sameness. By pointing to the transnational connections tours counter the image of a confined and immobile place, circulating representation of a globally connected and cosmopolitan neighbourhood.

By analysing tourism in the Dharavi slum in India, Romola Sanyal argues that tours serve as a “counter-narrative to the elite imagination of the city, developing its own narrative of cosmopolitanism and worldliness that challenges hegemonic aspirations for the city” (Sanyal 2015: 95). I believe we can apply this idea to Tepito too. If Tepito presents an impediment to Mexico City's image of a global and cosmopolitan capital for the city authorities, tours construct the neighbourhood as an exceptional place, constituted by a matrix of transnational networks. This advances the right of *barrio* residents to be present and visible in the city centre with their ‘own’ and non-hegemonic cosmopolitan identity.

As I pointed out previously, tourists attending Tepito tours are important participants in (re)making the *barrio's* image of (im)mobility. More than that, they are also significant for mobilizing them. By talking and showing pictures of Tepito in their own local environments

or placing them online, tourists engage in the circulation of stories and images about globally connected neighbourhood. These stories provide a currency through which Tepito is also placed on a tourist map, granting it greater visibility and value in the city. Street vendor Gabriela stressed the tourist fame of Tepito, claiming that “Tepito is known worldwide. Truthfully, it is known worldwide. And, and, all the foreigners want to know Tepito. It is the same people from the city that want to know Tepito. It is like going to basilica or going to Xochimilco.¹²² The entire world wants to know it.”¹²³ This not only positions the neighbourhood next to other famous tourist attractions but it also challenges power constellations in the production of tourist spaces in Mexico City from which Tepito was previously excluded.

The virtual mobility of a touristic Tepito through travel blogs, tourist forums and informal conversations (word of mouth) and the growing number of tourists coming to the neighbourhood, increases Tepito’s visibility within the city’s tourist fabric and cosmopolitan brand, potentially granting certain level of recognition to the neighbourhood. As Nancy Fraser points out, recognition is about “upwardly revaluing disrespected identities” which means gaining a voice and enacting struggle against cultural or symbolic injustice of non or mis-recognition (Fraser 1996: 7). In this context, through the process of (re)shaping the imaginary of (im)mobility, tours provide a space through which Tepito’s visibility and value in the city have potential to be transformed.

Production of value through tourism was explicitly emphasized by Javier. He was a self-taught artist who created art from car spare parts, which he also sold in the mechanic workshop below his apartment. Occasionally, the tour guide led tourists to his house where they talked to him and became familiar with his work. Javier really enjoyed having visitors although this rarely benefited him financially: tourists almost never bought his art as it was too heavy and bulky to carry. Yet he told me that he hoped other residents would also open their doors to tourists the way he did, “in order to teach what it (Tepito) is. Because here we have writers, artists, singers, boxers, we have people that have value. And they only talk of delinquents. So, I would like people to open up; because through the tours to Tepito one can

¹²² Basilica of our Lady of Guadalupe and Xochimilco are famous tourist attractions of Mexico City.

¹²³ Tepito es conocido mundialmente. De verdad, es conocido mundialmente. Y todos los extranjeros quieren conocer Tepito. Es más, la misma gente de la misma Ciudad quiere conocer Tepito. Como ir a conocer la basílica, como ir a conocer Xochimilco. Todo el mundo quiere ir a conocerlo.

get to know more people that have value and are valued here in the borough of Morelos”.¹²⁴ Javier’s statement implies that tourists moving through the *barrio* were able to discover this value which would otherwise remain hidden. Moreover, they mobilized the value and made it visible within the city’s tourist fabric, exposing Tepito as a place worth travelling to. Fabian Frenzel uses the term “tourist valorisation” to emphasize the “ability of tourists to add layers of meaning to existing locations” which can lead to changing the perception of a place and disrupting the value regime which stigmatizes them (Frenzel 2016: 7). In this sense, tourists’ mobility to Tepito plays an important role in altering the meaning and value attributed to the neighbourhood and its residents.

Negotiating urban imaginaries and mobility gaps

Javier’s quote, however, raises the question of who can produce Tepito’s value through tourism or how is this value constructed and represented through the tour? By pointing to artists and singers, writers and boxers, value is linked to those who are creative, productive and able to mobilize Tepito’s name in a positive light across the city. Street youth, thieves and delinquents as well as those who are immobile, unskilled or unfit for work – those seen in society as economically or culturally unproductive – are usually not part of this story as they are hardly able to alter Tepito’s symbolic position in the city.

Therefore, while the visiting tourists bring certain level of recognition to the neighbourhood, increasing its symbolic value, this also reproduces the existing “global hierarchy of values” (Herzfeld 2004). Value is a social construct and does not reside in the commodity itself but in its exchangeability (Appadurai 1988: 13). In the words of Arlene Dávila, the value of places is not inherent to them but results from their assessment against established system of value (Davila 2004: 104). Tours shape the imaginary of Tepito as a mobile and globally connected place which provides space for revaluing its place identity. But whereas branding becomes part of the value creation, it does not challenge the dominant narratives of the urban value itself. Tours provide space for a different visibility of the residents in the urban fabric but only as hard working and globally connected agents.

¹²⁴ Pues ojalá más gente como yo se abriera, para que enseñara, lo que es. Porque aquí tenemos escritores, artistas, cantantes, boxeadores, tenemos gente muy, este, valía. Y no más hablan de los delincuentes. Entonces, a mí me gustaría eso, que se abriera y en los recorridos de Tepito, se vaya conociendo más gente que tiene valor, y valía aquí en, la colonia Morelos.

Therefore, while branding contests it, it also reproduces the official narratives of the city as the space of cosmopolitanism, productivity and consumption.

By reproducing hierarchy of values, branding also generates exclusion within Tepito. Since everybody is not immersed or active in transnational networks to the same extent, they do not all belong to the imaginary of mobility shaped by the tour. The flows of goods, people and ideas can bring social mobility for some but they can also increase social inequality of others (Hannerz 1992 in Klaufus 2012: 690). For Doreen Massey, this depends not solely on the issue of who moves and how, but also on “power in relation to the flows and the movement. Different social groups have distinct relationships to this anyway differentiated mobility: some people are more in charge of it than others; some initiate flows and movement, others don’t; some are more on the receiving-end of it than others; some are effectively imprisoned by it” (Massey 1994: 149). In Tepito, there are those who are closer to the global flows of goods (like vendors) and people (those involved in tourism or art) than others, which increases their social status and makes them valuable for constructing Tepito’s imaginary of mobility. Those that do not possess mobility capital, particularly drug addicts and homeless youth, are excluded from the branding process. To a certain extent this also had an impact on my own research as several people I initially included in my study had already previously participated in artist, tourist or other cultural projects, making them more connected to the transnational flows perpetuating Tepito.

Moreover, the meaning of movement conveyed through the tours provides more value to some forms of movement than others. Tours emphasize transnational flows of goods and people while they obscure connections that are formed within the city or the country. Mauricio’s travels to Zapatista communities to conduct shoe-making workshops, which he was very proud of, or barrio-to-barrio exchanges among artists, were excluded from the tour’s narrative. Similarly, tourists from Europe or the USA received greater attention compared to those from other areas of Mexico or even other Latin American countries. While some flows represented movement “across differences”, others symbolized movement between “sameness” (Vodopivec and Jaffe 2011: 124). In order to claim the inclusion of Tepito into a cosmopolitan and globally connected city centre, tours focused on the former and excluded the latter.

According to Kevin Fox Gotham exclusion inflicted by branding is inevitable. While urban imaginaries are plural, contested and power laden, branding aims to create a clear and coherent one which does not always correspond with the lives of all the residents who are

supposed to “live the brand” (Gotham 2007: 844). Not all residents of Tepito identify with the imaginary produced through the tour and not everybody considers transnational connections to be necessarily that valuable. Tepito writer Rodrigo and a member of the cultural collective *Los Olvidados* questioned the number of international researchers coming to study the *barrio*. While international researchers mobilized Tepito in transnational networks he was doubtful of the impact this had for the residents. These networks may have made Tepito famous globally but he did not see any on the ground transformations which benefited residents, neither individually nor collectively.

Ernesto, a *barrio* resident and a photographer, was sceptical too, and not just of transnational but also of translocal connections. In general, he considered it important for Tepito to ‘open up’ and be more receiving of ‘outsiders’, including tourists. Yet he wondered about the way tourists talked about the neighbourhood when circulating stories and photos in their own social environments. There was already a power discrepancy between the residents and the tour guide in brokering narratives and shaping images. But to what extent was the tour guide still in control of the images produced after the tour was over?

As tourists mobilize Tepito in their own settings they take control over the representations, transforming them according to their own agenda. Ernesto questioned whether tourists, along with others visiting the neighbourhood (researchers, artists), really used Tepito to renegotiate its place value in the city or they utilized it to build their own personal value, reproducing an image of Tepito as a place of danger and immobility. In our interview, he stressed: “They come and go and they go and repeat what many have already repeated, no? In reality, what they want is to say, and many times this is the case, many people that come here, ‘I was in Tepito, I got to know this and that, I was here, I was there’. Because there is a dark legend that says, ‘oh, you were really brave’, no?”¹²⁵ For Ernesto, this meant that mobility to Tepito did not necessarily benefit the neighbourhood. He feared that the tourists and other visitors appropriated Tepito to highlight their own mobility and to construct their personal bravery in transgressing socio-spatial city divides.

Thus, Tepito tours do not necessarily challenge mobility gaps or facilitate transnational mobility of *barrio* residents. Although they increase visibility of the neighbourhood as a tourist site, residents continue to lack the opportunity to participate in the

¹²⁵ Porque vienen y van. Y se van y repiten lo que ya han dicho muchos, otros ¿no? Realmente lo que quieren es decir, y muchas veces es eso, mucha gente que viene aquí, "es que yo estuve en Tepito. Yo conocí a éste, yo conocí a estos, yo estuve aquí, yo estuve acá " Porque hay una leyenda negra que dice, "oh, qué audaz fuiste", ¿no?

city as tourists. Opening Tepito to tourism enables already privileged middle and upper classes to enter bubbles they previously considered unattainable and while they get the possibility to transgress the city divides, Tepito residents do not get the same possibility. By exposing global spaces and mobile residents, tours also promote and reproduce urban value of modernity and global connectedness.

Nevertheless, while tours are not able to alter the existing power hierarchies in the creation of urban value and the city brand, they provide space for increasing the symbolic value of the neighbourhood and its residents. Tours provide a terrain where residents can potentially negotiate their socio-spatial marginalization by symbolically moving Tepito across city boundaries through tourist networks. This further highlights their activity in the process of globalization and shows them as active agents in making a cosmopolitan city.

In this chapter I have examined the way Tepito residents experience mobility gaps across scales (global and at local level) and how they use other forms of mobility to contest them. Tours depict and promote global networks which residents are part of and seek to transform the imaginary of Tepito from an immobile *barrio* to a globally interconnected, cosmopolitan place. While this has potential to re-value Tepito's place in the city it also reproduces urban hierarchy of value.

In the next chapter I analyse tensions that arise with commodification and aestheticization of Tepito for tourism. By exploring the presence of violence in the tour and the way this violence is presented and performed through the tourist encounter, I explore the question of who has the right to represent violence(s), or more broadly, who has the right to broker and brand Tepito. I link this to the way residents narrate and negotiate the presence of violence(s) in the *barrio* by focusing on the invisible, structural forms of violence.

6. Tepito brand and the (in)visibility of violence(s)¹²⁶

Representing violence(s)

Every day on the way from my house to the metro station, I passed a street vendor selling newspapers. Unintentionally, my gaze was always drawn to the cover of the tabloid, *El graphico*, one of the more sensationalist daily newspapers in Mexico. Usually, part of the front page of this *nota roja*¹²⁷ featured a nude woman in a rather sexy pose, while the other part portrayed a close-up of a dead, often brutally murdered body. As the aim of such covers was to attract the reader, it was definitely working. But I constantly wondered how these images impact the way people think, understand and talk about violence, especially those who witness or are affected by these violent events directly and regularly.

Connecting pornography and violence may be a successful marketing strategy, as the newspaper is supposedly the most widely read daily newspaper in Mexico. However, this strategy also de-contextualizes violent events, turning them into a spectacle and the victims into dehumanized commodities. Although readers are not only passive receivers of the images and messages produced, daily exposure to the shocking photographs and catchy titles does not necessarily increase their understanding of the violence taking place. On the contrary, the tabloid rarely explains the background of the events, focusing solely on criminal violence: on assaults, murders and rapes. Yet under this “pornography of violence” which focuses on the sensational details and images of blood and aggression, other forms of violence, such as structural and political violence, are untold and obscured (Bourgois 2001: 11).

This is not to deny the continuous and highly problematic presence of brutal and physical violence in the country or the need to make this violence visible. The ‘war on drugs’ declared by the former president Felipe Calderón (2006 – 2012) considerably contributed to the vicious circle of violence, impunity and repression in the country, also bringing to light the corruption of the state’s institutions and its connection to drug cartels (Hernández 2014).¹²⁸ In 2017, several reports pointed to the surge of violence in the country, registering

¹²⁶ I would like to thank my colleague Alana Osbourne whose text (not yet unpublished) on violence and tourism in Trench Town, Kingston, Jamaica, inspired me to write this chapter.

¹²⁷ The literal translation of the *nota roja* is “red note or red news,” close to the English word yellow journalism. It refers to a sensational journalism genre which focuses on stories involving physical violence (Alfaro Viquez 2014: 634).

¹²⁸ His decision to use a military approach to combat drug cartels resulted in the escalation of drug related violence and increased perception of the government’s corruption. As the journalist Anabel Hernández demonstrated in her book

an increase in extortions, kidnappings and homicides related to organized crime (Heinle, Rodríguez Ferreira and Shirk 2017; see also Human Rights Watch World Report 2017). In some areas of the country crime levels are so high that people face – directly or indirectly (via family, friends or as passers-by) – assaults, tortures and decapitated bodies regularly. Since those reporting on these incidents are often also the target of the attacks, it is important to look not only at the representations produced but also to ask who is producing them and for what purpose.

While for the tabloid *El Grafico* portraying dead bodies is a marketing strategy which increases their sales and turns violence into a commodity like any other, for those living in the areas more severely affected by violence, this can also be understood as a strategy of breaking high levels of (self) censorship. In the case of the northern Mexican state Tamaulipas, for example, due to the drug trade and political corruption one of the most violent and censored states in the country (Correa-Cabrera, Machuca and Ragland 2016), posting bloody pictures (also, not exclusively) on Facebook or Twitter is also a way to make visible what is strategically or politically silenced: the brutality of cartel violence, the corruption of the government and human rights abuses. The administrators of the Facebook group Value for Tamaulipas¹²⁹, or the twitter account #ReynosaFollow,¹³⁰ who describe themselves as a group of concerned citizens but who remain anonymous for security reasons, use bloody images of events they witness to break the on-going silence. This means that those who are affected by these forms of violence directly, or witness it up-close, take a level of control over what to display and what to hide, when to do it and how. In this case, the display of violence is also a way to claim power over the representation of the place and the production of a place-narrative.

I think this is an important point when discussing representations of violence, a point that I connect to Tepito too. The question is not only who has the power to produce the images and narratives of violence but also who has the power and the right to broker and ‘edit’ them and how. Since circulating media representations of Tepito as *the* violent space in the city are mostly produced by those who are not from the neighbourhood, this perpetuates

Narcoland, the state officials and subsequent governments worked not to destroy all the cartels but to destroy competition for the Sinaloa cartel and its leader, El Chapo. State institutions were thus increasingly seen as siding with the cartels, as the perpetrators of violence and not the protectors of safety and security (Hernández 2014).

¹²⁹ Valor Por Tamaulipas. See: <https://www.facebook.com/ValorTamaulipas/>, <https://www.facebook.com/ValorPorTamaulipas> (accessed 5th September 2016).

¹³⁰ Twitter account used to report criminal activities in Reynosa town, Tamaulipas: <https://twitter.com/hashtag/reynosafollow?lang=en> (accessed 5th September 2016)

power inequality between those who author, circulate and consume these images (Larkin 2015: 84) and those who live in Tepito.

Although residents are actively engaged in the production of representations and voices, adjusting images according to their own wishes and agendas, they lack the power to circulate and disseminate them, particularly in relation to mass media. In their narratives, residents strategically move between the display and concealment of the violence present. These negotiations are not only about the need to obscure the murders and assassinations taking place in Tepito in order to produce a more positive image. It is also about having the power in deciding what to make visible, when and how. Residents negotiate power and control over the production of representations and narratives, not only in relation to larger power structures beyond Tepito, but also among themselves.

Furthermore, the “pornography of violence” displayed by the media, often through graphic images and spectacular titles,¹³¹ ties Tepito’s violence almost exclusively to its physical, criminal manifestation. This obscures other forms of violence people in Tepito live and face and it shapes the way the neighbourhood is constructed, understood, experienced and interacted with. The stigma of violence, assembled through circulating representations, has a strong impact on the neighbourhood’s inhabitants, turning the stigma of violence into a form of violence itself.

In this chapter I analyse the ways residents negotiate the presence of violence(s) in the *barrio* and the ways violence(s) taking place are (re)presented. By drawing on the tour with Victor and the evening walk with Mauricio, I focus on the presence and absence of different forms of violence in their narratives. Depending on the image and narrative they wish to portray, I look at the way they continuously and strategically move between the concealment and display of violence(s). Victor capitalises on popular images of Tepito’s criminal violence by taking tourists, although only briefly, to the more criminally notorious and drug-ridden area of the neighbourhood. Yet in order to build a more positive image, he strategically plays down the presence of crime and violence in the tour. While this strategy enables a representation of Tepito that goes beyond its violent character spectacular-ized by the media, it also obscures other, more invisible forms of violence perpetuating residents’ lives. The evening walk with Mauricio points to these violence(s) and it exposes the residents’ need to

¹³¹ For example: Drilling a head of a vendor, *El Gráfico* (19th September 2016): <http://www.elgrafico.mx/la-roja/19-09-2016/perforan-cabeza-comerciante-de-tepito>, Riddled a vendor in Tepito, *El Gráfico* (23rd August 2016): <http://www.elgrafico.mx/la-roja/23-08-2016/acribillan-comerciante-de-tepito> (accessed 19th November 2016).

make them visible. This also raises the question of who has the right to represent violence(s), or more broadly, who has the right to broker and brand Tepito.

“Marked like a cow”: The stigma of violence and violence of a stigma

*“A stigma is like marking a cow. Like putting on a seal. On Tepito, they put a seal of douchebags and assholes, and thieves and cheats.”*¹³² (Tepito resident Javier)

“I get up with this stigma every day”, said Manuela, while chewing on her cigarette. She said it slowly, in order for her words to sink in. She stopped and looked at me to see if I understood what she meant, and then she continued: “This criminalises me as a person. To criminalise is to say, ‘a cradle of delinquents, only pure animals live there [...]’. They follow their dynamics, their rules. Their uses and habits’ [...]. The most powerful part of Tepito is its stigma.”¹³³

Manuela is a human-rights activist, born and raised in Tepito, and she has a habit of getting involved in all human-rights related problems in the neighbourhood. She is in her early 30s and has a sharp, yet friendly face. For her, the stigma hanging over Tepito is not just a label but a mark that deeply impacts her life and the lives of her neighbours. This can range from small things, like not being able to get a taxi to go to Tepito late at night, to much larger problems, such as being continuously criminalised. To give an example, Manuela told me a story of her neighbour and friend Sofía, whose son had been kidnapped in a nightclub in a lively borough *Zona Rosa* in 2013, together with twelve other people, many of them from Tepito. She explained the difficulties Sofía faced in the police investigations and in the media, which vigorously stigmatised her and her son due to their Tepito origin. Moreover, the fact that Sofía’s husband and the boy’s father had been in prison for the last twelve years on charges of kidnapping, extortion and organised crime, has not helped.¹³⁴ Manuela explained

¹³² Un estigma es como marcar una res. Ponerle un sello. Aquí nos pusieron un sello de ojetes y culeros, y ladrones y tramposos.

¹³³ Pero me levanto con ese estigma, todos los días, con, aparte la criminalización hacia mi persona. Criminalizar, sí decir, “cuna de delinquentes, en realidad viven puros animales ahí. [...] Siguen sus dinámicas, sus reglas. Usos y Costumbres.” [...] Entonces, la parte más fuerte que tiene Tepito es el estigma.

¹³⁴ In the morning of 26th May 2013, 13 young people were kidnapped from a night club After Heaven in a lively borough of Mexico City, *Zona Rosa*, where they had been partying all night. Many were from Tepito. According to eye witnesses, armed men entered the bar and took them into three vans parked outside and drove off. This so called *levanton* – mass kidnapping – is a common cartel strategy which is not so unusual in other parts of Mexico. However, it rarely happens in Mexico City, especially in the city centre in a broad daylight, with hundreds of police officers in close range. Various interpretations of the reasons for the kidnapping emerged but up to the day it remains unclear what happened to the

that due to all these factors Sofía was not always taken seriously by investigators,¹³⁵ while the media repeatedly portrayed the kidnapping of the youngsters as the show-down among Tepito's criminals.¹³⁶ This implied that being from Tepito was a sufficient reason to be the victim of presumably internal clashes among organized crime.

In our conversation Manuela pointed out that the images and messages that the media produced contributed to Tepito's over-representation and spectacle-ization, resulting in a stigma of criminality and delinquency. This stigma, which focuses almost exclusively on murders, assaults and seemingly internal disputes, obscures power relations behind the representations and places violence as a manifestation of cultural difference rather than the outcome of social, economic and political processes (Rhodes 2012: 685). The mosaic of mainstream news, popular movies, books, online forums and blogs, produces a hyper-real (Larkins 2015) Tepito that inspires imagination and produces imaginaries that travel far beyond the lives of the people in the neighbourhood.

In her book *The Spectacular favela* (2015), Erika Robb Larkins analyses the powerful capacity of the media to constitute reality. She suggests that they produce a hyper-real *favela*, a copy or the representation of a 'reality' that does not reflect the original and is made more compelling and vivid than the original that inspired it. This hyper real "does violence to those that it is supposed to represent because it distorts and simplifies the lives of people rarely given the chance to represent themselves" (Larkin 2015: 84). As Manuela also suggests, the abstract representations are transformed into an embodied and experienced reality, making the stigma of violence also an enactment of violence: it is not only about the poverty and violence imagined to take place in Tepito but also about the poor and simplified representations that become a form of violence themselves. This is why for Manuela challenging Tepito's stigma is a daily priority. While lighting another cigarette, she told me that "to get rid of the stigma is to say I am human, I work, I live and sustain myself in the same way as you do, *cabron*."¹³⁷ This involved portraying Tepito as a unique yet an 'ordinary' place of 'ordinary' people.

kidnapped. Although police found some bodies for which they claimed they belonged to the 13 victims, family members persist these bodies are not of their children. Sofía believes that the body she buried is not the body of her son. She still continues to look for him.

¹³⁵ This was also expressed by Sofía in our conversation.

¹³⁶ See for example: Caso Heaven Case: venganza que terminó en múltiple homicidio, *Milenio*, http://www.milenio.com/policia/caso_Heaven-El_Javi-Jose_Javier_Rodriguez_Fuentes-autor_intelectual-la_Union_de_Insurgentes-jovenes_del_Heaven_0_303569813.html (accessed 19th November 2016).

¹³⁷ Quitar el estigma de decir soy humana, trabajo, vivo y subsisto igual que tú, cabrón.

In order to de-construct the stigma so firmly embedded in the city's urban fabric, Victor also wants to move away from media stories of assault and shoot-outs. He thus touches on the presence of crime and violence in the tour only briefly, capitalising on the images and fears tourists bring with them. Somewhere in between the narrative of the resistant and cosmopolitan neighbourhood, he stops for a moment to point to the drug-trade and violence, yet quickly returns back to the path of the heroic Tepito. This is the focus of the next section.

Narrating violence: Beyond the *nota roja*

We were standing in the middle of a large avenue, encircled by stalls. We were a group of ten and with the exception of myself everybody else was from Mexico City and its surroundings. The air was stuffy. Due to heavy traffic, cars were moving slowly, appearing to be almost standing still. Victor, surrounded by curious tourists, was explaining the main points of the tour and the route we were going to take. It was noisy as there were many vendors walking up and down the street, shouting out prices and goods they were selling. Yet Victor has quite a strong voice so tourists were listening carefully, nodding and absorbing his words.

Before moving forward, Victor asked the group about their “scenarios of fear”¹³⁸: what they feared most when talking about Tepito. A lady, who came with her husband, was from the middle-class area Satelite, responded first. She said that she feared getting lost among the stalls, as she had bad orientation and imagined Tepito to be like a labyrinth: once you entered it, it was not easy to find your way out. After a moment of silence, a young man continued: his fear was to be held-up at gun-point and robbed - an event he had already experienced in the neighbouring borough Guerrero. While he was talking, I remembered a survey I had carried out in my first month of fieldwork. I had circulated it among my network so it was of rather a small sample, but its purpose was to get a feel of the way city residents imagine Tepito. One of the questions was precisely about fears¹³⁹ people have of the neighbourhood. Similarly, to the tourist talking, many answered they feared assaults, armed-robberies, shootings and the drug-trade.

¹³⁸ Los escenarios del miedo.

¹³⁹ I included the question on the suggestion of Victor.

Victor listened carefully, nodding his head as to show that he had heard of similar things before. Although he rarely asked tourists about their fears, it was something that intrigued him. In our interview, he explained that he liked to build on people's fears, taking tourists to places through which these worries could be dissolved.

We crossed a large road, squeezing between the cars still stuck in the traffic jam. On the other side of the road there was a small park with a few benches and tiny patches of grass hardly visible under huge piles of garbage. Initially, the park was built as one of the few public spaces in the area but was now mainly used by street youth as a place to sleep. Our group stopped at the edge of the park and I looked around. There were about ten to fifteen young men and women sitting on benches and the ground, while their sleeping bags were unfolded next to the road. Looking at their clothes and exhausted bodies, it seemed that many of them had been living on the streets for a while. The entire place smelled of *mona*, a popular drug involving inhalation of an industrial solvent. *Mona* has a very strong smell which makes it easy to notice. It is a drug that can be found all over the city and among different classes, although it is still more concentrated in lower-class neighbourhoods and among street youth.

My observations were interrupted by Victor, who began to explain the history of Tepito and of its resistance identity. He talked about the *barrio*'s power and strength and clarified the most popular slogans like "Tepito exists because it resists."¹⁴⁰ Tourists circled around him. From time to time some of them looked around the park and briefly observed the atmosphere, but mostly full attention was on the guide and not on the surroundings. Victor continued to talk about Tepito's history and resistance, making no reference to the park or the people in it. A young man, pushing his nose heavily into *mona*, approached us. The drug was already having a strong impact on him and he had difficulties standing. He stood next to the group for a while, sniffing, listening, with tourists still concentrating on what the guide was saying. After several minutes Victor finished his historical overview, inviting the group to follow him, walking towards one of the alleys behind the park.

The alleys were stall-free which made walking along them easier and more relaxed. The tourists were chatting about what they had heard so far or what was yet to come. After a couple of turns we arrived in Mineros street – a street notorious for small scale drug trade and (gang) violence. While conflicts are not limited to this street alone, residents consider it to be

¹⁴⁰ Tepito existe porque resiste.

among the more conflict-ridden areas of Tepito. Besides a few young men hanging out in front of the houses, the street was empty. As we were away from the main road it was less hectic and noisy. We stopped in front of a large mural known as the Mural of the Missing¹⁴¹, sometimes also referred to as Mural of the Fallen, located next to a large wooden cross.¹⁴² The mural portrays a large number of faces standing in endless rows, with Jesus sitting in the middle and a lion and lioness walking in front. The mural is in fairly good condition although it is visible that it has not been repainted for a while. Part of it is faded and part is missing as some of the outer layer of the wall has fallen away.



Figure 9: Mural of the Fallen or Mural of the Absent. Photo: Boris Prodanović.

“The trade here is different than that of the market”, Victor began, referring to the drug-trade taking place on the streets. “A segment of the growing informal economy was converted into its counterpart”, he added, “the criminal economy.”¹⁴³ The mural, he continued, was dedicated to those who died in Tepito due to the drug-trade or organized crime. The faces on the wall were not there by chance— family members paid to get their

¹⁴¹ Mural de los Ausentes.

¹⁴² Mural de los Caídos.

¹⁴³ Aquí es otro comercio. Un segmento de la creciente economía informal se ha convertido en la contraparte de la economía criminal.

deceased relatives included. It was a way to remember them beyond the *nota roja*, Victor clarified. This comment implied that while the media regularly reported on the shootings taking place in Tepito, this was done in a spectacular way, with graphic pictures, catchy titles and little contextual background. Rather than pointing to the roots or consequences of the violence taking place, the media presented it as an everyday event, a ‘normal’ battle among criminals and gangs. This normalized violence and criminalised the victims, turning both into a commodity to be sold. Yet for the relatives of the deceased, the mural was a way to emphasize human loss and to commemorate the victims, providing them dignity without regarding the way they lived or died.

After this brief explanation, tourists started to take photos. Victor glanced towards the house on the other side of the street to see if Hector was around. Hector¹⁴⁴ was a former drug vendor (some claimed he was still ‘in the business’) in his mid-thirties, well-known around Tepito. In contrast to internet images of the tough looking, tattooed Tepito men (Chapter Three), Hector was skinny and had a boyish-looking face. He had been in a wheelchair for the last 17 years after being shot in his spine in a gun fight. He came out of his house and observed the tourists taking photos. As the group gradually circled around him, Hector pointed to the faces on the wall, clarifying that these were his uncles and aunts, cousins and friends. “Too many of my relatives are on the wall”¹⁴⁵, he said in a soft and calm voice. Tourists listened carefully, waiting for him to say more.

Yet Hector did not say anything else about the mural, nor did he talk about his former drug-business or the events that put him in the wheel chair. In fact, he quickly changed the topic, asking tourists if they had seen him in the TV show *Cronica de Castas*, which had just finished its first season. A few had heard of it but none had seen it. Hector went on, enthusiastic about the experience of acting, explaining that he hoped to pursue his acting career further. As he invited the group to check out the show, a three-year old boy came to sit on his knee. Hector introduced the boy as his nephew. Since the boy’s mother, Hector’s sister, was in prison, he was taking care of him. Victor looked at the group and said it was time to go. We thanked Hector for his time and continued our walk, passing a group of men leaning against the wall, observing us in silence. Besides this group, the street was again completely empty and silent, making the atmosphere stiff and uncomfortable.

¹⁴⁴ Hector died of liver failure in July 2015.

¹⁴⁵ Muchos miembros de mi familia están ahí, en la pared. Demasiados.

At the end of the road we made a right turn and stopped at the stall selling *las migas*, described by Victor as the working-class stew, made out of old bread and pig bones. People were sitting around a large table, eating and chatting, while *doña* Isabela, the stall owner and vendor, was mixing the stew. Our group stopped to buy some pastries and Victor introduced us to *doña* Isabela who greeted the group with a large kind smile. She immediately reached under her seat and took out an old edition of Playboy, turning to a page entirely dedicated to life in Tepito.¹⁴⁶ Her finger stopped at one of the pictures where she proudly stood in front of her pots filled with *las migas*. She joked about her appearance in Playboy and made some funny, sexy, gestures. The group laughed and in contrast to the serious atmosphere at the mural, the area felt livelier and relaxed again. Victor pointed to the title of the article which read *Tepito: barrio bravo*, resuming once more the narrative of a tough and resistant neighbourhood. The food and the comfortable atmosphere revived the tourists' energy. We waved goodbye and retook the route, moving towards the market again. I started talking with Victor who was happy with the way the tour was going. The tourists seemed to be feeling good and they appeared to be very interested.

Coming back to the market, we were again faced with the cacophony of sounds and smells. As we were navigating between the stalls and the people, Victor whispered to me that a few days ago Laura, the *Las Gardenias*¹⁴⁷ team-coach, was murdered in the middle of the day at Tepito stadium, by being shot in the head. He shook his head, adding that it was an unexpected and terrible tragedy. A tourist walking further behind approached us and Victor changed the topic of our conversation, never mentioning anything else about this event throughout the rest of the tour.

Brokering violence and transforming fears

As a tour guide who leads tourists into a heavily represented and stigmatised neighbourhood, Victor strategically navigates between what to narrate to tourists and what to leave out; between what he refers to as the dark and violent side of Tepito and its invisible, resistant side. Being a tour guide gives him considerable power in representing Tepito.

¹⁴⁶ The reason for Tepito's performance in Playboy was the Cuban actress Sissi Fleitas who chose Tepito as a place for her nude pictures. She decided to take photos in Tepito because she considered it to be an emblematic Mexican barrio full of colours, tastes and traditions. See: La rubia cubana Sissi Fleitas se desnuda en Tepito para 'Playboy', *Excelsior*, 17th December 2013: <http://www.excelsior.com.mx/funcion/2013/12/17/934100> (accessed 26th November 2016).

¹⁴⁷ *Las Gardenias* is Tepito's football team which consists of transsexual people.

Although there is some interaction between tourists and residents during the tour, the guide is often the only '*tepiteño*' with whom tourists have significant contact with. Victor thus becomes a broker between Tepito and the city, one that negotiates physical access (which places are visited and which are not), encounters (interactions with residents and the environment) and understandings (cognitive access) (McGrath 2007; Weiler and Yu 2007 in Weiler and Walker 2014). As somebody who has a lot of contact with tourists, researchers and journalists, Victor is well aware of the images visitors bring with them. In the tours he thus negotiates between tourists' expectations, his own narrative about life in the *barrio* and his efforts to counter the stigma.

He brokers Tepito in a way that tackles violence but still constructs the brand of resistance and cosmopolitanism. Bearing in mind tourists' images and fears of Tepito, he does not want to by-pass the criminal violence portrayed by the media completely. Still in order to (re)brand Tepito into something more positive, violence is strategically present (f.ex. mural) and absent (f. ex. Laura's murder) in the tour. This is a balancing act: violence is 'needed' for the tour yet too much of it also risks ruining the narrative being put forward. To this end Victor continuously capitalises on existing images and fears, trying to subvert them into their counterpart. Or as he stated in our interview, it is about turning stereotypes into anti-stereotypes.

Taking tourists to the mural, located in the notorious area of Tepito is part of this strategy. First, by pointing to the way residents cope with the violent consequences of the drug-trade taking place on Tepito's streets, the guide is able to go beyond the bloody spectacle of violence shown by the media. Second, the visit to the area is brief, placed in-between more relaxed tourist stops, where the narrative of resistant and cosmopolitan Tepito is quickly re-taken.

Going beyond the media spectacle is made possible by Victor's focus on the mural as a site of public memory, a site to remember violent events and the people who died; and on the grief of family members who make a financial contribution to have their relatives' faces painted on the wall as a sign of respect and dignity. Hector, who counted numerous family members on the mural, alludes to this grief. Although he may have been involved in several violent incidents himself, he was not shielded from its consequences. His story indicates that even drug-traders, de-contextualized by the *nota roja* as heartless and 'naturally' delinquent, are victims too.

Hector is also a figure through which Victor constructs an anti-stereotype of a drug-dealer in the tour. Skinny and boyish looking, stuck in a wheelchair, he does not fit the stereotype of a tough and dangerous criminal. By avoiding talking about his past Hector also negotiates his figure as a dealer, intentionally or not, pointing to other aspects of his identity. He is an actor, trying to make it in the acting business, and he is a loving uncle who takes his nephew under his care. In a way, Hector embodies the contradictions of Tepito: criminal, dangerous and powerful, yet also friendly and caring, ready to give a helping hand. Yes, people involved in criminal economy, as Victor labels it, live in Tepito, but they are more than just criminals. They are also neighbours, friends and family members, and they are part of the *barrio's* fabric too. Presenting the figure of a drug-dealer to tourists and pointing to his 'normal' life beyond the criminal episodes, is thus part of the guide's effort to destigmatise Tepito and challenge tourists' fears.¹⁴⁸

The latter is also the reason that Tepito's street vendor Esmeralda, who is part of the tour as tourists always visit her stall, is pleased to receive tourists. As tourists walk around the neighbourhood she observes their attitudes changing: "It's good that they come, they get to know that not everything that is told about Tepito is true, that Tepito is a beautiful neighbourhood and that people in it are beautiful too [...] and when there is opportunity to see when they enter. Ah, to see their scared faces. And when they leave, with smiles on their faces, free of all the things they were carrying when they entered. This is beautiful."¹⁴⁹ Esmeralda feels that tours have an impact on tourists' perceptions of Tepito which go beyond media stories of danger and violence. More than that, as her statement implies, the tours open space for changing people's interaction with Tepito, transforming their feelings of fear to one of warmth and happiness.

This is also what Victor wants. In our interview he emphasized: "They [tourists] re-appropriate many sayings and slogans that we have made during the years. This I feel is very important. Because tomorrow they can be good interlocutors, in the family, in the society, in schools, in places of their work, [they will say] "I was in Tepito". It could be a symbol of

¹⁴⁸ It should be noted that Hector, although presented as a former drug dealer, is also depicted as a productive and creative young man, engaged in various artistic and cultural projects. Therefore, his figure does not contradict the value of productivity constructed through the *Made in Tepito* brand, as analysed in previous chapter.

¹⁴⁹ Pues está bien, que vengan, que se den cuenta que, todo lo se dice no es verdad, que Tepito es un barrio muy bonito y que la gente, que está en él, es bonita la gente, ¿no? [...] cuando hay oportunidad de verlas cuando entran. Eh, pues les ves las caras así como de asustados Y ya cuando los ves que salen, y los ves con una sonrisa y que salen, libres de tanta cosa que andaban cargando cuando entraron. Eso sí es bonito.

pride, of a personal challenge, to attend one day Tepitour in Tepito.”¹⁵⁰ Victor considers the enactment of walking through Tepito to be potentially transformative, not only for the *barrio*, but also for the tourists: turning their fears into a symbol of personal challenge and pride. This also expands his role: he is not only brokering access, understandings and encounters but also tourists’ emotions and their safety. Furthermore, tourists’ personal and embodied experience of this transformation turns them into de-stigmatising agents who talk about their Tepito experience to friends and family, circulating a new, potentially different narrative of a place. By being able to go ‘in’ and ‘out’ of the more notorious and violence-prone areas safely, indicates that these are possibly less dangerous than portrayed by the media. Violence is thus strategically placed in the tour, aiming to go beyond the *nota roja* and challenge tourists’ fears while at the same time brand Tepito as the *barrio* of resistance and cosmopolitanism.

Negotiating (in)visible violence(s)

The focus, however, should not only be on the way violence is represented in the tour but also on what is represented as violence. Tepito residents allude to this distinction when talking about violence(s) in their neighbourhood, pointing out that criminal violence is just one of many forms of violence they experience. Instead of looking at violence though it’s multiple forms, the tour focuses on the already visible, highly mediatised criminal violence, obscuring other forms, like structural violence (Galtung 1969; Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois 2003; Farmer: 2004), in the process.

Structural violence is “violence exerted systematically” (Farmer 2004: 307); it is violence that is built into the social structure and is manifested as unequal power and unequal life chances (Galtung 1969: 171) which makes it relatively invisible. When I talked with Rodrigo, a writer and a member of the artistic collective *Los Olvidados*, he pointed to the presence of structural violence in Tepito. In our conversation he stressed that “poverty is also a form of violence”¹⁵¹, underlining that the stigma hanging over its residents obscured the violence(s) they endure.

¹⁵⁰ Retoman muchos de los dichos y eslogan que hemos acuñado en todo este tiempo. Entonces, eso a mí me parece bastante importante. Y que el día de mañana sean buenos interlocutores en la familia, en la sociedad, en la escuela, en dónde trabajen, "yo fui a Tepito". O sea, es un símbolo de orgullo, de reto personal, haber ido un día a un Tepitour en Tepito.

¹⁵¹ Pobreza es una forma de violencia.

The focus on Tepito's criminal – on the direct and the physical – violence throughout the tour misses an opportunity to turn these invisible forms of violence into visible ones. Although the tour's narrative goes beyond the media spectacle, (re)shaping the figure of the *narco* and pointing to some difficult consequences of violence in the neighbourhood, it still perpetuates a limited understanding of violence, framed through the lens of delinquency and crime. This manifests not only through what the guide points to and explains but also through what he lacks to address, for example the deprivation of the homeless and drugged youth in the park. At that site, the guide's focus on Tepito's history and resistance seems disconnected from the environment. There is no reference to the exclusion these young people experience, the violent conditions of the environment in which they sleep (the garbage, possible assaults, cold), or to the link between the drug-trade, drug-abuse and structural inequality. Instead of bringing these forms of violence(s) and their entanglements to light, tours obscure what Philippe Bourgois and Nancy Scheper-Hughes referred to as the "continuum", the connection between the visible (criminal, self-inflicted) and invisible (structural, normalised) forms of violence (Bourgois 2009: 18, Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois 2003).

Yet Rodrigo's comment above is telling. It illustrates that the residents, rather than pointing to the drug-trade and crime, want to make visible the invisible violence(s) which perpetuate their lives. The spectacular presence of criminal violence in the media and in political discourse makes many reluctant to repeat the stories and consequences of these episodes. They talk about the problems of exclusion instead, of drug-abuse, environmental hazards and infrastructural problems, the state's criminalisation and corruption– everything they feel is neglected and invisible, but has a significant, violent impact on their daily lives. Rather than seeing themselves exclusively as perpetrators of violence, as portrayed by the media, they want to point out they were also its victims – victims of the inequality and exclusion in which they live.

Their victimhood is unnoticeable and many feel their exclusion is criminalised. Gustavo spoke in length about the large number of *tepiteños* in prison: "Tepito leads in the number of prisoners worldwide. We, *tepiteños*, occupy the first, non-honourable, place in the number of people in prison."¹⁵² He argued that this was not only because there was more crime in Tepito than in other places – criminal violence was not hermetically enclosed in the *barrio*, it was present all over the city – but that the high-rate of imprisonment was also

¹⁵² Tepito es el primer lugar, de presos, en todo el país. O sea, quiero decir, los tepiteños ocupamos el deshonesto lugar de tener el primer lugar, de nuestra gente detenida, presa, eh, habita en las cárceles del país.

because the police (ab)used Tepito to produce “archives of delinquents”¹⁵³ and to portray themselves as efficient in catching criminals.¹⁵⁴ “This talks about the criminalisation of poverty”, he stressed. “The criminalisation of the *barrio*. Of this stigma, always present in the *barrio*.”¹⁵⁵ Furthermore, the police not only criminalise Tepito but also form part of its criminal networks. Gustavo highlighted the problematic link between the local police and drug-traders, which made the police an active agent of the violence it ought to be preventing. His comment should not be understood in a way that transfers the responsibility for the drug-trade and criminality in Tepito exclusively to the police or other state representatives. Rather, Gustavo wanted to stress that Tepito’s residents were rendered visible only when they were criminalised and stigmatised which made the exclusion and insecurity of their daily lives invisible.

Mauricio, a former shoe-maker, who refers to himself as a cultural promoter, is particularly critical of the singular way violence is represented in the media. He argues that there are many problems in Tepito its residents endure, which have a deep and violent impact on their lives. He considers informal spaces to be part of Tepito’s problem, spaces that perpetuate violence(s) in the neighbourhood, not resist it. He invited me for an evening walk around Tepito, pointing to different forms of violence(s) so I could see and feel what he meant. Our walk is the focus of the next section.

Behind the market stalls

I met Mauricio at 8pm at the main avenue which had far less traffic than during the day. It was already getting dark and the market had closed. Mauricio was waiting for me in front of the metro station. He was always very punctual which, compared to others, was not that common. Mauricio was one of Tepito’s central figures with a significant level of respect within the neighbourhood. Being in his 70s he had retired and dedicates most of his time to grassroots community projects, mainly related to art activities and work with children and youth.

¹⁵³ Archivo de delinquentes.

¹⁵⁴ I could not verify the statistic to which Gustavo referred. Nevertheless, the statement emphasizes his sentiment of criminalization of Tepito's residents.

¹⁵⁵ Eso habla de la criminalización, de la pobreza. De la criminalización, del barrio. Del estigma, siempre presente en el barrio.

We started to walk down the main street towards the market. Mauricio stressed – he did it almost every time we met, just to make sure I really understood – that street vending has completely displaced the crafts and trades (*oficios*), for example, shoe making, popular in Tepito in the middle of 20th century (Alba Villalever 2009: 16). As a former shoe maker, he argued strongly for the need to learn such trades. Mauricio was aware of the need for street vending – jobs are scarce so it is a way to make a living – and he was not upset with street vendors per se. But he was critical of commoditised society where youth learned only how to sell and consume but were never taught how to produce anything, let alone anything useful.

From the main street we entered the empty market. The stalls, covered in yellow and blue canvas, were empty of merchandise but the metal structures stood solid as vendors never removed them. Mauricio pointed out that during the weekend it was popular for vendors to sell *Michelada* (beer with chilli), although selling alcohol on the street is forbidden. This attracted a lot of young people who come to Tepito to get drunk.

Since it was a week-day the market was completely empty and most of the vendors had already left. In between the stalls, we occasionally ran into some of them sitting on the pavement, chatting, having a beer and a joint. The smell of marihuana was wafting in the air, mixed with the odour of garbage. Mauricio guided my gaze to the trash on the ground which seemed endless. This was the amount of garbage that vending produces *daily*, Mauricio told me, repeating it frequently during our walk, in order to imprint the image in my head. As we were walking down the street he pointed to my right saying that the pavements have been completely occupied by stalls which made it difficult to walk there during the day and dangerous to walk there during the night. People frequently got robbed behind the stalls when it got dark. We continued walking through the market full of empty stalls and trash, arriving at a street covered by a tin roof. Mauricio shook his head to show his disapproval of changing the open and public street into a closed market space but said nothing.

Out of the blue an elderly man came up behind us pushing his hand against his nose. He greeted Mauricio in a friendly way and while I observed the man's hand I became overwhelmed by the smell of *mona*. I realized that his hand was pressed against his nose because he was sniffing. He walked with us for a while but mostly kept quiet. The impact the drug had on him was visible. His expression was distant and his mind seemed lost – which is what *mona* does, it makes you completely numb. After some time, the man said goodbye and Mauricio remarked, visibly sad, that drugs had become a major problem in Tepito. As we discussed the increasing levels of drug-abuse and its connection to the drug-trade, music was

increasingly interrupting our conversation by becoming louder with our every step. At the end of the street I noticed a store and located the source of the music. While I observed some young people standing in front, drinking beer, I tried to grasp the meaning of the lyrics, but my Spanish deluded me. I asked Mauricio about the lyrics but he did not reply, and merely pointed out, in disapproval, that what they were playing one of the very popular *narcocorridos*.¹⁵⁶

After almost an hour of walking, we continued our way towards the housing unit called Palomares. We left the metal structures of the stalls behind and without them the street felt wider and the air easier to breathe. Palomares was a large white building, with many apartments and a big concrete courtyard. When we arrived, it was completely quiet. Without the lights visible through the windows it would have felt empty. This was where Mauricio was born and where he had lived for the first years of his life. Consequently, many people in the building knew him and he felt safe coming here at any time of the day. But the area itself was not safe, he added, as many people around here are involved in criminal activities. During the following months of my fieldwork this was the site of a range of shootings. In October 2015 a small baby was severely injured during an assassination which left the baby's father dead. This was just one of many violent events that took place in the neighbourhood, with Palomares being one of the areas where such violent outbursts were more common and was thus recommended to be avoided by 'outsiders'. After standing in the courtyard for a while, absorbing the atmosphere, Mauricio interrupted our silence by asking himself out loud what will happen to all the children and youth living in these circumstances. Will they turn into delinquents, drug addicts? "I have seen so much of this here", he added. "And it hurts. It hurts all of us"¹⁵⁷. Not sure what to say, I nodded sympathetically, but said nothing.

As we stood in the middle of the courtyard, talking about the problem of crime and drug dealing, I asked Mauricio about the Mural of the Fallen. How did he feel about it? He sighed and rolled his eyes slightly. He was not very keen on painting drug-dealers on the wall. Although he knew many of them he was of the opinion that they should not be portrayed as heroes by being imprinted on the wall or the cross. A boy he knew, whose father

¹⁵⁶ *Narcocorrido* is a drug ballad. During the 1980s ballads (*corridos*) about drug-trafficking and violence that surrounds them became very popular, and came to be known as *narcocorridos*. The widespread popularity of this genre has been interpreted by various scholars and journalists, some arguing that they are a strategy of resistance to state corruption, or that they are propaganda for the cartels or a cultural genre which discloses the truth of the censored events (Muehlmann 2014: 89).

¹⁵⁷ Lo veía tanto aquí. Eso duele. Nos duele a todos.

had been shot and his name carved on the cross, passed the site every day. Mauricio wondered whether this made the boy see his father as a hero, wanting to have his name there too. This was the wrong role-model for a child to have, Mauricio stressed, especially in a *barrio jodido*, the poor neighbourhood.

On our way out of the courtyard, we stopped at what looked like a small garden, but was covered in garbage. “This was one of the projects we did,”¹⁵⁸ Mauricio said. He explained how they wanted to make a communal garden for the house but with no success. As they did not fence it in, it got destroyed. For a while we just stood there observing this quite sad looking former garden. I looked at Mauricio and noticed his disappointment. His ideas on improving the neighbourhood through such small-scale interventions in space were obviously neither appreciated nor respected by all of its residents.

It was 10pm when Mauricio decided it was time to head back. We made our way to the market which was still empty and dark. We arrived at the main avenue where Mauricio pointed to the trees overlooking the street. All of the trees were either covered with canvas or had canvas tied to them. Mauricio turned to me in anger: “It is quite unbelievable that no environmentalist ever comes here and condemns this. This is ecocide!”¹⁵⁹ I continued to observe the street for a while. It was still quite empty, with only a few cars passing. There were some people walking along the street, many coming to collect garbage to sell. Due to the amount of garbage the smell was quite strong. After waving Mauricio goodbye and walking back to the metro I still had the smell in my nose but this was quite quickly substituted by the smell of daily sweat and metal inside the metro.

The violence(s) and pain behind resistance

The walk with Mauricio exposed the presence of multiple violence(s) in Tepito and the ways residents felt and experienced them in their daily lives. Conversing with the tour’s narrative, Mauricio highlighted that the tour guide touched only the tip of the iceberg of violence(s) residents endured. Explicitly, Mauricio rarely framed the problems he pointed to as violence. Rather, he talked about the corporeal and emotional impacts these problems had on residents’ personal lives and on the collective fabric of the neighbourhood. This pointed to

¹⁵⁸ Es uno de los proyectos que hicimos.

¹⁵⁹ Por qué ningún ambientalista viene aquí y lo condena. Esto es un ecocidio.

the notion of violence defined less through what it is and more through what it does. The walk exposed the ways structural inequality and power relations play out at the level of everyday life and on the harmful effects they produce (Auyero and Burbano de Lara 2012; Rodgers and O'Neill 2012: 402). As violence(s) and its harmful effects does not affect everybody in the same way (Auyero and Burbano de Lara 2012: 21), the walk also illustrated how different places and sites are contested as they carry diverse meanings for different people.

The street market is particularly relevant for grasping these points. While tours represent the street market as a source of creativity, resistance and cosmopolitanism, it does not show, Mauricio claimed, the huge amount of problems the street market produces. If tours shift violence to the areas beyond the market, Mauricio brings it back, pointing to the market as a site and a source of violence. In our walk, he drew attention to the attacks that happened at the market during the night, mainly behind the stall's metal structures that vendors left behind.

Yet more than the violent crimes that took place, Mauricio wanted to stress that the street market, which he claimed got out of control, was itself a form of violence. As vendors – many of whom are not from Tepito and only come to the neighbourhood to sell – do not completely remove the stalls, it is difficult for residents to walk obstacle-free during the night. Let alone use the street for children to play in. Mauricio considers the market's occupation of the streets to be a form of violence on Tepito's physical (on its streets) and social space. This was what Mauricio wanted me to see with my own eyes and feel with all of my senses: the metal structures fixed to the ground which a pedestrian needed to avoid, the amounts of garbage that was left daily and was not cleaned regularly and thus smelled badly, the emptiness of the market due to a lack of public space where residents could hang out, the run-down houses, increasingly turned into warehouses and whose decay was hidden behind the stalls and consumer goods during the day. Walking around the market after vending had stopped felt as if Tepito had been stripped of its façade. If Victor emphasized that *lonas* (canvas) covering the market were like the neighbourhood's second skin that protects (Hernández Hernández 2012: 1) from external interventions and displacement, it also felt that the *lonas* of the market obscured its social and environmental problems (poverty, violence, drug abuse, huge amounts of garbage) and the impacts these had on the daily lives of its residents. It was almost as though the bustling of the market diverted the attention of the

visitor away from violence, poverty, drug abuse, the drug trade and environmental degradation.

The sound of the market which tourists were exposed to during the day was not the same as the sound Mauricio wanted me to hear. The sound of the tour's market was a cacophony of vendors yelling, of shoppers bargaining, of loud music playing at the stalls selling CDs: this was the sound of work, activity and creativity. The sound of Mauricio's market was different: it was silent. This was the sound of emptiness, interrupted occasionally by the sound of canvas rubbing against metal structures, pointing to the lack of public space in the area. In the evening, the daily smell of food stalls was transformed into one of garbage and drugs: the smell of Tepito's social problems. The market as a space of consumer's desires and dreams was turned into a space of leftovers. This was the point Mauricio wanted me to understand: the harmful consequences of street vending which for him were daily and corporeal.

This brought to light the connection between environmental degradation, infrastructural deprivation and violence. In their analysis of urban marginality in an Argentinean *barrio*, Javier Auyero and Burbano de Lara highlight the harmful consequences of environmental hazards and poor infrastructure and their role in the reproduction of marginalization and destitution (Auyero and Burbano de Lara 2012). Infrastructure is fundamental in shaping people's relationships with each other and their environment and may thus have a violent and harmful effect on their lives, resulting in what Dennis Rodgers defines as infrastructural violence (Rodgers and O'Neill 2012). The notion of infrastructural violence refers to the socio-spatial production of suffering through infrastructure (Rodgers and O'Neill 2012: 405) and it points out "how more structural forms of violence flow through material infrastructural forms" (Rodgers and O'Neill 2012: 405).

Mauricio hints to this form of violence by pointing to the way the market infrastructure limits residents' relationships with each other and disconnects them from their environment, having violent and harmful effects on their lives. Moreover, this implies the market to be the material site of structural violence, as the high-levels of inequality gives people no other choice than to work in precarious and informal jobs, reproducing resident's exclusion and marginality.

And then there were those who became involved in drug-dealing and other forms of criminal activities. As we stood at the premises of Palomares, Mauricio stressed the far-reaching consequences this had, not only for families but also for the social fabric of the

neighbourhood, as it resulted in high levels of family violence, drug-abuse and street violence. Mauricio found this highly problematic and this is also what made him question the aestheticization of violence through the mural and the cross. He considered them to be more than just the sites of memory. He feared they also pointed to Tepito's future, turning criminal activity into something desirable for generations to come, becoming a space where the violent fabric of Tepito is (re)produced.

Mauricio's emphasis on Tepito's daily violence(s) and its harmful consequences challenges the tour's narrative of strength and empowerment. While tours serve as a counter-narrative to Tepito's stigma by portraying the neighbourhood as resistant and cosmopolitan, this also obscures daily struggles and problems that some of its inhabitants continuously face. Although Tepito is much more than its popular image of violence, drugs and delinquency, this is nevertheless part of its everyday landscape. While the narrative of resistance and strength contributes to the empowerment of Tepito's inhabitants, becoming a strategy of coping and negotiating exclusion, this narrative does not challenge the structural inequalities behind it and it neglects the painful consequences these inequalities cause. Although daily struggles and violence(s) do not affect all the inhabitants to the same extent or in the same way, they cut into Tepito's social and emotional fabric. The pain to which Mauricio referred to while we were standing in Palomares was not just his personal pain, but the public pain that was the consequence of severe inequalities and violence(s).

I came across the notion of public pain at a presentation of the book *The Interior Circuit* (2014), written by an American novelist Francisco Goldman. During a discussion with Mexican writer Daniel Saldaña Paris, they framed public pain as a political and social category which accompanies violence, impunity and inequality present in the country. The pain refers to the ways people experience violence(s) that surrounds them, individually and collectively, and the damaging effects this has on the society in which they live. This notion of pain comes close to what Arthur Kleinman, Veena Das and Margaret M. Lock address as the "social suffering, the whole assemblage of human problems that result from what political, economic, and institutional power does to people" (Kleinman, Das and Lock 1997: ix).

Pointing to this suffering or the pain, *el duelo*, during our evening walk, made visible the dynamics and experiences of (in)visible violence(s). This also exposed the messy and entangled relationship between multiple violence(s) and it pointed to the ambiguities of coping with its consequences, moving between the power of resisting them and the

vulnerability of living them. By leaving out the latter from the tour, it ignored the complexity of daily life in Tepito which is corporeal and emotional. It is due to this embodied experience of violence(s) and pain, which forms part of residents' lives that makes Mauricio question who has the right to broker and brand Tepito.

The right to brand and the harm of branding

The problem Mauricio pointed to was that the guide, although a former resident of Tepito and still deeply involved in the neighbourhood's activities, does not live there anymore. It is not about questioning his knowledge of the neighbourhood or his networks; rather, the problem for Mauricio is that he does not personally experience Tepito's complexities, from its strengths to its vulnerabilities, on a daily basis. Mauricio stressed several times that "we have to live all the *desmadre* (chaos) that vending produces, but the guide goes to his home outside of Tepito."¹⁶⁰ Therefore, the right to broker and brand Tepito was, according to Mauricio, reserved for those who live in the neighbourhood, living not just its heroic but also its violent side.

Mauricio's comment was connected to the prevailing sentiment amongst residents that Tepito is constantly being appropriated by people and institutions for socio-economic or political purposes (see Chapter Three). Residents are annoyed with the constant use and abuse of the neighbourhood for different agendas, which is why they also differentiate between *tepiteros* (people coming to Tepito to work but who do not live in the neighbourhood) and *tepiteños* (residents of Tepito).¹⁶¹ In an interview for the news portal Vice, Victor told the journalist that being from Tepito is a state of mind,¹⁶² which implied that one does not need to live in the neighbourhood to be a *tepiteño*, thus also giving legitimacy to his brokering role. But Mauricio did not agree with this. Using tourism to counter the stigma, to navigate exclusion and to negotiate inequality, could only be performed by those who lived through all of this daily, with their entire bodies and emotions.

The guide's emplacement in Tepito is entangled with the brand he constructs throughout the tour. While this brand becomes a source of empowerment and strength for its

¹⁶⁰ Tenemos que vivir todo el desmadre que el comercio produce, pero el guía regresa su casa fuera de Tepito.

¹⁶¹ For some of my interlocutors this was a way to underline what they considered a tangible distinction between 'outsiders' and 'insiders'. This differentiation was partially a consequence of the boom of street commerce after 1994 which increased the already existing feeling of appropriation of Tepito from the 'outside'.

¹⁶² El ser *tepiteño* es un estado de ánimo. See: Playing Soccer in One of Mexico's Most Dangerous Barrios, *Vice*, 15th May 2015: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oAxf6PQmVw> (7:33; accessed 1st August 2016).

residents, it also produces new tensions. Firstly, one of the problem's is the tour's focus on the *barrio*'s criminal violence which reproduces representations of violence portrayed by the media, simplifying the multiple violent experiences of the residents and obscuring the link between violence and inequality.

Moreover, behind the heroic representations that tourists encounter and experience during the tour, the daily life in the *barrio* is not always as heroic. Turning Tepito's stigma into a brand provides space to potentially reposition Tepito's place in the city, but this does not change the continuous violence(s) residents face. The tour's narrative of resistance, power and strength does not open space for people to mourn and to cope with daily difficulties. These painful daily problems are not always easily fixed; on the contrary, people need time to face them and also learn how to live with them.

Philippe Bourgois argues that while gripping descriptions and grotesque photographs contribute to pornography of violence and reinforce the negative perceptions of a place, the imperative of focusing merely on its positive characteristics also reduces the harm and suffering that violence(s) produce (Bourgois 2011: 29). Similarly, while tours try to counter the spectacular presence of Tepito in the media, its focus on Tepito's heroic and resistant side also obscure the invisible violence(s) and its more silent coping strategies. Through the branding process which tries to overturn the stigma of a violent Tepito, other forms of violence to which residents point to continue to remain invisible. Branding Tepito thus plays a double role: while it offers a strategy to publicly cope with its exclusion and violence it also produces new tensions and wounds.

By using the example of violence this chapter has looked into tensions that arise with the commodification of Tepito for tourism. I have analysed the way walking tours depict and sell violence in Tepito, also looking at the way residents understand and negotiate presence and representations of violence(s). Different views over how violence should be represented and what should be represented as violence also raises the question of who has the right to broker these violence(s), or more importantly, who has the right to broker and brand Tepito.

In the following chapter I point to the emerging governmental interest in Tepito tours and I highlight the way this has altered the dynamics, route and narrative of the tour. By building on the emblematic *barrio* culture, governmentally backed tours provide an opportunity for a stronger cultural presence and visibility of Tepito in the city. However, as 'Tepito culture' becomes more popular, it also exposes the contested and elusive understandings of culture between governmental actors and Tepito residents. While the city's

symbolic economy based on leisure and tourism provides space for visibility of *barrio* culture, at the same time it triggers a power struggle over how this culture should be marketed, for whom and for what purpose.

7. Making of the *barrio* culture

Tepito, a place of rich culture

It was a hot Saturday afternoon in the middle of June 2015. We were a group of twenty people standing at the start of Peralvillo Avenue, a street formerly known for shoe production and one of the oldest streets in Tepito. The group of visitors were mostly from federal ministries and the media so there were many cameras present, persistently following the moves of the state officials. Their assistants were constantly on the phone, ‘tweeting’ what was said and posting pictures on Facebook. People passing by stopped from time to time to observe the group and then continued on their way.

This was the first tour organized by Victor together with a few other residents – a human rights activist Manuela, a street vendor and queen of *albur*, Gabriela and a street vendor Paola - and in cooperation with SEGOB’s representatives (Mexico’s federal Secretariat of Interior) which only weeks prior initiated a project aiming to expand tourism in Tepito. Their plan was to turn informal, sporadic and flexible walking tours into a professionalized, formalized and popularized tourist product which would attract larger amounts of tourists. For this reason, also the price of the tour increased from the previous MXN 100 to MXN 300.¹⁶³ The idea of expanding tourism in Tepito was only partially inspired by the existing walking tours. The main incentive was the success of the experimental theatre play *Safari in Tepito*¹⁶⁴ produced by the famous Mexican director Daniel Giménez Cacho, which SEGOB’s department for Prevention and Citizenship Participation¹⁶⁵ financially supported through their violence prevention program.¹⁶⁶ Representatives from the department joined forces with the existing tour guide and other residents who had previously cooperated and showed an interest in participating in Tepito’s tourist development.

While we were waiting for the tour to start, we received leaflets and postcards which indicated the route, including pictures and descriptions of each site visited. The name of the

¹⁶³ 100 MXN is 5 EUR and 300 MXN is 15 EUR.

¹⁶⁴ The play was based on a Dutch “live theatre” or “intervention theatre” piece titled Wikjsafari (<http://www.tga.nl/voorstellingen/wijksafari>), directed by a Dutch theatre producer Adelheid Roosen. Together with the Mexican director Daniel Gimenez Cacho she used the same model to produce a play in Tepito. Viewers walked around the neighbourhood with Tepito residents who also took them to people’s houses and where residents talked about their life. For more information see: <http://www.zinaplatform.nl/project.php?id=2&l=en>.

¹⁶⁵ Subsecretaría de Prevención y Participación Ciudadana.

¹⁶⁶ Through this department SEGOB supported the project with one million Mexican pesos which is approximately 50 000 EUR. See SEGOB website: <http://www.gob.mx/segob/prensa/el-arte-es-un-instrumento-que-promueve-la-cohesion-social-campa-cifrian>.

tour had changed into *Tepitour* and the logo *Moved by Peace*, the official brand of the National Program for Social Prevention of Violence and Delinquency¹⁶⁷, was printed on every page.

After the group had gathered and the media had taken the first snapshots we started to move. Instead of heading towards the street market which was on the other side of the road, we were taken away from it, towards the historical sites down Peralvillo Avenue. Our first stop was *vecindad* number 15. The group stopped at the entrance of the building where Victor explained the history of Tepito and then pointed to the architecture of the house, explaining its structure and functionality. Built in the 18th century, he said, it was considered one of the oldest *vecindades* in Tepito and was placed under historical protection in 1981. The visitors admired the building and took pictures of the once beautiful yet now severely rundown staircase in the middle of the large courtyard, the setting of the famous movie *Caifán del barrio* (1986).

At the entrance of the house the sub-secretary of the SEGOB's Prevention and Citizen Participation department, Eunice Rendón Cárdenas, opened the event. She began by mentioning the projects they had previously implemented in Tepito as part of their violence prevention program. She emphasized the tours were a continuation of these projects and that the incentive for tourist development was in fact the *barrio*'s cultural fabric itself: "At SEGOB we asked ourselves: why don't we form a tourist product here in Tepito? Like they take you to see *favelas* in Brazil, here you can go see Tepito, a place full of rich culture."¹⁶⁸ Turning Tepito's culture into a tourist product, she continued, will attract tourists from all over the world and transform the neighbourhood into a famous tourist attraction of the future. With the media's attention to her every word, the sub-secretary highlighted the role of tourism in bringing recognition to Tepito's identity¹⁶⁹ and "strengthening (its) social cohesion."¹⁷⁰

After this initial introduction she passed the word back to Victor who remained the official guide of the tour yet now sharing his role with Manuela and Gabriela. The group left the house and continued walking down Peralvillo Avenue. Victor pointed to the art-deco architecture of the houses overlooking the street and added that many famous people lived

¹⁶⁷ Programa Nacional para la Prevención Social de la Violencia y la Delincuencia.

¹⁶⁸ ¿Porque no hacer un producto turístico aquí en Tepito? Así como te llevan en Brasil ver este las favelas aquí también puedes ver Tepito que tiene mucho más rica esa cultura.

¹⁶⁹ Resaltar la identidad de un lugar

¹⁷⁰ Fomentar cohesión social.

there, for example the former Mexican president Manuel González (1880-1884) and Jaime Nunó, a Spanish composer of the music for the Mexican national anthem. Some people nodded, as if they already knew all this, while others quickly turned their heads to get a good look at the houses as the group walked towards Santa Ana church. The media followed, filming the houses and the group strolling down the wide, vending-free avenue.

Throughout the rest of the tour, the governmental officials and journalists continued to explore historical areas and cultural sites of Tepito. The guides took them to churches – to the famous church *La Concepcion Tequipeuhcan* where the Aztec emperor Cuauhtémoc was imprisoned in 1521 by conquistador Hernando Cortez; to the still existing *vecindades*, and to the monument of José Maria Morelos - a Catholic priest and a revolutionary who fought for Mexican independence. While a large part of the tour focused on Tepito's history and tradition, the guides also talked about contemporary cultural life in the *barrio*, taking tourists to the monuments of *Siete cabronas*, the altar of *Santa Muerte*, the Mural of the Fallen and the Kid Azteca Stadium.

The media continued to follow the group and the assistants persistently posted photos and statements onto social media, emphasizing the incredible experience of the tour, of Tepito's history and culture.¹⁷¹

The governmental efforts to expand tourism in Tepito triggered interest among various actors who wanted to engage in its development. The number of residents involved in guiding and brokering Tepito increased slightly, bringing new voices and perspectives to the narrative of the tour. While this de-monopolized the guide's power over tourism in the neighbourhood, it also increased governmental control over the process. The new *Tepitour* gained the attention of other governmental institutions which further reinforced the governmental role in marketing and branding the neighbourhood.

The governmentally backed marketing of *barrio* culture provided an opportunity for a stronger presence and visibility of Tepito in the city, pointing to its importance for the city's cultural heritage and national identity. However, as Tepito culture was rapidly gaining attention on the city's tourist market, it also exposed the contested and elusive understandings of this notion between governmental actors and Tepito residents.

This chapter looks into different ways *barrio* culture is understood, deployed and marketed by the governmental institutions and the neighbourhood's cultural collectives.¹⁷² I

¹⁷¹ See for example <https://twitter.com/tepitours>.

look at the politics behind ‘cultural branding’ and I question what is promoted and how, by whom and for whom. My aim is not to identify or define *barrio* culture but to explore the diversity of its meanings and uses by a range of actors with a variety of interests and agendas. I focus on the historical and present linkages of culture and space, that is to say, I look more closely at the ways different actors ascribe *barrio* culture onto urban space.

The differences over meaning and promotion of culture are entangled with the negotiations over urban development. With the shifts in urban development towards symbolic economy, culture became an important “instrument used by the government to sell, frame and claim space” (Davila 2004: 9). The cultural discourse under which urban development takes place thus makes culture a powerful means for controlling cities (Zukin 2004: 86), turning culture into a currency of commercial exchange (Zukin 1995). Referencing to cultural identity can therefore render marginalized neighbourhoods attractive and easily marketable. In other words, the visibility of marginal areas as cultural products can provide cities with a competitive advantage in the interurban competition (Shapiro 2016: 171). However, the meanings of culture are multiple and power-laden which makes cultural politics of urban development a contested process. The on-going negotiation over understandings and uses of culture among a range of actors plays a significant role in challenging the social constellations of power in the city, questioning the top-down planning of urban development. Ideas to promote Tepito culture through tourism are thus linked to broader efforts to transform the neighbourhood symbolically, economically and materially.

New brokers, new narratives

In the middle of June, just a couple of weeks before the first *Tepitour* took place, SEGOB organized meetings with Victor and several other residents. The aim was to discuss the possibilities of expanding tourism in Tepito, striving to attract more tourists and possibly turn the walking tours from the individually-led into a more collaborative project. Several SEGOB representatives attended the meetings and discussions revolved around organizational factors and marketing strategies.

Manuela and Gabriela were both keen to participate. Manuela considered tourism to represent an important strategy of the *barrio*’s de-stigmatization while Gabriela had many

¹⁷² I use the word collective from the Spanish word *colectivo* which many artistic groups and cultural movements in Tepito use to refer to their group or association and their communal work.

ideas for potential new routes and tourist sites. They both saw tourism not only as an economic opportunity but also a possibility to have a stronger voice in the place-narrative and place-branding. A lot of enthusiasm was generated at the meetings and there was a prevailing sentiment that Tepito was on the verge of a large tourist development.

This new initiative repositioned power constellations in brokering and branding Tepito. Manuela and Gabriela began to share the guiding role with Victor, contributing with their ideas and personal perspectives of the neighbourhood. On the one hand, increasing the number of tour guides decentralized the brokering and branding process. On the other hand, the ownership of the tours and tourism development broadly remained an open question. SEGOB's support – mainly symbolic and in terms of promotional and not financial – increased the governmental role in the way tours should be organized and promoted. The “we” that sub-secretary of the SEGOB's Prevention and Citizen Participation department Eunice Rendón Cárdenas emphasized in her speech stressed that the federal ministry, despite its efforts to include more residents in the tours, saw itself as a significant player and in control of Tepito's touristification.

After initial enthusiasm Victor became somewhat critical of the growing role of governmental officials and of their efforts to professionalize and standardize the tours. In our interview he underlined that he saw his tours, rather than selling Tepito as a product, a way to tell the truth about the neighbourhood: “[...] if I go in front of the group they know it is because we are projecting another image of the *barrio*. The real and truthful image of the *barrio*, no? That we are not selling a product. That we are drawing back a veil, yes? That we are unveiling the truth. It is to reveal with a small V. Because we rebel, with a capital R, yes? This is the intention.”¹⁷³ Although ‘truth’ and ‘authenticity’ were highly contested ideas, Victor's statement to a large extent suggests that he considered his tours, which were part of informal economy themselves, also as a potential strategy of countering the standardized and mass-oriented tourism of the city centre. Victor believed that the flexibility of the tours would not only bring more satisfaction to tourists but would also help to keep the ownership over tourist development in Tepito. However, who exactly was to have this ownership remained elusive and unclear.

¹⁷³ [...] si yo voy al frente de un grupo es porque estamos proyectando otra imagen del barrio. O sea la, la imagen real y verdadera del barrio, ¿no? Que no estamos vendiendo un producto. Que estamos, descorriendo un velo, ¿sí? Que estamos revelando la neta. Es un poco revelar... con 've chica'. Por qué nos rebelamos, con 'be grande', ¿sí? Eh, ésa es la intención.

By the end of the summer, the eagerness regarding Tepito's tourism development decreased. Due to political changes at SEGOB as well as differences that emerged among the group involved in tourism planning, mainly over how to manage the walking tours, *Tepitours* came to a standstill. Victor retook his previous route but kept the new name. Despite the fact that the federal secretariat backed out of the project, the initiative nevertheless triggered expansion and transformation of the tours, diversifying the number of tour guides. In the middle of 2016 when I was already back in Europe, I noticed that Manuela occasionally continued to take tourists, particularly student groups, around Tepito.¹⁷⁴ I also found that the architect Carlos, who had been working with students on environmental projects in Tepito for many years, began to organize tours on a more regular basis, opening them to a wider public.

Yet the visibility of their initiatives remained rather limited as another Tepito tour was developed by the city government by the end of 2015. Towards the end of the summer Delegation Cuauhtémoc started to drive tourists to Tepito in an old trolley car. Although trolley tours have existed for years, the Tepito route was the newest addition. When I left Mexico at the beginning of November 2015 this tour was still in the process of preparation so I never had the opportunity to attend one. But at the beginning of 2017 the media reported this to be by far the most popular trolley tour.¹⁷⁵ Interestingly, this tour carried the same name – *Tepitour* – yet they were slightly shorter than those organised by SEGOB, lasting approximately two to three hours and were free of charge. By taking tourists down Peralvillo Avenue the tour stopped at *vecindades*, churches, the former *pulque* custom¹⁷⁶ and the *Maria Velasco* art gallery, the only gallery in Tepito.

In order to turn Tepito into a trendy, competitive and popular tourist product, both governmental initiatives were backed by a strong marketing strategy. SEGOB's representatives invited lots of media to attend the tours and their assistants placed every word and picture on social media, as described in the beginning of the chapter. During the summer *Tepitour* was frequently in the news which created an atmosphere that the neighbourhood was becoming a fashionable place to visit.

¹⁷⁴ See: "Tepitour": un recorrido para 'Dreamers', *CBS News*, 5th July 2016: <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/tepitour-un-recorrido-para-dreamers/> (accessed 5th April 2017).

¹⁷⁵ See: 'El Tepitour' es la estrella del tranvía en la Cuauhtémoc, *Milenio*, 2nd January 2017: http://www.milenio.com/df/tepitur-tranvia-cuauhtemoc-turismo-barrio-tepito-milenio_0_877112285.html (accessed 5th June 2017).

¹⁷⁶ Aduana de pulque. This is a historical building located at the corner of Peralvillo Avenue. During the 18th and 19th century this was the main entry point for transporting *pulque* from the neighbouring states to Mexico City and where taxes on transport were collected. In 1931 the building was declared a national monument (Márez Tapia 2011: 61).

Newspapers wrote extensively about this new tour, emphasizing the importance of Tepito's "cultural identity, history and gastronomy."¹⁷⁷ The Twitter account, which SEGOB created in order to promote tours, was full of comments praising Tepito's identity and social cohesion, inviting people to come and "live the experience of TepiTour."¹⁷⁸ The emphasis on the *barrio*'s history, tradition and cultural identity was also the result of the modified tourist route. As mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, the guides took tourists to *vecindades*, churches and monuments, focusing on the neighbourhood's historical, religious and cultural spaces. Victor, Gabriela and Manuela were fond of including these sites in the tour. This "cultural exhibition"¹⁷⁹, as Gabriela put it, was an opportunity to show that the Historic Centre was not the only area with a rich history and cultural heritage but that Tepito was part of it too.

Yet tours intentionally avoided the street market which was not appreciated by Victor or Gabriela. Governmental representatives were not keen on promoting politically and economically contested informal spaces or shopping of pirated and smuggled goods. While it was not possible to avoid the market completely – getting from one side of Tepito to another required passing through the market – it nevertheless played a less significant role, also downsizing the narrative of a tough and resistant *barrio*. By including new spaces, tours mobilised new representations and narratives which appraised the history and cultural identity as the neighbourhood's main attribute.

The trolley tours had a somewhat similar focus. In the same way as the federal ministry, the delegation also promoted Tepito as "the emblematic neighbourhood"¹⁸⁰ and a "cradle of national history."¹⁸¹ Every Tuesday afternoon a promoter stood in front of the trolley in the city centre shouting: "Tepito is not just commerce, in Tepito there is history!"¹⁸² Such slogans emphasized the importance of the neighbourhood's past but also implied that

¹⁷⁷ La identidad cultural, histórica y gastronómica. See *Milenio*, 15th June 2015: http://www.milenio.com/df/Tepitour_recorrido-Tepitour_historia-Tepitour_arte-Tepitour_Segob_0_536946531.html (accessed 10th March 2017).

¹⁷⁸ Los invitamos a vivir la experiencia del TepiTour. *Twitter*, 2nd July 2015: <https://mobile.twitter.com/Tepitours/status/616694902747869184> (accessed 10th March 2017).

¹⁷⁹ Muestra cultural.

¹⁸⁰ Emblemático barrio Tepito. See: *City Manager*, 20th June 2016: <http://revistacitymanager.com/index.php/2016/06/20/viaje-gratis-la-ciudad-abordo-tranvia/> (accessed 10th March 2017).

¹⁸¹ Cuna de la historia nacional. See Delegation Cuauhtémoc website: <http://www.cuauhtemoc.cdmx.gob.mx/paginas.php?id=subturismo> (accessed 10th May 2017).

¹⁸² ¡Tepito no es sólo comercio, en Tepito hay historia! See: *Diario de México*, 15th May 2016: <http://www.diariodemexico.com.mx/un-tranvia-llamado-tepito/> (accessed 10th May 2017).

the large street market was not part of its history. Tradition, cultural identity and history, placed in monumental buildings and houses, became the buzz words for marketing Tepito.

Tepito, emblematic *barrio* of the Historic Centre

If six years ago the authorities criticized tourism in Tepito (see page 101), by the end of 2015 they were actively involved in its development. The city and federal authorities vigorously marketed *Tepitours*, framing Tepito as the “most emblematic *barrio* of the Historic Centre”¹⁸³ or as one of the “oldest and mythical.”¹⁸⁴ Next to the stories and images of violence and delinquency, the media began to portray the neighbourhood as *the* unique place of Mexico City, full of rich history and cultural identity, promising its visitors a “taste of the past.”¹⁸⁵

In their online promotional material Delegation Cuauhtémoc used similar terminology to market Tepito as it did for the Historic Centre, stressing its emblematic and legendary character, encapsulated in historical monuments and cultural heritage.¹⁸⁶ By promoting the two areas in a similar way, the delegation framed Tepito as a unique but also integral part of the Historic Centre, the city’s most important tourist and heritage site.

By emphasizing Tepito’s cultural uniqueness, its emblematic character and history, the governmental authorities gradually began to promote the *barrio* as a cultural asset. Drawing on its past, manifested in historical and religious monuments and buildings, tours fostered an understanding of the neighbourhood as a space of value for the city’s history and future development.

Although this frame and the intensive promotion increased the presence of *barrio* culture in the city, both SEGOB and Delegation Cuauhtémoc were the ones who remained in control of the narrative put forward, strategically marketing only certain aspects of Tepito’s cultural identity. While symbolic economy provides diverse opportunities for cultural production and consumption, the authorities desire to control the production of symbols

¹⁸³ Barrio más emblemático del Centro Histórico. SEGOB’s leaflet distributed at *Tepitour*.

¹⁸⁴ Barrio más antiguo y mítico. See *Ciudadanos en Red*, 30th April 2016: <http://ciudadanosenred.com.mx/tepitur/> (accessed 10th March 2017).

¹⁸⁵ See: Viajan al pasado, *Reforma*, 17th June 2016:

<http://www.reforma.com/aplicacioneslibre/articulo/default.aspx?id=871808&md5=c91830598a67ead1a726b22c0f590257&ta=0dfdbac11765226904c16cb9ad1b2efe&lcmd5=c6da3bc511c543af1e7f3f2ae3ce4359> (accessed 27th May 2017).

¹⁸⁶ See CONCAULTA’s website: http://www.cultura.gob.mx/turismocultural/destino_mes/cd_mexico/ (accessed 25th March 2017).

(Zukin 2001), to have power over the meaning of culture that is put on display. Veiled under discourses of uniqueness and legendary history, *Tepitours* fused *barrio* culture with heritage and tradition, materialized in architecture and historical sites. By pointing to the neighbourhood's past, Tepito became an attractive and unique tourist destination of the future.

Marjana Johansson highlights that rebranding of a place often re-invokes "the nostalgic past, pointing to cultural or historical circumstances which are seen to give a place a specific aura" (Johansson 2012: 5). However, the relation between the place and its past is constructed and sanitized (Johansson 2012: 5; see also Lee and Yeoh 2004), which entails only certain aspects of history are marketed and put on display. *Tepitours* drew on the history of national importance, on historical narratives that were relevant for the development of the city's cultural heritage and national identity. By exhibiting the houses of the former Mexican president and author of the Mexican anthem, these tours highlighted the significance of Tepito's history in building the Mexican nation. The sites of Cuauhtémoc the last refuge or the former *pulque* custom pointed to Tepito's pre-colonial past, materializing the official narrative of national identity construction by emphasizing the pre-Hispanic origins of Mexican culture.

Yet tours bypassed other aspects of Tepito's history to which its residents frequently pointed to, such as political struggles against governmental redevelopment projects, for example Plan Tepito in the 1970s. Or they neglected the variety of cultural movements which emerged as a result of a social and political critique of the residents' socio-economic situation; the movements, on which cultural collectives continued to build their present work. Governmental control over the tour's narrative not only sanitized the neighbourhood's history but also disassociated understanding of culture from historical and present *barrio* politics. That is to say, the conflation of culture with architecture, heritage and tradition that took place under governmental discourse obscured other understandings and uses of culture in Tepito, particularly those that expressed its relation to inequality, politics and class identity. 'Cleaning' Tepito culture of inequality and politics enabled the authorities to market the *barrio bravo* as a trendy tourist product and as an exciting cultural experience.

Nevertheless, being in Tepito and admiring its architecture, historical monuments and churches, provided tourists with new ways of knowing and sensing the place. This historical framework helped to construct a sense of "historical cultural unity" (Luck 2009: 36) and provided a space for tourists to connect to the neighbourhood. A tourist and city resident

Maria, was surprised to ‘discover’ the art-deco architecture at Peralvillo Avenue, just like that present in the Historic Centre. She considered visiting Tepito important for everyone living in Mexico City as it helped them to understand “our history.”¹⁸⁷ Walking around the notorious neighbourhood, learning about its history and cultural fabric, enabled tourists to re-appropriate violent urban spaces and integrate them into the city’s common historical trajectory. SEGOB’s slogan *Moved by Peace* under which tours took place strengthened this idea. As tourists walked along Tepito’s streets they symbolically played a role in re-signifying their meaning, turning them from dangerous areas and no-go zones into historically important and culturally attractive tourist sites.

However, while this created spaces which connected tourists to Tepito and its residents, it did not necessarily increase tourists’ awareness of the wider socio-spatial inequalities that shaped Tepito in the first place. Rodrigo, a member of the cultural collective *Los Olvidados*, highlighted this point, noting that while tours equipped tourists with new knowledge about Tepito they also turned the neighbourhood into a souvenir.¹⁸⁸ *Barrio* culture became an experience or a memory, limiting its potential for political engagement and change.

Mauricio was of a somewhat similar opinion. For him the governmental role in touristification of the *barrio* was not much different from urban development strategies in other parts of the city. Although he recognized the potential of tourism for Tepito, he claimed that the problem was its top-down approach: “Everybody talks about making place beautiful [...] Make them beautiful in order to sell them [...] And when they talk about selling tourism, they talk about money flowing in [...] so the country can progress. But it is not like this. Because they always start with the project upside-down. Before all of this they should work on developing communities, neighbourhoods, work with the people.”¹⁸⁹ Mauricio’s statement implies that rather than using *barrio* culture for mobilizing its political power and developing the neighbourhood, authorities promoted culture to attract capital investment and use cultural tourism for the economic development of the city. The problem of this top-down process of touristification was that it fostered a specific meaning and understanding of *barrio* culture

¹⁸⁷ Nuestra historia.

¹⁸⁸ Sí, es un espectáculo, es un souvenir.

¹⁸⁹ Donde todos hablan de poner bonito un lugar [...]. Ponerlo bonito, para venderlo [...]. Y cuando se habla de vender al turismo, se habla de, para que caiga la derrama de dinero [...] y el país, pueda, progresar, ¿no? Cuando no es así. Porque ellos empiezan un proyecto siempre al revés. Primero deben de empezar, el desarrollo con las comunidades, con los barrios, con la gente.

and that it was primarily directed towards tourists rather than the residents themselves. Mauricio argued that a specific historical linkage between culture and urban space should be promoted, one which emphasized its political potential for challenging inequalities and changing the neighbourhood. For him this also meant that the promotion of culture should largely take place in the neighbourhood, among residents, as he considered cultural awareness to be an essential resource for building collective identity and a sense of community.

Cultural places as political spaces

I first met Mauricio in August 2014. We met at *El foro* (the forum), also referred to by residents as *Martes de Arte* (Art Tuesdays). This was a rather small, open-air space, located at the intersection of two large avenues crossing Tepito (Eje 1 and Vidal Alcocer). It was a colourful place, surrounded by a brightly painted fence which separated the area from the street market. There was a small concrete stage in a corner, which was used regularly for cultural performances. A mural by the recently deceased and widely known Tepito artist Daniel Manrique was painted across the wall and this was accompanied by his quote: If we all pulled together life would be much better.¹⁹⁰

This was Mauricio's favourite place. He always sat on the steps of the stage, chatting with others, often elderly people from the *barrio*. They gathered there daily to discuss the events of the day, the neighbourhood's issues or national politics. Mauricio, in collaboration with Pedro, was also in charge of running the place and organising its activities. They regularly met there to plan the weekly cultural program and special, one-off events. Tuesday evenings were reserved for dancing, Wednesday for poetry writing and reading and Fridays were dedicated to a course in painting. Once in a while Mauricio conducted shoe-making workshops and just before I was leaving a young hair-dresser began hair cutting classes.

As the few parks in the neighbourhood were surrounded by street stalls or were inhabited by street youth, *El foro* was one of the few places where residents could gather and hang out. Occasionally people from other parts of the city, mostly artists and students, also joined in the activities. The events taking place were free of charge and with occasional

¹⁹⁰ Si todos jaláramos parejo la vida sería más chida.

support from private and governmental entities, Mauricio and Pedro were able to run the cultural program regularly.



Figure 10: Dancing event at *El foro*.

The aim of *El foro* was not simply entertainment. For Mauricio, Pedro and others who supported their work, it was a space of encounter and social cohesion. They were convinced that by bringing residents together to mutually create a physical and social space, where they can share and exchange skills in arts and (traditional) crafts and trades (shoe-making), could build a collective identity and sense of community. As stated on the website promoting their projects “only by supporting the arts and crafts of the neighbourhood can we open new pathways of individual and collective development.”¹⁹¹ Cultural spaces were thus essential for building community and changing Tepito’s social and material environment.

The making of cultural spaces was a social and political process. Mauricio argued that they provided a site to build the capacities of young residents, to teach them about arts and professions and thus equip them with an alternative to street vending and the drug-trade. While these spaces advanced the importance of the neighbourhood’s self-autonomy and economic survival, they were also important for building residents’ cultural identity and political conscience.

The purpose of cultural spaces was a way to make a claim on Tepito, on its streets and public spaces which over the years had become increasingly appropriated by street vending.

¹⁹¹ Solo apoyando las artes y los oficios del barrio podremos abrir nuevas vías de desarrollo individuales y colectivas. See their website: <http://casabarriotequito.com/actividades-culturales-en-tepito/> (accessed 25th March 2017).

They represented a strategy of intervention into a physical and social environment which cultivated a specific relation with the neighbourhood. This granted some sense of control over the construction of urban space in a way that takes into account residents wishes and needs. Production of urban space was not simply about appropriating physical space but also about having the power over imagining change for Tepito.

This was something that Mauricio regularly explained to journalists, researchers, artists or others who visited the neighbourhood. Being an important figure in Tepito he was also a broker who regularly met with ‘outsiders’ to talk about life in the neighbourhood and his work. He arranged meetings or interviews at *El Foro*. These meetings were an opportunity to make cultural spaces visible and promote their meaning and role for residents. Mauricio and Pedro worked hard, in cooperation with other cultural collectives, to increase knowledge about cultural projects taking place – among those visiting the area as well as among residents themselves. They collaborated with students, (inter)national researchers and journalists, and Pedro regularly used the internet and social media to promote their ideas. Occasionally they took visitors for a tour of Tepito, guiding them around houses and courtyards painted with murals, focusing on the work of Daniel Manrique and the cultural movement *Tepito Arte Acá*, co-founded by the artist in 1972.

In his interviews, conversations or informal tours, Mauricio regularly explained the meaning of *barrio* culture in terms of their group and their work. Following the tradition of Manrique, they understood culture as the neighbourhood’s daily life rooted in artistic practices and traditional arts, crafts and trades (shoe-making, carpentry etc.). For Manrique, the link between art and manual work was significant as it demystified the concept of art as the practice of the privileged. Countering an elitist understanding of culture as art closed in museums and galleries, Manrique placed art into the sphere of everyday life, emphasizing its relation to manual work and deconstructing the boundary between artist and manual worker (Folgarait 1986: 65, 69). Together with others members of *Tepito Arte Acá*, to which Mauricio as a shoe-maker also belonged, culture was an expression of the *clase popular*, the working class, conceived and materialized on the streets, courtyards and other public spaces (Folgarait 1986).

Manrique’s philosophy was based on the entangled relationship between art, (manual) work and way of life. He considered art to be not merely a question of aesthetics but a form of “community intervention which provides *tepiteños* with the tools to recognize their

problems and find solutions”¹⁹² (Rosales Ayala 1987: 34). The presence of art in the centre of people’s everyday life aimed to build a collective identity (Fukushima Martínez 2012: 11) and political conscience, to be used in challenging the unequal socio-economic and political structures.

Tepito Arte Acá also promoted a specific relation between *barrio* culture and urban space. In fact, the movement did not start as an artistic collective but as a strategy to oppose the urban re-development project *Plan Tepito*, proposed by the government’s Commission of Urban Development in 1972. In 1979, to counter this plan, members of the movement¹⁹³ ordered a study which resulted in an alternative proposal, prepared by the architecture school at UNAM, in which they called for the need to create “architecture by the people and for the people”¹⁹⁴ (Rosales Ayala 1987: 21). Although *Plan Tepito* never took off, this point calls attention to *Tepito Arte Acá* which came to life not simply as an artistic movement but also as a critical attitude to a social situation (Rosales Ayala 1987: 8); as a political critique of top-down urban development and as a struggle for power over the neighbourhood’s change. As members of *Tepito Arte Acá* movement pointed out, knowing what to do with houses, patios and streets, to have control over creating urban spaces also meant being aware of one’s own cultural identity (Rosales Ayala 1987: 39). For cultural collectives, this relation between cultural identity and urban space remains relevant till today.

By bringing journalists, researchers, students and the neighbourhood’s residents to cultural spaces, cultural collectives foster a specific relation to the neighbourhood’s past. They advance an understanding of the *barrio*’s history and cultural identity which takes into account its social and political struggles. Through this historical narrative they frame culture as a site of politics, a tool for negotiating urban development strategies and for challenging socio-spatial inequalities. Rather than cleaning *barrio* culture of class identity and political struggle they attempt to promote this culture with a politically aware agenda.

Although Mauricio and Pedro brokered cultural spaces to ‘outside’ visitors – by talking to the media, giving presentations to students, networking with other cultural collectives around the city – their primary goal was to promote their work, their ideas and understandings among Tepito residents. Pedro often stressed that the problem was not merely the image people from other places had about Tepito, but also how residents themselves

¹⁹² Intervención comunitaria para ofrecer a los tepiteños herramientas que les permitan reconocer sus broncas y encontrar soluciones.

¹⁹³ The tour guide was also one of the members of the movement *Tepito Arte Acá*.

¹⁹⁴ Es arquitectura de humanos para humanos.

understood the neighbourhood's culture and identity. He argued for the need to change the minds of people in order for people to make their own changes, which meant constructing consciousness, identities and increase a feeling of pride.

Pedro and Mauricio thus wanted to raise resident's awareness about *barrio* culture and its specific relation to the neighbourhood's history and urban space. Learning about art and professions was about building residents' conscience of historical political struggles and developing their sense of community. Being conscious of this culture and history was a way to reconcile tensions and fragmentations in the neighbourhood or as Pedro stated, without "culture there is no co-existence."¹⁹⁵ It was residents' awareness and sense of community that Pedro and Mauricio considered to be potentially transformative for the neighbourhood and in challenging urban socio-economic and political inequalities.

***Barrio* culture and urban development**

While governmental authorities begin to promote *barrio* culture as an extension of the Historic Centre and its cultural heritage, significant for building national identity, cultural collectives highlight the link between culture, class identity and political struggle. The different ways *barrio* culture is understood, used and promoted by governmental authorities and cultural collectives, points to different relations actors have towards the neighbourhood's history and urban space. These differences are not solely about having control over cultural meaning or about appropriating Tepito's physical space, but also about fostering a different political imagination and idea of change. In other words, the contested meaning of culture unmask the different ideas over how Tepito should be developed, by whom and for whom.

Governmental authorities consider Tepito as a space where urban development policies are to be reproduced, with tourism as an important strategy of this process. Simply put, governmental support of Tepito tourism is also part of its urban regeneration scheme without making clear who this development would benefit the most. Although Mauricio and Pedro recognize the potential of tourism development, they also emphasize that questions, such as who is involved in tourism, how and what role should it have in the *barrio*, matter. They argued for residents control over the process of touristification as well as over the

¹⁹⁵ Sin cultura no tenemos convivencia.

neighbourhood's development more specifically: residents should agree and decide which needs should be primarily addressed and which projects should be financially supported.

In his book on street vendors in Mumbai, *The Slow Boil*, Jonathan Shapiro Anjaria argues that to conceive and promote marginal places as strongholds of culture has the potential to “challenge dominant concepts of what a global city looks like” (Shapiro 2016: 177). Focus on the cultural fabric of a marginal neighbourhood represented and marketed through tourism, can therefore provide a terrain for negotiating a hegemonic city image and top-down development policies. This means that instead of hiding places like Tepito from the tourist gaze, cultural branding turns these places into added value in promoting a touristically dynamic and culturally diverse city. However, it is important to pay attention to ownership over this cultural visibility and to the way this culture is promoted, for whom and for what purpose.

Reorganisation of urban development around symbolic economy provides spaces through which a range of actors can negotiate cultural meanings and representations. Different groups and individuals construct, alter, deploy and contest these meanings in order to advance specific interests (Hyrapiet and Greiner 2012: 408). Zukin calls this a “permanent paradox, a paradox between centralized monopolies that attempts to control cultural production and the new ideas that require democratic access to the means of cultural expression” (Zukin 2001: 4). This means that while the representation of culture, promoted under governmentally run tourism, becomes a way for authorities to appropriate meanings and narratives, cultural production can also serve as a resource to contest these processes. These negotiations also unmask the way various actors imagine urban development and change, of their neighbourhood and of the city more specifically.

This chapter has looked into the way different actors understand, promote and brand *barrio* culture through tourism. Whereas cultural branding negotiates Tepito's symbolic position in the city, it also opens space for authorities to take control over the way *barrio* culture is marketed and expand their urban development strategies. In other words, the contested understanding of *barrio* culture, which comes to the fore with Tepito's tourist development, is linked to broader efforts to transform Tepito and Mexico City, symbolically and materially.

8. Conclusion: Commodifying and negotiating inequality

This thesis has analysed the motives, processes and effects of turning a marginalized neighbourhood into a tourist destination, focusing on the way commodification of urban poverty and violence affects the urban imaginary of the neighbourhood and its social relations.

I have paid particular attention to how shifts in urban development policy towards symbolic economy, oriented around leisure and tourism, affects residents of marginalized neighbourhoods like Tepito and how they experience, narrate and negotiate these changes. I argue that urban development is not simply imposed on people by dominant powers but is a process of on-going contestation and negotiation. While neoliberal economic restructuring and the rise of symbolic economy in Mexico City through which city authorities reorganize their economy around leisure and tourism aggravates socio-spatial inequalities, it also opens space to contest them. I suggest that urban politics should be analysed not only through the power of the elite but also through the power of lower-classes. Moreover, as economy is always embedded in a political, social and cultural framework, I understand urban development as a site of political struggle not only for economic resources but also for place-based meaning and identity.

I analysed these processes through the case of slum tourism. With the rise of symbolic economy, city authorities increasingly commodify urban spaces for cultural production and consumption, particularly for the purpose of tourism. I used the concept of place-branding to highlight how various actors - with a focus on the tour guide and Tepito residents - use commodification of urban spaces for tourism to negotiate the neighbourhood's symbolic position in Mexico City. I suggested that place-branding is a dynamic, contested and political process which various actors – within and throughout Tepito – use for their purpose and agenda. I have thus examined the process of branding, paying attention to what is being branded, by whom and for what purpose. To understand the process and effects of touristification it is important to explore who is involved in tourism, how and for what purpose.

I have argued that tourism in Tepito, although it is sporadic and small-scale, opens a platform to potentially re-signify image and symbolic value of the neighbourhood, for tourists and for the neighbourhood's residents.

By reworking Tepito's 'difference' (from criminality to resistance as analysed in Chapter Three) and pointing to its 'sameness' (global agents with a cosmopolitan identity as analysed in Chapter Four), actors involved in the tourist encounter construct, perform and mobilize new representations of the neighbourhood. This does not mean that the grassroots tours which bring a limited number of tourists to the neighbourhood shift the image of Tepito throughout the city. Nevertheless, tours do open an opportunity to transform the *barrio*'s value in the city, seeking to challenge the hegemonic vision of urban development and urban politics. Commodification of Tepito also plays a significant role in building a strong, emblematic place-based identity (of resistance and cosmopolitanism) where self-Othering becomes a strategy to re-value Tepito not just for tourists but also for residents themselves.

However, while commodification of the neighbourhood contributes to identity building it also causes tensions. There are differences in the way Tepito residents understand the emblematic '*tepiteño* identity', and there is disagreement over who has the right to brand and broker Tepito, how, for what purpose and for whom. Moreover, although branding becomes part of the value creation it does not challenge the dominant narratives of urban value itself. In other words, while branding Tepito contests it, it also reproduces official city narratives as a space of cosmopolitanism, modernity, productivity and consumption.

Therefore, struggle for visibility and recognition does not necessarily rework the structural inequalities of urban life. That is, there is a danger that the cultural politics of recognition and visibility, welcomed and promoted under symbolic economy, becomes an end in itself. Rather than reworking the social, economic and cultural structures, seeking visibility can foster the right to be (re)present(ed) – thus, to be physically present in the space of the city without necessarily advancing the right to produce urban space in a way that meets the needs of its lower-class inhabitants (see Purcell 2002: 103).

Moreover, while the growing touristic visibility of Tepito in the city begins to bring some sort of value and recognition to the area, it also produces fear among *barrio* residents of the potential gentrification and displacement, a process they observed in the redevelopment of the Historic Centre. In his book *Slumming it*, Fabian Frenzel reminds us that visibility is actually something that some areas, due to the fear of eviction, seek to avoid (Frenzel 2016: 173). Branding thus plays an ambiguous role: as it contributes to recognition it can also pose a threat.

The growing visibility of Tepito as the city's 'cultural asset' captures the attention of governmental authorities who try to keep control over the way Tepito tourism is implemented

and promoted. Although governmental involvement provides space for other residents to become active in Tepito's tourism development, it also increases their own role in the process. This not only creates a certain level of control over development of tourism but also over meaning and visibility of Tepito in the city.

Nevertheless, this does not mean that tourism is not also a source of empowerment for Tepito residents or tourists who potentially connect to the neighbourhood in a different way. Rather, the ambivalent role of tourism which I highlight throughout the thesis unmasks the on-going (and never-ending) process of urban development; a process through which a range of actors with different economic, political and symbolic power collaborate or compete in order to transform the material and social environment according to their own interests and needs. In other words, negotiations around the production of tourism emphasise that urban development is not a process informed by the binary relation between marginalized residents and the elite, but that tensions and alliances are created across various social groups and scales. Moreover, the contested process of tourism-making in a marginalized neighbourhood also points to the fragmented and political process of place-making, in which people engage in differently (discursively and materially) and in relation to different power structures (within a place and beyond).

In the beginning of the thesis I posed two main questions which guided my analysis:

1. How do residents of stigmatized and marginalized urban areas negotiate inequality and their place in the world?
2. What role does commodification and aestheticization of stigmatized neighbourhoods for tourist purposes play in these processes of negotiation? How are urban marginalized areas produced as a site for tourism and how the process of touristification affects the place and its residents?

In the next section I will synthesize my analysis, focusing initially on the first question, connecting it to the second one in the final section.

Place-making and negotiating inequality

Throughout the thesis I focus on the entanglement between tourism-making and place-making, understanding them as two interconnected aspects. I quoted ways Tepito residents experience, narrate and negotiate socio-spatial inequalities, and how these inequalities and struggles are branded and sold through tourism.

I started this thesis by highlighting that Tepito, although in urban imaginary commonly perceived as a fixed and bounded community, is not a homogenous entity. Rather, it is a heterogeneous space to which people attach different meanings and emotional connections. These meanings are continuously negotiated by a range of actors who take part in the place-making process (residents, former residents, vendors, shoppers, tourists, tour guides etc). By looking at the way Tepito is produced as a place through historical relations to the city and through circulating representations (Chapter Three) I emphasize the relational production of places (material and discursive).

However, by pointing to relational production and fluidity of places I do not suggest that people do not construct “some sort of boundaries around their places, however, permeable” in order to make places out of spaces (Escobar 2001: 147). According to Arturo Escobar these boundaries are not natural or fixed but form part of material and cultural production of place “by people who share what Virilio (1997, 1999) calls *hic et nunc* (here and now) of social practices” (Escobar 2001: 152). While the construction of boundaries contributes to the collective identity, it is also a source of internal tensions and exclusion. The processes of meaning making and identity building are thus continuously constructed and negotiated through social interaction and struggle between different groups. It is through these negotiations and claims to a seemingly single and coherent identity that the multivocality of a place is unveiled.

The multivocality of Tepito became particularly evident when I walked around the neighbourhood with its residents. The routes they took, the people they talked to and the stories they told, exposed the material, social and sensorial differences within the neighbourhood, pointing to the mutually contested and negotiated ways of making place. The different narratives experienced through these walks were a mix of people’s personal memories and stories, joined together with the wider social, material and historical background of Tepito. These narratives were not just expressed in words but were experienced with all of the senses. Places we visited and sensed in these walks, stories we

listened to - all of this exposed Tepito as a place full of contradictions, while at the same time also of overlapping ideas and experiences.

The different meanings people ascribe to places are intertwined with their emplacement in them, with their interactions with others, with the material landscape and their emotional attachment to them. By walking around Tepito, people imbue places with different meanings, pointing out that there is no single or fixed sense of a place. It is the entanglement of these meanings, their on-going negotiation and contestation infused with power relations that contributes to the production of Tepito as a place: a place with multiple identities and voices.

My salsa teacher Gustavo highlighted this point, emphasizing that Tepito is “a neighbourhood of contrasts. In Tepito you encounter everything [...]. This plurality of Tepitos, it is all, a melodrama of histories, where we basically have to live together.”¹⁹⁶ Sharing the physical space does not necessarily lead to sharing the social, sensorial or emotional space.

By moving away from understanding Tepito as a ‘naturally’ bounded place and by focusing on the way the neighbourhood is produced as a place by a range of actors with different interests and agendas, I argue that Tepito residents are not united by the same political agenda due to poverty and violence perpetuating their lives. As places are produced in relation to other places and global connections the same can be said for residents’ struggles and engagements with power structures. By looking at translocal connections which Tepito residents establish across their immediate environment (see Chapter Five), I highlighted that their agency to negotiate inequality and exclusion does not reside in the place itself. Rather, it is produced through encounters these connections enable.

This, challenges the understanding of power relations and urban politics as dichotomies between the dominant, top-down hegemonic power (the government, the city authorities) and the bottom-up local resistance (Tepito residents). Rather, it shows that there are different modes of engagement with power structures, as the power circulates unevenly within a place. Collaborations are made and ideas shared, exchanged and reshaped across ‘local’ boundaries. Strategies that Tepito residents use to negotiate their personal and collective exclusion and socio-spatial inequality, which is reinforced also by discursive marginalization (stigma), are thus diverse and contested. People collaborate with other people

¹⁹⁶ [...] es un barrio de contraste. En Tepito encuentras todo [...]. Esos, muchos Tepitos, es todo un melodrama, de historias, donde a final de cuentas, todos nos conjugamos.

within and across Tepito in order to implement projects which carry different ideas about re-making and transforming the neighbourhood. This causes tensions and fragmentations but also opens doors for new cooperation.

In order to identify the ways Tepito residents negotiate their place in the world in relation to inequality and exclusion, I explored how they narrate life in the neighbourhood, focusing particularly on how they perceive, understand and experience informality and violence. I focus on these two themes because of the dominant images that circulate about Tepito, which frame the drug-trade, crime and street vending as the neighbourhood's main attributes. By pointing to the role informal space plays in residents' lives or to the different violence(s) they endure, residents challenge dominant discourses around informality and violence, as well as around Tepito as a place. Taking resident's own narratives and understandings as a basis allows us to explore how they frame their daily struggles and how they use these processes for building a place-based identity.

Residents negotiate their place in the world through various practices and discursive strategies. Throughout the thesis I identify several modalities of engagement with power structures which are not clear-cut but entangled by power relations within and across Tepito. In Chapter Four I highlight how residents experience exclusion and inequality and how this links to Tepito's resistance identity. I focus less on resistance as a practice and more on the way this resistant identity is understood, narrated and constructed.

Using the example of informal spaces (economic and religious) - where I point to the complex entanglement between formality and informality – I illustrate how the idea of resistance is not framed only through defiance against existing social, economic and political structures, but also through the ideas of self-autonomy, flexibility and adaptability. 'Making it on your own', promoted under the neoliberal paradigm of self-responsibility, can also be understood as a strategy of contesting on-going insecurities, which provides a site for building a strong, heroic place-based identity. Thus, the process of self-Othering accentuates Tepito's 'difference', but also re-shapes it from criminality and delinquency to that of survival and creativity. Through self-Othering, residents appropriate dominant representations that portray them as criminals and delinquents, and transform these into images of survivors and heroes.

By re-working the neighbourhood's 'difference' residents also point to the 'sameness' with the rest of the city, which provides space to claim inclusion of Tepito into the urban fabric. This emphasises that marginalized residents do not only resist (practically or

discursively) the hegemonic production of urban space but also strive for their inclusion. Tepito residents point to global connections in their narratives and it is through these connections and discourses that they can construct their cosmopolitan identity and claim inclusion within the modern and cosmopolitan city. With the redevelopment of Mexico City at the end of 1990s, the material and aesthetic differences between Tepito and the historic centre widened and this further placed Tepito on the ‘Other’ side of the modern and cosmopolitan city, reinforcing the image of an immobile and localized place. Yet as I highlight in the thesis (Chapter Five), lower class residents are not immobile or confined to their space. Despite the mobility gap – which is present across scales – they establish global networks and they use them to negotiate unequal access to mobility, highlighting their active role in globalization from below.

Despite Tepito’s emblematic and epitomized identity of resistance, the neighbourhood residents understand this identity differently and relate it to various physical and social spaces. As I have illustrated in Chapter Six, although some residents consider informal spaces to be part of Tepito’s ‘we can make it’ identity, others experience these areas as spaces that perpetuate violence(s). Although circulating representations of Tepito focus on the spectacular violence –physical assaults, murders and kidnappings – there are many other forms of violence(s) that residents endure. These invisible forms of violence – for instance structural or infrastructural violence – are often hidden from immediate view. By making these violence(s) present in their narratives, residents point to their victimhood, showing that they are not merely perpetrators of violence, but also its victims. This further implies that they are not solely survivors who resist, but that they also suffer and endure.

The capacity to cope should not be understood as a form of disengagement with power structures or a lack of agency. On the contrary, it fosters the framing of an agency which is not a synonym for resistance and points to the “capacity to endure” (Mahmood 2001: 211). I believe that being able to cope opens space in Tepito to articulate public pain, which Mauricio implicitly referred to in our walk, and that this can provide space for solidarity and connection among residents. Moreover, the importance of the embodied experience of coping and pain is also connected to the question of who has the right to define and talk about violence. As the walk with Mauricio demonstrates, this right is often reserved for those who endure violence(s) daily, directly or indirectly.

In the last chapter I briefly tackled the way cultural collectives negotiate Tepito’s place in the world and strive for change. I outlined their work and the ideas they promote,

focusing on the production of cultural spaces in the neighbourhood. These spaces are interventions in the neighbourhood's physical and social space, both seen by the collectives as vital for building a sense of community and political (class) identity which they consider to have potential in transforming the neighbourhood. The idea behind these cultural spaces is to enable Tepito residents to take control over the neighbourhood's development. My point was not to evaluate whether they were making this possible or not, but rather to point to the way they understand their work themselves. This was important in explaining the tensions and collaborations which take place among the different actors working and living in the neighbourhood. The idea behind the production of cultural places is not about opposing, reworking or subverting the structures of power but finding ways to transform them, to modify relationships and the ways of seeing the self and other (for different understandings of transformation and resistance see Jefferess 2008).

The purpose of analysing strategies which residents use to negotiate inequalities and Tepito's place in the world was to examine the complex, on-going and contested process of place-making. Moreover, my aim in identifying different engagements with power structures and strategies people use to 'make it', either individually or collectively, was not to evaluate them. Rather, it was to recognize tensions and collaborations which emerge with the implementation of various projects, such as is the case of development of tourism. Understanding struggles behind place-making is essential in comprehending ways Tepito residents strive for change. In this way, I look at Tepito as a space of contestation and power struggles, but also as a space of cooperation that permits different visions, values, desires and needs to coexist. I argue that this friction not only causes tensions and fragmentation in Tepito but also opens space for transforming the *barrio* in multifaceted ways, with tourism as an important strategy in the process.

Place-branding and commodifying inequality

Drawing on the contested and negotiated process of place-making across scales, I analyse how Tepito is produced, branded and consumed as a tourist space. I argue that tourism-making and place-making are entangled and contested political processes as they both involve a range of actors with different aspirations, agendas and powers.

With shifts in urban development, tourism has become vital to the city's symbolic economy. This plays a major role in aggravating inequalities and speeding up gentrification,

displacing lower-class residents from touristic areas; at the same time tourism enables increasing visibility of stigmatized neighbourhoods, areas which governmental authorities and elites in many cities around the world are eager to hide. Commodification of urban spaces for cultural production and consumption, enhanced by the rise of symbolic economy, is a site of struggle, not only for economic resource but also for meaning and identity – of Tepito and of Mexico City. Tourism is a way for different actors – also low-income residents – to appropriate and re-work urban development strategies and use them to their own advantage.

Tourism in Tepito, although limited in number and size, can thus be understood as one of the strategies that various actors – residents, tour guide, tourists – use to negotiate the *barrio*'s place in the world. Production and consumption of Tepito for tourism provides space to contest the injustice of the neighbourhood's misrecognition (the stigma), seeking to construct a more positive image of the place, triggering a sense of pride among residents. In other words, commodification of Tepito for tourism aims to transform the *barrio*'s stigma into a brand.

The concept of place-branding served as a tool to analyse how a range of actors engages with urban development to negotiate Tepito's symbolic position in the city. Place-branding facilitates selling places on the global tourist market and provides an advantage in interurban competition. Branding is a process of commodification, as it sells places turning them into a site of consumption. Yet it is also a process of identity building, potentially fostering a sense of belonging to a place. Central to branding is to question what is being branded, by whom, for whom and for what purpose.

Chapters Four and Five explored the *Made in Tepito* brand and the way it is produced through the tourist encounter. I understand the tourist encounter as interaction between people with different cultural and social backgrounds, histories, placed in unequal power relations and overlapping or competing agendas.

I have shown that the *Made in Tepito* brand is less about selling poverty and violence, than it is about commodifying people's daily struggles and ways of making a living (which goes beyond paid labour). As I analysed in Chapter Four, by (re)branding informality, tours remake, strengthen and promote Tepito's identity of resistance. This also reshapes Tepito's 'difference' from the one associated with criminality to that of creativity and heroism. In Chapter Five I looked at how the visibility of residents' global networks, which also challenges a hegemonic understanding of globalization, assists in building the *barrio*'s

cosmopolitan identity. By pointing to the residents' active participation in globalization from below, tours highlight Tepito's 'sameness' with the rest of the city.

Branding therefore remakes, sells and promotes Tepito's identity of resistance and cosmopolitanism. Once these images are commodified they are also mobilized, which in turn challenges power relations implicit in the production and circulation of representations. The *Made in Tepito* brand – the brand of difference and sameness – provides space for renegotiating Tepito's symbolic position within the city's urban imaginary. Commodifying and selling Tepito on the tourist market has the potential to challenge hegemonic ideas of urban development and politics. By placing Tepito and its residents on a tourist map of the city, tours contest the city image and brand produced by the authorities. People can challenge, change or appropriate dominant brands and use them for their own purposes. Branding can thus be understood also as a site of political engagement, a strategy which low-income residents use to rework urban development strategies for their own benefit.

Although I stress the role of the tour guide in building the *Made in Tepito* brand, I also point out that branding is not a unilateral process. Representations are made and re-made in the tourist encounter: while the tour guide brokers access to the neighbourhood and is in charge of what is being made visible and how, the residents tourists visit during the tour, also have power over their own performance in the interaction. Tourists take these experiences and images home where they mobilize them in their own circles but potentially also reshape them according to their own understandings and interests. This means that branding is not a clear-cut process but one that is constantly being re-made through a power-laden tourist encounter.

Tourists therefore play an important role in mobilizing the images of the neighbourhood and potentially incorporating the *barrio* into the city. Walking through the neighbourhood provides tourists with an experience that sometimes transforms their relation to the *barrio* and its residents. By perceiving Tepito as an integral part of a common time and place (see Maria's statement in Chapter Seven) tours provide space for new connections among city residents.

The *Made in Tepito* brand is not merely a logo or a slogan but an embodied experience of sensations and emotions. Sensing, performing and experiencing Tepito through the tourist encounter transforms meanings and value around Tepito as a place. As senses are connected to different social orders these associations are re-formulated through the tourist encounter. Instead of connecting smells, sounds and aesthetics of the neighbourhood to chaos

and criminality they become linked to productivity, creativity and survival. The embodied and sensorial experience of the brand facilitates the transformation of Tepito's social value, making it valuable for the production of a global and culturally diverse city.

Efforts to re-value Tepito through tourism is linked to building a strong place-based identity. The *Made in Tepito* brand enables residents to portray a positive image of themselves and their neighbourhood, navigating between how they see themselves and how they want to be seen. In this sense, tourism becomes a means of empowerment and a site for people from stigmatized places to 'tell their own story'. Commodification of the neighbourhood's struggles and modes of engaging with power structures can eventually loosen political potential of these strategies (more on this below) but nevertheless it can also present a political instrument in the construction of resident's identity (Bianchi 2003: 20), fostering a sense of pride and belonging to the neighbourhood.

However, tourism-making is also a contested process, negotiated by the actors involved. There are different views not only on what is being made visible and how, but also by whom. In Chapter Six I focus on these differences, highlighting that places in the neighbourhood foster various, conflicting meanings for residents, which also causes disagreements about the way Tepito identity is to be constructed, branded and sold. I link this to the question of violence and analyse how violence is presented in the tour and what is presented as violence. I claim that by building an image of resistance which seeks to counter the violent (and violence of a) stigma, tours reproduce hegemonic understandings of violence. Although the narrative and performance of violence in the tourist encounter deconstructs the image of a criminal Tepito, also pointing to the difficult daily context of violent events, the *Made in Tepito* brand obscures the invisible violence(s) present.

Chapter Six also points to the ambivalent figure of the tour guide, highlighting the ambiguous attitudes of residents towards his role as a broker. Despite the multiple actors involved in the tourist encounter the tour guide is particularly powerful in brokering and branding the neighbourhood. The discursive and material appropriation of Tepito (of images and physical space) by political decision makers, journalists, researchers, vendors and others, makes residents attentive to what is being said, sold or circulated about their neighbourhood. Although in their narratives residents proudly highlight the global connections they are part of, they are also defensive about the production of images of Tepito. They want to have control over the making of their neighbourhood rather than having the neighbourhood made for them. This simply means that not everybody is entitled to make tourists spaces out of

places. As Chapter Six illustrates, the right to be a broker is reserved for those who live in the neighbourhood and who experience the *barrio* daily and corporeally and in all its shades.

The ambivalent figure of the tour guide also unmask the (negotiated) process of boundary making within the neighbourhood. As already noted above, people continue to construct the sense of boundaries around their places even though these are sites of on-going contestation. By differentiating between “*tepiteños*” and “*tepiteros*” residents continuously negotiate these boundaries, questioning the right to be a “*tepiteño*” and belong to the neighbourhood. As the tour guide is a former resident, with various networks and friendships in the neighbourhood, he is an ‘insider’. However, since he does not live in the area anymore he is also an ‘outsider’. His figure points to the fuzziness of these two categories, at the same time it also highlights the importance of this ‘in-betweenness’ for the brokering process.

Although commodification of Tepito for tourism is a means of binding the neighbourhood together, constructing and reinforcing the collective identity, at the same time it also creates tensions among residents. The on-going contested and negotiated process of place-making is not something that is easy to translate or broker to people visiting the neighbourhood. It is difficult for Tepito tours to capture the diverse embodied, performative and material characteristics of everyday life. The branding and selling of the *barrio* needs a coherent narrative. Therefore, while branding Tepito creates possibilities for identity formation it also brings to the fore the competing voices of how this identity should be portrayed and sold. On the one hand tourism cuts through fragmented pieces by pulling them together and forming space for identity construction and a feeling of community, on the other hand it causes new fragmentations and tensions.

Furthermore, this plurality of voices and narratives also points to the vast differences in how places are lived. The *Made in Tepito* brand of resistance and cosmopolitanism may embrace the sensuous and lived experience of Tepito, but it is only able to tell one side of the story. In order to brand and sell the neighbourhood successfully, tours obscure the ‘multiple realities’ and silence the multivocality of the neighbourhood through a singular narrative. The heterogeneous process of place-making is a challenge to the branding strategy which seeks to create and promote “one and unique selling point and hereby dismissing and muting the ‘destination mess’” (Ren 2011: 879).

While branding opens the possibility for residents to claim visibility and strive for recognition, this visibility also triggers fears about potential displacement. The growing visibility of the tours makes authorities attentive to what is being branded through the tour

and how. Although governmental involvement in Tepito's tourism development de-monopolizes control over touristification by involving more residents, the authorities also increase their own control over the process. By modifying the route, they also alter the meanings and the narratives which are put forward through the tour, adapting them to their own interests. This also points to the change in governmental attitude. If years ago, the authorities considered Tepito tours to be an impediment to the city's image they began to see them as a cultural asset. In this way, Cultural Safari in Tepito plays a double role: by leading tourists to one of the most notorious neighbourhoods of the city, the tours tarnish the city's image of safety and modernity; but by deconstructing the stigma they also become an asset to the city's rich cultural history and diversity.

Chapter Seven highlighted on-going negotiations between residents and authorities over Tepito's cultural meanings, and the way these meanings are 'put to work' – the way they are marketed, by whom and for whom. By taking tourists to historical monuments of national importance, tours taking place under governmental control use and deploy *barrio* culture in a way that contributes to the city's image of a rich cultural heritage and a cradle of national identity. On the one hand this fosters a sense of pride among some of the residents as it makes the neighbourhood valuable, not only for the image of the city but also for the identity of the nation. On the other hand, governmental control over the meaning and marketing of *barrio* culture disconnects it from residents' everyday politics. I juxtapose understanding and marketing of *barrio* culture by the authorities to that of Tepito's cultural collectives. By looking at the creation of cultural spaces in Tepito I explore the important historical link between *barrio* culture and class identity, and their use for the neighbourhood's political engagement. Confronting the uses of culture between governmental tours and cultural collectives does not only point to different understandings and cultural meanings, but also brings to light the question of who should be the target of this cultural promotion.

Although cultural activists are also brokers who invite artists, activists and students from all over the country (and the world) to visit Tepito, to show the neighbourhood's rich artistic heritage and practice, their primary aim is to promote *barrio* culture among the residents themselves. They seek first and foremost to use culture as a means of building Tepito's collective identity and a sense of community which they consider essential for bringing necessary changes to the neighbourhood. Rather than focusing on transforming the image and an understanding of Tepito among 'outsiders', they argue for the need to raise awareness of the *barrio*'s identity among residents themselves. As some of the members of

the cultural collective pointed out, only a politically conscious and connected community can challenge existing urban inequalities and transform the neighbourhood.

These different ways culture is understood, used and promoted are not solely about control over its meaning or about the appropriation of *barrio*'s physical and social space, but also about fostering different political imaginations and ideas for change. In other words, the contested understandings of culture that comes to the fore with Tepito's tourist development are linked to broader efforts to transform the neighbourhood symbolically, socially, economically and materially. This also points to the different views residents have over tourism in Tepito and its role in changing the neighbourhood. Although members of the cultural collectives are not necessarily against the touristification of Tepito, they do highlight that questions such as who is involved in tourism, how much, when and for whom, are questions that matter.

The contested, entangled and political process of tourism-making and place-making unmask the asymmetrical powers (economic, political and symbolic) people have in the process of urban development. Moreover, it also points to different ways they understand this development and how they imagine and aspire for change. The restructuring of cities under a neoliberal paradigm is thus neither total nor totalizing but a process that is continuously negotiated by a range of actors; a process which reproduces unequal power structures but also provides space to challenge them.

9. Deutsche Zusammenfassung

Übersetzung: Magdalena Bruckmüller-Schindler

Meine Dissertation basiert auf einer Feldforschung in Mexico Stadt, die ich von 2014-2015 durchgeführt habe. Ich habe dabei das berühmte und zentral gelegene Viertel Tepito untersucht, das auch als „Barrio bravo“, das wilde Viertel, bekannt ist.

In der vorliegenden Arbeit werden die Motive, Prozesse und Auswirkungen analysiert, die die Veränderung eines ausgegrenzten Viertels hin zu einer Touristendestination begleiten, und dabei ein Schwerpunkt darauf gelegt, wie sich die Kommodifizierung städtischer Armut und Gewalt auf das städtische Imaginäre des Viertels und auf seine sozialen Beziehungen auswirkt.

Besondere Aufmerksamkeit wurde dabei der Frage gewidmet, welche Auswirkungen das Umschwenken der städtischen Entwicklungspolitik zur „symbolischen Ökonomie“ der Freizeit- und Tourismuswirtschaft auf die Einwohner von Armutsvierteln wie Tepito hat. Es wurde der Frage nachgegangen, wie sie diese Veränderungen erleben, erzählen und sich damit arrangieren. Ich behaupte, dass Stadtentwicklung nicht nur „von oben“ durch dominierende Mächte geschieht, sondern dass sie fortlaufend angefochten und neu verhandelt wird. Durch die neoliberale wirtschaftliche Restrukturierung und die Zunahme der symbolischen Ökonomie werden die sozio-räumlichen Ungleichheiten weiter verstärkt, sie bietet jedoch gleichzeitig die Möglichkeit, ihnen entgegenzutreten. Meiner Meinung nach muss Stadtpolitik nicht nur anhand der Macht der Elite, sondern auch anhand der Macht der niederen sozialen Schichten analysiert werden, auch wenn sie in einem asymmetrischen (Kräfte)verhältnis zueinander stehen. Außerdem ist wirtschaftliche Entwicklung immer in politische, soziale und kulturelle Rahmenbedingungen eingebettet, und daher betrachte ich Stadtentwicklung als einen Schauplatz politischer Auseinandersetzung, bei der es nicht nur um die Aufteilung ökonomischer Ressourcen, sondern auch um die Entwicklung einer ortsbezogenen Sinnstiftung und Identität geht.

Diese Prozesse wurden anhand des Beispiels des Slum-Tourismus analysiert. Dabei habe ich „Place-Branding“ als Grundlage verwendet, um zu veranschaulichen, wie verschiedene Protagonisten – insbesondere Fremdenführer und die Einwohner Tepitos – touristische Vermarktung von urbanem Raum benutzen, und wie die symbolische Position des Viertels in dem städtischen Imaginären von Mexico Stadt neu verhandelt wird; einen

Schwerpunkt habe ich dabei auf die Touristenführer und Tepitos Einwohner gelegt. Place-Branding ist im Fall Tepitos ein dynamischer, wirtschaftlicher und politischer Prozess, den verschiedene Akteure – innerhalb und außerhalb Tepitos – für ihre Zwecke und ihr Programm verwenden. Der Branding-Prozess wurde daher unter folgenden Fragestellungen untersucht: warum, von wem und zu welchem Zweck wird etwas vermarktet? Um den Prozess und die Auswirkungen der Tourismuserschließung zu verstehen, ist es wichtig zu untersuchen, wer Tourismus betreibt, und ob und in welchem Ausmaß Tourismus für den untersuchten Ort vertretbar wäre.

Barrio-Tourismus bietet meines Erachtens die Möglichkeit, Bedeutungen, Auffassungen und den Wert Tepitos neu zu besetzen – sowohl für die Touristen als auch für die Anrainer des Viertels selbst.

Die Akteure, die in die Konzeption der touristischen Begegnung involviert sind, arbeiten am „Anderssein“ Tepitos (von der Kriminalität in Richtung Widerstand, wie in Kapitel drei ausgeführt) und betonen dabei seine „Gleichheit“ (von der Immobilität und Begrenzung zu Weltbürgertum, worauf in Kapitel 4 eingegangen wird); so werden neue Darstellungen des Viertels konstruiert, ausgeführt und mobilisiert, die es ermöglichen, den Stellenwert des Viertels innerhalb der Stadt zu revidieren. Sobald eine Imagebildung kommodifiziert wird, wird sie auch verbreitet, was eine Chance für die Einwohner von Tepito ist, die vorherrschende Vorstellung von Stadtentwicklung und die Stadtpolitik in Frage zu stellen. Die Kommodifizierung Tepitos spielt auch bei der Bildung einer starken, emblematischen, ortsbezogenen Identität eine signifikante Rolle, bei der die Wahrnehmung der eigenen Andersartigkeit („Self-Othering“) zu einer Strategie wird, um Tepito neu zu bewerten – nicht nur für Touristen, sondern auch für die Einwohner selbst.

Dennoch: Die Kommodifizierung eines Stadtviertels trägt zwar zu seiner Identitätsbildung bei, verursacht aber gleichzeitig Spannungen. Die Einwohner Tepitos begreifen die emblematische „Identität tepiteña“ auf unterschiedliche Weise, und es gibt Auffassungsunterschiede der Einwohner darüber, wer das Recht hat, Tepito zu branden und zu vermarkten, wie, zu welchem Zweck und für wen. Obwohl Branding Teil des Wertschöpfungsprozesses wird, widerspricht es dennoch nicht dem vorherrschenden Narrativ über den angestrebten Stellenwert der Stadt. Daher fordert das Branding Tepitos das offizielle Narrativ zwar heraus, bestätigt aber gleichzeitig das Stadtimage als einen Ort der Weltoffenheit, der Modernität, Produktivität und des Konsums.

Der Kampf um Sichtbarmachung und Anerkennung führt daher nicht notwendigerweise zu einer Bekämpfung der strukturellen Ungleichheiten des städtischen Lebens. Anders gesagt droht Gefahr, dass die Kulturpolitik der Stadtentwicklung, die auf bloße Sichtbarmachung und Anerkennung abzielt, und die als symbolische Ökonomie willkommen geheißen und gefördert wird, nur einen Selbstzweck erfüllt. Denn anstatt die sozialen, wirtschaftlichen und kulturellen Strukturen der Stadt zu verbessern, wird das Anrecht auf die Stadt eher zu einem Anrecht auf „Gesehen werden“.

Darüber hinaus bringt die zunehmende Sichtbarmachung Tepitos innerhalb der Stadt zwar Wertschätzung und Anerkennung, erzeugt gleichzeitig aber auch Angst unter den Bewohnern des Viertels hinsichtlich einer möglichen Aufwertung und Verdrängung; denn diesen Prozess haben sie schon bei der Sanierung des Zentrums beobachtet. In Fabian Frenzels Buch *Slumming it* (erschienen 2016) wird dieses Problem aufgegriffen: Manche Gebiete versuchen Sichtbarmachung zu verhindern, da die Angst vor Vertreibung oder Verdrängung vorherrschend ist (Frenzel 2016: 173). Das Branding eines Viertels ist daher ein zweischneidiges Schwert: Einerseits trägt es zur Anerkennung bei, andererseits kann es auch zur Gefahr werden. Die zunehmende Sichtbarmachung Tepitos als „Kulturgut“ hat die Aufmerksamkeit der zuständigen Regierungsbehörden erregt, die nun versuchen, Kontrolle darüber zu erlangen, wie Tepito den Tourismus implementiert und verbreitet. Das bedeutet, dass die Autoritäten den Inhalt der Tourismustouren bewilligen müssen, was die Machtkonstellationen im Branding-Prozess maßgeblich beeinflusst. Obwohl die staatliche Einmischung anderen Bewohnern Tepitos Raum gibt, sich in die Entwicklung des Fremdenverkehrs einzubringen, stärkt sie auch ihre eigene Position. Dadurch wird nicht nur ein bestimmter Grad an Kontrolle über den Tourismus, sondern auch über die Inhalte, Identität und Sichtbarmachung Tepitos innerhalb der Stadt erlangt.

Dennoch heißt das nicht, dass Tourismus nicht auch eine Stärkung der Einwohner Tepitos, aber auch der Touristen bedeutet, die möglicherweise mit dem Viertel auf unterschiedliche Weise in Kontakt treten. Die ambivalente Rolle des Tourismus, die ich in meiner Dissertation thematisiere, enthüllt vielmehr den fortschreitenden Prozess der Stadtentwicklung und -politik; in diesem Prozess gibt es verschiedene Akteure mit unterschiedlicher wirtschaftlicher, politischer und symbolischer Macht, die miteinander kollaborieren bzw. konkurrieren und dabei das Ziel verfolgen, die materielle und soziale Umwelt im Sinne ihrer Interessen und Bedürfnisse zu gestalten. Anders gesagt, fördert das „Ausverhandeln“ verschiedener Positionen in der Tourismusentwicklung zutage, dass nicht

die Vorstellungen der Elite gegen die der Benachteiligten stehen, sondern dass über soziale Gruppen und den lokalen und globalen Rahmen hinweg.

Darüber hinaus weist der umkämpfte Prozess der Tourismusentwicklung in Armenvierteln auch auf den fragmentierten und politischen Prozess von Place-Making hin, in dem sich Menschen unterschiedlich engagieren und in unterschiedlichen Machtstrukturen in Verbindung treten (innerhalb eines Bereichs und darüber hinaus).

Zu Beginn meiner Dissertation habe ich zwei Schlüsselfragen formuliert, die der Ausgangspunkt meiner Analyse waren:

1. Wie gehen die Einwohner von stigmatisierten und marginalisierten Vierteln mit Ungleichheit und ihrem Platz in der Welt um?
2. Welche Rolle spielt die Kommodifizierung und Ästhetisierung für Touristenzwecke in diesem Verhandlungsprozess? Wie werden Armenviertel als Touristenstandort positioniert und wie wirkt sich der Tourismus auf das Viertel und seine Bewohner aus?

In dem nächsten Abschnitt werde ich meine Analyse zusammenführen und mich zunächst auf die erste Frage konzentrieren, die ich dann im letzten Abschnitt meiner Arbeit mit der zweiten Frage verbinden werde.

Place-Making und Ungleichheit

In meiner Dissertation habe ich versucht, auf die Verstrickung zwischen Tourismusvermarktung und Standortaufwertung einzugehen, da ich sie als miteinander verbundene Faktoren betrachte. Ich habe herausgearbeitet, wie die Einwohner Tepitos sozio-räumliche Ungleichheiten erleben, wiedergeben und sich damit arrangieren, und wie diese Ungleichheiten und der tägliche (Überlebens)kampf für den Tourismus gebrandet und verkauft werden.

Zu Beginn meiner Arbeit wurde ausgeführt, dass Tepito keine homogene Einheit ist, obwohl es im städtischen Imaginär als ein fixes und abgegrenztes Viertel wahrgenommen wird. Vielmehr ist es ein heterogener Raum, dem Menschen verschiedene Bedeutungen zuschreiben und zu dem sie verschiedene emotionale Verbindungen haben. Diese Bedeutungen werden von einer großen Gruppe verschiedener Akteure ständig neu verhandelt,

die in den Prozess des Place-Makings eingebunden sind (Einwohner, ehemalige Einwohner, Verkäufer, Käufer, Touristen, Touristenführer etc.). Bei der Analyse von Tepitos Stellenwert durch die geschichtliche Entwicklung und im Verhältnis zu den propagierten Darstellungen der Stadt (Kapitel drei), wird die in Beziehung stehende „Produktion“ („Erschaffung“) von Orten deutlich.

Jedoch bedeutet die in Beziehung stehende „Erschaffung“ und Fluidität von Orten nicht, dass Menschen nicht auch „Grenzen rund um ihre Gebiete aufbauen, die aber durchlässig sind“, um „Plätze außerhalb von Räumen“ zu bilden (Escobar 2001: 147). Gemäß Arturo Escobar sind diese Grenzen nicht naturgegeben oder unabänderlich, sondern sind Teil der materiellen und kulturellen Produktion von Raum Menschen, die – der These Virilios folgend (1997,1999) – soziale Praktiken *hic et nunc* teilen. (Escobar 2001: 152). Während der Aufbau von Grenzen zur kollektiven Identität beiträgt, ist es auch ein Grund für innere Spannungen und Ausgrenzung. Die Prozesse der Bedeutungsbildung und des Identitätsaufbaus werden so ständig neu verhandelt und durch soziale Interaktion, Konflikte und Kämpfe zwischen verschiedenen Gruppen hervorgerufen. Aufgrund dieser Verhandlungen und Forderungen nach einer einzelnen und kohärenten Identität wird der Facettenreichtum (Rodman 1992) eines Ortes enthüllt.

Die vielen Facetten Tepitos traten bei meinen Spaziergängen durch Tepito, die ich mit seinen Einwohnern unternahm, deutlich zutage. Anhand der Wege, die sie gingen, der Menschen, mit denen sie sprachen und der Geschichten, die sie erzählten, anhand all dessen wurden die materiellen, sozialen und sensorischen Unterschiede im Viertel deutlich, und wiesen auf die angefochtenen und übereingekommenen Wege von „Place Making“ hervor. Die verschiedenen Narrative, die sich durch diese Spaziergänge erfahren, waren ein Mix aus persönlichen Erinnerungen und Erzählungen der Menschen, die in den breiteren sozialen, materiellen und historischen Background Tepitos eingebunden wurden. Diese Erzählungen wurden nicht nur mit Worten wiedergegeben, sondern sie wurden mit allen Sinnen noch einmal durchlebt. In diesen Spaziergängen wurden Plätze besucht und erspürt, und die Geschichten, die erzählt wurden, zeigten, dass Tepito ein Ort voller Widersprüche, aber auch von sich teilweise deckenden Ideen und Erfahrungen ist.

Die unterschiedlichen Bedeutungen, die die Menschen Orten zuschreiben, waren mit deren eigenen Einbettung darin, ihrem Umgang (mit anderen Menschen), der realen Umgebung und der emotionalen Verbundenheit verknüpft. Orte wurden mit unterschiedlichen Bedeutungen belegt, und dabei wurde deutlich, dass Orte – wie Dinge –

nicht nur eine, einzige, fixe und unabänderliche Bedeutung haben. In die Verstrickung dieser Bedeutungen, die einem permanenten Verhandlungs- und Widerspruchsprozess unterworfen sind, spielen Machtverhältnisse mit hinein, die dazu beitragen, Tepito als Ort zu definieren: als einen Ort mit mehreren Identitäten und Stimmen.

Wenn man davon abgeht, Tepito als natürlich begrenzten Ort zu verstehen und sich darauf fokussiert, wie sich dieses Viertel als Ort herstellt, wird klar, dass die Einwohner Tepitos nicht durch ein gemeinsames politisches Ziel, die Bekämpfung der Armut und Gewalt, die ihr Leben bestimmt, geeint werden. Wie Orte in Verbindung zu anderen Orten und globalen Verbindungen stehen, so gilt dasselbe auch für die Nöte und Auseinandersetzungen der Einwohner mit Machtstrukturen. Durch die Beobachtung der globalen Vernetzungen, die die Einwohner Tepitos über ihre unmittelbare Umgebung hinaus erzeugen (siehe Kapitel 5), ließ sich darauf hinweisen, dass ihre Zugänge, Ungleichheit und Benachteiligung zu überwinden, nicht vom Ort abhängig ist. Viel eher gilt, dass sie durch Begegnungen, die diese Verbindungen ermöglichen, entstehen und daher vernetzt werden.

Das stellt die Auffassung von Machtverhältnissen und Stadtpolitik infrage, die bisher vom Spannungsfeld der Machtverhältnisse zwischen den herrschenden, top-down Mächten (Regierung, Stadtverwaltung) und des bottom-up des lokalen Widerstandes (Einwohner von Tepito) ausgingen. Viel eher wird deutlich, dass es unterschiedliche Verquickungen und Auseinandersetzungen mit Machtstrukturen gibt, da die Macht uneinheitlich innerhalb eines Ortes zirkuliert: Weder Widerstand noch Gewalt sind vollkommen, sondern nur fragmentarisch, ungleich und inkonsistent (Sharp *et al.* 2000: 20). Über die „lokalen“ Grenzen hinweg wird zusammengearbeitet, und Ideen werden geteilt, ausgetauscht und neu entworfen. Die Strategien, wie die Einwohner Tepitos mit ihre/r persönlichen und kollektiven Ausgrenzung und sozio-räumlichen Ungleichheit umgehen, die auch noch durch die diskursive Marginalisierung (Stigma) verstärkt werden, sind daher unterschiedlich und umstritten. Menschen arbeiten mit anderen Menschen inner- und außerhalb Tepitos zusammen, um Projekte umzusetzen, die das Viertel erneuern und verändern sollen. Die Ideen sind dabei unterschiedlich, was zu Spannungen und Fragmentierungen führt, aber auch Türen für neue Formen der Zusammenarbeit öffnet.

Um die unterschiedlichen Methoden, wie Tepitos Einwohner mit der Ungleichheit und den ihnen zugewiesenen Platz auf der Welt umgehen, zu analysieren, habe ich untersucht, wie sie ihr Leben im Viertel schildern. Dabei bin ich insbesondere der Frage nachgegangen, wie sie die Informalität und Gewalt in ihrem Viertel wahrnehmen, verstehen

und erfahren. Ich fokussierte mich deshalb auf diese Themen, da sie die Vorstellungen/Vorurteile über Tepito dominieren, inklusive Drogenhandel, Kriminalität und Straßenverkauf als Hauptmerkmale. Mit der Betrachtung des informellen Raums und seiner Bedeutung im Leben der Einwohner Tepitos oder der unterschiedlichen Formen von Gewalt, die die Einwohner ertragen, stellen sie die vorherrschenden Diskurse über Informalität und Gewalt, als auch über Tepito als Ort, infrage. Indem die Narrative und Auffassungen der Einwohner als Grundlage genommen werden, kann untersucht werden, wie sie den täglichen (Überlebens)-Kampf begreifen und wie sie diese Prozesse für die Bildung einer ortsgebundenen Identität verwenden.

Die Einwohner betrachten/verhandeln ihren Platz in der Welt mithilfe unterschiedlicher Methoden und diskursiver Strategien. Ich habe im Laufe meiner Untersuchung verschiedene Methoden des Umgangs mit Machtstrukturen beobachtet, die nicht einzeln voneinander getrennt sind, sondern von asymmetrischen Machtstrukturen innerhalb Tepitos und darüber hinaus aufrechterhalten werden. Im 4. Kapitel habe ich herausgearbeitet, wie die Einwohner Ausgrenzung und Ungleichheit erfahren, und wie dadurch ihre Identität als Widerständige beeinflusst wird. Ich habe weniger Widerstand in der gelebten Form untersucht, sondern wie die Identität des Widerstands verstanden, erzählt und konstruiert wird.

Dabei habe ich das Beispiel von informellen Orten (wirtschaftlicher und religiöser Natur) herangezogen, indem ich die komplexe Verquickung von Formalität und Informalität untersucht habe. Anhand dessen habe ich veranschaulicht, wie die Idee des Widerstandes gebildet wurde, nämlich nicht nur als Trotzreaktion gegen existierende soziale, wirtschaftliche und politische Strukturen, sondern auch als Idee der Selbstbestimmung, Flexibilität und Anpassungsfähigkeit. „Selber machen“ (Making it on your own“) als Postulat des neoliberalen Paradigmas der „Selbstbestimmung“, kann auch als Strategie gegen die sich ausweitenden Unsicherheiten verstanden werden. Es schafft die Möglichkeit, eine starke, heroische ortsbezogene Identität zu erschaffen. Anders gesagt, wird dadurch das Self-Othering Tepitos betont, gleichzeitig aber neu gedeutet: weg von der Kriminalität und Delinquenz hin zu Überlebensstrategie und Einfallsreichtum. Mithilfe des Self-Otherings rücken die Einwohner die dominierenden Vorstellungen über sich als Kriminelle und Delinquenten zurecht, und transformieren sie in Bilder von Überlebenden und Helden.

Durch die Neudefinition des „Andersseins“ betonen die Einwohner des Viertels gleichzeitig jedoch ihre Gleichheit/Angepasstheit an die Stadt, und infolgedessen fordern sie

die Inklusion Tepitos in die urbane Struktur. Das bedeutet, dass Stadtbewohner mit niedrigem Einkommen nicht nur (praktisch und diskursiv) gegen die hegemoniale Entwicklung von städtischem Raum aufbegehren, sondern auf für ihre soziale Eingliederung kämpfen. Mit der Sanierung Mexico Stadt Ende der 1990er Jahre wurden die materiellen und ästhetischen Unterschiede zwischen Tepito und dem historischen Zentrum verstärkt. In der Folge wurde Tepito ein Platz abseits der modernen und weltoffenen Stadt zugewiesen. Das Image eines stillstehenden und eingegrenzten Viertels wurde verstärkt. Doch wie ich in Kapitel 5 herausgearbeitet habe, waren die Bewohner des Slumviertels weder im Stillstand noch auf ihren Ort beschränkt. Trotz des Mobilitätsrückstandes über alle gesellschaftlichen Schichten hinweg, etablieren sich globale Netzwerke. Sie verwenden sie, um den ungleichen Zugang zu Mobilität zu thematisieren, und betonen dabei ihre aktive Rolle in der Globalisierung „von unten.“ Das hat Wirkung in den globalen Netzwerken und Zusammentreffen, die sie errichten. Mithilfe dieser globalen Vernetzungen können sie ihr weltoffenes Profil schärfen und infolgedessen ihre Einbindung in die moderne und kosmopolitische Stadt fordern.

Trotz Tepitos emblematischer und verkörperter Identität des Widerstandes, herrscht unter den Bewohnern keine einheitliche Vorstellung darüber vor, und sie verbinden sie mit unterschiedlichen physischen und sozialen Orten. Wie ich in Kapitel sechs veranschaulicht habe, assoziieren einige Bewohner Widerstand mit manchen informellen Orten, andere wiederum assoziieren diese(lben) Orte als von Gewalt geprägte. Obwohl die kursierenden Darstellungen/Vorstellungen über Tepitos von spektakulären Gewaltberichten – wie physische Attacken, Morde und Entführungen – geprägt sind, gibt es noch viele andere Formen von Gewalt, die die Bewohner erdulden (müssen). Diese unsichtbaren Arten von Gewalt – auch struktureller oder infrastruktureller Natur – erschließen sich oft erst auf den zweiten Blick. Diese Gewalt wurde anhand der Erzählungen der Einwohner sichtbar, und machte ihre Rolle als Opfer deutlich: Sie verbreiten nicht nur Gewalt, sondern sind gleichzeitig auch Opfer. Dies bedeutet, dass sie nicht nur Überlebende, die Widerstand leisten sind, sondern dass sich auch leiden und ertragen.

Im letzten Kapitel habe ich kurz die Aktivitäten der Kulturgruppen umrissen, und habe analysiert, welchen Platz in der Welt sie Tepito zuweisen, und wie sie Veränderungen anstreben. Ich habe ihre Arbeit und ihre Ideen, die sie verbreiten, analysiert und fokussierte mich auf die Entwicklung kultureller Plätze im Viertel. Diese Orte sind Eingriffe in das physische und soziale Gefüge des Viertels, die von den Kulturgruppen als überlebenswichtig

für die Entwicklung eines Gemeinschaftssinns betrachtet werden; nur so könne eine politische (Schicht)identität entwickelt werden, die das Potenzial habe, das Viertel zu verändern. Die Einrichtung kultureller Orte verfolgt daher das Ziel, die Einwohner Tepitos zu ermuntern, die Kontrolle über die Entwicklung des Viertels selbst in die Hand zu nehmen. Dabei ging es nicht darum, zu beurteilen, ob sie das tatsächlich ermöglichen oder nicht, sondern herausarbeiten, wie sie ihre Arbeit selber sehen. Das war wichtig, um die Spannungen und Kollaborationen zu erklären, die zwischen den verschiedenen Akteuren, die in dem Viertel leben und arbeiten, bestehen. Die Idee der Entwicklung von kulturellen Räumen ist nicht, bestehende Machtstrukturen zu bekämpfen, neu zu erschaffen oder auf den Kopf zu stellen, sondern Möglichkeiten zu schaffen, sie zu transformieren, Beziehungen zu verändern, als Erfahrung und Möglichkeit, sich und den anderen zu betrachten, zu sehen.

Die Strategien der Bewohner, mit den Ungleichheiten und ihrem Platz auf der Welt umzugehen, wurden analysiert, um den komplexen, Änderungen unterworfenen und umkämpften Prozess von Place-Making zu erforschen. Dabei wurden unterschiedliche Methoden, wie in Machtstrukturen eingegriffen wird und Veränderungsstrategien entwickelt werden, ermittelt, ohne sie zu bewerten. Vielmehr war es ein Ziel, die Spannungen, aber auch die Zusammenarbeit, die bei der Verwirklichung verschiedener Projekte –wie bei der Entwicklung des Tourismus – stattfinden, zu untersuchen. Es ist grundlegend, die Anstrengungen/Kämpfe, die „Place-Making“ begleiten, zu erkennen, um zu verstehen, wie Tepitos Einwohner nach Veränderung streben. Daher betrachte ich Tepito als einen Ort der Auseinandersetzung und Machtkämpfe, aber auch als einen Ort der Zusammenarbeit, der die Koexistenz verschiedener Visionen, Werte, Wünsche und Bedürfnisse erlaubt. Ich habe festgestellt, dass diese Reibereien nicht nur Spannungen und Fragmentierung in Tepito verursachen, sondern es ermöglichen, das Viertel facettenreich zu verändern, wobei Tourismus ein wichtiger Teil dieses Prozesses ist.

Tepitos „Branding“: Kommodifizierung der Ungleichheit

Um den widersprüchlichen und veränderbaren Prozess von „Place-Making“ über über den lokalen und globalen Rahmen hinweg zu veranschaulichen, habe ich analysiert, wie Tepito als Touristendestination erzeugt, gebrandet und „konsumiert“ wird. Meines Erachtens sind Tourismusvermarktung und „Place-Making“ miteinander verstrickte und umkämpfte

politische Prozesse, da sie verschiedene Akteure mit ununterschiedlichen Bestrebungen, Zielen und Mächten aufs Tapet bringen.

Durch die Neuausrichtung der städtischen Entwicklungspolitik wurde Tourismus in der symbolischen Ökonomie der Stadt überlebensnotwendig. Während dies dazu führt, dass Ungleichheiten verstärkt, Gentrifizierung beschleunigt, und die Bewohner niedriger sozialer Schichten aus touristischen Zonen verbannt werden, ermöglicht der Tourismus gleichzeitig, die Sichtbarkeit von Elendsvierteln zu verstärken. Gerade das wollen Stadtregierungen und Eliten in vielen Städten rund um den Globus verhindern.

Die Vermarktung von städtischen Räumen für kulturelle Entwicklung und deren „Konsum“, die durch die symbolische Ökonomie zunimmt, ist Kampfplatz nicht nur um ökonomische Ressourcen, sondern auch um Sinn und Identität – von Tepito und von Mexico Stadt.

Tourismus bietet Möglichkeiten für verschiedene Akteure – auch Einwohner niedriger sozialer Schichten – sich Stadtentwicklungsstrategien zu eigen zu machen, zu verändern und sie zu ihrem eigenen Vorteil zu nutzen

Tourismus in Tepito kann daher als eine Strategie verschiedener Akteure – der Einwohner, der Touristenführer und der Touristen – verwendet werden – um den Platz des Viertels in der Welt neu zu definieren- / zu verhandeln. Tourismusproduktion und -konsum bieten Raum, der Ungerechtigkeit, die dem Viertel durch Missachtung (und Stigmatisierung) widerfährt, zu begegnen. Er ermöglicht ein positiveres Image des Ortes, und infolgedessen, dass die Einwohner stolz auf ihre Herkunft werden. Anders gesagt, kann die Vermarktung Tepitos für Touristenzwecke das Stigma des Viertels in ein Branding verwandeln.

Das Konzept von Place-Branding dient als Werkzeug, um zu analysieren, wie zahlreiche Akteure in die Stadtentwicklung involviert sind, und Tepitos symbolische Position in der Stadt neu verhandeln. Place-Branding erleichtert es, Orte am globalen Touristenmarkt zu vermarkten und verschafft einen Vorteil im Konkurrenzkampf der Städte. Es ist daher auch ein Prozess von Identitätsbildung, der möglicherweise das Gefühl, zu einem Ort zu gehören, verstärkt. Beim Branding ist die Frage zentral, was genau gebrandet wird, von wem und wozu.

In den Kapiteln 4 und 5 habe ich die Markenbildung „Made in Tepito“ untersucht und wie sie durch den Tourismus betrieben wird. Ich verstehe die Begegnung der Einwohner mit den Touristen als Interaktion zwischen Menschen mit unterschiedlichen kulturellen und sozialen Hintergründen und Geschichten, die in ungleichen Machtverhältnissen zueinander

stehen und deren Aufgaben sich teilweise überschneiden und teilweise in einem Konkurrenzverhältnis stehen.

Ich habe aufgezeigt, dass die Markenbildung „Made in Tepito“ nicht vorrangig bezweckt, Armut und Gewalt, sondern eher den täglichen (Überlebens)-Kampf der Menschen zu vermarkten. Wie ich in Kapitel vier analysiert habe, wird die Informalität gebrandet; Touristenführungen erschaffen, stärken und bewerben Tepitos neue Identität des Widerstands.

Das verändert auch Tepitos Postulat des „Andersseins“ – weg vom Image der Kriminalität hin zum Image der Kreativität und des Heldentums. In Kapitel 5 habe ich analysiert, wie die globalen Netzwerke der Bewohner, die auch das hegemoniale Verständnis von Globalisierung in Frage stellen, es ermöglichen, die weltoffene Identität des Viertels zu bilden und zu branden. Indem auf die aktive Partizipation der Einwohner in der Globalisierung „von unten“ hingewiesen wird, wird Tepitos „Gleichheit“ mit dem Rest der Stadt herausgestrichen.

Die Markenbildung erschafft daher Tepitos Identität des Widerstands und des Weltbürgertums neu, verkauft und vermarktet sie. Sobald diese Vorstellungen kommodifiziert werden, werden sie auch verbreitet, was die Machtverhältnisse in der Produktion und Verbreitung von Vorstellungen implizit herausfordert. Die Markenbildung „Made in Tepito“- Anderssein und Gleichsein – ermöglicht es, Tepitos symbolische Position im städtischen Imaginär neu auszuhandeln und fordert auf seine Art die Einbindung in das urbane Gefüge der Stadt. Die Vermarktung Tepitos für die Touristen kann die hegemonialen Ideen der Stadtentwicklung und der Politik in Frage stellen.

Indem Tepito (und seine Einwohner) auf der touristischen „Landkarte“ der Stadt hervorgehoben wird, stellen die Touren das Stadtbild und die Vermarktung der Stadt, die die staatlichen Autoritäten verfolgen, infrage. Die Markenbildung kann auch ausgereizt, umgedeutet oder für falsche Zwecke verwendet werden. In diesem Sinn kann Branding auch als ein Aspekt politischen Engagements verstanden werden; es wird von unterprivilegierten Bewohnern dafür genützt, urbane Entwicklungsstrategien zu vereinnahmen und zum eigenen Vorteil zu benützen.

Trotz der Bedeutung der Touristenführung in der Markenbildung „Made in Tepito“, ist Branding nicht ein einseitiger Prozess. Repräsentation wird erst durch die Begegnung mit Touristen ermöglicht und wieder verändert: während die Vermittler von Touristenführungen Zugang zum Viertel haben und bestimmen, was sichtbar gemacht wird und auf welche

Weise, haben die Bewohner auch Einfluss auf ihr eigenes Verhalten in der Interaktion mit den Touristen. Touristen nehmen diese Erfahrungen und Bilder mit nach Hause und verbreiten sie in ihren eigenen Kreisen; möglicherweise werden sie Eindrücke dadurch auch neu gedeutet – je nach eigenen Verständnis und Interessen. Das bedeutet, dass Branding nicht ein klar abgegrenzter Prozess ist, sondern durch die Begegnung mit den Touristen permanenten Änderungen unterworfen ist.

Daher spielen Touristen eine wichtige Rolle in der Verbreitung von Bildern des Viertels und für die Integration des Viertels innerhalb der Stadt. Durch die Spaziergänge können Touristen die Vorurteile gegenüber dem Viertel und seinen Einwohnern revidieren. Indem Tepito als integraler Bestandteil einer gemeinsamen Zeit und eines gemeinsamen Ortes wahrgenommen wird (siehe Marias Statement in Kapitel 7), bieten die Touren Raum für neue Kontakte innerhalb der Stadtbewohner.

Die Markenbildung „Made in Tepito“ ist nicht nur ein Logo oder ein Slogan, sondern eine verkörperte Erfahrung von Gefühlen und Emotionen. Die Touristen können Tepito bei ihren Besuchen spüren und erfahren, und durch diese Begegnungen können die Bedeutungen und der Wert Tepitos als Ort verändert werden. Statt Gerüche, Geräusche und optische Eindrücke des Viertels mit Chaos und Kriminalität zu verbinden, werden sie mit Produktivität, Kreativität und Überlebensdrang assoziiert. Die verkörperte und sinnliche Erfahrung der Markenbildung erleichtert die Umwandlung des sozialen Stellenwerts Tepitos, und steigert die Glaubhaftigkeit der weltoffen und kulturell vielseitig vermarkteten Stadt. Die Neubewertung Tepitos durch den Tourismus hängt mit der Entwicklung einer starken örtlichen Identität zusammen. Die „Made in Tepito“-Markenbildung ermöglicht es den Einwohnern, ein positives Bild ihrer selbst und des Viertels zu vermitteln, das zwischen der eigenen Wahrnehmung, und dem Wunsch, wie sie wahrgenommen werden wollen, oszilliert. In diesem Sinne wird Tourismus ein Mittel zu Empowerment und bietet eine Möglichkeit für Menschen benachteiligter Orte, „ihre eigene Geschichte zu erzählen“. Die Vermarktung des (Überlebens)Kampfes und seiner Methoden, in bestehende Machtstrukturen einzugreifen, kann möglicherweise das politische Potential dieser Strategien schwächen. Gleichzeitig kann es aber auch ein politisches Instrument der Identitätsstiftung (Bianchi 2003: 20) sein, das den Stolz bestärkt, aus dem Viertel zu stammen.

Dennoch kann die Tourismusvermarktung auch ein umkämpfter Prozess sein, der von einer Bandbreite verschiedener Akteure ausverhandelt wird. Es gibt unter Anderem verschiedene Auffassungen darüber, was sichtbar gemacht werden soll, wie und von wem. In

Kapitel 6 habe ich diese Unterschiede herausgearbeitet. Orte in dem Viertel können verschiedene, widersprüchliche Bedeutungen für die Bewohner haben, was auch Meinungsverschiedenheiten darüber auslöst, wie Tepitos Identität konstruiert, gebrandet und verkauft wird. Ich habe analysiert, wie Gewalt in der Tour gezeigt wird, und wie sie dargestellt wird. Dabei kam ich zu dem Schluss, dass die Touren ein hegemonistisches Verständnis von Gewalt wiedergeben, indem das Image des Widerstandes gestärkt wird, das versucht, das Stigma der Gewalt zu bekämpfen. Obwohl das Narrativ und die Wiedergabe von Gewalt es in der touristischen Begegnung ermöglicht, das Bild der Kriminalität zu revidieren, indem man auf die schwierigen, täglichen Begleitumstände von gewalttätigen Ereignissen eingeht, verschweigt die Markenbildung „Made in Tepito“ auch die unsichtbare(n) Formen von Gewalt, die es gibt.

Das sechste Kapitel geht auch auf die ambivalente Rolle des Touristenführers ein und betont dabei die zweideutige Einstellung der Bewohner hinsichtlich seiner Rolle als (Ver)mittler. Abgesehen von den vielen Akteuren, die in die Touristenvermarktung involviert sind, haben die Touristenführungen eine besondere Bedeutung in der Vermittlung und im Branding des Viertels. Die diskursive und materielle Besitzergreifung Tepitos (von Images und physischem Raum) durch politische Entscheidungsträger, Journalisten, Forscher, Verkäufer und andere, schärft die Aufmerksamkeit der Bewohner, was gesagt, verkauft, oder im Umlauf gebracht wird.

Obwohl die Bewohner stolz auf die globale Vernetzung, derer sie teilhaft werden, sind, sind sie gleichzeitig in einer Abwehrhaltung, wenn es um die Inszenierung ihrer „Lokalität“ geht. Nicht jeder ist daher befugt, Touristendestinationen aus Orten zu machen. Wie das sechste Kapitel veranschaulicht, sind nur jene als Vermittler befugt, die in dem Viertel leben und es jeden Tag am eigenen Leib erfahren.

Die ambivalente Figur des Touristenführers legt den (noch offenen) Prozess von Grenzen im Viertel fest. Wie schon an anderer Stelle ausgeführt, fahren die Menschen fort, Grenzen rund um ihre Plätze zu konstruieren, obwohl diese einem fortwährenden Prozess der Veränderung unterworfen sind. Indem zwischen „Tepiteños“ und „Tepiteros“ unterschieden wird, verhandeln die Bewohner diese Grenzen neu, und stellen das Recht, ein Tepiteño zu sein, in Frage. Da der Touristenführer ein ehemaliger Bewohner des Viertels ist, der über zahlreiche Netzwerke und Freundschaften verfügt, ist er ein „Insider“. Gleichzeitig ist er ein „Outsider“, da er nicht mehr in dem Viertel lebt. An seinem Beispiel wird deutlich, wie

verschwommen die beiden Kategorien sind, hebt aber gleichzeitig die Wichtigkeit dieses „Dazwischenseins“ im Vermittlungsprozess hervor.

Obwohl der Prozess der Kommerzialisierung für Toursimuszwecke dazu beiträgt, das Viertel zusammenzuschweißen, indem die kollektive Identität konstruiert und gestärkt wird, schafft er auch Spannungen innerhalb der Bewohner. Der fortwährende umkämpfte und verhandelte Prozess von „Place-Making“ ist etwas, das den Menschen, die das Viertel besuchen, nicht einfach vermittelt und erklärt werden kann. Es ist fast unmöglich, in den Touren durch Tepito die verschiedenen verkörperten, performativen und materiellen Charakteristika des täglichen Lebens einzufangen. Das Branding und Vermarkten des Viertels braucht eine kohärente Geschichte. Daher bringt das Branding Tepitos Möglichkeiten, eine Identität zu bilden, gleichzeitig treten die miteinander in Wettstreit stehenden Stimmen darüber, wie diese Identität dargestellt und verkauft werden soll, zutage. Einerseits verbindet der Tourismus die fragmentierten Teile, indem er Identitätsbildung und Gemeinschaftssinn ermöglicht, andererseits ruft es neue Zersplitterungen und Spannungen hervor.

Darüber hinaus ruft die Pluralität von Stimmen und Erzählmustern die vielen Unterschiede, wie Orte gelebt werden, hervor. Das „Made in Tepito“ – Branding mag die sinnliche, körperliche und gelebte Erfahrung von Tepito zusammenführen, aber es ermöglicht gleichzeitig auch, nur einen Teil der Geschichte zu erzählen. Um das Viertel erfolgreich branden und vermarkten zu können, lassen die Führungen die „vielfachen Realitäten“ im Dunkeln und verschweigen die Vielstimmigkeit des Viertels durch ein einziges Narrativ. Der heterogene Prozess des „Place-Makings“ ist eine Herausforderung für die Vermarktungsstrategie, da nur ein Alleinstellungsmerkmal geschaffen und beworben wird. Während Branding für die Bewohner die Möglichkeit eröffnet, Sichtbarkeit einzufordern und für Anerkennung zu kämpfen, trägt die Sichtbarmachung auch Ängste über potentielle Aussiedlung in sich. Die wachsende Sichtbarkeit durch die Führungen bringt die Stadtregierung auf den Plan, die beobachtet, was in der Tour vermarktet wird und wie. Obwohl die Stadtregierung darauf achtet, dass in die Entwicklung des Tourismus mehrere Einwohner involviert sind, verstärkt sie gleichzeitig auch ihre eigene Kontrolle. Die eingereichten Touren werden von ihr approbiert, und sie kann die Touren abändern - und an die eigenen Interessen anpassen. Das zeigt auch die Veränderung in der Einstellung der Regierung. Wenn vor Jahren die Zuständigen eine Tour durch Tepito noch als Beeinträchtigung des propagierten Stadtbildes sahen, betrachten sie sie nunmehr als kulturelle Bereicherung. In diesem Sinn, spielt der Stadtspaziergang – „Kulturelle Safari in

Tepito“ - eine Doppelrolle: indem Touristen zu einem der berüchtigtsten Stadtviertel geführt werden, wird das Stadtbild von Sicherheit und Modernität zwar infrage gestellt. Aber indem sie das Stigma Tepitos dekonstruiert wird, werden die Touren zu einer Bereicherung für die Kulturgeschichte und Diversität der Stadt.

Kapitel 7 versuchte den fortwährenden Verhandlungsprozess zwischen den Bewohnern und den Autoritäten über den kulturellen Sinn/Stellenwert Tepitos zu skizzieren, und die Art, wie diese Vorstellungen zusammengeführt werden. Touristen werden bei den unter staatlicher Kontrolle stehenden Führungen zu den kulturellen Monumenten von nationaler Bedeutung geführt. Die „Barrio“-Kultur wird entsprechend dem Stadtimagen eines reichen Kulturerbes „eingepasst“ und als eine Wiege der Nation positioniert. Einerseits wird dadurch der Stolz mancher Einwohner gestärkt, da das Viertel Wertschätzung erfährt, nicht nur, was die Errichtung der Stadt, sondern auch die Identität der Nation anbelangt.

Andererseits entfremdet die staatliche Kontrolle über das Marketing der Barrio-Kultur es von den Bewohnern. Ich habe das Verstehen und Marketing der Barrios Kultur durch die Autoritäten denen von Tepitos Kulturgruppen gegenübergestellt. Indem ich die Erschaffung von kulturellen Räumen in Tepito betrachtet habe, habe ich die wichtige historische Verbindung zwischen der Barrio-Kultur und Standesidentität betrachtet, und ihre Verwendung im politischen Engagement des Viertels analysiert. Durch die Gegenüberstellung der Verwendung von Kultur durch staatliche Touren und Kulturgruppen treten die unterschiedlichen Verständnisse und kulturellen Bedeutungen zutage, und bringen gleichzeitig die Frage ans Licht, wer das Ziel dieser kulturellen Bewerbung ist.

Obwohl Kulturaktivisten auch Vermittler sind, die Künstler, Aktivisten und Studenten aus dem ganzen Land (und der ganzen Welt) nach Tepito bringen, um das reiche künstlerische Erbe und die Praxis zu zeigen, ist das vorrangige Ziel doch, die Kultur des Barrios innerhalb der Bewohner des Barrios zu verbreiten. Sie setzen sich vor allem und zuallererst das Ziel, Kultur für die Erschaffung einer kulturellen Identität Tepitos einzusetzen und einen Gemeinschaftssinn unter den Bewohnern zu stärken, den sie für essentiell erachten, um die notwendigen Veränderungen im Viertel zu erreichen. Anstatt sich darauf zu fokussieren, das Image und das Verstehen Tepitos für „Outsider“ zu verändern, wollen sie das Identitätsbewusstsein der Bewohner stärken. Manche Mitglieder der Kulturgruppen behaupten, dass nur eine politisch bewusste und verbundene Gemeinschaft die existierenden städtischen Ungleichheiten in Frage stellen und das Viertel verändern kann.

Diese Auffassungsunterschiede über Kultur und ihre Verwendung und Verbreitung bezwecken nicht nur die Kontrolle über ihre Bedeutung oder die Vereinnahmung des physischen und sozialen Raumes des Viertels. Vielmehr werden dadurch verschiedene politische Vorstellungen gestärkt bzw. treten die unterschiedlichen Ideen, wie Veränderung passieren kann, zutage. Anders gesagt, stehen die Auffassungsunterschiede über Kultur, die im Zuge der Tourismusentwicklung Tepitos zutage treten, in Zusammenhang mit größeren Anstrengungen, um das Viertel symbolisch, sozial, wirtschaftlich und materiell zu verändern. Das offenbart auch die verschiedenen Perspektiven der Einwohner auf Tourismus und seinen Einfluss auf die Veränderung des Viertels. Obwohl Mitglieder von Kulturgruppen nicht zwingend gegen die Entwicklung als Tourismushotspot sind, betonen sie, dass es wichtig ist zu hinterfragen, wer Tourismus betreibt, wie viel, wann und für wen.

Der widersprüchliche, verquickte und politische Prozess von Tourismus-Making and Place-Making fördert die asymmetrischen Machtverhältnisse (ökonomischer, politischer und symbolischer Natur) zutage, die Menschen in der Stadtentwicklung haben, aber auch unterschiedliche Verständnisse und Aspirationen bezüglich Entwicklung und Veränderung. Die Restrukturierung von Städten unter neoliberalen Gesichtspunkten ist daher nicht vollständig sondern ein Prozess, der kontinuierlich von einer Bandbreite von Akteuren neu verhandelt wird; ein Prozess, der ungleiche Machtstrukturen wiedergibt, der es aber auch ermöglicht, sie in Frage zu stellen.

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