Introduction

Desde el cielo una hermosa mañana,
Desde el cielo una hermosa mañana,
La guadalupana, la guadalupana, la guadalupana bajó al Tepeyac.
Suplicante juntaba sus manos y eran mexicanos su traje y su faz.
Su llegada llenó de alegría de luz y armonía todo el Anáhuac.
Junto al monte pasaba Juan Diego y acercóse luego al oír cantar.
A Juan Diego la Virgen le dijo, este cerro elijo para hacer mi altar.
Y en la tilma entre rosas pintada su imagen amada se dignó dejar.
Desde entonces para el Mexicano
Ser guadalupano es algo esencial,
En sus penas se postra de hinojos y eleva sus ojos hacia el Tepeyac.

—“La Guadalupana,” devotional song
for Our Lady of Guadalupe

Turning down a quiet, residential street toward Our Lady of the Rosary Parish early on a weekend morning, it is possible to imagine that one is not in the Bronx or New York City at all, but somewhere more quiet and peaceful. When the air is clear and the temperature is warm, and the window boxes, yards, community gardens, and trees are full of leaves and flowers, it is possible to find a certain resemblance between this place and other very different places, here and “home,” for some who nurture nostalgia for somewhere other than this city. It was just such an August morning when I arrived at Our Lady of the Rosary Parish to talk with Marco. I found him tending to the image of Our Lady of Guadalupe which is just outside the rectory. He swept around the feet of the Virgin and the sidewalk in front of her shrine. He discarded the wilted flowers left as offerings along the image’s enclosure and emptied then refilled the vases with water, placing them carefully within reach of the sidewalk. He
remarked that if he did not do this regularly, people would simply throw flowers at the Virgin’s feet in offering, and he would later have to remove the decaying stems. He cleaned the glass enclosing the image of the Virgin, and picked up gum wrappers and other bits of litter that had found their way into the area. Before he left, he deposited his own flowers into a vase, crossed himself and kissed his fingers.

For many observers, there is nothing less remarkable than someone from Mexico engaging in devotional practices to that country’s patron saint, Our Lady of Guadalupe. That Marco was in the Bronx tending to the Virgin’s shrine is not, in itself, noteworthy in this age of accelerated migration from Mexico to the United States. When these practices actually surface to the level of commentary in migration literature, they are often described as a retention of cultural and religious identity from “home”: Guadalupan devotion, guadalupanismo, is the most salient, well known, and widespread aspect of religiosity in Mexico, so it is logical that it would continue in the diaspora. Further, there is a centuries-old history of Guadalupan devotion in the region now known as the Southwestern United States, further cementing its centrality in U.S. understandings of Latino religiosity. Historians of migration and of religion have chronicled
the deployment of national devotions in the project of immigrant incorporation in the United States, by which assimilation is measured and charted by the insertion of “Old World” beliefs and rituals into the frame of civil religion. As assimilationist paradigms have been revised, and in some cases, rejected, the attention to religion perhaps became a proverbial baby thrown out with the bathwater, receding from centrality in analyses of immigrant insertion in the United States. Only in the last few years have religious practices, modes of congregation, and devotion again been observed to be both transformed and transforming in the migration experience, and immigration studies and religious studies have come together (see Hondagneu-Sotelo 2007; Alba, Raboteau, and DeWind, 2009; Vásquez and Marquardt 2003, among others).

While the devotional practices centered on Our Lady of Guadalupe engaged in by Mexican immigrants in New York City may seem familiar to some observers, they occur in a unique historical moment of massive and accelerated migration, militarization of the border, stagnation of immigration laws, and worldwide struggles for rights by those displaced by globalization. They occur in New York, a city that has been site of many kinds of immigrant mobilizations over more than a century, but never any precisely like these. Every year on December 12, thousands of Mexican immigrants gather for the mass at Saint Patrick’s Cathedral in honor of Our Lady of Guadalupe’s feast day. They kiss images of the Virgin, carry framed portraits in expectation of a bishop’s blessing, and wear traditional costumes associated with the story of the Virgin’s apparition; and they also carry signs asking for immigration reform, chant “¡Sí, se puede!” [Yes, we can!] just like protestors do at marches, and display Mexican and U.S. flags. It is through Guadalupan devotion that many undocumented Mexican immigrants are finding the will and vocabulary to demand rights, immigration reform, and respect. In these practices and in the places that they make Guadalupan through their activities, not only is their faith transformed into a platform for making claims to rights, but they transform themselves, becoming emboldened in their struggle to provide for their families and build their lives in the city with dignity.

This book is about New York–based Mexican immigrants who envision community, develop modalities of collective organization, reimagine their own identities, and turn these to the task of broadening their rights—all in the idiom of devotion to the Virgin of Guadalupe. All of this is happening in parish-based confraternal social organizations called comités guadalupanos, Guadalupan Committees, which together are linked in a
network called *Asociación Tepeyac de New York*. Members of these organizations join together as *immigrants* and in defiance of the undocumented status many of them share. As such, they develop a mode of *being*, of situating oneself with respect to the state and society in the United States and in the broader multinational globalized sphere that neither assumes assimilation nor the seamless maintenance of ties to the homeland. Instead, it is an activist, enfranchised identity, as globalized as the capitalist economic forces which prompted their migration in the first place, uniquely dedicated to the transformation of life in the present, not in the nostalgic past of “home” nor in the imagined future of return or legalization in the United States.

This transformation has implications for notions of citizenship. While much writing on immigration assumes that citizenship is a condition that begins after the bestowal of the juridical attributes of belonging, I argue in this book that Mexican immigrants are engaging in political, activist activities which enhance their sense of well-being in material, lived, and symbolic ways even while their juridical status remains unchanged. This kind of citizenship—broader, more performative, and more agential than the strictly juridical classification of citizens—is necessary to all other rights projects, both in the realm of formal citizenship and in other areas of social life. Mexican immigrants’ involvement in such activities, and perhaps more importantly, the disposition which enables such engagement, is not easily measured quantitatively in votes cast, dollars raised, petitions circulated, or meetings attended. While such dispositions may not register on formal surveys of political activities, it is no less important and real for the people involved. Indeed, it is their engagement and willingness to stand up for themselves and other members of the community they have created that will have the biggest impact on their quality of life in the United States. Legalization of their immigration status, if and when it comes, will be joyfully welcomed, but they are no longer holding their breath. Historically in the United States, as well as in many other immigrant-receiving nations, citizenship has not been defined exclusively as juridical membership in the nation-state the way it increasingly is today. Rather, citizenship has had broader meanings referring to notions of belonging, rights, responsibility, and a disposition toward civic engagement. Coherent within these meanings, the activities of members of the comités guadalupanos and Asociación Tepeyac constitute an important model of citizenship in the here and now, even as these immigrants struggle for access to the juridical realm of membership in the nation-state.
Not simply another piece of baggage brought—sealed and intact—by migrants into new locales, religiosity is only recently coming to be understood as a space for new kinds of collective and individual identities. Religion offers a privileged lens for examining immigration, as immigration does for religion, and both offer insight into U.S. society and its treatment of newcomers as well as the newcomers’ perception of and adaptation to life in this country. Sociologists of religion have been at the forefront of this wave of attention to the intersection of religion, immigrants, and civil society (see Alba, Raboteau, and De Wind 2009; Ebaugh and Chafetz 2000; Hondagneu Sotelo 2007; Kniss and Numrich 2007; Palacios 2007; Warner and Wittner 1999; Wood 2002; and Zolberg and Casanova 2002) and this book enters into conversation with such perspectives while incorporating anthropological research methodologies and perspectives on transnationalism, devotional practice, citizenship, and personhood.

Religiosity—and by that I mean the whole complex of practices, beliefs, devotions, and modes of social organization and relations between and among practitioners as well as between laypeople and specialists—is a vector for collective and individual transformation. It provides ways for immigrants to contextualize, signify, and actively redefine their place in the United States and it transforms their understandings of who they are, where they come from, and most importantly, the rights and treatment they feel they deserve. Therefore, it is not safe to assume that as immigrants become more deeply embedded in the receiving country and are distanced in time and space from “home” that the role of religiosity in their lives will wane. We also cannot attribute religiosity’s persistence solely to participation by immigrants in transnational social networks that compress the sensation of distance from their communities of origin and perhaps enable them to sustain the festive calendar of their hometowns. Instead, there is something far more vital and transformative that occurs when Mexican immigrants engage in devotional practices dedicated to Our Lady of Guadalupe in New York City.

Each December since 2002, Asociación Tepeyac and its member comités have organized a binational torch run, La Antorcha Guadalupana, in which a living flame has been carried by relay runners, over land, from the Basilica of Guadalupe in Mexico City to Saint Patrick’s Cathedral in New York. The runners wear shirts that read “Messengers of a people divided by the border” and advocate for immigration reform at the same time that they pay homage to their patroness. As the runners make their way south from Mexico City to the Mixteca region from which many
Mexicans in New York hail, then up the eastern seaboard, they draw people into the streets who walk or run along with the torch and two enormous paintings of Our Lady of Guadalupe and Saint Juan Diego, witness to her apparition. People come out of their homes and workplaces to kiss and touch the images and the torch, acquiring a bit of the residue of the Basilica, epicenter of Guadalupanismo, even while they find themselves in Anniston, Alabama; Charlotte, North Carolina; or Newark, New Jersey. An organizer told me that the torch connects Guadalupanos in Mexico and the United States who are not themselves able to travel. These nodes of Guadalupanismo are like a string of pearls, he said, forged by devotion and activism. The pearls evoked by the antorchas organizer are like an amulet, protecting and linking Mexican immigrants in the United States as a collective and also giving individuals reassurance and a sense of protection as they face new challenges.

**Argument**

Immigrants involved in comités guadalupanos and Asociación Tepeyac are redefining their rights, citizenship, and identities by renegotiating the symbols of faith and nation, mobilizing the space of the church, and participating in activities normally reserved for citizens. They do these things with very material aims such as immigration rights, social services, and political and economic equity, and less material aims such as expanding notions of the rights to which they feel entitled, and their sense of solidarity and community with other Mexican immigrants. This argument challenges existing theorizations of the role of religion in the lives of immigrants in the United States, of their relationship to conceptualizations of citizenship, and of the nature of immigrants’ political engagement.

Mexican immigrants in New York City who participate in these organizations often name their main connections to each other as national identity, faith in the Virgin of Guadalupe, and undocumented migration status. While there are many who consider themselves members of the Mexican community and who participate in these organizations yet do not subscribe to one or more of these identities, these nevertheless constitute the primary modes of identification linking members of these organizations and those they consider to be their constituency. Analysts of Mexican migration might expect Guadalupanism, immigration status, and Mexican national identity to provide important idioms of collective identity for a
Mexican immigrant population in the United States. Nonetheless, I argue that these three vectors of identity are revalorized and made to serve different and powerful purposes in the experience of migration in a process that is, at the same time, a process of community formation. The term “vector” implies both magnitude and direction. Guadalupanism, migration, and national identity are commonalities shared by many Mexicans living in New York, but they are not static attributes. They are dynamic, lived, and changing sets of practices and meanings. Scholars of transnationalism and migration have, commendably, developed vivid metaphors for movement, frequently favoring the use of terms like circuits and flows to describe the movement of people, ideas, practices, values, goods, and capital, between sending and receiving communities. Some of these metaphors have been developed as a critique of earlier studies of immigration for their assimilationist bias, in which migration is a teleological ray, starting in one place and aspiring toward another in a unidirectional fashion. In such models, features such as language and religion were as static as luggage, carted along but not changing, and eventually abandoned. Here, we attribute dynamism to aspects of identity which are both transformed and transformative by viewing them as vectors.

The undocumented Mexican immigrants involved in comités guadalupanos and Asociación Tepeyac come to interpret, through their participation in these organizations, their “illegality” in moral terms, as a failure of larger economic structures beyond their control that cause human suffering and can only be remedied both through recourse to Our Lady of Guadalupe and activism in her name. The revalorization of Guadalupe in the context of what liberation theologians would call structural sin—racism, inequality, poverty, exclusion, or exploitation—cannot be taken for granted. How should we trace the ways that Guadalupanism comes to provide language for a project of rights acquisition and empowerment? I would suggest that it is not through a broad statement or doctrine developed by the Church or by a charismatic activist or group of activists attempting to “politicize” Guadalupan devotion, but rather emerges from the everyday experiences of Mexican immigrants as they go about their business of going to work, keeping their families together, participating in church activities, and sweeping shrines to the object of their devotion.2

Of course, there are significant numbers of Mexicans in New York who do not participate in these or other organizations (such as Casa México, Casa Puebla, small business collectives and so on), or whose
memberships in voluntary associations are limited to soccer leagues and hometown clubs. However, participation in los comités guadalupanos and in the Asociación Tepeyac differs in providing two self-conscious projects: the building of a Mexican community and the promotion of its members’ rights as Mexican immigrants through the idiom of Guadalupan devotion. This agenda differs from other community-building projects centered upon a shared status as workers, as Latinos, or as migrants from a particular town or state, such as that which occurs in other organizations. Also, as I will show, individual variance from the modes of identification asserted by the comités guadalupanos and Asociación Tepeyac is often subsumed into a collective discourse that asserts them.

Sweeping

In the ethnographic vignette above, we focused on a single devotional practice, one that is not picturesque, but, rather, mundane: sweeping. Dating at least to Early Modern Spain, sweeping and other housekeeping in a shrine to the Virgin Mary has been considered a profound devotional practice. Philip II, perhaps the most powerful sovereign of his age, was known to regularly sweep the shrine at Guadalupe in Extremadura (Christian 1981; see also Altmann 1989; and Starr-LeBeau 1996). As he swept, he asserted both his power over his subjects and his humility to the Virgin Mary, on the stage of such dramatic turning points in Spain’s history as the resolution of the Reconquista and launch of the Conquest. In Mesoamerica, prior to Spanish arrival, sweeping had different but similarly profound meanings. At the end of a 52-year bundle of years, the Mexica [Aztec] century, all dwellings were swept, all refuse brushed away, all pottery, utensils, and brooms broken, and then all fires were extinguished, to await the lighting of the New Fire in the chest of a sacrificial victim. That fire was subsequently delivered by relay runners carrying torches to every corner of the empire, assurance that the sun would again rise and life would continue (del Paso y Troncoso 1979).

In the process of compiling the Florentine Codex, Mexica informants told Fray Bernardo de Sahagún their origin myth, albeit with vocabulary already colored by Iberian religiosity (e.g., the notion of penance): their principal deity, Huitzilipochtli, was conceived when his mother, Coatlicue, who already had 401 children, was sweeping, and a feather flew into her womb, implanting his fetus:
In Coatepec, on the way to Tula,
    there was living,
    there dwelt a woman
    by the name of Coatlicue.
She was mother of the four hundred gods of the south
    and their sister
    by name Coyolxauhqui.
And this Coatlicue did penance there,
    she swept, it was her task to sweep,
    thus she did penance
    in Coatepec, the Mountain of the Serpent.
And one day,
    when Coatlicue was sweeping,
    there fell on her some plumage,
    a ball of fine feathers.
Immediately Coatlicue picked them up
And put them in her bosom.
    When she finished sweeping,
    she looked for the feathers
    she had put in her bosom,
    but she found nothing there.
At that moment Coatlicue was with child. (Sahagún 1950: 44)

In Mexico, from the colonial period forward, tasks like sweeping the local chapel have historically been the responsibility of participants in the extensive cargo system, sometimes called la mayordomía, in small rural towns in which power in the community is managed through the hierarchical and collective distribution of labor and goods (Chance 1985). Today, in towns across la Mixteca, the region that overlaps Puebla, Oaxaca, and Guerrero states, with so many residents now living in New York City and other U.S. locations, the roles associated with the upkeep of the chapels and the devotional images are often fulfilled, against custom, by women and elderly men. Because participation in the mayordomía remains a basic requisite for retaining access to communally held land (Rivermar Pérez 2003), such tasks are neglected only at significant cost. Even though sweeping might seem instrumental—maintaining the chapel in hopes that a saint will return the favor, or fulfilling a communal obligation in exchange for benefits—it is much more than that. Sweeping has become a poignant indicator of change: a
repetitive, mundane, and at the same time profound practice for marking time and attempting to compensate for the absence of those who have left.

Change happens thousands of miles away, as well: I could see it as I watched Marco, sweeping a shrine dedicated to Our Lady of Guadalupe in the Bronx. As he moved the broom to and fro, enjoying the pleasant weather and the peaceful street, Marco asserted himself as the Virgin's legitimate caretaker, possessing keys to the rectory, fulfilling his appointed task cheerfully and reliably. As he would tell me in interview, he is someone who has found a familiar and gratifying task in his new hometown, and with his broom, stroke by stroke, he contradicts the dominant image of Mexicans in New York living a disenfranchised, fearful, virtually clandestine existence. The meditative back and forth of the broom also contradicted the impression many Mexicans have of their compatriots in the United States: forgetting who they are and where they came from, forgetting their mother, the Virgin of Guadalupe. And even while Marco's personal life was in a shambles, he told me it was his work at the parish, among other devotees to Guadalupe, that remained stable and fulfilling. It was precisely this kind of mundane but meaningful activity which gave him a way to be, a role and identity that contradicted the instability of other areas in his life and lent meaning to his very presence in this city. While this is not a book about sweeping, it is in small, individual devotional acts as well as spectacular collective ones engaged in by immigrants that we can learn more about the ways that they make a place for themselves in a new city and draw from that a sense of how they see themselves and the rights they feel they deserve.

In devotional practices like sweeping, leaving flowers at the Virgin's feet, or organizing her feast day celebration, most participants do not set out to resist or revise what they assert are the appropriate ways to pay homage to Our Lady of Guadalupe, and yet to ignore the transformations implied in these practices would be to miss their significance. In the chapters that follow, I trace how devotional practices to the Virgin of Guadalupe among Mexicans in New York, in multiple circumstances and settings, are a way that individuals and groups transform themselves, form communities of practice, and come to understand themselves as more deserving of rights and dignity than their status as undocumented immigrants usually entails.
**Research Setting**

The Mexican population in New York City is 289,755, according to U.S. Census data for the most recent year available, 2007; a growth of 57.7 percent since 2000 (Limonic 2008). The Census itself estimates an undercount for New York City of 7.9 percent (Smart Girl Technologies 2002: 5), which, if Mexicans were undercounted at the same rate, would make the Mexican population 312,655. Because Mexicans are probably undercounted at a higher rate, a reasonable estimate is probably around 350,000–400,000. According to Joel Magallán, executive director of Asociación Tepeyac, there are as many as a half million Mexicans in New York City, a full 50 percent of them undocumented. While activists have an interest in larger numbers which might help convince others of the urgency of their claims, the discrepancy in numbers can also be interpreted as a function of undocumented migration in which, from the moment of border crossing, immigrants attempt to circulate and live undetected by a state that would deport them. Official estimates by government agencies such as the Census miss entire segments of the population, including those who live clandestinely in illegal housing such as sub-basements or who share an apartment among as many as two dozen people, situations in which, even if a census worker does knock on the door, full disclosure does not behoove those inside.\(^5\)

Analysts classify migration by Mexicans to New York as accelerated (Cortes 2003; Binford, cited in R. Smith 2001: 281; Rivera Batiz 2002: 4; Rivera Sánchez 2004), doubling in the 1990s, and again since 2000, with the majority of this community having arrived only after the mid-1990s (Bergad 2007; Limonic 2008). Of all Latino groups, Mexicans have the highest percentage of immigrants among them, 63–70 percent (U.S. Census 2006; Rivera-Batiz 2002: 5), an indication of the recentness of migration and the still nascent second generation. Analyzing the phenomenon of migration only from the state of Puebla, which until 1995 sent the clear majority of Mexican immigrants to New York City, there was a 26-fold increase in the rate of international migration (which is virtually all to the United States) from 1980 to 2000; and between 1995 and 2000, the number multiplied five times more (Cortes 2003). At the same time, migration expanded to include other parts of La Mixteca, as well as more migrants from Mexico City’s periphery (especially Ciudad Nezahualcóyotl), and other states.\(^6\)
Many scholars have argued against facile and mechanistic assessments of the “push” and “pull” factors influencing migration (Guarnizo and M. P. Smith 1998; Mahler 1998; R. Smith 1995, 2005). They ask, for example, if a nation experiences an economic crisis, why isn’t there a still higher rate of migration and why do members of communities in particular areas tend more often to seek solutions to economic problems through migration than others (see R. Smith 2005)? Keeping this in mind, it is possible to attribute the accelerated migration of people from communities in La Mixteca to a combination of multinational, national, and local economic and political factors which made earlier modes of subsistence in the region less fruitful at the same time that the flow of migrants to a newer destination seemed to offer greater economic opportunities reached sufficient mass to enable greater numbers of people to participate. Massey argues that each cohort of migrants makes it easier for those who succeed them by lowering the costs and risks associated with migration (1999; also Durand and Massey 1992). This contributes to a snowball effect in which migratory flows that began with a trickle come to impact virtually every household in many rural Mexican hamlets.

In Mexico, the application of neoliberal policies of structural adjustment, the North American Free Trade Agreement, and the devaluation of the peso, which precipitated an economic crisis in 1994, had a disproportionately negative impact on poorer and rural economies. The influx of cheap rice, wheat, and corn from the United States further battered Mexican farmers and the local farm economy. But these events were perhaps only the final straw, given that in 1986–87, a series of events triggered what has been called “the migration syndrome” in La Mixteca region, including a crisis in regional agriculture and increased demographic pressure (Marroñi 2003). Indeed, a greater proportion of the people I interviewed in the course of my study migrated to New York between 1989 and 1995 than during any other time period.

The two comités guadalupanos included in this study are located in the Bronx. The Bronx is the borough of New York City with the third largest population of Mexicans, after Brooklyn and Queens, but it is the one that has experienced the steepest growth in its Mexican population in recent years, 92.5 percent since 2000 (and an impressive fivefold increase since 1990) versus an average of 33.5 percent for the other four boroughs this decade (Bergad 2007). Brooklyn received larger numbers of Mexican immigrants earlier than the other boroughs, but the growth of the Mexican population there has tapered off in this decade. While slightly more than
half of the Bronx’s foreign-born population has naturalized, the Mexican immigrant population is composed overwhelmingly of new arrivals who have had few opportunities to regularize their immigration status. Generally speaking, the more recent an individual’s immigration, the more likely he or she is not naturalized. For those Mexicans who arrived to New York before 1980, 22 percent are naturalized citizens, while for those who arrived after 2000, the number is less than 1 percent. In the Bronx, 39 percent of the total number of Mexicans in the borough arrived since 2000, an additional 40 percent arrived since 1990: in other words, four out of five have been here less than two decades (Bergad 2007).

Because of the disproportionately recent growth of the Mexican population in New York City, constituted in large part by undocumented young people who migrated prior to having finished secondary school or established a vocation in their place of origin, there is a tendency among scholars, Mexican government officials, activists, and service agencies to generalize and associate this profile with all Mexicans in New York. Further, organizations like Asociación Tepeyac tend to emphasize the severe needs and high numbers of people in that category for whom poverty, exploitation, and disenfranchisement are primary concerns. Nonetheless, there are many thousands of Mexicans in New York City who are neither undocumented nor especially vulnerable to the problems and circumstances suffered by recent immigrants. Current research by scholars in the region is beginning now to fill one gap in this area with a focus on the very different issues facing the second generation of Mexicans in New York City as they work to fulfill the aspirations their parents had for them when they migrated (Smith 2005; Cortina 2003).

This book focuses on a relatively small proportion of the overall Mexican population in New York City: those people who were members of comités guadalupanos or associated with Asociación Tepeyac from 2000 through 2003. I have continued to follow the organizations in an intermittent fashion until the present and there are individuals with whom I have maintained close contact. This book does not seek to characterize, describe, or analyze the Mexican population as a whole, although many of the issues, concerns, and perspectives presented in this book by individuals, in meetings, and by community leaders, are relevant to a much larger number of people (immigrants, undocumented immigrants, Mexicans) than those whose experiences I focus upon directly.

Research for this book was conducted from 2000 to 2008, including 18 months of full-time research from May 2002 to October 2003.
Methodologies, discussed further in the next chapter, included participant observation, structured and unstructured interviews, photo elicitation, and focus groups. In all, I interviewed approximately 60 people formally (all of them adults, with slightly more women than men) and enjoyed informal conversations and *convivencia* with many more, in addition to regularly attending comité guadalupano meetings and most events the comités and the Asociación organized. Participants were recruited and participant observation occurred in three key sites: los comités guadalupanos, or Guadalupan Committees, of Our Lady of the Rosary and Saint John parishes, located, respectively, in the University Heights and Mott Haven neighborhoods of the Bronx, as well as Asociación Tepeyac de New York, located on Fourteenth Street in Manhattan. Together, los comités guadalupanos and Asociación Tepeyac constitute the largest membership-based network of Mexicans in New York.

Asociación Tepeyac is the most well-known community organization dedicated to Mexicans in the city, with its leaders often serving as prominent and visible spokespeople and advocates for Mexicans in New York in Spanish and English-language media in the United States and in Mexico, with elected officials, and vis-à-vis other community organizations, foundations, and service providers. The two comités on which I focused my attention formed under very different circumstances. While Saint John’s comité was among the first confraternal parish organizations to be founded by early immigrants from Mexico in the 1980s, more recent immigrants from rural Puebla state founded el comité guadalupano of Our Lady of the Rosary Church with help from Asociación Tepeyac in 1998. Observing the daily practices and interactions of these three entities with each other and other comités, the archdiocese, the press, and other social groups, I traced the flow of ideas between a larger umbrella organization charged with agenda setting and discursive production, and local sites of participation. Situating myself in three sites simultaneously provided a fruitful basis for comparison and for judging the currency of the discourses of guadalupanismo, or faith in Guadalupe, within and outside the sphere of Tepeyac.
Organization of the Book

The remaining chapters focus on the formation of los comités guadalupanos and Asociación Tepeyac and the different activities in which these groups engage. The second chapter outlines the theoretical framework that structures our analysis and also describes the methodology of the study and demographic characteristics of Mexicans in New York. The following chapter recounts the founding of the two comités guadalupanos that were the focus of the research and the umbrella organization that links them, Asociación Tepeyac. The three subsequent chapters focus on three distinct modes of Guadalupan devotion engaged in by members of these organizations. The first, discussed in chapter 4, is about the image of Our Lady of Guadalupe and its ability to serve as a beacon to Mexican immigrants in New York City, as well as its circulation. I focus in part here on la misión guadalupana, the practice of carrying an image of Our Lady of Guadalupe from home to home, one of the most common practices among comités guadalupanos around the city. La misión is frequently one of the activities least known to outsiders but most important for the members of the comités, not only for marking members and potential members as part of the community but also a means by which the group makes claims over a specific local territory. The second practice, described in chapter 5, is the performance of the Stations of the Cross, or el Viacrucis, which occurs on Good Friday each year. Parish-based and citywide performances of the Stations of the Cross differ in their purposes and intent, serving both as a means in which groups negotiate their roles vis-à-vis each other and map parish bounds but also for the comités to rehearse their groupness against imagined outsiders. Chapter 6 examines La Antorcha Guadalupana, or Guadalupan torch run, organized annually by Asociación Tepeyac, in which a flame is brought overland from the Basilica of Guadalupe in Mexico City. Finally, the concluding chapter analyzes these practices and the ways that they assert a platform for community formation based on Guadalupan devotion, Mexican national identity, and being undocumented. In sum, the practices of the members of los comités guadalupanos and Asociación Tepeyac forge a space in which participants imagine themselves to have rights in a context that not only denies them their rights and citizenship, but even their humanity.