In Mexico, even those who have never visited the neighbourhood of Tepito would testify to its stigmatization. It is typical to introduce it as one of the most dangerous places in Mexico City, to link it to crime, and to posit it as the place where "everything illegal" can be bought in its famous tianguis. This discourse is based on fear and frequently disseminated in the media. Eduardo Nivón explains that the sense of belonging to a place is cultivated in the imaginary, and that "it is developed on the basis of sharing a symbolic universe amongst us and the others." The neighbourhood of Tepito, due to its location and origins, embodies "the Other" in Mexico. The category "dangerous" is itself woven in with the notion of social class, and figured as early as the sixteenth century after the first traza divided Mexico City, when the centre was destined for the Spanish and the periphery for the Indians. The castes and conditions for the "uncultivated" were also defined then, along with the living areas for precarious workers who had not learned a trade, thieves, and criminals. This logic perpetuated class segregation by way of zoning, and was accentuated throughout the city's industrialization and modernization periods. During the alleged stage of progress and modernization in the 1950s, most of Tepito's population lacked economic resources and services, and the neighbourhood was considered to be full of delinquents. At the market, racial mixing was promoted in the official national imaginary, in order to agglomerate the Mexican population under the concept of a single "race" within a nation. However, as

is often the case, while the State sought to eliminate racial tensions by trying to convert indigenous peoples to raza (creoles), racial and status differences in fact deepened.

Nowadays, Tepito is no longer located in the periphery and is part of Mexico City's Historic Downtown. It is a neighbourhood whose history is intimately linked to the territoriality and to the economic and social mobilization of a market-place. Its inhabitants' identification processes have adapted in response to political changes, agreements, and negotiation, among neighbours, merchants, and municipal and State authorities, who have gradually changed the uses and meanings of public space. The case of the cult of Santa Muerte (Holy Death) illustrates this. Unlike the Virgin of Guadalupe, "la flaquita" (the skinny one) does not perform miracles, but residents ask parro (favour) of her, to resolve any given aspects of their lives: money, work, marriage, etc. Such phenomena have, constructed unique cultural forms that selectively forget and/or remember traditional customs, while incorporating other local features that transcend both the colonial past and the fixed relationships between the subaltern and the hegemonic.

The neighbourhood has managed to preserve its identity and remain within its own territory, while at the same time, it exists as a product of, academic study and as part of the collective mythology. Even those who come from Tepito (los tepiteños) are strongly tied to social movements. In other words, tepiteno identity functions politically, as an attitude of resistance. At first, its inhabitants sought to identify themselves as tepiteños to defend the neighbourhood against real estate capitalism, and quickly, the tepiteño identity became affirmative.

Tepito works as the hinge with perimeter A of the City's Historic Downtown, and yet it appears to be segregated from it. Informal commerce dominates the area: the market uses the streets every day except Tuesdays, when the merchants take their day off. There have been many transformations in housing and commerce. The areas' inhabitants have...
Mantecón, however, according to Guadalupe Reyes and Ana López, was the first marginal urban neighborhood. This is because Tepito was the last neighborhood with an indigenous character, meaning that Tepito was the last to be occupied by the Spanish. As a result, people choose to live cheaply on the periphery, crowded in small rooms with high ceilings where mezzanines are often built in order to maximize space.

In Tepito, there are also four markets and very close to it, in La Lagunilla, another three, with 2,600 tenants in total. The commercial activities of this huge tianguis represent 15,450 formal and informal sales points, drawing a daily influx of approximately 22,000 wholesale buyers and retail customers. They are there to buy new, used, recycled, imported, pirated, and stolen clothes, shoes, household appliances, and electronic gadgets.

Among the people who use the tianguis, there is a strong sense of community, which is a word used in more formal terms as “vecindad,” and the proliferation of vecindades gave Tepito an urban dimension that distinguished it from the rest of the city. Tepito’s importance can also be attributed to its geographical location, the character of its inhabitants, and its long and storied history. Bario (borough) is different from colonia (neighborhood or gated community), which is a word used in more affluent areas of the city. For tepeños, their borough operates at an urban scale that both instantiates and preserves their roots, identity, and culture.

From the mid-nineteenth century until the beginning of President Porfirio Díaz’s regime (1877), the north of the city was heavily re-structured: it was enlarged and thus included the north of the city. For tepeños, this expansion was essentially to be distinguished by the people who used them. It was thus during this period that the stereotyping of Tepito began.

Most of the vecindades in Tepito were built during Díaz’s regime (1877–1911), and originally conceived to be used as hostels that would lodge travelers arriving from the provinces in order to sell their merchandise in the city. These were gradually transformed into permanent housing. Oscar Lewis’ well-known novel, Los hijos de Sánchez (Sánchez’s Children) portrays the difficult and precarious life of the Sánchez family, who lived in a vecindad known as Casa Blanca. He presents Tepito as a subculture and as a mode of life isolated borough, and he describes poverty as a sub-culture and as a mode of life perpetuated over generation, the result of the adaptation and reaction to marginalization.

In actuality, however, tepeños have long incorporated elements from hegemonic culture in order to tailor them for consumption by subaltern classes, demonstrating a capacity not to remain isolated, but rather adapt over time. This peculiarity has allowed Tepito to remain relatively in sync with global market processes. It would thus be a mistake to define tepeño culture as unique, because both hegemonic and subaltern cultures have given rise to the place. By 1911, the poor quality of life was not only reflected in the type of housing in the borough, but also by the lack of basic services. Boroughs came to be absorbed as the city grew, as previously peripheral zone, were added to urban conglomeration. Differences within the city were accentuated as it grew, and Tepito was increasingly inhabited by the working class.
class, whose poverty ended up generating other problems in the area, thus earning Tepito the title of the “tough borough.”

In the 1920s, Tepito attracted many tradespeople, and migrants from places like Jalisco and Guanajuato arrived en masse. Commercial activity in the zone had not yet acquired the scale it would achieve later on, there was a food market in the Fray Bartolomé de las Casas plaza, but few other retail or wholesale businesses. After 1940, when the barracks of Violante, La Bolsa, Díaz de León, and El Rastro were integrated to form Morelos, commercial activity intensified, and small stands flourished on Aztecas, Caridad, and Tenochtitlán streets. There, the ayateros (clothing merchants) would sell clothes and second-hand objects that they bought from fayuca (goods smuggled from the US) of cocoons, and the success of tianguis, or mercados de abastos, which were a cause of some local concern. These urban transformations, the expansion of the tianguis, and the success of the "tough borough."
The 1985 earthquake was also a major justification for the re-development of the area. The social fabric was severely damaged and led to a process of gentrification that sought to displace the original population in order to significantly increase the value of the land and attract new populace with greater income and social status. Just prior, however, and more significant, was the redesignation of the downtown core, including Tepito. After the Templo Mayor ruins were discovered in 1978, the area was named “Mexico City’s Historic Downtown” by a presidential decree two years later. Indeed, the most important collateral changes in the last two decades have been undertaken through the “Rescuing Historic Downtown Program,” officially initiated in 1990. It has been executed with public resources in collaboration with the private sector, especially entrepreneur Carlos Slim, who funded the Centro Histórico Foundation, which acquired many of the area’s buildings. Another similar institution, Mexico City’s Centro Histórico Trust Fund (FCHM), originally created as a private entity, was transferred to the government when the leftist PRD (Democratic Revolution Party) officially took power of the city in 2001.

Due to the increasing prominence of the Historic Downtown designation, a considerable number of itinerant tradespeople located in the area’s “first” square were displaced, beginning in the early-to-mid-2000s, putting pressure on the merchants of Tepito to accommodate them. In response, the local government intervened: taking away the merchants stands from the street, and installing surveillance cameras. Marcelo Ebrard, then Mexico City’s mayor, also expropriated a major housing unit—40 Tenochtitlán Street—arguing that illegal activities were taking place such as piracy and drug trafficking. As a result all the inhabitants—40 Tenochtitlán Street—were evicted from their homes. As a result, it has not allowed itself to be entirely “scaled down,” but through self-sufficiency solves its own problem, dismissing governmental urban solutions, it continues with its ancestral heritage, articulated in its vocations of recognition and legitimation over and over again.

In Tepito, the informal market prevails, continuing with its ancestral heritage, articulated historically in an originary borough—authentic and rough by birth. The area still lies under the historical significance of its genealogical (cactus). Tepito functions as a socioeconomic laboratory that resisted the ruinous processes of the neoliberal system. Because Tepito learned to mix local culture with its street economy, it has not been able to be entirely “scaled down,” but through self-sufficiency solves its own problem, dismissing governmental urban solutions, it affirms its own life through its vocations of crafts and commerce. In Tepito, there are still 15,450 businesses that represent more than 5,000 tepiteños who make a living every day, submerged in their own histories.