Politics and Partnerships

The Role of Voluntary Associations in America’s Political Past and Present

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Resolviendo: How September 11 Tested and Transformed a New York City Mexican Immigrant Organization

Alyshia Gálvez

There is a single two-lane road connecting the city of Puebla and the small town of Tulcingo del Valle in the rural area called La Poblana Mixteca, in southeastern Mexico, the region where vast numbers of Mexicans living in New York grew up. In Tulcingo, it is possible to eat New York-style pizza or use a phone in a calling center where the operators spend all day dialing numbers that begin with the three main New York City prefixes: 718, 212, and 917. It used to be that the three-hour drive was punctuated by little more than stately saguaro cacti and an occasional stray dog. But since late 2002, there is a stand at a wide spot in the road called Zaragoza where travelers can take a break for a soda, a bag of potato chips, or to eat some tamales (figure 11.1). The stand is run by a woman named Félix Martinez with help from her mother and sister, and she is often accompanied by the youngest three of her five children. Her two oldest sons are in Chicago, having migrated with help from an un-
employed in the Twin Towers and missing in the aftermath of September 11. She was seven months pregnant, knew no English, could not read or write Spanish, and had flown to the border, then traveled overland, crossing the border with a coyote, a trafficker in human beings, to search for José.2

On September 11, 2001, the offices of Asociación Tepeyac on West 14th Street, about a mile from the World Trade Center, became the default refuge for many Latino immigrant workers fleeing the destruction downtown on foot. As people covered in dust and debris began streaming in over the course of the morning to use the phone, rest, and watch the news, and as Cantor Fitzgerald, AON Corporation, the Port Authority, and other agencies and businesses began to construct lists of the missing using payroll records, Tepeyac became one of the first institutions to ask, “What about the people who were working off the books?” That day, Tepeyac began to compile a second list of the missing, the invisible victims, many of whom would never appear in the “Portraits of Grief” in the New York Times, whose family members would never receive death certificates, and whose names will not be etched in the granite at the future WTC memorial.

José Morales had only just migrated to New York City during the summer of 2001. He was still paying off his coyote and had yet to send any money to his pregnant wife and their children, let alone photographs, mementos, or letters about his new life. He did call, though, and he said he was working “en las torres gemelas,” the Twin Towers. Félix did not have a marriage certificate; the two children José fathered do not bear his last name; she did not even have a photograph of him.3 Even if she had, though, these would not have been enough for her to qualify for federally funded victims’ assistance without some kind of proof that he had been employed and perished in the towers.

Until the Family Assistance Center was created by the Mayor’s Office of Emergency Management to offer “one stop shopping” for victims’ families and the United Services Group created a single database

1. With respect only to migrants from the southeastern state of Puebla, who until 1995 were in the clear majority among immigrants to New York City; from 1980 to 2000 there was a twenty-six-fold increase in the rate of international migration (which is virtually all to the United States), and between 1995 and 2000 five times as many poblanos came to the United States as arrived from 1980 to 1985 (Cortes 2003).

2. Félix’s story is drawn from accounts by volunteers who worked with her, as well as media coverage of her story, including a report on CNN by Viles (2001). I did not ask her to tell me the story when I met her in the fall of 2002, because I did not wish to dredge up painful memories. All of the accounts coincide that she traveled shortly after September 11, and in Viles’s account she flew to the border, then traveled overland to New York, arriving the week after the disaster.

3. In this rural region of Mexico, many couples share their lives as “common-law” spouses. Formal marriage is expensive and complicated, especially when one or both partners were previously married (as was the case with Félix), and bear relatively few benefits.
for gathering information on all of the victims and their relatives, survivors were forced to fill out multiple forms for every possible form of assistance, and many wandered from hospital to hospital hoping a loved one would turn up. The Federal Emergency Management Administration (FEMA) even—inexplicably—prohibited nonprofit organizations from assisting people with completion of their forms (Coe et al. 2003:4). If we factor in the challenges faced by Félix having only just arrived in New York City, virtually penniless, without English or basic literacy and lacking documentary proof of her relationship, it is clear that her efforts to obtain information and benefits would be difficult and she was not likely to be credible as a widow to the major victims’ aid agencies. Indeed, a volunteer at Tepeyac told me that aid workers at other organizations had at times leaned conspiratorially toward Félix and asked how she was so sure her husband had not simply run off with another woman and told her he was emigrating. “He could be in your neighboring town in Mexico right now,” they would say.

However, in Tepeyac, an organization composed mostly of and in service to undocumented Mexican migrants, it is known that few—if any—people undertake a border crossing lightly, especially from a place as remote from the U.S.-Mexico border as Zaragoza, while seven months pregnant, and leaving behind four other children. That Félix had done this—and during the almost complete paralysis of mass transport in the days following September 11—was evidence in itself that she was credible and worthy of support, even while her story continued to baffle people who were accustomed to quite astonishing stories of sacrifice.

In this chapter, I analyze the role filled by Asociación Tepeyac de New York after September 11, 2001, and the ways that its success in filling a void in services for immigrant victims of the World Trade Center attacks transformed the organization. I ask whether this transformation was merely an inevitable—if hastened—stage in the organization’s maturation toward greater bureaucratization and formalization of its services, or whether, in fact, the changes in the organization may have hearkened the end of its grassroots appeal and efficacy. This is a story with resonances of a long history of the growth and transformations of culture- and faith-based organizations serving immigrants reaching back to the mid-nineteenth century, even while it is also a story that could only occur in the twenty-first century in our particular globalized moment and the unique climate of expansion of “third sector” provision of services.

Over the last decade we have seen an erosion of the welfare state and a bolstering of the expectation among conservative and mainstream sectors that the philanthropic “third sector” as well as the corporate, private sector can step into the vacuum left by the state. The withdrawal of many government-based services has been accompanied by an expansion of federal funding of private sector and faith-based programs. In this chapter, I examine how a faith-based organization such as Asociación Tepeyac de New York filled an important role in this new era of service provision in the aftermath of September 11. Faith-based and community-based organizations often exhibit much greater flexibility and sensitivity than their governmental counterparts. If they are able to access federal and state funding they can sometimes direct those funds to people who are categorically ineligible for most government benefits, such as the undocumented immigrants who are the constituency of Asociación Tepeyac. However, September 11 marks both the beginning and the end of an era for Tepeyac in that it made available new sources of funding (mostly in the category of emergency, seed, and start-up grants), which fostered its growth and expansion, at the same time that they increased its dependence on outside funding and made it ineligible for
some of the funding for small and underfunded organizations that had enabled it to function previously. Further, the insertion of Tepeyac into federal, state, and nonprofit funding arenas implied a necessary rationalization of its operations, programming, and messaging in ways we might recognize as institutional isomorphism (DiMaggio and Powell 1983).

This chapter will analyze the transformation of Asociación Tepeyac from a very local network of parish-based devotional organizations to a large, transnational organization subject to the pressures and expectations of funders and a broad swath of advisers, philanthropists, and evaluators from the foundations that both enabled and guided its transformation. To analyze this transformation, I employ Michel de Certeau's notion of strategies versus tactics, a dichotomy that enables us to contrast Tepeyac before September 11, when it was an informal grouping of community-based organizations, with the large, professionalized organization that Tepeyac has become since then, obliged by its own success to conform to the organizational structures characteristic of large, funded service agencies. Ironically, the same transformations that marked Tepeyac's success could very well spell its eventual demise, as some charge that the changes wrought took the organization away from its original purpose and that it lost legitimacy with a large part of its constituency.

In Spanish, the verb resolver has more complex meanings than simply "to solve" a problem, its literal translation. A musician might be admired for his ability to resolver, to creatively improvise when his bandmates lose the beat or forget the melody; a parent living in poverty whose children never feel deprived is said to know how to resolver. Resolver is comparable to the notion of tactics in the dichotomy de Certeau constructs between strategies and tactics. In his formulation, tactics are, by definition, subaltern, and depend "on time—... always on the watch for opportunities that must be seized 'on the wing.' Whatever it wins, it does not keep. It must constantly manipulate events in order to turn them into 'opportunities'" (1984, xix). He continues, "Tactics do not obey the law of place, for they are not defined or identified by it.... They are not any more localizable than the technocratic (and scriptural) strategies that seek to create places in conformity with abstract models" (1984, 29). I would argue that strategies correspond to the practices developed by institutions and their members to maximize resources in a climate of bureaucratization of structures, and they are implicit as an ideal form of behavior for organizations within the teleological isomorphism of institutions posited by DiMaggio and Powell (1983). In this chapter, I will examine how Asociación Tepeyac went from being a network of organizations which used tactics, in the de Certeauian sense, and in the vernacular, grassroots, activist sense, to serve the needs of its constituency to being an institutionalized nonprofit organization, pressured through both coercive and normative isomorphic processes (DiMaggio and Powell 1983) to rationalize and bureaucratize itself and thus develop strategies for long-term viability. After September 11, 2001, Asociación Tepeyac showed its ability to resolver around a seemingly insurmountable predicament, and as I examine here, it continues resolviendo on a daily basis, working to build an empowered immigrant community in a transformed political and economic landscape. Nonetheless, it has had to exchange some of its tactics for strategies, and in the process has alienated some of its grassroots base and created a distance between its constituency, leadership, staff, and volunteers, which in the early days were one and the same.

Service Provision in a Historical Context

Asociación Tepeyac's formation can be contextualized within a long history of mutual aid societies and immigrant service providers in the United States from the mid-nineteenth century forward. Its positioning as a collection of lay societies organized under the mantle of the Catholic Church helps us understand how Tepeyac became an organization with a tremendous amount of legitimacy both with its members and with the larger organizational landscape of service provision, while still retaining its flexible, tactical character within the relatively inflexible, rule-bound context of the church. Historically, guilds or mutual aid societies, which were formed in the interest of mutual assistance, aid to the poor and sick, burial of members, and worship of particular patron saints, have "enlarged the great family to afford assistance to one another as one would to a brother" (Brentano 1870, 37). This is a logical consequence of industrialization for Durkheim who posits that the kinds of mechanical solidarity "natural" to preindustrial, undifferentiated societies must, in a sense, be manufactured in societies marked by a division of labor (1984, 84–85).

Confraternal organizations dedicated to saints and mutual aid were one of the key forms of popular organization and social welfare in the colonial and postcolonial periods in Latin America and continue to be an important mode for the organization of social life in urban and rural
contextual parishes combated the fear that loss of language preceded loss of faith, and within the same neighborhoods, different immigrant groups attended different churches. This even led to the creation of broader Catholic nationalisms, among Italians, for example, who previously had identified as Neapolitans, Sicilians, and so on (Dolan 1994; 78; Orsi 1992; Tomasi 1970, 1975).

By the time of the great Puerto Rican migration from 1946 to 1964, the Catholic Church shifted from an emphasis on national parishes to a focus on ethnicity, as a result of the largest effort ever within the Archdiocese of New York to serve a particular cultural group (Gleason 1987; see Glazer 1963 on ethnicity; McGreevy 1996). The arrival of so many immigrants, many of them from rural areas who were nominally Catholic but had little experience with the church as an institution, was called "a state of emergency" by Francis Joseph Cardinal Spellman (Dolan and Vidal 1994, 75). Rather than send to Puerto Ricans within the old model of the national parish, in which immigrants did not necessarily attend their local parish church but attended a regional church with their countrymen in which their language was spoken, often by a priest from the "old" country, the archdiocese opted for a language-based pastoralism in which new seminarians were trained in Spanish. In addition to the regular English language mass, they gave a second, or more, masses in Spanish.  

In Catholic parishes in New York City, religious fraternities, prayer societies, and ethnic confraternities have found space and support for their activities. Historically, parishes have become the logical home for lay organizations comprised of immigrants, such as the comités guadalupanos that would only later be linked under the mantle of Asociación Tepeyac. Tepeyac could not have developed as quickly as it did without the preexisting space for organization provided both by the Catholic parish's structure for lay involvement and the diocese's assistance.

That space was not only particular to the New York City Catholic institutional landscape but also particular to the role of lay religious associational organizations. In parishes with multiple pastors, the church might be spatially subdivided with the main space being dedicated to the English mass, and a basement or smaller rectory chapel being home to the Spanish language mass. This separation, which seems to many to be visibly hierarchical, bothered Puerto Rican civil rights activists who complained of being relegated to basement churches (Diaz Stevens 1993). A monsignor I interviewed in a very large parish in the northernmost section of the Bronx justified this division—which persists in his parish—by saying that the Latino parishioners do not like the austere, modern design of St. Bartholomew's Church with its emphasis on the sculptural formality of the altar and architecturally maximized play of natural light, preferring the basement chapel to which the statues of saints and the Virgin Mary were relegated after the renovation.
Latinos in New York City: A history of Asociación Tepeyac

History of Asociación Tepeyac

The role Asociación Tepeyac would play following the tragic events of September 11, 2001, was unpredictable and represents a conjuncture of various elements. I focus my attention here on the organization’s unique positioning and ability to respond to the crisis, and the way that response would in turn transform the organization itself. Asociación Tepeyac de New York is an umbrella organization of Catholic parish-based Guadalupan committees dedicated to "the social welfare and human rights of Latino immigrants, specifically the undocumented in New York City" (www.tepeyac.org). Although some of the member committees were formed as many as two decades earlier, the association was created in 1997 by a group of priests and Mexican community leaders who sought a concerted way to serve the needs of the very rapidly growing Mexican population in New York City, which was marked by high rates of labor exploitation, poverty, and little access to services. In the beginning, Jesuit brother Joel Magallán Reyes, the founder, and Esperanza Chacón, a community leader, sat on five-gallon paint buckets, used crates for desks, had one phone, and recruited leaders at city playgrounds and area "shape-up" sites where day laborers congregate (interview with Chacón, November 1, 2000). Eventually the archdiocese rented them a four-story dilapidated former convent on 14th Street between Eighth and Seventh Avenues. Slowly, by linking all of the existing committees, encouraging the formation of more in neighborhoods only just receiving influxes of Mexican immigrants, and appealing to otherwise disparate and disconnected recent immigrants with the familiar idioms of Guadalupan devotion, Mexican nationalism, and openness about undocumented status, Tepeyac grew into one of the largest, most known, and respected immigrants’ rights groups in New York City. Even before September 11, Tepeyac was so extensively discussed in the Spanish-language media in New York City, in the United States more broadly, and in Mexico that some immigrants came to its 14th Street offices seeking orientation immediately on arriving in New York City. Others carried the phone number with them when they crossed the border, calling the office from motels or rest areas on Arizona highways, seeking assistance in contacting relatives in New York City or to denounce abuses by the Border Patrol. When I began research in the organization in 2000, I would frequently hear Chacón working on cases like that of a migrant who never arrived at his brother’s house in Brooklyn. She alternately spoke with the young man’s mother in rural Puebla, his brother, and the Mexican consulate in Tucson, trying to retrace his movements and determine where he had last been seen.

Asociación Tepeyac's organizational strategy is premised on a universal Catholic humanism. The rights immigrants claim are seen as a function of their status as human beings, vouchsafed by the figure of the Virgin of Guadalupe. The rights, I elaborate here, are based on a popular understanding of the Virgin’s role as protector and provider for those of particular vulnerability. By appealing to the Virgin of Guadalupe, Asociación Tepeyac was able to work with Mexican and Latin American immigrant communities without regard to immigration status. The organization of the Virgin, I argue, was a powerful symbol in the way it allowed people to think in ways that were both new and familiar. Through participating in confraternal social organizations dedicated to the Virgin of Guadalupe, it is argued that Mexicans in New York City are able to mobilize for immigrant rights more successfully than if they were to come forward simply as an association of undocumented immigrants. Not only does their choice of organizational modality offer powerful symbolic and discursive tools that draw from Catholic theology, it offers ready allies and, as we can see in the September 11 disaster, ways for them to access federal funds and services for which they would otherwise be ineligible. This goes beyond being a matter of “strength in numbers.”

5. In my book, Guadalupe in New York: Devotion and the Struggle for Citizenship Rights among Mexicans (New York University Press, 2009), I extensively discuss the role of these three concepts: Guadalupanismo, Mexican nationalism, and undocumented status as Tepeyac’s mode of mobilization.
Virgin Mary, in her manifestation as Our Lady of Guadalupe. This articulation of rights seeks to supersede the nation-state and render moot its laws which cast undocumented immigrants as juridical *personae non gratae*. In this way, immigrants disengage from the narrowly constructed and xenophobic debates about law and juridical status in which, by virtue of being undocumented, their claims for rights are always already illegitimate, and when granted, cast as a “favor” voluntarily ceded by a benevolent state and populace that owes them nothing and can at any time revoke whatever benefits might have been granted in moments of largesse or economic expansion.⁶ The efforts of immigrants to imagine themselves as rights holders above and beyond the nation-state is an example of postnational or cultural citizenship, premised on “universal personhood” as theorized by Soysal (1994), Rosaldo (1997), and Flores and Benmayor (1997).

Although Tepeyac does get into the nitty-gritty of politics at the local, state, and national level, ultimately the organization’s struggle for a humane reform of immigration law in the form of an amnesty that would allow undocumented immigrants already in the United States to remain, work legally, and ultimately achieve naturalization is premised on the idea that the quest for survival, for a living wage, may—and in our transnational age often does—take workers across borders. They argue that immigrant workers are fulfilling a demand for labor at the same time that they seek a living for their families, and as such, their actions should not be considered “illegal.” Indeed, this assertion of rights is also corroborated by such entities as the signatories of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, as well as the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops and the Episcopado Mexicano who wrote in a joint letter, “Strangers No Longer,” of the arbitrariness of borders and their immorality if they prevent people from seeking a living wherever they may find it (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops 2003).

Asociación Tepeyac fulfills a significant role in serving as a collective proxy enabling engagement in civic processes by people who individually, as undocumented immigrants, are ineligible for such participation. Participating in protests and lobbying, the undocumented members of Tepeyac behave “as if they were citizens” (Bosniak 1998). These rehearsals of citizenship open up spheres of access to the civic processes of lawmaking within which immigrants hope to promote the legislation of an amnesty granting them legal status, even while they are unable to participate formally in electoral processes. In the interim, these activities prepare them for an anticipated future in which they will be fully enfranchised citizens. It is hard to imagine that the net effect of such participation would be so significant or empowering were the immigrant members of Tepeyac to take on the state and its representatives as individuals. However, channeled through Tepeyac as an intermediary and proxy, their voices are multiplied and amplified, and enable them to achieve greater legitimacy for their claims.

**Asociación Tepeyac and September 11, 2001**

It was logical when, on the morning of September 11, so many Latinos saw the offices of Tepeyac, literally at the border of the original catchment area cordoned off as “Ground Zero” and in sight of the smoking ruins, as a refuge. The problem was that at that point in the organization’s life there were still only two computers, a handful of phones, and two paid staff members employed by the organization. Nevertheless, lacking any semblance of the kind of infrastructure necessary for such a task, Tepeyac undertook to address the needs of the disaster’s invisible victims. Almost immediately, they began to develop an innovative system that has since been adopted by other nonprofit organizations to identify victims who do not leave a paper trail.⁷

As the reader will recall, initial estimates held that as many as ten thousand people perished in the disaster, and initial relief efforts, while well intentioned, sometimes missed the mark in poignant ways: only a small fraction of the thousands of body bags ordered by the city were used, funds set up for 9/11 orphans went unclaimed, and initial counts of

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⁶ The debate over immigrant access to health care is a good illustration of this tendency to alternately grant, then withhold services to undocumented immigrants. Although it makes good public health sense for all of those living in a society to have equal access to health care, especially for treatment for infectious diseases and immunizations, immigrants’ ability to obtain low-cost or state-subsidized health care is often the first thing threatened by any surge in xenophobia, such as the failed attempt to ratify Proposition 187 in California, and similar moves in New York State, following September 11 and the subsequent “belt-tightening” of the city budget enforced by Mayor Michael Bloomberg. At the moment, New York State is one of the most generous states in terms of state-subsidized health care, offering free and low-cost health care to children and pregnant women with or without a Social Security number (generally, among noncitizens, only work visa holders and permanent residents are able to obtain Social Security numbers).

⁷ One organization that has adopted their methods is Safe Horizons, an organization dedicated to serving victims of violent crime and domestic violence.
gather testimonies from family members, they documented sixty-seven cases, including sixteen Mexicans. They also provided services to nine hundred workers dislocated by the tragedy, 64 percent of whom were Mexican, 9 percent Ecuadoran, and most of the rest from elsewhere in Latin America and the Caribbean, virtually all of them undocumented (Coe et al. 2003; Asociación Tepeyac 2003). To date, of the sixty-seven cases documented by Tepeyac, only forty-eight families have received death certificates and only thirty-seven were eligible for federal compensation (Coe et al. 2003, 40). The discrepancy in proportions of Mexicans among those served in the two groups is because Tepeyac was one of the only organizations publicly reaching out to undocumented victims of the Trade Center attack, and thus many non-Mexican survivors also sought its services. Tepeyac was not the only organization providing services for displaced workers, on the other hand, and Mexicans were more likely than people of other nationalities to receive them because these involved a long-term commitment by recipients of aid, including mental health services, job training, computer, ESL, and GED classes if relevant, all in Spanish (except for ESL), and couched in the particularly Mexican cultural milieu of Tepeyac.9 The likelihood of a displaced worker who was not Mexican committing to many months of interaction with an organization that asserted its collective identity in particularly Mexican idioms was less than for those who sought its assistance simply in obtaining a death certificate and emergency survivors' benefits. The organization, at the same time, also engaged in less outreach to non-Mexican displaced workers. Because funding for these ongoing services was minimal, outreach was limited and those served were likely to belong to the organization's preexisting constituent base.

Just as undocumented immigrants are ineligible for many federal- and state-funded services, including Social Security and unemployment insurance, undocumented victims of September 11 and their survivors were not eligible for unemployment insurance, workers' compensation, Social Security, or FEMA benefits. Although many of the families of those 9/11 victims who appeared on official payrolls have received pensions and death benefits, life insurance, and Social Security benefits amounting to more than a million dollars, many of the families of undocumented

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8. Windows on the World was one of the few employers that came forward and worked to identify all of its missing employees and through the foundation it began, Windows of Hope Family Relief Fund, worked to get their families survivors' benefits, irrespective of their immigration status (Polakow-Suransky 2001).

9. Even the name Tepeyac is something of a code word. Mexicans are likely to understand the reference to the hill at Tepeyac outside Mexico City, site of the apparition of the Virgin of Guadalupe in 1531.
victims received nothing at all from the main sources of aid. In October 2001, the Red Cross promised to distribute aid to victims referred by Tepeyac so they could meet their immediate food and housing expenses, saying that up to $1,500 would be given to families that submitted required affidavits at the Family Assistance Center. Another $28,500 was pledged, to be divided equally among the families that could produce death certificates (Moreno González 2001). If this indeed occurred, it would have meant that each family that received a death certificate would have received a paltry $593.78. Even Luz María Mendoza (figure 11.3), who like Félix traveled from Mexico in the days after September 11 in search of her missing husband, but who came bearing check stubs and photos of her husband at his job at Windows on the World, was turned away from the Family Assistance Center and eventually required help not only from Tepeyac but also from the Mexican consulate before she received a basic survivor’s benefit package. Indeed, problems in accessing aid were not experienced only by undocumented workers and their relatives; overall, seven of ten requests for housing assistance were denied by the Federal Emergency Management Administration (O’Neil 2001). Nonetheless, the problems seemed to be disproportionately experienced by those who also tend to be the most vulnerable in society: those who were already in financially precarious positions before the disaster, immigrants, non-English speakers, the disabled, and so on. For example, until criticisms resulted in protests and a congressional hearing, FEMA distributed fifteen thousand faulty aid applications in the weeks after the attack, and applications for aid were only available in English (Henriques 2002).

It is typical, according to some analysts, that when donors respond to a specific incident with an outpouring of contributions, that the rules for giving are not so strictly enforced (Steurele 2003, 3). Although some lawmakers proposed various amendments to regulations, such as granting permanent residency or citizenship to the widows and children of WTC victims or suspending certain eligibility requirements, to date this has not occurred. FEMA outreach workers insisted to Tepeyac representa-

![Figure 11.3. Luz María Mendoza, whose husband died in the World Trade Center and who, unlike many other victims, had pay stubs and photos of her husband at work in the towers to corroborate her story.](image)

sentatives that many of their clients did qualify for aid (U.S.-born children of victims, for example) and held workshops on how to file FEMA applications, but only one of the three hundred applications that were filed with the assistance of Tepeyac received FEMA assistance. Applicants were further dissuaded by the stern and discouraging warning on the applications that applicants who were in the country illegally would be subject to prosecution (Coe et al. 2003, 40). Indeed, in the aftermath
of the disaster Spanish-language media forewarned that undocumented immigrants would be subject to greater scrutiny following the attacks, could be liable for summary deportations, and possibly forced to repay any federal aid that they might have received in the past, including emergency Medicaid for emergency room visits, workers' compensation, and so on. Unfortunately, many of these dire predictions have borne out and they certainly had the immediate effect of discouraging many victims and survivors from seeking disaster aid. For these reasons, Tepeyac was uniquely positioned to resolviendo and foresee the needs and serve the "invisible victims" of September 11.

Following September 11, analysts remarked that the diversity of charities and organizations poised to provide services proved to be the city's greatest strength in its response to the disaster: "Many of New York's charities are small and sharply focused on immigrants, for example...groups often overlooked by larger, more generalized agencies" (Coe et al. 2003, 13). Most of Tepeyac's WTC relief funding was from private foundations such as the American Jewish World Service, AFL-CIO, and the Robin Hood Foundation. In a blurring and overlap of sectors, as theorized by Elisabeth Clemens and Doug Guthrie in the introduction, Tepeyac's role is not simply one of funneling private funds and facilitating access to government services. In the wake of September 11, immigrants were targets of even greater xenophobia than had become normal in the era after the passage of the 1996 Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act (IIRIRA). For example, the National Association of Realtors even barred its September 11 charitable donations from benefiting non-permanent-resident immigrants (Coe et al. 2003). Even if the will had existed to do it, any major effort by FEMA or the beleaguered American Red Cross to revise their regulations and make it possible for people without Social Security numbers or legal immigration status, much less any conclusive evidence that their loved ones perished in the disaster, to apply directly for benefits would have been met roundly with criticism and might have resulted in even greater scrutiny of the evidence—or lack thereof—being provided by people like Félix.

Asociación Tepeyac played the role of intermediary between the large government and nongovernmental agencies, foundations, and individual donations to provide direct benefits to victims and their families as well as to displaced workers. In this way, they represented a flexible and strategic response to a disaster that required a coordination of services like no other in history. The former chief executive officer of the September 11th Fund wrote later that "the problem was not money but coordination" (Gotbaum 2003, 2). Then—New York attorney general Eliot Spitzer likened his work to achieve coordination of relief efforts and a single survivors' database to "herding cats" (Barstow 2001).

The nonprofit sector offers greater flexibility in response to a disaster than a behemoth like FEMA because of its ability to receive and distribute funds with less federal oversight. Tepeyac, as a relatively young nonprofit that nonetheless had earned a widely known and respected reputation among Latinos in the city, especially among Mexicans in the United States and Mexico, and bearing the legitimacy of archdiocesan patronage, was uniquely situated to address the needs of a sector of victims of the September 11 disaster who were not being adequately served. Precisely because of the organization's relative newness and lack of a staff schooled in negotiating the labyrinthine paths of federal funding, it was able to respond in a more flexible, tactical and, ultimately, highly effective manner than many older and larger organizations.

Asociación Tepeyac Today

Asociación Tepeyac was transformed by its involvement in the September 11 disaster and relief effort. As described previously, de Certeau contrasts tactics and strategies, associating the former with flexibility, improvisation, and subalternity and the latter with power and bureaucracy. Asociación Tepeyac shifted from a mode of operating and planning that was tactical—based on emergent human rights issues, a dedicated if constantly rotating staff and volunteer base, and an always uncertain fund-raising environment—to being an organization with a more professionalized staff that was flooded by funders, program evaluators, philanthropists, city and federal oversight, and a high-stakes media and public relations environment. The process by which Tepeyac responded to this shift and

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11. Among other things, the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act increased employer penalties for hiring undocumented workers and instituted three- and ten-year bars on reentry for immigrants who were deported.
the end result—the organization's transformation from grass-roots organization to service agency—is comprehensible within DiMaggio and Powell's theory of institutional isomorphism, by which organizations come to resemble each other in their competition for resources, customers, political power, institutional legitimacy, and social and economic fitness (1983, 150).

The responsibility that Asociación Tepeyac assumed for counting, documenting, and providing for the survivors of the "invisible" victims was much larger than its existing infrastructure could accommodate. Nonetheless, the staff and volunteers did not pause in their efforts but carried on, accomplishing with sheer will and dedication what an organization double its size would have found overwhelming. Liliana Rivera Sánchez told me that in the weeks following 9/11, she worked as a volunteer at Asociación Tepeyac for twenty hours a day, going home only to sleep for a few hours, and then returning to the task at hand. She accompanied the survivors of victims to the family assistance center and hospitals, and even more than a year later, after relocating to Puebla, Mexico, spent a great deal of time delivering funds and paperwork and checking in with Félix in Zaragoza, a three-hour drive away. In the chaotic but generous outpouring of charity following 9/11, the need for organization and channeling of assistance was even greater than the need for additional funds.

Foundations and private donors learned of Tepeyac's work, marveled at what they were accomplishing with virtually no budget, and clamored to provide them with more resources. The Robin Hood Foundation awarded Tepeyac $600,000; $420,000 for emergency cash relief to families of World Trade Center victims, and $180,000 designated to strengthen its relief services (Robin Hood Foundation 2006). The following year, the foundation awarded an additional $480,000, most of it for staffing, and it continued to fund an after-school program that Tepeyac ran in Queens for several years afterward. Nonetheless, while a half million dollars can cover several salaries for a year or two, grants like this are assumed to sustain an organization temporarily while it applies for other funding for operating expenses, salaries, and long-term growth. In addition, Tepeyac charges membership fees and a modest tuition for its ESL, computer, and GED courses, which are intended to provide it with necessary income indefinitely. However, the organization has been unable, to date, to expand its programs and constituency while

at the same time securing funding sources that will enable it to operate at this expanded magnitude in the long run. September 11 ratcheted up the expectations for and the role of Tepeyac in ways that are not fully reversible, and perhaps are not reversible at all. Over the past few years, most of the paid staff has been laid off or asked to revert to volunteer status. In one particularly poignant example, there is a former staff member who had been employed in a restaurant in the Twin Towers and who the morning of 9/11 ran from the smoke and debris, that enveloped him when he emerged from the subway on his way to work. After seeking assistance at Tepeyac, he was hired there, first in WTC relief work, then in cultural affairs. However, after four years of full-time work at Tepeyac, he is now waiting tables again to earn a living.

In efforts to obtain grants for operating costs—often the most difficult funding category because many funders prefer funding terminal "projects," not overhead—the development director has discovered that because of two years of greater-than-a-half-million-dollar budgets following on the heels of 9/11, Tepeyac is now ineligible for the smaller $20,000 to $50,000 grants that were its bread and butter. However, it does not have the many years' long track record to qualify for or the infrastructure to manage multimillion dollar government service contracts or grants from larger foundations. This year, the director of the Queens center was told that in addition to single-handedly running a bustling community center, she needs to find money for her own salary and the center's rent while coordinating a full calendar of English, GED, and computer classes, as well as women's groups, cultural activities, and children's programming. As of this writing she was hustling to raise funds by renting the center's space to individuals and organizations for activities ranging from tax preparation to quinceañera rehearsals to poetry readings.

Indeed, there seems to be a structurally analogous problem occurring with Tepeyac as an organization to what occurs with its constituents as immigrants. Just as immigrants who seek services must contend with cultural and language barriers and legal bars to their eligibility because of their lack of citizenship and/or legal residency, Asociación Tepeyac, as a relative newcomer in the nonprofit world, has had to rapidly professionalize and formalize structures that emerged organically from its grassroots basis in forty parish-based community organizations; and

12. Thank you to Lis Clemens for suggesting this metaphor.
yet it still faces large obstacles in its effort to integrate into the institutional culture and elaborate governing mechanisms of “fundable” nonprofits. This can be seen in the absurdity of the development director’s task of applying for funds from foundations with grant applications that she writes, and, if received, which she will administer and evaluate because the organization does not have enough personnel to spare any other staff members from their always urgent program responsibilities to fulfill these tasks. Further, with layoffs due to the organization’s inability to sustain payroll for its dramatically expanded staff, the comprehensive and complex programming that the immediate post-9/11 funding enabled, including long-term mental health services, job training, and more, has had to be scaled back, and the remaining skeleton crew fulfills the work of two or three job titles apiece in order to keep the rest of its programs and services afloat.

Another consequence of the expansion and increased visibility of Tepeyac after 9/11 is that Joel Magallán has had to assume the role of “executive director” with its attendant obligations of hosting funders, public speaking engagements, lobbying, media appearances, and so on, which sometimes run contrary to how he and his constituency might have preferred to define his role as a “community leader.” While he has been profiled in the New York Times, Spanish-language media including El Diario and El Diario de México, and on television, and awarded honors by the mayor of the city of New York, the consulate of Mexico, and the Robin Hood Foundation, he has lost the support of many of those who worked with him to create Tepeyac a decade ago. Some community leaders complain that in the past they would call or visit Tepeyac and it was Joel who picked up the phone or answered the door. Now, visitors are made to wait or are passed on to staff members, while he spends a great deal of time outside of the office on appointments, meetings, press conferences, and travel. Further, he must balance the tremendous and conflicting pressures of the expectations of funders for proper management, administration, and auditing of funds; of actors in the larger political sphere with whom he must develop and sustain relationships; and of those Mexican immigrants who have been Tepeyac’s base, for sincerity and comprehension of their needs and an authentic cultural bond.

Perhaps this process was inevitable and not unique to Tepeyac. Only two months after 9/11, analysts anticipated a “day of reckoning” for newer nonprofits that had not yet developed a solid donor base. Robert F. Sharpe Jr., a nonprofit-group consultant, predicted a significant winnowing: “A lot of the charities that were formed in recent years aren’t going to make it” (O’Neil 2001). Further, Cho (2002) and Aanft (2002) have signaled the difficulty of raising funds for programs and services that benefit immigrants after 9/11 because of the rise in xenophobia and increased focus on terrorism, as well as new provisions on charitable giving under the USA Patriot Act.

This process of change is predicted by DiMaggio and Powell’s theorization of coercive, normative, and mimetic isomorphism (1983). Building on Hawley’s description (1968), DiMaggio and Powell define isomorphism as “a constraining process that forces one unit in a population to resemble other units that face the same set of environmental conditions” (1983, 149). During the first four years of its existence, Tepeyac, apart from minimal diocesan support, was otherwise independent and, while its activities and reach were limited by an almost total lack of funding, it also did not need to answer to anyone. The (volunteer) personnel director once complained to me long before 9/11 that he was never sure if the funds for payroll would be available on payday for the few employees he needed to pay, or if they had perhaps been used to pay the electric bill or print the newsletter. Members paid dues in exchange for low-cost ESL and computer classes and other benefits, but there was little transparency about the funds’ use. There has never been an accusation, to my knowledge, of misuse of the funds, and it is clear to anyone who enters the offices that funds have rarely been used to make the staff more comfortable or better equipped, and the director is known for his asceticism, but there has not been the transparency of recordkeeping required by external funders.

After September 11, 2001, however, the funding agencies that with the best intentions sought to enable Tepeyac to meet the needs of the survivors and displaced workers of the terror attacks, continue serving its existing clients, and expand its services, also imposed expectations and practices on the organization that inevitably changed it. Of the three kinds of isomorphic processes posited by DiMaggio and Powell—mimetic, normative, and coercive—the latter two seem most relevant to an analysis of Tepeyac after 9/11. Mimetic processes involve imitation on the part of organizations that model themselves after other organizations due to uncertainty. Mimesis is less relevant to Tepeyac, an organization that, until recently, had surprisingly little contact with other similar ser-
vice providers and immigrant groups, and a marked lack of interest in following anyone else's example. ¹³ However, it is subject to coercive isomorphism: if a funding agency provides capital, it wants (and needs for accountability to its own funders and board of directors) certain assurances that the money is being used for its intended purpose. This process of coercion begins before a funder even enters into a relationship with an organization; in order to apply for a grant, an organization like Tepeyac must accommodate its mission, purpose, and its operations to the terms, concepts, and modes that are comprehensible, and ultimately, acceptable to, the external source. Although Tepeyac, as is typical of organizations only recently viewed as "fundable" and chronically short on funds, went through a phase after 2001 of applying for anything for which it could conceivably be eligible, only in the last year or two has the organization begun to weigh the potential benefit of a grant against the coercive pressures a funder might impose and chosen not to apply for some funding opportunities. Nonetheless, because of these coercive pressures, the organization has expanded its mission, "toned down" its Mexican identity,¹⁴ and placed its greatest emphasis on programs for youth and children.

Normative pressures have also worked to further isomorphism between Tepeyac and other nonprofit organizations in the United States. Before 9/11, volunteers and a minimal staff wore many hats. The executive director rejected the notion of job descriptions and preferred to assign tasks to people based on their interests and skill sets, even if it meant their work might overlap several different project areas. After 9/11, Tepeyac organized its work into departments, composed of staff; campaigns linking staff and constituents; and "commissions" composed of board members (who are community leaders), volunteers, staff, and members of the comités. Many of the departments included highly trained professionals: lawyers (volunteer) and paralegals, psychologists, educators, and administrators. Soon, some of these new staff members turned the lack of job descriptions into a complaint about what they perceived to be disorganization and an excessive workload. Job descriptions, after all, describe one's task within an organization as much as they make a job comparable to similar positions in any like organization:

¹³ See Gálvez (2004) for an extended examination of Tepeyac's historic reluctance to build coalitions and alliances with other groups.
¹⁴ The development director described to me the innovation of the use of an abstract butterfly motif in its most recent annual report as a response to funders who balked at the ubiquitous images of the Mexican flag and the Virgin of Guadalupe in its previous reports as "too Mexican."

"Such mechanisms [including also professional training institutions and trade associations] create a pool of almost interchangeable individuals who occupy similar positions across a range of organizations and possess a similarity of orientation and disposition that may override variations in tradition and control that might otherwise shape organizational behavior" (DiMaggio and Powell, drawing on Perrow 1983, 152).

Instead of personal interest and the director's assessment of need in distributing responsibility, staff wished to constrain their tasks to a coherent and discrete area for which they had been trained. At the same time, because federal laws governing hiring would cast Tepeyac's efforts in the past to create and nurture a visibly and profoundly Mexican space as discrimination, the new hires, although still largely bilingual, were quite diverse in terms of national origin and ethnicity. Further, federal hiring regulations also mean that many of the people who have been core participants in the creation of Tepeyac are not eligible to be hired as staff because of their undocumented status. Of course, being able to hire a highly trained staff is important to any organization that seeks to provide high-quality services to an ever-expanding constituency, but so is the retention of continuity with the institution's original organizing principles. Nonetheless, this example of normative isomorphism is another way that the organization has been transformed.

Ultimately, the expansion of Tepeyac after 9/11, even if it ultimately cannot be sustained, has already permanently altered the organization. Should it be unable to access funding and sources of income that enable it to operate at its expanded scale, it nevertheless cannot return to being a volunteer-driven, grassroots association of parish-based voluntary organizations. Indeed, many of the core activists who had been instrumental in the organization's formation have withdrawn from it, and several of them have turned their energy to smaller, community-based organizations in the five boroughs of New York City, with different purposes, varying from cultural expression to soccer to political activism. Perhaps the most striking consequence of the untenability of the conflicting pressures and demands on the organization is that the forty parish-based Guadalupan committees that composed the Asociación now are fewer in number than a dozen, as many have seceded or disbanded. Instead, staff at Tepeyac now, and only recently, have stopped emphasizing the role of the comités and instead say that the association's base is its two community centers based in Queens and the South Bronx, which are mainly dedicated to the provision of services and are largely unaffiliated
with the Catholic Church. In addition to the Manhattan headquarters, these two centers offer services including financial literacy workshops, ESL, GED, and computer classes, and after-school programs to Mexican and other Latino immigrants. Even the most basic defining characteristic of Tepeyac, that it was founded to serve Mexican immigrants, has been forced to change, as funders balk at the presumed exclusionism of that mission and ask the organization to be more universal and inclusive in its outreach and constituency. Its mission statement, which previously was described as service to and mobilization of the Mexican immigrant community, now refers to “Latino immigrants.”

Ultimately, it remains to be seen whether 9/11 produced, in an accelerated and dramatic fashion, a transformation of Tepeyac that was inevitable. After all, few grassroots movements can be sustained over the long term without losing members to other causes and core participants to fatigue, burnout, and better-paying jobs (cf. Edelman 1999). Perhaps the transformation has allowed Tepeyac to embark on a new path that will enable it to serve many more thousands of clients for years to come. Indeed, the creation of immigrant-serving institutions that can serve the changing needs of a population as it settles in the United States and of new arrivals who may face a different landscape than their predecessors should be considered a good thing. Nonetheless, there are many who are saddened by the transformation of Asociación Tepeyac from a movement into an institution.

Conclusion

Asociación Tepeyac illustrates a trajectory that is surely not unique in the history of institutions in the United States or around the world: it grew from being a group of loosely affiliated mutual aid societies into a movement, and from a movement into an institution. Similar trajectories can be traced with political parties, unions, and religious organizations throughout the world. The Guadalupan committees, parish-based confraternal societies, became linked into an activist movement for the rights and dignity of undocumented immigrants, especially Mexicans, in the New York area. Then, because of the events of 9/11 and its aftermath, this movement and its nascent organizational structure turned its efforts to coordinating relief, services, and long-term empowerment of the “invisible victims” of that tragic day. This abrupt expansion of its mission and its widely acknowledged and astonishing success at serving this elusive and underserved population prompted it to expand its operational capacity and led funders to shower it with the means to do so. However, that funding expanded its infrastructure very rapidly during a hectic period, and the organization’s efforts to turn that infusion of capital into a solvent operating budget in the long term has yet to be successful. As such, while the organization grew beyond its founding parts—its grassroots base in the committees—it has not achieved full legitimacy in the eyes of foundations nor of its constituency in its role as an institution dedicated to service provision. Ironically, the very thing that drew funders to Tepeyac in the aftermath of September 11, its ability to creatively respond to the tragedy in ways no other agency did, to resolver, was precisely what would have to be changed with the infusion of foundation dollars: tactics would have to be made into strategies, and the pressures toward institutional isomorphism would become irresistible.

Nonetheless, I think this move from associationalism, which is such an important part of American civic life, into activism, and then into institutionalization, for people who are not actually yet “Americans” offers quite liberatory possibilities. Indeed, historically, some of the same organizations that were founded in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to serve the most basic needs of European immigrants in the United States have, over a century, become some of the oldest and most prestigious service providers still operating, and their missions are now typically very broad. In the meantime, too, organizations such as Tepeyac provide concrete benefits to people who otherwise would be left in the cold, unserved by the behemoth relief agencies and service providers. Indeed, as Tepeyac is made to resemble other agencies by the forces of institutional isomorphism, it could also influence other organizations to take greater consideration of undocumented immigrants and others who fall through the cracks in many existing services. Presumably isomorphism is not unidirectional. Nonetheless, it is important to contextualize this transformation within larger national and global processes of globalization, the shrinkage of the welfare state and expansion of the third sector, and a rise in the role of faith-based service providers. By examining this larger context, it becomes possible to observe how the tactics developed by Asociación Tepeyac to serve a highly exploited co-

15. Nonetheless, the South Bronx center is housed in a church building. Since this writing, the South Bronx Center was closed due to lack of funds.
munity of undocumented Mexican immigrants and that made it uniquely able to resourcefully address (what I call resolver) the sudden and overlooked needs of the "invisible" victims of 9/11 were consequently redirected. When the tactics were transformed into strategies, Asociación Tepeyac became a larger, more efficient, and more fundable institution at the same time that it was alienated from its base. It remains to be seen whether this transformation was ultimately for the best.

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