TO COME AND GO: TRANSNATIONAL LIFE BETWEEN MEXICO AND ALASKA

by

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Abstract

This dissertation examines the experiences of place and patterns of transnational mobility of three generations of people who have been living between Acuitzio del Canje, Michoacán, Mexico and Anchorage, Alaska, USA for several decades. These people hold dual US-Mexican citizenship or US permanent residency and are able to move across the continent in a way that many Mexican migrants cannot. Based on twelve months of ethnographic research in both Acuitzio and Anchorage, and ten years of engagement with people in these locations, I analyze the experience of Acuitzences (people from Acuitzio) at several levels: as they encounter frictions in their movements between Michoacán and Alaska; the practices of multigenerational family units who gain traction over time to build lives in both Anchorage and Acuitzio; the uneven and situated habits that generate a transnational class formation, and the ways in which Mexicans in Alaska re-conceptualize their senses of place by developing transnational identities out of the symbols and mechanisms of both nation-states. In showing how distance is key to the experience of Mexican migrant-immigrants in Alaska, this research also contributes to theorizations of the relevance of distance in the creation of spatialized differences. My analysis reveals that over time, Acuitzences in Alaska orient their lives to both locations as they live, work, and imagine their futures across the continent. Acuitzences in Alaska have created a transnational social field and orient themselves more to the field as a whole than to any one location in it. For most of them, Acuitzio, Anchorage, and the experience of mobility between the two places are necessary to feel at home in the world. These findings contribute to the anthropological research on mobility, citizenship, transnational migration, and the production of space, and bring the spatially bounded fields of Circumpolar Studies and Latin American Studies together. Based on this, I advocate for a transnational approach to theory and policy that embraces the multiple trajectories that construct places. Despite policy restrictions to migration, the lives of transnational Acuitzences who come and go show how the United States and Mexico are profoundly coproduced geographies.
Preface

This dissertation represents original and independent work by the author, Sara Komarnisky, who designed the research program, performed all aspects of the research program, and analyzed all data. The author is therefore solely responsible for any errors and/or omissions in this document. Portions of Chapter 1, 3 and 4 appear in the following publication:


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List of Abbreviations

AFN – Alaska Federation of Natives
ANCSA – Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act
APEC – Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation
ALC – Adult Learning Centre
DEW Line – Distant Early Warning Line
DREAM Act – Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors Act
FBI – Federal Bureau of Investigations
GED - General Educational Development
H1N1 – Influenza A virus subtype H1N1
ICE – Immigration and Customs Enforcement
ID – identification
IME – Instituto de los Mexicanos en el Exterior
INA – Immigration and Nationality Act
IRCA – Immigration Reform and Control Act
LA – Los Angeles
LAX – Los Angeles International Airport
NAFTA – North American Free Trade Agreement
NASA – National Aeronautics and Space Administration
PAN – Partido Acción Nacional
PFD – Permanent Fund Dividend
TSA – Transportation Security Administration
UAA – University of Alaska, Anchorage
US – United States
USA – United States of America
USCIS - US Citizenship and Immigration Services
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Annie V. Komarnisky
1917-2010
Chapter 1: Introduction – “Yes, There Are Mexicans in Alaska”

On a visit to Anchorage in 2010 I took the bus downtown to see the Mexican Consulate, which had opened in 2008. A lot had changed since the last time I was in town almost five years earlier. The Anchorage Museum had a new glass façade and landscaping, and across C street was the Consulate itself, a yellow two story building with the words Consulado de Mexico spelled out in black, and a large Mexican flag waving in the wind. Walking on the museum grounds across from the consulate I stopped to take a photograph, and overheard the comments of a middle-aged white couple, walking past slowly, with cameras slung around their necks. Tourists. Indeed, summertime in downtown Anchorage means tourists, lots of them, arriving on buses from cruise ships, spending a few hours in the city before taking the bus or train for sightseeing elsewhere. Others might fly in and spend a couple of days in Anchorage before gearing up and leaving town for a backcountry adventure. I suspected these two were of the cruise ship variety.

“Honey,” the woman said, “Consulado de Mexico, now what do you suppose that is?”

“Not sure, looks like some kind of Mexican government office,” the man said.

“Well, what the heck is it doing here?”

On a cool, cloudy summer day in Anchorage, the Mexican dance and culture group Xochiquetzal-Tiqun had been asked to perform along the route for a 5km fun run. They thought there would at least be a stage! Or a sound system! There was neither, only an empty parking lot. I stood with the dancers as the adults deliberated about what to do. After a quick vote, the group decided to go ahead and dance anyway, “After all, we’re already in costume.” As the dancers got to their places, someone backed the Chevrolet Suburban up, opened all of the doors, and turned
up the speakers so that the dancers and runners could hear the music playing from the automobile’s CD player. Someone hit play and the youngest dancers with girls in colourful dresses and boys in black pants, white shirts, and a red sash danced to a *jarabe* in the Jalisco style. As they danced, parents and supporters of the group chatted on the sidelines. One woman joked about how the runners would be confused by the scene as they jogged past, “They’ll think that they’ve run all the way to Tijuana!” The group erupted with laughter as the adult dancers took to the parking lot – women dressed in white lace dresses, dancing to a song from Veracruz.

Almost every evening when I lived in Vancouver, I went to the dog park at the end of the block. While there, the dog owners inevitably struck up conversation with each other. One of them, the owner of a labradoodle tumbling around with my golden retriever asked me, “So what do you do?”

“I’m an anthropologist, I’m working on my PhD in anthropology at UBC.”

“Oh yeah, so what do you study?”

I replied, “I work with people from a small town in central Mexico who live and work in Anchorage, Alaska.”

“What? There are Mexicans in Alaska? What do they do there? How do they get there? Isn’t it too cold for them?”

I sat with Renata in her living room in Anchorage, my digital tape recorder running to capture her responses in an audio file. I asked her, “When you’re in Mexico and you say you live in Alaska, what do people say about that?”
She replied, “Their first expression usually is something like, ‘Oh my gosh, don’t you, like, freeze up there?’ Because they think it’s always snowing. I’m like, ‘No, it doesn’t just always snow. It’s actually snowing less and less as the years go by.’” She paused and glanced out the window, “I’m really surprised that it hasn’t snowed yet this year.”

“I know!” I exclaimed, “I thought it would have snowed by now for sure.”

Renata continued, “Yeah. But anyway, that’s their first impression. ‘It’s so cold over there in Alaska’, ‘Do you live in igloos?’ stuff like that, you know? People from the pueblo know that there are a lot of people living in Anchorage who are from Acuitzio but once I went to Mexico City I realized that people there were surprised. Like, ‘Oh my gosh, there’s Mexicans up there in Alaska? Like, there’s Latinos?’ And I’m like, ‘Yeah, there’s not just Mexicans there’s like Colombian people, people from Venezuela, there’s so many of us in Alaska.’”

**Mexicans in Unexpected Places**

Since I began working with people who move between Michoacán and Alaska, the most common questions I am asked about my work are as follows, “There are Mexicans in Alaska?” “How do they get there?” and “What do they do there?” Each of the vignettes above hint at a sense of anomaly and dissonance when “Mexico” and “Alaska” are brought together. Alaska is thought of as a separate, isolated, wild place where people of Mexican background are not supposed to belong. Racial and spatial perceptions that have become mainstream within the United States about Mexican migrant-immigrants place them closer to the US-Mexico border. The joke among Mexican dancers in Anchorage that the runners in a race will think they’ve run “all the way to Tijuana” evokes how there is something unexpected about this materialization of a Mexican dance performance in Alaska. Similarly, the Mexican Consulate building in
downtown Anchorage is perceived by American tourists who arrived on a cruise ship as something anomalous or out of place. Finally, in my own everyday life in Canada the most common reaction to my work is similar to that of the man at the dog park: surprise. Elsewhere in Mexico, people have also been surprised to hear of their *paisanos* living so far north.

The fact that these questions are asked at all illustrates how effectively Alaska and Mexico have been produced as separate in the popular imagination. Not just separate, but distant and fundamentally different from one another, far away both geographically and socially. As much as Mexico and Alaska have been produced as separate, Mexican migrant-immigrants are perceived as spatially located closer to the physical border with Mexico, and “out of place” so far north. Alaska and Mexico are produced as spatially and racially distant spaces, located at either end of the North American continent. Conventional wilderness narratives, and “sourdough”¹ adventure tales about Alaska do not leave much room for diversity in what it means to be Alaskan, aside from the White Settler European – Alaska Native dichotomy (Thompson 2008). Spatial terminology that marks distance is also widely used within the state of Alaska to demarcate it from other locations. Many people refer to the rest of the United States as “the Lower 48,” for example, emphasizing Alaska’s location as both north of and separate from the contiguous 48 states. People also refer to locations “Outside.”² Capitalized, the term indicates “everywhere else.” This spatially demarcates Alaska as separate from everywhere else Outside of its territorial boundaries. A similar linguistic spatial demarcation divides Mexico from the United States: “*el otro lado*” or “the other side” (of the border) is used in Mexico to refer to the

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¹ In Alaska, a sourdough is an old-timer, someone with many years of experience in the North. The term apparently dates back to the Klondike Gold Rush where experienced miners carried sourdough starter with them. A newcomer to Alaska is colloquially called a cheechako, a Chinook Jargon term that also dates to the Klondike.

² This is a term commonly used by Alaskans to refer to any location outside the state boundaries.
United States in general. And so, Mexicans in Alaska are interpreted as unexpected, odd, as people out of place.

In this dissertation, I analyze the multiple ways in which people of Mexican background living in Alaska navigate but also undermine this sense of spatial disconnect. I trace the spatial practices of three generations of migrants who have been moving between Acuitzio, Michoacán, and Anchorage, Alaska since the 1950s. Over time, these people have created a sense of orientation within a transnational social field. Both locations, and the common experience of mobility between them, are essential for feeling “at home.”

Phillip Deloria wrote about expectation and anomaly in his book, *Indians in Unexpected Places* (2004). In it, he described the broad cultural expectations in the United States relating to Native Americans and how events that do not fit within the norm are considered anomalous. Even as anomaly defines the event as unnatural and odd, the naming of an anomaly re-creates and re-empowers the same categories it escapes (Deloria 2004). Mary Douglas’s classic work shows that when people or objects cross categories, they are considered “matter out of place” and even dangerous or polluting (Douglas 1966). In Douglas’s work as well, these anomalies reinforce the categories they cross. There are spatial expectations as well. Gupta and Ferguson (1992) argue that representations of space in dominant discourses and also in the social sciences are dependent on images of break, rupture, and disjunction so that each society, nation, or culture is presented as occupying its own discontinuous space (Gupta and Ferguson 1992:6). Nation-states are also formed based on the idea of territorial separation and boundedness (Anderson 1991; Gupta and Ferguson 1992) and a sedentarist metaphysics where “people are often thought

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3 I thank Natalie Baloy (2014), Lindsay Bell, and the Arctic Crossings Network for Scholars of the Circumpolar North for drawing my attention to Deloria and the utility of “unexpectedness” for my analysis.
of, and think of themselves, as being rooted in place and as deriving their identity from that rootedness” (Malkki 1992:56). Indeed, in this framework, a migrant or a refugee would be considered “uprooted” and anomalous, signaling a loss of moral and emotional bearings and threatening to spoil cultural and national identities (Malkki 1992:65).

Henri Lefebvre would call the official and normative expectations that structure how we understand places like Alaska, Mexico, and North America “representations of space” which exist in dialectical tension with spatial practices and what he calls “representational spaces,” which include lived, subaltern spatial symbols and meanings (Lefebvre 1991). One particularly powerful representation of space in the United States is the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA). When the INA was created in 1952, it brought together a variety of statutes that governed immigration law. The act has been amended many times since then, but it makes up the basic body of immigration law in the United States (US Immigration and Nationality Act 2013). As a legal document, the INA is profoundly about spatial relationships. Words like “in” or “out”, “entry” or “deportation”, and so on evoke movement between places outside of the United States of America into the nation-state itself. And it is abundantly clear that the law also allows the state to control, regulate, and limit that movement by legally defining who may cross the border into the United States and who may not. In this formulation, borders are presented as unproblematic delineations that separate nation-states and cultures. This is a representation of national space that is dependent on images of break, rupture, and disjunction where the distinctiveness of societies, nations, and cultures based upon the idea that they occupy their own “naturally” discontinuous spaces. As argued by Gupta and Ferguson, discontinuity forms the starting point from which contact, conflict, and contradiction between cultures and societies has been traditionally theorized (Gupta and Ferguson 1992:7). A legal representation of the world as a
collection of discrete nation-states fragments space into diverse national societies, each rooted in its own proper place. “Space itself becomes a kind of neutral grid on which cultural difference, historical memory, and societal organization are inscribed. It is in this way that space functions as a central organizing principle in the social sciences at the same time that it disappears from analytical purview” (Gupta and Ferguson 1992:7). This idea of space also functions as a central organizing principle in US immigration law.

It is important to note that this vision of space is produced by the state, and by the many politicians who have written, debated, voted on, passed, and later amended this body of laws. Discourse on space, like the INA, can “supply clues to, and testimony about, this productive process” (Lefebvre 1991:37). As a representation of space, the INA is “tied to the relations of production and to the ‘order’ which those relations impose, and hence to knowledge, to signs, to codes, and to ‘frontal’ relations” (Lefebvre 1991:33). The INA could also be seen as what De Certeau (1984:122) calls “spatial legislation” that determines rights and divides up lands by “acts” or discourses about actions. In so doing, a spatial legislation story like the INA “has distributive power and performative force” (De Certeau 1984:122).

This act operates as much more than a representation of space since the INA allows the state to create and enforce its spatial vision of the United States. Through mechanisms of surveillance, many of which are outlined in Title II of the INA, state discipline, in the words of Michel Foucault, “fixes; it arrests and regulates movements; it clears up confusion; it dissipates compact groupings of individuals wandering about the country in unpredictable ways; it establishes calculated distributions” (Foucault 1995:219). This idea that state discipline seeks to “fix” bodies in space is also taken up by Deleuze and Guattari (1987) who argue that one of the
fundamental tasks of the state is to striate the space that it reigns over. “It is a vital concern of every State not only to vanquish nomadism but to control migrations and, more generally, to establish a zone of rights over an entire exterior, over all of the flows traversing the ecumenon” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987:385). The state tries to capture all flows, restricting movement to clearly defined, carefully measured, and heavily regulated paths (Deleuze and Guattari 1987:386, see also Virilio 2006).

It would follow then, that stories and practices about places that are excluded, that do not fit with expectations, that interrupt (Simpson 2014) could be perceived as anomalous, such as the practice of Mexican dancers in an Anchorage parking lot, for instance. Michel-Rolph Trouillot describes how anomaly arises out of a process whereby dominant narratives of globalization silence the past on a massive scale, systematically erasing the long-distance encounters that have marked human history across time and space:

“For sushi in Chicago to amaze us, we need to silence the fact that the Franciscans were in Japan as early as the fifteenth century. For Muslim veils in France to seem out of place, we need to forget that Charles Martel stopped Abd-al-Raman only 300 miles south of Paris two reigns before Charlemagne. To talk of a global culture today as a new phenomenon, we need to forget that Chinese chili paste comes from Mexico, French fries from Peru, and Jamaican Blue Mountain coffee from Yemen” (Trouillot 2003:34).

This is why many authors have emphasized the contingent, entangled, interconnected, and co-produced nature of places, undermining their apparent stability, boundedness, and timelessness (Gordillo 2004; Gupta and Ferguson 1992; Massey 2005; Rockefeller 2010; Tsing 2005). Deloria advocates “unexpectedness” as a framework to rethink those moments when places get entangled in ways that may strike some people as “anomalous.” The unexpected thus

4 Deleuze and Guattari speak of sedentary space as striated “by walls, enclosures, and roads between enclosures” (1987:384). I think that much like the Great Wall of China, the US-Mexico border fence is a particularly spectacular example of the striation of space.
resists categorization and questions expectation itself. Along similar lines, Malkki writes there is no such thing as “matter out of place,” and shows how Hutu refugees and migrants created their own categories (Malkki 1995). Indeed, in general, “people categorize back” (Malkki 1995:8).

My anthropological attention to geographies connected through transnational and intergenerational patterns of mobility examines the production of distance at both ends of the North American continent. Distance is a relationship between space and time measured through movement, and is always experienced as relative so that locations are distant from one another, never simply “distant” in the abstract. By the production of distance, I mean the set of institutions, practices, and representations that make one location distant from another. For this reason, distance is always social and spatial. Liisa Malkki wrote about the production of distance between a refugee camp and town in Tanzania. These locations were spatially distant but “this spatial distance was exaggerated in the mutual perceptions between camp and town because such a great social distance had come to be inserted between them. The appearance of distance, then, was another expression of the social construction of difference between camp and town” (Malkki 1995:198).

Distance then, is a spatial expression of social perceptions of difference. In an era of globalization and “time-space compression” (Harvey 1989), due to technological innovations in transport and communication, locations are experienced as closer together. But places like Alaska are perceived as distant from anywhere else, and much of my analysis will focus on how people navigate these perceptions of distance.

Transnational migration is, in part, a spatial practice that navigates this distance by producing an interconnected space, a transnational social space. Many scholars have written about transnational migration patterns that connect places elsewhere in Mexico and the United
States (e.g. Cohen 2004; De Genova 2005; Kearney 2004; Rouse 2002; Smith 1998; Stephen 2007; Striffler 2007). Many other authors have examined transnational patterns of connectivity created by migrants elsewhere in the world (Bloch 2011; Chu 2010; Constable 2003; Miles 2010; Ong 1999; Olwig 2007; Parreñas 2005; Schiller et al. 1995). In the case of Mexican migrants in the United States, this interconnected space has been referred to with different terms: “the transnational migrant circuit” (Rouse 2002), a “transnational community” (Striffler 2007), the “articulatory migrant network” (Kearney 2004), a “transnational conjectural space” (De Genova 2005), or as involving “transborder lives” (Stephen 2007). Such spaces are seen as producing dual identities, “cultural bifocalities” (Rouse 2002), “peripheral vision” (Zavella 2011) or a sense of belonging “neither here nor there” (Striffler 2007; Zavella 2011). Other scholars refer to “the Mexican diaspora” (Gutiérrez 1999; Rinderle 2005), which also evokes interconnected space through displacement, hybridity and travel. However, diasporic locales are places that are not necessarily defined by a specific geopolitical boundary (Clifford 1994:304). In either formulation, the everyday spatial practices and lived experiences of Mexican migrants produce hybrid spaces which are in productive tension with the dominant representative spaces of the nation-state that the US Immigration and Nationality Act produces. In Alaska, this hybrid space is also in tension with the idea that this is a spatially separate state and a frontier wilderness. Transnational culture flows and mass movements of populations mean that “familiar lines between ‘here’ and ‘there’, centre and periphery, colony and metropole become blurred” (Gupta and Ferguson 1992:10).

In this dissertation, I show how Acuitzences form “multiplicities of attachments” (Malkki 1992:72) in both Anchorage and Acuitzio, producing unexpected identities that challenge and test the territorial boundedness of the nation-state (Appadurai 1996b). Regular movements
between Alaska and Michoacán raise questions about the way in which multiple spatial points of reference across international borders affect people’s sense of belonging. For people who have been moving back and forth between Mexico and Alaska for several decades, the old anthropological assumption that there was a neat correlation between a “culture” and a “place” becomes more problematic than ever. Instead of looking for roots, the everyday lives of people who live in Mexico and Alaska show how places are continually produced through connection with other geographies. Alaska, Mexico, and North America are all products of interrelations. Throughout this dissertation I intend to shift the discussion from anomaly to unexpectedness by focusing on the crossings between Mexico and Alaska, specifically those crossings between Acuitzio and Anchorage made by multigenerational families who re-categorize the very meaning of “North America.” For this reason, I follow De Genova and use the term “migrant” or “migrant-immigrant” instead of immigrant to retain a sense of movement, incompletion, and irresolution of social processes of migration (De Genova 2005:3; Kearney 2004; Zavella 2011).

US-Mexican transnational space, then, is gradually built up by the everyday practices and transactions of people and things (Ferry 2013). In order to counteract the sense of anomaly in my analysis, I ground the discussion in everyday life, spatial practices that are ordinary for the people who live them. Building on work of philosophers and anthropologists who have theorized about space and place, I analyze how these people, together with other actors and institutions, produce the places they inhabit (Kearney 2004; Lefebvre 1991). This means treating space as social, for all spaces “embody and imply social relations” (Lefebvre 1991:83). I specifically draw on Lefebvre to conceptualize how places are created through action but constrained and influenced by projects of those who wield power at a larger scale (Lefebvre 1991:269). “Agents of power bring forth structures…the which act as representations…of people’s spatial practice; these
representations are in turn realized in the lived space that results as people incorporate (or do not) these new constraints into their spatial practice” (Lefebvre 1991:269). Space is thus produced through the tension between mobility and interconnection and forces that control and constrain that mobility. This dissertation therefore draws on authors who have drawn attention to the productive tension between movement and the control of this movement by the state (for example, Cresswell 2006; Deleuze and Guattari 1987; Kearney 2004; Lefebvre 1991; Massey 1994, 2005; Rockefeller 2010). Mexico and the United States are profoundly entangled places, “unstable processes made and unmade through practice and through the connections these places maintain with each other” (Gordillo 2004:253). These spatial interactions are defined by what Anna Tsing (2005:4) calls friction: “the awkward, unequal, unstable, and creative qualities of interconnection across difference.”

Mexicans in Alaska

Mexican migration to the United States has been ongoing at least since the Treaty of Guadalupe ended the Mexican-American war in 1848 and created the spatial boundary of these two nation-states in its current form. Since that time, the United States has been dependent on Mexican labour first to build railroads, later to supplement the workforce during a World War, and now to provide low-cost labour for agricultural work and service industry positions. The United States endures as a primary destination for Mexican labour migrants, as generations of mexicanos continue to seek a better life in el norte even as xenophobic opinion and policy in the US make immigration reform an ongoing issue. Labour migration between Mexico and the United States has been the topic of much anthropological research (Alvarez 1995; Boehm 2012;

The connection between Mexico and Alaska is often framed as “new” (García and Velázquez 2013; Binkowski 2014). But the connections between Alaska and Acuitzio are long running, and the connection with Mexico more generally has even deeper historical roots. Spanish explorers departing from Mexico in the 18th Century explored the Pacific Northwest and what is today Alaska, leaving their names behind on Valdez and Cordova and Revillagigedo Island, Alaska (Langdon 1997; Olson 2002). Labour migration between Mexico and Alaska has been ongoing since at least 1901, and probably earlier. While in Anchorage, I visited the federal archives to look for traces of *mexicanos* in Alaska in federal court records, including Declarations of Intent and Petitions for Citizenship that were submitted and reviewed within the Territory, and later the State of Alaska. I spent many days there leafing through the pages of heavy, hardbound volumes of naturalization records from district courts across the territory of Alaska. One of the earliest was a Declaration of Intention to apply for US citizenship for a Mexican citizen living in Ketchikan in the 1910s. From the information on the form, this person was born in 1890 in Santa Rosalia, Mexico. He walked across the border to El Paso, Texas in 1906, at 16 years of age, and by 1917 was residing in the then-territory of Alaska. He served in the US Army, and was honorably discharged in 1918; for this, the $4.00 fee to apply for US

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5 The earliest Declarations of Intention or Petitions for Citizenship made by a Mexican national that I found at the National Archives was dated 1901.

6 This section draws on archival documents from the following sources: Federal Court Records in the holdings of National Archives and Records Administration, Anchorage (Record Group 21), Naturalization Case Files, Alaska State Archives, Juneau, Alaska, and Alaska Juneau Gold Mining Company’s employee record index 1914 to 1944 Alaska State Library Historical Collections, Juneau, Alaska. A potential direction for future research is documentation and analysis of the Mexican experience in Alaska before statehood.

7 I am not sure which Santa Rosalia – there are many.
citizenship was waived. By 1919, when he filed his Declaration of Intent and Petition for Citizenship, he was living in Ketchikan and working as a labourer, with a tattoo of clasped hands and a cross on his left arm. The declaration of intention says: “I am not an anarchist; I am not a polygamist nor a believer in the practice of polygamy and it is my intention in good faith to become a citizen of the United States of America and to permanently reside therein. So help me god, Signed Simón Vega. Jan 18, 1919.” In court records, I read about cases that involved Mexican nationals in Southeast Alaska back to the 1910s, men who worked in canneries or as miners. Indeed, it is likely that Mexican stampeders and muleteers who went to California looking for gold followed the rushes north, to British Colombia, the Klondike, and later to Nome reached Alaska in the late 1800s. Many early 20th century mining company employment records from Southeast Alaska list the birth country of their foreign born employees. One of these is from 1916, for John M. Baltazar, who worked in a Juneau mine as a mucker.8 Before that, he worked for a cannery on Excursion Inlet, “pitching fish”. He writes that he does not live with family, and that he sends remittances to his mother, who lived in Purepero, Michoacán. Mexicans were also recruited to work in fish canneries in Alaska. The earliest documentation shows that people from Mexico began working in Alaska canneries in 1905, and continued to work there during labour shortages related to World War I, comprising a major part of cannery crews up to the late 1920s (Norris 1984).

During World War II, the military presence grew in Alaska and citizenship records show that many Mexican nationals applied for citizenship while stationed there. My ethnography begins after the war, when Acuitzences first began traveling to Alaska in the early 1950s,

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8 In mining, a mucker is someone who shovels broken ore or waste rock into tramcars or buckets.
seeking higher wages than they had been earning in California. These young men were likely seeking adventure, too. But the links to Mexico are historically deeper (Langdon 1997; Olson 2002).

The Consulate of Mexico in Anchorage hosted an exhibit called “First Mexican and Spanish Explorers of Alaska” from September 15 to October 15, 2012, to celebrate both Mexican Independence Day and US Hispanic Heritage Month. The exhibit represented “the historic relationships between Alaska and Hispanic cultures, beginning with Spain’s exploration and emphasizing Alaska’s connection with Mexico through rarely-seen maps and illustrations depicting six voyages that took place from San Blas, Nayarit, Mexico in the late eighteenth century.” These maps were displayed alongside “vibrant and colourful Hispanic traditions in textiles,” including a dress from Nayarit. The press release notes “the original content of this exhibition is based on a publication about Spanish voyages to Alaska by the anthropologist M. Wallace Olson” (Olson 2002). What is interesting is how these voyages are re-framed from Spanish voyages of exploration, to Mexican ones. After all, the point of departure for the Spaniards is now the Republic of Mexico. Consul Abud gave a presentation at the University of Alaska, Anchorage entitled “Historical and Social Links between Mexico and Alaska” where he introduced the Spanish voyages of exploration and then moved directly to speaking about present-day Hispanics in the United States, and then the Mexican population in Alaska, ending with a review of Mexican cultural activities and events in Anchorage (Abud 2012). I write more about the Spanish speaking population in Anchorage in Chapter 2 and about the Consulado de Mexico en Anchorage in Chapter 6, but here it is interesting to note how a historical connection 

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9 The exhibit was held at the Wells Fargo Alaska Heritage Museum, located in the entrance to the Wells Fargo building in midtown Anchorage.
between Mexico and Alaska is produced, and a line of continuity is made between 18\textsuperscript{th} century Spanish explorers and today’s Spanish speaking population in Alaska. Especially in Southeast Alaska, Filipino, Mexican, and other immigrants intermarried with the local Tlingit residents (Bucholdt 1996). Indeed, interrogating the history of the connection between Mexico and Alaska questions the line between newcomer and native, and sometimes between Indigenous and Immigrant.

There are interesting spatial implications to how the history of labour migration from Mexico to the US is told by researchers. Some authors have argued that the “traditional sending regions” of migrants diversify over time (e.g. Cornelius 1992). Others argue this is not the case, that most migrants continue to be from the historic “heartland” for migration from Mexico: the states of Aguascalientes, Colima, Durango, Guanajuato, Jalisco, Michoacán, Nayarit, San Luis Potosí, and Zacatecas (Durand, Massey, and Zenteno 2001). Researchers also show that migrants are being “pushed” out of traditional receiving areas such as California and the US Southwest, primarily, and “pulled” into other areas such as Arkansas and the south or small town Pennsylvania (Striffler 2007; Lattanzi-Shutika 2011). This creates a relatively coherent temporal and spatial trajectory of migration from Mexico to the US where migration historically is between the traditional sending region in West Central Mexico and traditional receiving areas in the United States. For example, Massey, Rugh, and Pren (2010) writes that “historically, the vast majority of Mexican immigrants went to just five states: the border states of California, Arizona, New Mexico, and Texas, and the industrial hub of Illinois. From 1910 to 1960, 90 percent of all Mexican immigrants lived in one of these states.” Over time, the geography of Mexican migration concentrated in California, so that “by 1980, 57 percent of all Mexican immigrants lived in California alone, with 23 percent in Texas and 8 percent in Illinois, so that 88 percent of
all Mexican immigrants lived in just three states” (Massey, Rugh, and Pren 2010).

The authors attributed the expansion of Mexican migrant-immigrants to other “new” destination points in the United States to increased frictions at the border and in border regions (Massey, Rugh, and Pren 2010). The increasing militarization of the border and the construction of actual walls and fences diverted flows away from traditional destinations in California toward new locations elsewhere in the United States (Massey, Rugh, and Pren 2010). Striffler writes that migrants are increasingly settling in the US heartland, where economic conditions in small towns make settlement financially possible and also require longer stays. People follow family and community members to new locations so that “once a few pioneers determine the viability and desirability of a new location in the United States, the circuit can shift quickly from California to, say, Arkansas” (Striffler 2007:675). This is more than a shift in location, however. Striffler argues that the transnational migrant circuit is being totally disrupted as people approach permanent settlement in places like Arkansas. Similarly, Debra Lattanzi-Shutika frames Mexican migration-immigration to Pennsylvania as a “new destination settlement,” part of a larger trend since the mid-1980s, “the phenomenon of Mexicans settling permanently in communities outside the border region” (Lattanzi-Shutika 2011:4).

Alaska is not included in recent studies about geographical diversification in migrant-immigrant origins and destinations, likely because the numbers in Alaska are, and always have been small. For example, the percentage of the Alaska population who are of Mexican origin was only 0.26% in 1960, 1.7% in 1990, and 3.0% in 2010 (US Census). My research could add Alaska as a “new destination settlement” in this way, but I problematize such a lineal trajectory, for Acuitzio certainly and perhaps for Mexican migrant-immigrants more generally. For one thing, such a conceptualization of a migrant heartland confines “the Mexican United States” to
the Southwest and Chicago. However, this renders *mexicanos* in other parts of the country as invisible or newly “out of place,” *golondrinas* outside of their “habitat.” Migration-immigration from Mexico to Alaska has been ongoing for decades, and although there have been changes over time, I hesitate to add Alaska as “new.” Alaska is a *different* destination from elsewhere in the United States, but it is not especially new. As well, rather than approaching permanent settlement in Alaska, this dissertation shows how, over time, people orient themselves more to the transnational social field as a whole, and require *both* locations and the common experience of mobility between them to feel “at home.”

I seek to examine Anchorage as a site for the negotiation of the US-Mexico border despite its physical distance from the actual border, a site for the contingency of boundaries, for the ongoing social production of the boundaries between Alaska and the rest of the United States, between the United States and Mexico, and between Latin America and elsewhere. Families of Mexican background in Alaska are not people out of place, they are part of a conjectural space with repercussions in all directions (De Genova 2005:98). Indeed, as many scholars have noted: Latin America does not end at the US border (Beasley-Murray 2010; Kearney 2004; Rouse 2002). By conceptually extending the influence of the US-Mexico border across the entire continent, it is possible to envision links between south and north in producing larger systems and the fundamental total influence of the border and its inequalities across all of North America, not just along the border zone itself.

Preconquest America was characterized by the flow of people and objects across the continent (Boehm 2012:15). Moreover, Western expansion and US imperialism in Latin America went hand in hand. The same American imperialist project that produced Alaska as a Last Frontier also produced "the west" and Latin America as spaces for resource exploitation. Central
to this process was the production of the US-Mexico and US-Canadian borders to delineate the limits of the imperial frontier. The border with Mexico was required for Western expansion, including Alaska (Price 2004:45). Spanish explorers who went to Alaska left from the shores of what later became Mexico means that the history of connection and exchange between Alaska and Mexico is potentially very long and very rich. There is potential not only for decolonization by viewing North America this way, but also revised histories. Southwestern USA was once Mexico, leaving behind Spanish speaking residents who say, “the border crossed us.” Alaska could have been Mexico, with a history of Spanish exploration, Spanish names inscribed on the landscape all over the state (Rey-Tejerina n.d.). What if before the American presence there, the Spanish had settled? What if they never left?

More recently, North America has been produced as a profoundly unequal economic and political unit, institutionally congealed within the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), which produces its own crossings and disjunctures, potentially drawing together Alaska and Mexico under the rubric of “free trade” but ending up institutionalizing difference and capitalizing on economic inequality. Migrations in North America today are produced by inequality and reflect the profound imbalance of power playing out in everyday lives (Boehm 2012:15). “The intimacy of transnationality has been and continues to be characterized by both continuity and fragmentation: flows, connections, and linkages characterize transnational lives as do breaks, shifts, dislocations, and disruptions” (Boehm 2012:15). US immigration policies and practices have shaped intimate migrations (Boehm 2012:15).

The re-territorialization of people of Mexican background in Alaska can unsettle hegemonic assumptions about the racial-spatial order of the United States (c.f. Gordillo 2011). After all, Alaska is the furthest North American point from the polluted, mixed up space of the
US-Mexican border. Hispanics or Mexicans aren’t supposed to be here, far away from Los Angeles, San Jose, Texas and other geographies where their presence is taken for granted. But, they are. As I have argued elsewhere, Alaska needs to be conceptually “reconnected” (Komarnisky 2012). Although northern spaces occupy a unique position geographically and historically, they have always been produced through their interconnections with elsewhere. Alaska is the product of translocal imaginative, historical, and political economic processes (Ganapathy 2013). Translocal spatial formations have produced Alaskan landscapes as a place for either extractive resource development or of bountiful pristine nature were constituted and defined from afar, through legislative acts and imaginative representations made by southern outsiders (Ganapathy 2013).  

Viewing the north through its connections serves to contest stereotypes of Alaska and the circumpolar north as distant wilderness frontiers, and bring the north and the south together as coproduced geographies. Alaska has been a crossroads for Indigenous people on both sides of the Bering Strait and between different territories on the mainland, Spanish and British explorers, Russian fur traders and missionaries, American colonists, and people from all over the world who seek their fortunes in gold, fish, and oil, or look to find themselves as tourists in sublime wilderness landscapes (Buchholdt 1996; Dombrowski 2001; Feldman 2009; Fitzhugh and Crowell 1988; Friday 1994; Haycox and Mangusso 1996; Kollin 2001; Kurtz 2006; Langdon 1997; Luehrmann 2008; Olson 2002; Norris 1984; Willis 2010). In spite of the deep and ongoing history of continental connection, Mexicans in Alaska have been produced as unexpected, and people out of place. However, people

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10 Ganapathy analyses these translocal spatial formations in tension with the more grounded and culturally meaningful place-making of Gwich’in Athabascan people (Ganapathy 2013).
categorize back (Malkki 1995) and throughout this dissertation I analyze the crossings that draw together Alaska and Mexico in the everyday lives of people who move between these places.

**Frictions, Paradoxes, and Power Geometries of Mobility**

Throughout this dissertation, I also explore the role of mobility in the production of transnational space. Travel back and forth of people and other agents is key for maintaining a connection between Anchorage and Acuitzio. Indeed, for some people the very ‘state of movement’ is being ‘at home’ (Malkki 1992). Over time, Acuitzences orient themselves to a social world that encompasses both Anchorage and Acuitzio, and the common experience of mobility between them. Even when people settle more permanently at a site within the transnational social field, as I describe in more detail in the conclusion, the possibility of movement is always there.

Although the Acuitzences in this dissertation are able to travel relatively freely as dual citizens with US passports, I analyze the materiality of their mobilities by land, across borders, and through the air as inflected by multiple frictions and obstacles of terrain. As Acuitzences move, they engage with social, political, and imaginative landscapes, technologies of travel as well as with the unevenness of the terrain of the land and sky. Mobility between Mexico and Alaska therefore means experiencing friction, and especially the friction of socio-spatial distance, since these two locations are geographically located as far away from one another, and are socially produced as different ways of life within different nation-states.

I also explore the power geometry of mobility among Acuitzences of different generations within one family network. My analysis of mobility unfolds through time among three generations of Acuitzences who have moved between these spaces. I show how friction
becomes converted into *traction* and describe how “provisional points of friction shift across uneven landscapes, historical moments, and the differential abilities of specific subjects to establish footholds that gain ground” (Moore 2005:281). Depending on the generational and gendered position of individual family members, Bravo family members established footholds in Alaska and have gained ground since. They have gained ground in terms of spatial mobility, as well as class mobility and immigration status moving from undocumented labourers in the 1950s and 1960s to relatively well off working class dual citizens with middle class aspirations today.

Members of the multigenerational Bravo family network have spatialized their relationships across the continent, and experience mobility depending on their positionality within the network, their gender, age, and immigration and socioeconomic status. People draw from and work within their positionality within multiple resources, systems, and structures to keep moving between ‘here’ and ‘there’.

Throughout, I analyze paradoxes of mobility for Acuitzences in Alaska. Processes and events that tie Acuitzences to place in Acuitzio, such as owning property, celebrating major life events, and having income-generating businesses there end up *facilitating* mobility, making it easier to come and go. In Anchorage as well, processes that tie people to Alaska as they spend more time there, becoming more established socially and financially, owning property, and advancing in their careers, it becomes *easier* to travel back and forth. A major paradox is the relationship between citizenship and mobility. Citizenship is intended to tie individuals to a specific nation-state, as evident in the language and procedures of becoming a citizen. Through the process of becoming a citizen, you “become” American, tied to the nation-state as you receive the rights and obligations of a citizen. However, the process of obtaining citizenship also facilitates mobility or even requires it as a matter of process.
Deborah Boehm asked people in both the United States and Mexico where they would choose to live, if anywhere. They told her that they wished for the freedom to come and go, to build their lives from both sides of the border (Boehm 2012:3). She analyzed the multiple barriers to such mobility that undocumented or mixed-status families face, including the presence of the US state in everyday lives, categories that define and exclude, border controls, and deportations. These processes limit movement and can result in very long periods between coming and going (Boehm 2012:3). Other factors that prevent fluid, unrestricted movement include different subjectivities, experiences and circumstances based on legal status, age, gender, sexuality, socio-economic class, access to resources, race/ethnicity, marital status, family ties. These intersect with political-economic realities shaping who migrates, if, when, and how often, the character of their border crossings, and finally, their length of stay in the United States (Boehm 2012:4).

In spite of these barriers, Boehm shows that people still want the freedom to come and go between the United States and Mexico, to make lives from both sides of the border, to live here and there (Boehm 2012:3, my emphasis). Therefore, a key applied finding of my work is an exploration of transnational life among people who are able to come and go. This has important implications for immigration policy, since people want to be able to live across the border, to move around more freely, and ultimately, to exploit the structural inequality of the North American economy, building their lives across the US-Mexico border and in more than one place. Many Acuitzences in Alaska are living that ideal due to relative privilege and expertise with mobility and living across borders. These people hold dual US-Mexican citizenship or US permanent residency and are able to move across the continent in a way that many Mexican migrants cannot. They are able to come and go, and have been successful at maintaining
connections and building identities in both Anchorage and Acuitzio. Although people experience being “neither here nor there” like the immigrant workers that Striffler describes (2007), through mobility and other spatial practices, Acuitzences in Alaska also work to be here and there, to come and go, orienting themselves to a transnational social field that extends between both places. To feel at home in the world, these people rely on their fraught and uneven spatial attachments to each place, and on the common experience of mobility between them.

**Organization of the Thesis**

In analyzing the everyday lives of Acuitzences who move between Acuitzio and Anchorage, I start from their words, insights, and actions along with my participant-observation of life within this transnational social field. The following chapter describes Acuitzio and Anchorage in greater detail, and outlines the multi-sited methodology used for this project.

The following two chapters analyze mobilities between Mexico and Alaska, specifically the spatial practice of Acuitzences in terms of mobility, the physical and material flows, transfers, and interactions that occur in and across space and assure production and social reproduction. Chapter 3, The Annual Migration of the Traveling Swallows – Friction, Distance and Transnational Mobility, is about the materiality of mobility across the long distance between Mexico and Alaska. I use the concept of friction to show how mobility of people is never smooth, for they encounter frictions and obstacles along the way. Friction is the point at which an individual’s mobility engages with the social, political, and geographic terrain, including weather, border crossings, airport security, long distances, and other frictions encountered along the route.

I continue the focus on mobility through time within a multigenerational family unit in Chapter 4, “My Grandfather Worked Here” – Generation, Gender, and Travel Back and Forth.
This chapter is about the initial migrations from Acuitzio to Alaska, and how this mobility has gained traction and continued across three generations. The history of movement between Acuitzio and Anchorage takes place within this multigenerational family whose members differ along lines of gender and generation. Migration is not a linear or unidirectional movement between distinct, bounded nation-states, nor is it a progression from Mexican to US-American over time. Instead, people orient their lives to the circuit as a whole where the shared experience of mobility produces a transnational social field. By transnational social field, I mean the field of social relations that extends between points in different nation states (Schiller et al. 1992). In this dissertation, the transnational social field is produced through the shared experience of mobility and the maintenance of familial, economic, social, organizational, religious, and political relations between Anchorage, Alaska and Acuitzio, Michoacán.

The next two chapters shift the analysis away from mobility per se to other forms of spatial practices within transnational space. In Chapter 5, “You Have To Get Used To It” –The Making of a Transnational Habitus, I analyze the ways in which people produce a sense of belonging in transnational space. People talk about having to get used to a new way of life. On the one hand, they work to connect Mexico and Alaska in their everyday lives and develop a transnational habitus where Acuitzens travel with things, they build relationships on both sides of the border, they develop skills and statuses to operate on both sides, and their subjectivities draw on multiple points of reference. But people also navigate regimes that keep the two separate. Such regimes produce differential legal statuses like US-Mexican dual citizens, US permanent residents, or those with “undocumented” status. Such statuses result in different sets of dispositions and practices and ultimately, a different transnational habitus. Access to US residency and citizenship also affects the process of transnational class formation, whereby
people build livelihoods and lives across the US-Mexico border. Belonging in transnational space means feeling at home in both Acuitzio and Alaska, with the opportunity to move between them.

In Chapter 6: “It Freezes the People Together” – Producing a Mexican Alaska, I write about groups that re-categorize space and produce a Mexican Alaska. I write about institutions and groups that “freeze the people together” in Anchorage and Mexico, such as the Mexican Consulate in Anchorage, the dance and culture group Xochiquetzal-Tiqun, the restaurant Mexico in Alaska, and the Acuitzio del Canje Migrant Club in Alaska to explore how each of these groups produce representations of Mexican Alaska through image and collective action. These groups each bring Mexico and Alaska together into new representations of space, re-categorizing and expanding the borders of Latin America.

I conclude this dissertation by analyzing where Acuitzences in Alaska see their future. As I argue throughout this dissertation, people orient their lives and mobilities to the transnational space that extends between Mexico and Alaska. As circumstances change along the life course, within Acuitzio and Anchorage, in North America, or globally, people are able to be flexible, and expand or contract the network as necessary. In fact, some Acuitzences are reorienting their primary residence to Mexico, but keeping a house in Alaska so that they can visit. Again, the possibility of mobility is always there. The ideal transnational life is lived in both Anchorage and Acuitzio and along routes between them, and identities are built that draw on these multiple spatial points of reference. Transnational life between Mexico and Alaska thus re-works expectations about the North, Alaska, and Mexicans in the United States to include the multiplicity of trajectories that cross the continent.
Chapter 2: North American Fieldwork – Between Acuitzio and Anchorage

“Why not focus on any culture’s farthest range of travel while also looking at its centers, its villages, its intensive fieldsites?” (Clifford 1997:25)

When Your Field Site Leaves You

At the end of twelve months of fieldwork, ten of which I spent in Anchorage, I found myself left behind in Alaska. It was late June and the sun only set for a couple of hours each night, leaving the city in twilight until the very early dawn. I spent my time going to visit fieldwork contacts who were leaving for Mexico, packing up my own small apartment in Fairview, and planning the long drive back to Canada. As more of my main contacts and friends in Anchorage left, I soon realized that I wasn’t an anthropologist preparing to leave the field; I was an anthropologist whose field had already left.

Similarly, since I first went to Acuitzio for fieldwork in 2005, I had been back to visit at times when my Alaskan contacts were visiting and other times when they weren’t there, and found it a very different experience. The town was quieter, there were fewer events with no migrants in town, and houses where I had been welcomed were closed up and empty for the season. My fieldsite hadn’t arrived yet; I was visiting at the wrong time.

This is only possible because I had designed my project to focus on Acuitzences in Alaska, and not Acuitzio or Anchorage in general. Or, more specifically, the goal of my dissertation research was to examine the historical and ongoing connections created between Alaska and Mexico by multi-generational families of Mexican background. In particular, I focused on the spatial practices of families living in Anchorage and Acuitzio, and how their
constructions of a new sense of belonging in Alaska are entangled with ongoing patterns of mobility, practices, and imaginings that connect them with Acuitzio, their town of origin in Michoacán. Through ethnographic fieldwork in both Anchorage and Acuitzio, I planned to explore the potential tensions that may emerge between these people’s patterns of transnational mobility and the more rigid spatial imaginings of North America, like that of US Immigration Law, the dominant media representations about Mexican migrants in the US and the widespread image of Alaska as a space of wilderness seemingly removed, due to its location in the far north of North America, from the impact of Mexican migration. I was interested in how people from Acuitzio produce these spaces as connected even as political, economic, and imaginative processes produced them as extremely separate. My research would focus on how transnational connections are constructed through family and kinship ties and how these family ties take social form within specific networks of social relations. My fieldsite was a transnational space that extends between Mexico and Alaska, which, although not clearly delineated on a map, could be found among the people who live transnationally. Although North America became the structural frame for my ethnography, I chose a methodology that would allow me to zoom in on the everyday lives of people who move across the continent.

**Multi-sited Ethnography**

To do this, I planned to do multi-sited ethnography, a mobile ethnography that traces a cultural formation across and within multiple sites of activity. “Multi-sited research is designed around chains, paths, threads, conjunctions, or juxtapositions of locations in which the ethnographer establishes some form of literal, physical presence, with an explicit, posited logic of association or connection among sites that in fact defines the argument of the ethnography.”
This method has been taken up by anthropologists in general but has been particularly important for the study of transnational processes, enabling the researcher to ethnographically trace processes as they play out in daily life in different sites. For studies of Mexican migration and immigration to the United States, multi-sited research usually implies ethnography in communities in Mexico and the United States. Recent ethnographies by Deborah Boehm (2012), Lynn Stephen (2007), and Debra Lattanzi Shutika (2012) illustrate the strength of conducting research at different sites within a transnational social field. For example, Lynn Stephen (2007) situated her ethnography *Transborder Lives* in small villages in Oaxaca and across ethnic, class, colonial, and state borders within other regions in Mexico and the United States. Debra Lattanzi Shutika (2012) did fieldwork with Mexican families in Textitlán, Guanajuato and Kennett Square, Pennsylvania over ten years, tracking the formation of a new destination settlement in Kennett Square and accompanying changes in Textitlán. Deborah Boehm (2012) traced “intimate migrations,” flows that both shape and are structured by gendered and familial actions and interactions, but are always defined by the presence of the U.S. state. She traced these flows through ethnographic research in a rural village in San Luis Potosí, Mexico, as well as in the United States.

I ethnographically “followed the people” from Acuitzio to Anchorage, spending summer in Acuitzio, and the fall, winter, and spring in Anchorage, like they do. I also travelled between Acuitzio and Seattle with the Bravo Family, as analyzed in Chapter 3. As I followed the people, and focused on the connections they make to produce transnational space I also became one of those connections between places, someone who, along with my research participants, lived in the same transnational social field. As such, I also documented my own travel to and from Acuitzio and Anchorage along airplane and highway routes.
Is research conducted this way best conceived of as multiple fieldsites or as one site extended across the continent? I believe there are methodological implications of each. By defining transnational space as a spatial formation produced by and extended from Acuitzio to Anchorage by the people I worked with, then my fieldsite represents one single spatial formation, with key points at either end. In the following chapters, by reading about the lives and travels of Acuitzences to, within, and from Alaska, we can start to see how these places, Acuitzio and Anchorage, have always been connected to elsewhere and could be imagined as a single transnational social field. This is different than two places linked through migration, a conceptualization of space that reinforces the sedentarist metaphysics of nation-states as distinct and bounded spaces.

However, it is also clear that the uniqueness of each fieldsite matters. The specifics of these locations inflect the transnational social field with particularities. For example, Acuitzio is more similar to Anchorage than you first expect. As I will elaborate in Chapters 4 and 5, the network of Acuitzences who regularly move between Acuitzio and Anchorage means that you encounter the same people in each place. The emphasis on nature, especially mountains and water, in both places, is another similarity that people mention. For instance, one of my interviewees told me that when he first arrived in Alaska, it seemed “almost like Mexico because of the vegetation. Because of the vegetation it was like the countryside in Mexico. Different kinds of trees, but the pines are really similar. And the city of Anchorage was small.” The fact that Acuitzio and Anchorage are both experienced as relatively small also makes the experience of these two places more similar. For some people, for example, Mexico City was experienced as more different and socio-spatially distant than Anchorage. Consider as well that Acuitzio is not tropical. Since it is located at a higher altitude in the highlands, during the winter months it can
be cold. It is possible to feel colder in Acuitzio with no central heating than it is in Anchorage, where one goes from heated home to heated car to heated workplace.

The location within the United States matters as well, so that Mexican Chicago is qualitatively different from Mexican Alaska, from Southern California, from North Carolina. For Acuitzences in particular, they organize differently in each place and therefore experience each US location differently. For example, in Chicago, Acuitzences are very involved in politics, including national-level immigration protests and labour rights as well as Acuitzio-focused fundraising and action. In Anchorage, they are less involved with these kinds of organized activities, which fits more with Alaska’s libertarian political climate. Alaska is also unique as a destination because of large number and unique status of Alaska Natives, the distinctive ethnic diversity in Anchorage, and a widespread culture of hunting, fishing, and living from the land. In what follows, I describe the fieldsites for this project in greater detail: Anchorage, Acuitzio, and the routes in between. I then describe my methodological practice in this transnational space, and the data that I collected for this dissertation.

**Acuitzio, Michoacán, México**

“It’s the most beautiful town in Mexico. No, cabrón, in the world!” – Luis Bravo

Acuitzio del Canje is the *cabecera* or head of the municipality of Acuitzio, which encompasses forty population centres, most of which are small *ranchos* or hamlets with less than 100 residents each (Jonasson 2008). It is located in a beautiful setting in the cool uplands of the state of Michoacán, near the capital city of Morelia (Wiest 1973, 2009). In the 2010 census, the population of the municipality was reported as 10,987, with over half of the population (6,333)
residing in Acuitzio del Canje (INEGI 2010). Of course, this does not include the entire
population of Acuitzences who claim the municipality as their home and to my knowledge there
are no numbers currently available to calculate how many Acuitzences live elsewhere yet travel
back regularly and maintain homes and social relationships there.

From Morelia, located in the Guayangareo valley surrounded by hills, you take Highway
14 Morelia – Uruapan/México in the direction of Tiripetio. The highway winds up into the hills,
gaining elevation. The road levels out and at Tiripetio you turn left onto the libramiento that
leads from Tiripetio, through Acuitzio, and on to Villa Madero and the Tierra Caliente.
Acuitzences proudly state that one of the first universities in the Americas was established in
Tiripetio (Arenas García 1988) and now an escuela normal rural\footnote{An escuela normal or normal school is a teacher’s college. In Mexico, the system of normal schools was created after the Mexican revolution, and maintains some of the revolutionary ethos of that era in the focus on educating and uplifting the rural poor.} is located there. After
Tiripetio, the road now follows a valley bordered by milpas and then begins to gain elevation
again, onto the shoulders of the Cerro Viejo overlooking the town, also known as the Cerro de la
Cruz for the cross mounted at the summit. At the colonia of Las Peñas, so named for its location
among the rocky cliffs and hills of the Cerro Viejo, is a large sign that says Welcome to Acuitzio
del Canje: Place of the Exchange of French and Belgian Prisoners for Mexicans 1865\footnote{Bienvenidos a Acuitzio del Canje: Lugar del Canje de Prisioneros Belgas y Franceses por Mexicanos 1865} highlighting the historical significance of this exchange of prisoners that added del Canje to the
town’s name, becoming Acuitzio of the Exchange.
Figure 1: Interior Michoacán, Mexico.
Map by Paul Hackett, adapted with permission (© 1970 Raymond E. Wiest).
To enter the town itself, a driver would make a left hand turn off of this highway, driving down a street that starts out fairly wide, then narrows and becomes one-way as it bends, then passes by the plaza and continues on Riva Palacio. The plaza and this street make up the social and economic hearts of the town. It is also the religious centre, since Riva Palacio is bookended by two churches, the Parroquia de San Nicolás and the Santuario del Sagrado Corazón. The municipal administration offices are also located at one end of the plaza, opposite the Parroquia. Adobe brick and concrete houses sit snugly against the sidewalks, many of which are painted a deep red and white, following a traditional style in the region. Along Riva Palacio hand lettered signs advertise butcher shops, restaurants, grocery stores, and other businesses. To the south of the town centre just off the highway that leads to Villa Madero is la Colonia Riva Palacio, most often referred to as La Colonia by local residents (Jonasson 2008). La Colonia is considered pretty far from town, even though to walk to the plaza from there takes only about 15-20 minutes.

The plaza itself is rectangular in shape, with the town administration at one end, and the Parroquia at the other. It has low walls around all sides, a kiosco and a fountain, carefully tended grass and manicured shrubs, and benches to sit on. The plaza is the centre of social relations for Acuitzences who live in town, and the focus of much nostalgia for those who live and work abroad. The portales run along both sides of the plaza with the small library, the only ATM machine in town, a restaurant and an ice cream shop, a veterinarian, as well as several stores. In the plaza itself are vendors in carts who sell tacos, hamburgers and hot dogs, fresh juice, among other things. Going to the plaza for tacos, ice cream, or hamburgers is a popular and delicious pastime. Major celebrations also happen in the plaza, or in the plazuela, just off to one side near the Parroquia. When I stayed in Acuitzio during the summer of 2011, there was a basketball
tournament in the plazuela, and every evening a crowd would gather to watch local teams compete against each other. Just ‘going to the plaza’ is a social event in and of itself. I remember sitting on a plaza bench, listening to the sounds of birds in the trees, murmurs of conversation, the sounds of streets and sidewalks being swept, and pre-recorded advertisements or loud banda music played from car speakers.

Acuitzences describe their town as tranquilo, quiet or peaceful, even as Michoacán in general is known as the home of drug cartels La Familia and Los Caballeros Templarios. The attempts of these groups to control space and mobility can make it more difficult to travel within the region. After buses were hijacked and set on fire along local highways, residents became wary of traveling by bus, and especially at night. My friend Alina would ask friends and family to update her by text if there were any problems on the highway when driving her own car on day trips within the region to Uruapan, Pátzcuaro, or local water parks.\textsuperscript{13} Local residents told me to be cautious about hiking in the mountains, taking the bus or driving at night, or visiting more dangerous towns and regions in Michoacán. When I started fieldwork in 2011, 21 corpses were found at the freeway entrances and exits to the capital city of Morelia, effectively closing the city until the police completed their investigation. More recently, fuerzas autodefensas in some communities in Michoacán, although not Acuitzio, were created to fight back against organized crime and corruption. In spite of staggering levels of violence and crime in Michoacán associated with cartel control over territory, government corruption, and the US-led War on Drugs, many

\textsuperscript{13} In the region around Acuitzio, there are many natural thermal springs and some of these have been developed into water parks, called balnearios. During the hottest time of the year, these are popular places to go for a day trip, to swim and enjoy a picnic or carne asada (grilled beef) at the park.
people continue to describe Acuitzio as tranquilo and go home to visit regularly. Others who live in the United States are not so sure, and wonder how safe it is to travel back.

The town is known for its natural atmosphere and for having lots of water. In Morelia, when I told taxi drivers or shop clerks or others that I was staying in Acuitzio, a common response was: “Ah, Acuitzio, hay mucha agua allá”. And so there is: one important landmark for town residents is the ojo de agua, or spring. At higher elevations farmland gives way to pine forests. In the past, an important industry in the region was forestry and related to that, furniture production. Today, many of the pine forests in the area have been cleared to farm avocados in the highlands. Avocados are called oro verde or green gold in this region, and they require a large investment, and huge pools of water to irrigate them.

In terms of the stories that town residents tell about the history of the pueblo, Acuitzio is a crossroads, a meeting up point for many trajectories. For example, I met with Pascual for an interview in the plaza in Acuitzio in 2011. Pascual was born and raised in Acuitzio, but lived and worked in Alaska in the 1990s. His father also worked in Alaska. During our interview I asked him to describe Acuitzio for me. He said,

“Well it’s a pueblo tradicionalista, and the most important part of Acuitzio is the history, no? Acuitzio is marked by historic events. The most important of these, well it’s when the French Intervention was here, no? In fact, before they called this town Acuitzio it had many names. One of them was Coyapán, which means lake of the snakes. That lake extended from just outside Acuitzio to Patzcuaro. Acuitzio, on its shield, has several decorations, no? There are the colours of France, the colours of Mexico, and in the middle we have a cannon crossed by rifles, but in the prehispanic part we have a mountain with a serpent and a lake. So that is about Coyapán, it talks about who we were long ago. After that, it changed to Coatepec, and later to Acuitzio. The names changed because the culture changed. The group of people and the language, no?”
In fact, Tapia notes, Aztecs called the area “Coatepec”, which was translated by the P’urhépecha\(^\text{14}\) into their own language as Acuitzio, both of which mean place of snakes (Tapia 1945).

Pascual continues, “Later the Spanish arrived. And they said, \textit{okay}, we have to give all of these indigenous people a saint so they will pray, no? And this saint was called San Nicolás de Tolentino, and one of those saints is still here, inside the church. After that they called the place, San Nicolás de Acuitzio. But it didn’t last, later they just called it Acuitzio, which means place of snakes.” Indeed, Carlos Arenas García traced the movement of Augustinian priests in the area, where they founded a convent in Tiripetio, as well as a university, the “Casa de Estudios Mayores” in 1540. The Augustinians gave Acuitzio San Nicolás de Tolentino as their patron saint, and for many centuries the town was indeed known as San Nicolás Acuitzio (Arenas García 1988:9).

The most important historical crossing of all was the exchange of French and Belgian prisoners for Mexican ones on December 5, 1865, an act that historians say led to the end of the Franco-Mexican war, created by the brief attempt by the Second French Empire under Napoleon III to conquer Mexico. Orchestrated by General Vicente Riva Palacio, whose name graces Acuitzio’s main street, this exchange is celebrated annually with day-long celebrations featuring a re-enactment of the exchange itself. In 1901 the town’s name was changed to Acuitzio \textit{del Canje}, or in English, \textit{Acuitzio of the Exchange}, to commemorate this event. Pascual continues, “When the French arrived to the area, Vicente Riva Palacio was stationed here, with many French and Belgian prisoners. At that time war was about honour. It wasn’t just killing for the

\(^{14}\) P’urhépecha are an indigenous group of Michoacán. They and their language are also sometimes referred to as Tarascan.
sake of killing, it was different then. Anyway, Riva Palacio sent a letter to the French commander and said, I have your prisoners, and I know that you have mine. Let’s exchange them. Where? In Acuitzio. When? December 5, 1865. And from that day, they have called it Acuitzio del Canje, after the exchange of prisoners, no?”

Pascual said that even though the exchange of prisoners in Acuitzio eventually led to the end of the war, it has had a lasting impact on the area. He said, “Certainly, some French people stayed here, living in the fringes, in the mountains, because they were people who had already spent many years here, decades even, fighting for a king and country they have lost. They couldn’t cross the Atlantic back to France so they stayed here.” The last names of many people in Acuitzio reflect this, Pascual’s included. He said, “My name isn’t Mexican, it isn’t Gómez or López, it isn’t Spanish, right? The French who stayed were persecuted and they sought refuge in the mountains near Tacámbaro and they changed their last names. From De la Bastia to Bastida.” Moreover, Pascual thinks his grandfather looked phenotypically French, “My grandfather was tall, really tall. He was also güero, not very indigenous looking at all, more French, no?” It’s true that many people from Acuitzio have light skin, eyes, and hair. One friend and research contact said that many people don’t believe he’s Mexican, with his blue eyes, light skin, and brown hair. Pascual also inherited his grandfather’s güero complexion.

Pascual continues, “So every December 5 in the parade, when I was a child I was tall and I always dressed up as a French soldier for the parade. Anyway, the exchange was the most important historical event for the town.”

He paused briefly, looking around the plaza before continuing, “This place has remained, no? A little of the architecture, the culture, the traditions, but basically it’s based in the traditions, in the religious and civic fiestas.”
Carlos Arenas García (1988) characterized Acuitzio as the access point to the mountains and the natural way to the southern part of the state, which allows for regional products from a large area to be distributed to other areas of the state and even outside of it. The town is near the path of the Camino Real, which was once used by colonists, missionaries, and supply caravans to travel between Mexico City and Santa Fe during the Spanish Colonial period. Gonzalo Calderón says that portions of that road still remain, buried under the dirt. In his dissertation, Wiest notes that the most memorable events in town history occurred during periods of conflict, due to the town’s strategic location between the Tierra Caliente and the railroad, which was completed in 1901 (Wiest 1970:11). Since the town was in a strategic place for the control of goods, Acuitzio was caught up in the independence movement, the French intervention, and the Mexican Revolution of 1910-1920 and the Cristero rebellion of the 1920s (Arenas García 1988; Garibay Sotelo 1980; Tapia 1945). The town was also an important commercial center and stopover point in the trade route of agricultural products from the Tierra Caliente (Wiest 1970:12). In fact the main route went straight through town, right along Riva Palacio. The town was once well known for wagon wheel building and repair, as well as huarache\textsuperscript{15} and shoe making. Shoe making remained important well into the 1970s (Wiest 1970, 1973). In the 1930s, the heavy traffic of goods from the lowlands to the railway and Morelia was diverted when the government constructed roads into Tacámbaro through Pátzcuaro, and into Huetamo from the highway leading to Mexico City. “A town that once relied on income from trade, in the form of night lodging, services, small businesses, and crafts, suddenly was caught with an excessive number of retailers and services. This change has had a marked effect on the entire municipality and is the

\textsuperscript{15} Huaraches are a Mexican sandal with Precolombian origins.
single most important factor underlying the continuous rate of out-migration” (Wiest 1970:12). As the route shifted, then, Acuitzio lost its position as an important way-point, and many people left, seeking work elsewhere in Mexico and across the border in the United States.

All of these things reveal that Acuitzio has long been a place spatially connected to elsewhere, and this is vital for the town’s sense of itself. Then as now, “Acuitzio must be seen as a town within a region relating to national Mexico and even to parts of the rest of the world” (Wiest 1970:12), including, as is shown in this dissertation, Alaska. The town, then, has been configured as outward-reaching, and indeed, as a collective, has been successful at extending its residents to points elsewhere, while keeping them engaged in the community. An important part of this connection to elsewhere is labour mobility. Acuitzio has a long history of labour migration to many destinations in the United States and elsewhere in Mexico. In 1970, Raymond Wiest wrote, “There has been a heavy emigration out of the rural areas into the cabecera, while at the same time townspeople have left the cabecera and migrated to urban centres, primarily Mexico City. This changeover of town residents is continuing” (Wiest 1970:10). Today, there are sizable populations of Acuitzences in Chicago, in the Los Angeles region, and in agricultural towns of the San Joaquin Valley in California, and in Anchorage, Alaska (Jonasson 2008). Acuitzio is town of migrants, and has been for generations now, and this is visible on license plates on vehicles in town, in currency exchange businesses along the main street, and in the annual celebration of the Día de los Norteños or Day of the Northerners on January 2, which celebrates town residents who work in the United States with a jaripéo\textsuperscript{16} and dance (Jonasson 2008).

\textsuperscript{16} Bull riding rodeo.
Anchorage, Alaska, USA

Over 7,800 kilometres north and west of Acuitzio is the city of Anchorage, located at about 61 degrees North, nestled between Cook Inlet and the Chugach Mountains. The Dena’ina people had settlements along Knik Arm for years before English explorer Captain James Cook explored and described the area in 1778. Russian traders and missionaries likely frequented the area as well, at least until Russian America was sold to the United States in 1867. The city of Anchorage itself was originally established as a tent city for workers building the Alaska railroad beginning in 1914. Anchorage is now the largest city in the state of Alaska, with a population of approximately 291,826, about half of the population of the entire state (US Census Bureau 2010).

On the way into Anchorage along the Alaska Highway and the Glenn Highway from Tok there are only smaller settlements and towns, forests, and mountains, rivers, and lakes. On the outskirts of Anchorage, however, the population density grows as you pass through the Matanuska Valley, and towns of Wasilla, Palmer, and Eagle River. Wasilla is now famous as the home of ex-governor and one time vice presidential candidate Sarah Palin, but it is also known as the start of the Iditarod dogsled race. The freeway widens, and on one side you pass a large American flag and a sign welcoming you to Fort Richardson-Elmendorf Joint Base. Construction of Alaska’s military facilities began during World War II, due to Alaska’s proximity to Japan. These facilities assumed an increasing role during the Cold War, then because of proximity to the Soviet Union. Military bases like Fort Richardson and Elmendorf have had a huge impact on the city of Anchorage. Today, they employ over 5,000 soldiers and civilians, many of whom
come from outside Alaska. After the entrance to Fort Richardson-Elmendorf, you pass Tikahtnu Commons with its expansive parking lot, movie theatre, nation wide chain stores and restaurants like Target, Kohl’s and the Olive Garden, and more local businesses like the Firetap Alehouse or Alaska Communications.

The city stretches out in all directions. It has one of the lowest population densities of any city in the United States, and its nearly 300,000 residents live in an urban area roughly the size of the state of Rhode Island. The city of Anchorage fills the whole plain between Turnagain Arm to the south and Knik Arm to the north, extending from the mudflats of Cook Inlet to the east up into the shoulders of the Chugach Mountains to the west. This spread out nature of the city means that there are many parks, and areas of open forest here and there. It also means that most people drive to and from home, work, school, shopping, and other activities. In contrast to Acuitzio, it is difficult to get around by bus and walking long distances is challenging. I found walking also to be considered odd by most people I knew in Anchorage, who would offer me a ride rather than let me walk.

Demographer Chad Farrell told me that, based on data from the 2010 US Census, the largest concentration of people of Mexican background is Fort Richardson (Farrell, personal communication 2014). Through archival research I also found that during the 1940s and 1950s many Mexican-born air force and army personnel became US citizens while stationed at military facilities in Alaska.

The neighbourhood I lived in, Fairview, had a bad reputation. Part of this was due to its low socioeconomic status, but I believe part of this was also because there were many Alaska Natives seen walking around in the neighbourhood. Although some may have been drinking, most were visiting Anchorage from rural communities, and therefore didn’t have a car to get around with. Hanging out in Fairview and walking around on foot was considered highly “sketchy” by middle class Anchorageites, but I liked the neighbourhood, its walkability, and its proximity to downtown.
Figure 2: Alaska, USA. Map by Paul Hackett.
Driving through the city you might notice that the tallest buildings are either hotels or oil company offices, reflecting two of the main industries in the state: oil and tourism. Wildlife is common in the city, especially moose, and it is very common to see moose ambling down a busy street, or sleeping outside of your doorway, even in more densely populated parts of the city. When the salmon are running, you can fish downtown at Ship Creek, or watch the fish running in Chester or Campbell Creeks. On a clear day, looking north, you can see Denali Mountain, or Mount McKinley, about 214 kilometres (133 miles) away. It looms larger than you might expect for that distance. Also on a clear day, looking west, you can see the Tordrillo Range,¹⁹ snow covered and jagged across the sea. Mount Susitna, or Sleeping Lady Mountain, so named because the mountain looks like a prone person, sits directly across Knik Arm, and is a notable landmark in the area.

Running through Anchorage from North to South is the Seward Highway, named so because it goes to Seward, about two and a half hours away on the Kenai Peninsula, the town itself a namesake of William H. Seward, the governor who initially purchased Alaska from Russia in 1867. In addition to the highway, Anchorage also has a large port, located near downtown, rail service, Ted Stevens International Airport and multiple smaller airports, as well as Elmendorf Air Force base, to the north of town. For the state of Alaska, Anchorage is where things move in, and through, to other destinations around the state, or to locations within the city. Anchorage is also a hub for international shipping, and the sounds of airplanes taking off, landing, or flying overhead are commonly heard. As is the constant hum of traffic and the clicks, calls, and echoes made by city-dwelling ravens.

¹⁹ Although the name of the range appears Spanish, it may be an adaptation of a Dena’ina (Athabascan) placename (Bright 2004:508).
Alaska is uniquely ethnically diverse, and Anchorage is no exception. For one, Anchorage is the largest “native village” in the state (Feldman 2009), with many people of Inupiat, Yupik, Aleut, Eyak, Tlingit, Haida, Tsimshian, and Northern Athabaskan background who live, work, or study in the Anchorage area. As well, people who live in rural villages travel to Anchorage from all over Alaska to access health and social services, for cultural gatherings, to shop, visit family, for leisure, or en route to other destinations. Students in the Anchorage School District speak at least 93 different languages at home (English Language Learners Program 2013). As well, the Alaskan Institute for Justice has trained over 200 bilingual interpreters in 40 languages through their Language Interpreter Centre (Farrell 2014). The three census tracts with the highest diversity in the United States in 2010 were in Anchorage, encompassing the neighborhood of Mountain View and parts of Airport Heights and Muldoon (Farrell 2014). Finally, the top three highest diversity high schools in the United States are East, Bartlett, and West High Schools, all located in Anchorage (Farrell 2014).

Anchorage can thus be seen as a crossroads: of cargo, of cultures, and of humans and animals. In fact, in downtown Anchorage in front of the Pioneer Cabin Visitor’s Centre, there is a sign that proclaims Anchorage as the “Air Crossroads of the World,” with arrows pointing from all sides listing distances to major global cities. People from all over North America and other continents have passed through Anchorage or other points in Alaska, entry points to the gold rush, the oil boom, and or to make money in fishing camps or on fishing boats. Perhaps, for example, in 2014 The Atlantic reported that the top two most diverse counties in the United States are in the Alaskan Aleutian Islands due to the commercial king crab fishery there (Narula 2014). Potential oil development would increase labour migration to the islands (Rosenthal 2014).
then, Anchorage gathers. It is a place that people go towards and seek out, whether for work, adventure, or access to wilderness.

**Tracing Mexican Alaska**

Mexican Alaska is the term I use throughout this dissertation to refer to the spatial formation where Mexico and Alaska are connected through transnational and transgenerational mobility, which I will analyze in more detail in Chapters 2 and 3. Here I draw on the idea of “Greater Mexico” proposed by Américo Paredes (1995) as all areas inhabited by people of a Mexican culture. We can extend Greater Mexico all the way to Alaska, both drawing upon and defying the geopolitical boundaries along the way. I also envision a spatial formation like De Genova’s Mexican Chicago, whereby Alaska is practically and materially implicated in Mexico and belongs meaningfully to Latin America (2005). Specifically, I trace the extension of “Greater Acuitzio” within a larger Greater Mexico that extends throughout the continent. People even talk about Anchorage this way, calling it “Anchorage del Canje,” because there are so many people there from Acuitzio. Indeed, in the Anchorage Spanish speaking community, or in businesses or institutions that serve them, people know of Acuitzio because of the relatively large number of people from the town who live in Anchorage.

In Anchorage itself, Hispanic/Latinos\(^2\) now comprise 7.6% of the population (US Census Bureau 2010). Estimates about the number of people from Acuitzio currently living and

\(^2\) This census category has changed over time, as have the definitions and social meanings of terms used to describe people like “Hispanic” and “Latino.” For more on changing census categories in the United States, see Rodriguez 2000. For more on terminology within the Mexican diaspora, see Rinderle 2005. I use “Hispanic” and “Latino” in this section because that is how these data are reported. My participants preferred to call themselves “Mexicans” or “mexicanos.”
working in Alaska vary. But of the roughly 11,526\textsuperscript{22} individuals living in Anchorage who are of Mexican origin (US Census Bureau 2010), my participants estimated that about 1,000 men, women, and children in Anchorage are from Acuitzio, a number that fluctuates depending on the season. By asking interviewees about their network of family, friends, and acquaintances from Acuitzio in Alaska, I was able to estimate that there were about 400 Acuitzences in Anchorage during my fieldwork. However, this does not include certain groups of individuals such as, for example, a group from town who worked at a greenhouse in south Anchorage every summer. I understand that they work under a temporary foreign worker program and are provided with room and board at the greenhouse site. The exact number of Acuitzences in Alaska doesn’t matter here as much as the way Anchorage is experienced. The social world of Acuitzences in Anchorage is made up of other Acuitzences, both in Anchorage and in Acuitzio itself.

Some characteristics of the Mexican population in Alaska seem to be different from that of Mexican migrants elsewhere the United States. My colleague, Dayra Velázquez, certainly found this to be true when she arrived in Anchorage for MA thesis fieldwork in 2006 (Velázquez 2007). She told me that she had arrived with questionnaires developed for use with migrants in Southern California. And she found that the questions were totally inappropriate in Alaska, where the Mexican migrants and immigrants she met owned their own homes and businesses and were not working in fields or as dishwashers, struggling to make ends meet. She frames migration to Alaska as different in terms of destination and in terms of the work that people do, so that rather than working in farms and fields like in California, newcomers from Mexico work in fish canneries and restaurant kitchens (García and Velázquez 2013).

\textsuperscript{22} 3.9\% of the population of Anchorage.
In a 2013 report about Alaska Economic Trends, drawing on data from the 2010 US Census, the authors report that, in general, the Hispanic population in Alaska has grown by 52% between 2000 and 2010 (Hunsinger 2013). Although Hispanic residents in Alaska make up a smaller segment of the population compared to the nation as a whole (5.5%, 16.3% nationwide), the increase over the 2000-2010 census period is higher for Alaska (52% increase, whereas it was 43% nationwide). The authors of the report attribute this growth both to migration/immigration and “natural increase” meaning that there were more births than deaths in this population. Like the nationwide Hispanic/Latino population, Alaskan Hispanics tend to be younger than the general population. Most Hispanic Alaskans live in Anchorage (home to 56.2% of all Hispanic Alaskans) and within the Anchorage bowl, Hispanic people are not concentrated in any particular neighbourhood. Outside of Anchorage, US census data shows higher shares of Hispanic residents in the Aleutian census areas, Kodiak Island, and Fairbanks borough. Different from the Hispanic population in the Lower 48, most Hispanic Alaskans were born in the United States (77.5% in AK, 61.9 nationwide), more report speaking English well (88.0% in AK, 77.2% nationwide), and they have a higher educational attainment than in the Lower 48 (76.7% in AK, 615% nationwide). Finally, “substantially fewer Hispanics were below the poverty level in Alaska than in the nation as a whole” (11.6% in AK, 22.4% nationally) (Hunsinger 2013).

In another report, “New Americans in Alaska”, new immigrants and their children are characterized as “growing shares of Alaska’s population and electorate” (Immigration Policy Centre 2013). They report a growth of the Latino population in Alaska from 3.2% in 1990 to

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23 However, Chad Farrell told me in an email that one of the largest concentrations of people with Mexican ancestry here in Anchorage is on the Fort Richardson-Elmendorf base. He believes that this points to the role of institutions like the military in contributing to localized diversity (Farrell, personal communication 2014).
5.8% in 2011 (Immigration Policy Centre 2013). Of these, unauthorized immigrants made up less than 1.5% of the state’s workforce in 2011 (Passel and Cohn 2011).

Of course, although the categories of Hispanic or Latino as a category are much broader than my study group of Acuitzences in Alaska, many of the findings in these reports are verifiable ethnographically. For example, I worked in Anchorage because I knew from previous research that most Acuitzences live in Alaska. In my research I did not find any geographic clustering of people of Mexican background within Anchorage. Most of the people I worked with were above the poverty level and were US citizens or residents.

In terms of migration and immigration and the composition of the Spanish-speaking community in the state, Alaska is unique. I believe the history of migration between Mexico and Alaska is also novel compared to elsewhere on the continent. Thus, transnational life in Alaska cannot be easily compared with transnational life in Southern California, or Oregon or other points “Outside.” Moreover, the Acuitzences that I work with are above poverty level and hold US citizenship or permanent residency. Although some characteristics will no doubt be similar, the contours of Mexican Alaska are therefore distinctive.

Routes Between

Above my desk as I write is a framed page of a book about Alaska, propped up on a shelf. It says: “As an engineering feat the Alaska Highway has been compared to the building of the Panama Canal. It stretches more than fifteen hundred miles from Dawson Creek, north of Edmonton in Canada, to Fairbanks, Alaska. Through virgin forests, over mountain passes, and across icy northern rivers the highway reaches through to connect Alaska with the main part of the continent. In only a little more than eight months after its beginning this great road was ready
for travel, though it was not yet finished.” Heroic narratives of conquering wilderness aside, routes like the Panama Canal, the Alaska Highway, transcontinental train tracks, and airports have fundamentally reorganized our experience of space and our perception of distance. With this in mind, I considered the routes between Mexico and Alaska to be important fieldsites as well. In conducting fieldwork along routes between Acuitzio and Anchorage, I conceptualize cultures as sites of both dwelling and travel (Clifford 1997:31). Throughout my fieldwork, I sought informal and formal tape-recorded descriptions of travel between Anchorage and Mexico in an attempt to “take travel knowledges seriously” (Clifford 1997:31). Inspired by Steve Striffler’s (2007) trip from Arkansas to Santo Domingo, Guanajuato with his research participants, I also traveled with the Bravo family by car, bus, and airplane, documenting our trip in fieldnotes and learning about how they experienced the trip. I intended to make similar trips with other research participants, but arranging the logistics proved difficult. I drove from Vancouver to Anchorage and from Anchorage to Edmonton with my partner Chris, our pets, and our 1997 Jeep Cherokee on the Glenn, Alaska, Cassiar, and Yellowhead Highways, documenting our experience of travel with photographs and fieldnotes.

Finally, travel between Mexico and Alaska requires crossing several international borders. Striffler (2007:684) crossed the US-Mexico border by car with his research participants driving back to Arkansas from Santo Domingo, and described the experience with the US customs official as follows:

“We are at the border. Carlos, Adolfo, and myself. We wait in line for over three hours. There is little traffic, but for most of the time we are not even moving. When we finally get to the border, the officer who checks our documents seems completely puzzled.

“What was the purpose of your trip?”

“Vacation,” I respond.
Still confused, he asks more bluntly: “What are you [a white American] doing with them?”

“I went with them to their hometown. We live in Arkansas and are trying to get back.”

“You were just on vacation with them.”

“Correct.”

He sends us to be searched. Tired, dirty, and stinking of last night’s fiesta, we empty the trunk and dump our stuff onto a couple of tables. The agent searching our belongings is in no hurry. It will be a long process. As we wait, Adolfo complains, “That fucking Chicano [border patrol agent]. He couldn’t believe a gringo was traveling with two Mexicans. That’s why he sent us over here to be searched [instead of waving us through]. (Laughing) We got stopped because you are a fucking gringo.”

Laughing, I say, “No, man, we got stopped because you two are Mexicans. Welcome home.”

By crossing the border together, Striffler and his companions had broken the racially bounded notion of difference and separation that the border relies on and enforces (Striffler 2007). In interviews, I looked for similar experiences in asking people about crossing the US-Mexico and US-Canadian border, about the passports they used to cross, what kinds of questions they were usually asked, and if they had ever crossed without papers. I documented my own experiences crossing borders as well, taking fieldnotes and photographs where possible.

As it turns out, traveling between Mexico and Alaska gave me insights into the production of distance, specifically how places are experienced as far from one another because of the travel itineraries used to connect them. It also gave me a sense of how travel, even by air and with US passports, is never a free-moving flow. Inflected with friction, mobility is uneven, and is experienced as a series of stops, starts, slow moving line-ups, and moments of speed along smooth highways or air corridors.
Looking for Similarities

In interviews and casual conversations, Acuitzences in Alaska drew attention to the fact that the same people live in and move between these places and refer to the “tranquility” and “the nature” that are important parts of the sense of place in each, and the fact that both are considered small towns, relatively speaking.

People that I met in Anchorage who are part of the Spanish-speaking community there often said, “there are many people from Acuitzio here” or “almost everyone from Acuitzio is in Anchorage.” People in Anchorage know of Acuitzio because there are so many Acuitzences there. In Acuitzio as well, people know about Anchorage. When I talked to Pascual in the plaza in Acuitzio he said, “Anchorage, we call it Anchorage del Canje,” and laughed. “Just, among ourselves, no? Anchorage del Canje, that’s how we know it.”

Indeed, Tomás talked about his decision to move to Alaska after working in California for many years,

“My sister was here, and she suggested that I come here, so I did. And I also have many friends here, I know many people from el pueblo here. People who have lived in Acuitzio and have lived here for many years. So I said, well, there will be people I know in Anchorage and it won’t be so difficult to live there, like it is when you don’t know anyone.”

This made it easy for him to adapt to life in Alaska, “It wasn’t difficult for me because I could adapt to whatever. I could accommodate whatever climatic, social, logistical change, everything.”

Laura talked about how much she likes it that there are so many people from Acuitzio,

\[\text{\footnotesize 24 In Anchorage there are also large numbers of people and a long-term connection with communities in Jalisco and Zacatecas. Here I focus only on Acuitzio.}\]
“Anchorage has many people from *el pueblo* living here. Wherever you go, you run into people you know from Acuitzio, I think that is what we like about it here.” After she said that, I talked about how people use the same words to talk about both places, that Anchorage and Acuitzio are both *tranquilo* and *seguro*, with lots of nature, mountains, and forests. Laura agreed, “Yes, yes it’s true. Maybe because of that we like it here because in one way we feel in the same place because all of Michoacán looks like Alaska!”

Serefina said something similar, when I asked her what she thought of Anchorage at first:

“I always thought it was beautiful and interesting here in Alaska. I’m from, *de provincia*, you know, everything is more natural. Or like there is more contact with nature, eating things that are 100% natural. All of that is nicer, so when I came here, I saw all of the nature and I liked it a lot. And later well, when I arrived, the winter was ending and the days were nice and long and it didn’t seem so bad to me. In fact, even the snow seemed interesting to me because well, I had never seen snow. I thought it was really interesting and apart from that I was with my husband, and that’s the most important thing, no?”

Indeed, in Acuitzio in 2011 someone told me that the things that people appreciate most about Acuitzio are “the natural spring, the ice cream in the plaza, and the *naturaleza*.”

Ernesto Calderón, Sr. also talked about how Anchorage and Morelia were similar in size when he worked in Anchorage decades ago: “When I worked there, Anchorage was a little city. And I remember that in 1978 there were about 150,000 inhabitants. Morelia was smaller then, too and they were very similar in size and in population.” Recall as well that in Chapter 3 when I described traveling to the airport with the Bravo family, Vero and Sophia said that they didn’t like Mexico City; they preferred smaller towns like Acuitzio, Morelia, or Anchorage. Leonardo Aldama described Anchorage like this: “It’s smaller here, life is more like it is in *el pueblo*.”

Jaime, one of the first men to go to Anchorage, and Pascual, who went there much later in the 2000s, also drew similarities between Michoacán and Alaska in terms of their love of outdoor
pursuits and their own adventurous personalities. Both of them climbed mountains and worked in natural areas in Mexico – Jaime worked in forestry, and Pascual has an ecotourism business. In Alaska as well, they continued these interests. Jaime worked as a field assistant for an Alaska Fish and Game biologist. Although Pascual’s father had worked in Alaska for many years, he didn’t want that kind of life for his son, so he didn’t arrange papers for Pascual to go to the United States. In fact, his father said, “It isn’t necessary. You have a house, school, family, clothes, food, everything. Everything that many people wish for, you have it here, for free.”

Pascual replied, “OK, but I want to have something of my own, eh. I’m going to Alaska.”

“If you cross that doorway, it’s just you and the world”

Pascual said, “OK, I’m going to go. I am 18 years old and I’m going”.

His father said, “OK, fine, go. But don’t come back until you’ve become a man.”

Pascual, was (and is) a mountaineer and outdoorsman who dreamt of climbing Denali, and went to Alaska on his own without papers and against his father’s wishes, seeking adventure and the ultimate wilderness experience. While there he washed dishes in a restaurant, and did whatever it took to have enough money to go camping, backpacking, and climbing on the weekends. He was sure to point out that he was different, that most people who go to Alaska are there to work for a better life, and a smaller percentage travel looking for adventure and new experiences. “I am one of those who went to Alaska and found my truth in its landscapes and mountains”. In fact, the state and the mountain he went there to climb meant so much to him, he named his daughter Denali. A photo of Jaime and other men from the first generation of men in

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25 Denali, also known as Mt. McKinley, is the highest mountain in North America.
Alaska cooking food after a hike sometime in the 1960s shows that they, too, engaged in outdoor pursuits.

My friend Ana said that life in Alaska got a lot more enjoyable once their family took up Alaskan activities like camping, mountain biking, and fishing. She said, “Until we got the motorhome, Sarita, summer was so boring!” They go camping every summer with a large group of Acuitzences and other friends, and Ana looks forward to grilling gorditas over the campfire. Many Acuitzences have taken up quintessentially Alaskan activities like salmon fishing, camping, mountain biking, and cross country skiing, as well as snowboarding and hiking.

People draw comparisons between Anchorage and Acuitzio all the time, describing both places as tranquil and natural. This is ironic because Alaska’s status as extremely separate and disconnected from elsewhere is partly due to its imaginary as a wilderness state. However, for Acuitzences, this wilderness status makes it more like the uplands of Michoacán where Acuitzio is located, an area that is also highly valued for its forests, rivers, and mountains. Acuitzio is known for having lots of water, and is the source of natural springs. The forests around Acuitzio, though managed for forestry, and increasingly logged and replaced with avocado orchards, are also part of this natural environment. Describing Acuitzio as “tranquil” is also interesting, considering the fact that Michoacán in general is associated violence related to the drug cartels and autodefensa groups that have proliferated in the state. In fact, the forests are said to have helped the cartels, hiding their activities from authorities. Nevertheless, people draw comparisons between Anchorage and Acuitzio in these terms, collapsing the sense of spatial and social distance between them.
Methodological Practice in Transnational Space

I conducted ethnographic fieldwork for my MA thesis project in both Anchorage and Acuitzio from July to December 2005 (Komarnisky 2006). My project was focused on food, and tracing the food-related connections between Anchorage and Acuitzio. In Anchorage, I met my first contact from Acuitzio at the Latino Festival in downtown Anchorage, and by the time I left for Acuitzio in November, I had completed multiple interviews, learned to cook tamales and atole and chicken with mole, and made friends that I would see that winter in Acuitzio, and remain in contact with. I also documented my arrival in Acuitzio in November of 2005:

Walking down the street towards the plaza, at first everything seems unfamiliar. Red and white buildings line the streets, narrow sidewalks, open doors open onto darkened stores…a stationary shop, a bakery, a grocery store, a butcher shop with a carcass hanging out front. I hear someone calling my name, “Sarita, Sarita, qué tal? Cuándo llegaste?” (Sara, Sara how are you? When did you arrive?) It’s Antonio who I met in Alaska! (Komarnisky 2006:31)

I returned to Acuitzio for informal visits after 2005, and in June 2011 I arrived there to begin a year of PhD fieldwork with Acuitzences who live between Mexico and Alaska. I began in Mexico because I knew from previous research that most Acitzences who live in Anchorage or elsewhere in the United States who are able to travel back to Acuitzio regularly do so over the summer months or in December (Komarnisky 2006). I arranged to stay with the Bravo family, who was in Acuitzio that summer, and planned to travel back with them by airplane. When I arrived in Acuitzio, I realized that another friend and research contact was there for the summer and I was able to stay with her occasionally as well. Living with Acitzences who came back to Acuitzio for the summer gave me the chance to interact informally with people who live between Mexico and Alaska, participate in their daily activities in their hometown, meet their extended family, and sometimes ask questions specifically relating to my project outside of a formal
interview. With research contacts in Acuitzio, I went shopping, visited family members and friends, ate tacos, hamburgers, and ice cream in the plaza, traveled to nearby towns and waterparks, went to bailes, comidas, and fiestas, visited family ranchos and avocado farms, went to school end-of year clausura ceremony, mass, and student performances, and spent time at home doing laundry, cleaning up, preparing food, eating, watching TV, or talking. I also participated in the preparations for Sofia Bravo’s quinceañera, which was held that summer. Many of the guests were also from Alaska, and in addition to making decorations for the party, I also gathered information about where the guests were from, who the madrinas and padrinos were, and attended the party myself (Appendix A). Finally, to trace the material dimensions of transnationality in Acuitzio, I documented items that had traveled from Alaska to Acuitzio. Sometimes it was an automobile with Alaska license plates; other times it was a magnet, displayed on a refrigerator (Appendix B). All of these experiences were documented in my daily fieldnotes.

In Acuitzio, I also sought out new contacts who had lived or worked in Alaska, and conducted 12 interviews with nine individuals. Three of these interviewees were older male members of the first generation of Acuitzences to go to Alaska, and I conducted life history interviews in Spanish focused on their experiences in Alaska with them (Appendix C.1). Five interviewees were individuals who had lived, worked in, or traveled to Alaska in the past, but who had since moved back to Acuitzio. The remaining interview was with a family member of someone who currently lives in Alaska. Before each interview, I used a standardized questionnaire to collect consistent demographic, travel, and family network information for each individual (Appendix C.3).
While in Mexico I was a visiting student at the Colegio de Michoacán, under the supervision of Dra. Gail Mummert. I had the opportunity to visit ColMich in Zamora, and meet other anthropologists there. I was also able to access their library to research Acuitzio, and access books about the town that are not readily available in Canada (Arenas García 1988; Garibay Sotelo 1980; Tapia 1945).

In August of 2011, I returned to Vancouver and drove from there to Anchorage via the Cassiar Highway meeting up with the Alaska Highway in Watson Lake. I lived in Anchorage from August 2011 until July 2012 before driving back to Edmonton, Alberta, where I have resided since. Although I lived in my own apartment in Anchorage, I drew on contacts made since 2005 and was able to continue to interact informally with people from Acuitzio in Alaska in their homes, at restaurants, at church services, at movies, shopping, camping, and at special events, like baby showers, baptisms, and birthday parties. I also conducted 28 recorded interviews with 31 Acuitzences in Alaska in both English and Spanish, again using a standardized questionnaire to collect consistent information about each participant (Appendix C.2). These interviews were open-ended, beginning with the question: “Tell me how you came to live in Alaska.” From there, I would also ask about trips between Anchorage and Acuitzio, things that people travel with between these two places, where the interviewee feels most at home, and where they imagine their future to be, among other topics (Appendix C.1). With 14 participants, I also collected information on the Acuitzence network in Anchorage. Using a network form (Appendix C.3), I asked these people to list other Acuitzences they knew in Anchorage, as well as their relationship to them (family, compadres, friends, or acquaintances).

During fieldwork in Acuitzio and Anchorage, travel was a popular topic of conversation: what airlines are best, what routes are good, what airports are preferable for flying into, what the
drive from Alaska is like, and so on. I organized my research to be able to elicit travel stories as well as experience the rigours of travel myself.

In Anchorage, I also conducted research at events and locations that explicitly brought together Mexico and Alaska, including restaurants (those that served Mexican food or were owned by people of Mexican background, or both), specialty grocery stores, Spanish-language church services, special events (Mexican Independence Day, Day of the Dead, Hispanic Heritage Month, 5 de Mayo celebrations, Government Hill School Spring Cultural Festival), and at the practices and performances of the Mexican dance and culture group Xochiquetzal-Tiqun. I collected pamphlets, newspaper stories, posters, and other forms of information at these events. As well, some of my research contacts were interested in practicing and improving their English-language abilities and I coordinated weekly lessons focused on conversational English for Spanish-speakers, with a theme and activity to guide the learning and conversation.

I interviewed community leaders in Anchorage, including Ana Gutiérrez-Scholl and Ana Del Real who co-direct Xochiquetzal-Tiqun, the president of the Acuitzio Migrant Club in Alaska, the Mexican Consul in Anchorage, Javier Abud Osuna, Daniel Esparza, community organizer and host of Latinos in Alaska, as well as a Spanish teacher, a lawyer with the Alaska Immigration Justice Project, a staff member with Catholic Social Services who works in refugee resettlement in Anchorage, a bilingual mortgage broker, a city councilor, and a staff member at Telemundo Alaska. These interviews focused more on specific organizations relating to the Mexican experience in Alaska. In total, throughout the course of my fieldwork in both Acuitzio and Anchorage, I interviewed 55 people in both English and Spanish. I also gained permission from 13 contacts that I interviewed during my MA thesis research in 2005 to re-analyze their
interviews. Information on citizenship, time spent in Alaska, age, marital status, family size, occupation, and education of all interviewees from Acuitzio is presented in Appendix D.

Finally, I conducted archival research at the United States National Archives – Alaska Pacific Region, located in downtown Anchorage. I reviewed naturalization documents and court cases from 1900-1960 for bureaucratic traces of Mexicans in Alaska before 1950. I also hired a research assistant to review and collect information from naturalization documents and mining company employment records from the same time period at the Alaska State Archives in Juneau, Alaska.

Throughout my time in Anchorage in 2011-2012, I was a visiting scholar at the Institute for Social and Economic Research (ISER) sponsored by Dr. Marie Lowe. At ISER I had the opportunity to interact with Alaskan academics and policy researchers, attend colloquia about social and economic policy in Alaska, and present the initial findings of my research.

There are a number of short research trips that also inform this research, but that fall outside of the period of dissertation fieldwork in 2011-2012. I visited Anchorage in August 2010 to interview Maria Elena Ball and Bart Roberts about the “Mexico in Alaska” postcards I analyze in Chapter 6. The postcards were exhibited and discussed at the Liu Institute at the University of British Columbia in April 2011. I visited Winnipeg in March 2011 to gather information from Dr. Raymond Wiest about his long-term research in Acuitzio (1966-2006). Finally, after interviewing Gonzalo Calderón by telephone in Anchorage in 2011, I visited him and his family in Long Beach, California in November 2012 to learn more about his adventures in Alaska.

Interviews were conducted in Spanish, English, or both, depending on the preference of the interviewee. Fieldnotes were written in English, with some Spanish phrases. During analysis,
interviews were transcribed in their original language, and if necessary, translated during chapter revisions. All errors of transcription and translation are therefore mine.

My approach to analysis has been driven by the theories of space, place and transnationality outlined in the introduction. As I reviewed my data, I looked for experiences of movement and control of movement between Mexico and Alaska, experiences of how people describe Alaska as separate but connected, and experiences of belonging or feeling out-of-place.

I analyzed life history interviews in terms of documenting the history of the connection between Mexico and Alaska in order to examine how Alaska and Mexico have historically been produced as very separate spaces even as they have been connected by the mobility of labour migrants. I also approached interviews as family histories of migration, and analyzed them in order to understand how family relationships and life events shape attachments to places of origin and new homelands (Olwig 2007).

Over the course of my graduate studies, I, too, have developed multiple spatial attachments in Alberta, Manitoba, British Columbia, as well as in Alaska and Michoacán. Since 2005 I have maintained contact with friends and research participants in both Acuitzio and Anchorage by telephone, text message, social media, and mail, and have visited both Acuitzio and Anchorage on multiple occasions. I also travel back and forth between Mexico, Alaska, and wherever I live the rest of the time. Friends in both Acuitzio and Anchorage always ask me “When are you coming back, Sarita?” and the answer is always “ Hopefully soon.”

I also find similarities between the changing rural life I knew in Alberta and the one I was learning about in Michoacán. My family came to Canada as immigrants from Galicia (then part of the Austrian empire, now part of the nation-state of Ukraine), Ireland, and Italy, four generations ago, and I also grew up in a rural area where many people could trace their common
kinship relations, nearly the entire town participated in celebrating weddings, baptisms, and funerals, and many farms still practiced some form of subsistence agriculture. My grandmother’s first language was Ukrainian, and my father speaks it as well. We have rural accents and we celebrate special occasions with our own traditional foods, symbols, and songs. Calling myself Ukrainian in Canada references a location, history, and a set of cultural practices that are Ukrainian but were never tied to a Ukrainian nation state. When my ancestors came to Canada, being Ukrainian referenced a nation without a state, as ethnic Ukrainians had been under Polish, Russian, and Austrian rule until the Ukrainian state was created after World War 2. Ukraine was later taken over by the Soviet Union, and even today there is a war over territory between Ukraine and Russia. Calling myself Ukrainian in Canada references a kind of national identity not tied to a nation state, similar perhaps to other transnational identity formations.

Over my own lifetime, I saw small scale farmers like my parents struggle to make ends meet, taking up other jobs in larger communities to supplement income from farming. I now realize that rural life everywhere has suffered in the face of neoliberal global capitalism, worldwide urbanization, and large scale farming as both rural Alberta family farms and Mexican livestock operations struggle to turn a profit. Employment and postsecondary education opportunities are limited in small communities. Similarly, reterritorializing across socio-spatial distance is challenging, whether from Europe to Canada in the 1800s or from Mexico to Alaska in the 1950s. I realize now that how a socio-spatial connection is maintained across generations depends on family, community, and global circumstances, especially the ability to travel back and forth regularly.

Based on the data I had collected, the theoretical frameworks I had studied, and my own positionality as a white Ukrainian and Canadian academic, I began writing almost as soon as I
finished fieldwork, drafting initial chapters as I transcribed interviews and organized my data. I began writing narratives based on my fieldwork that evoked the transnational processes that I saw in everyday life in Anchorage and Acuitzio. Next, I began to structure draft chapters around narratives of mobility, of family networks, of the citizenship process, and of traveling roosters that I had crafted. Over multiple revisions, I analyzed the processes evoked by each narrative, incorporating information from the literature, supporting statements from interviews and fieldnotes, and ethnographic details. The chapters that follow are the end result of that process.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have outlined the multi-sited approach to ethnographic research that I took in the design of the fieldwork for this project and detailed the specific methods and sources of data that I draw upon throughout this dissertation. I introduced both Acuitzio and Anchorage as fieldsites, and described their populations, histories, and unique characteristics. I also described what I mean by “Mexican Alaska” and gave information about the characteristics of that spatial formation. All of this is important background information to the chapters that follow. In Chapter 3, I write about mobility between Mexico and Alaska in terms of friction. No mobility flows evenly, frictions of distance, difference, and terrain inflect human mobility across space. I draw on data from fieldnotes, interviews, and a letter that I received in the mail to analyze travel by air, across borders, and along highways.
Chapter 3: The Annual Migration of the Traveling Swallows – Friction, Distance, and Transnational Mobility

During the summer of 2011, I lived with Juana, Luis, and their children in their Acuitzio home, a two-story yellow house located about three blocks away from the plaza. Juana and the kids lived there when Luis was commuting back and forth to Alaska. Now, the whole family lives in Anchorage for most of the year, and travels to Mexico every summer. I was with them on one of those summer trips.

The walls in the kitchen and sitting area in their home in Acuitzio are decorated with framed photos from Alaska: Denali Mountain, the northern lights illuminating the Anchorage cityscape, sled dogs running the Iditarod Race, and a poster commemorating the 50th anniversary of Alaska Statehood in 2009. One day I arrived back at the house after an interview to find that a television, benches, and chairs had been moved into the patio to watch the Mexico soccer team play in the Under-17 World Cup. Juana and Luis, Juana’s parents, and two of Juana’s brothers and their families were all there to watch the game. I sat next to Luis, and he handed me a cold beer. I took a sip, and then noticed that my chair was under a bird’s nest. I moved over a little. Living in a house arranged around an open-air patio, typical of many homes in Mexico, means that birds frequently come in and out of the living area, and some build nests around the patio. Luis saw me move my chair over, and glanced up at the bird’s nest. The nest was small, made of a clay-like substance molded onto the wall just where it meets the ceiling, and birds flew frequently to and from these nests.
Luis said, gesturing towards the nest, “I don’t want to kick them out because they come from so far away.”

“Really?” I said. He went on to tell me that they are called *golondrinas*, or swallows, and they come to Mexico for the winter from as far away as Alaska. He said they come every year at the beginning of the rainy season: “They come to raise their children, and then they go.”26

“Do the same ones come back every year?” I asked.

He said, “I think one of them is the same, but who knows”.

Juana pointed out the other nests around the house. There is a nest upstairs, and another one in the back, and another over the truck, in addition to the one right over our heads. She said “other houses don’t have them because many people break their nests and kick them out, even though they use a special soil so their nests are really durable.” Luis said, “They say if a child doesn’t want to talk, you take a swallow and get it to kiss the child. With Juana, they did this with 10 swallows!” Everyone laughed, knowing that Juana is a bit of a chatterbox, while she gave her husband a sideways look and a loving swat on the arm. Juana’s mother said, “They used to say that in the old days, but who knows.” Luis said, “Sarita, there’s even a song called *Golondrinas Viajeras*, from a TV show”.

Later, I looked up the song *Golondrinas Viajeras*, or Traveling Swallows. It was performed as a duet by Lucero and Joan Sebastián for the title sequence of a telenovela called *Soy Tu Dueña*.27 This is the first part of the song, with the chorus at the end:

26 *Vienen a criar y se van.*

27 The television show is not at all about labour migration or immigration to the United States, in fact it is a soap opera that centers on the dramatic love life of a wealthy and beautiful woman from Mexico City. In that sense, the song may be read as overcoming adversity to find true love. However, the lyrics also highlight the mobility of the swallow, its crossing of borders and seas and storms over long distances looking for a place to nest, to rest.
We cross borders
And oceans
The two of us faced adversity
We challenged a thousand storms
To live
A song
We arrive with tired wings
With wings tired of flying
Over mountains, valleys, and glens
But eager
To sing

Traveling swallows
We will not rest
Longing for an illusion
But always looking for somewhere to nest 28

Like Juana and her family, many Acuitzences move regularly across the continent, from their hometown in Acuitzio del Canje, Michoacán, to their current home in Anchorage, Alaska. Like swallows, their movement transcends geopolitical borders in many ways, creating a social space that connects these two distant locales. For the swallows, we tend to call the spatial formation within which they move a “habitat.” For the migrant-immigrant, scholars have called the transnational social space produced through movement “the transnational migrant circuit” (Rouse 2002), a “transnational community” (Striffler 2007), the “articulatory migrant network” (Kearney 2004), a “transnational conjectural space” (De Genova 2005), or as involving “transborder lives” (Stephen 2007). For these migrant-immigrants, travel is essential to their way of being in the world, and the way they move about within, understand, and produce spaces through interconnection. This is traveling-as-placemaking. And that Juana and her family felt an

28 Cruzamos las fronteras /y los mares /enfrentamos los dos/la adversidad/desafiámos también mil tempestades /para poder vivir/un madrigal /llegamos con las alas ya cansadas /con las alas cansadas de volar /por montañas, por valle y cañadas /pero con muchas ganas /de cantar (CORO) Golondrinas viajeras /vamos sin descansar /añorando quimeras /pero buscando siempre donde anidar
affective connection with those golondrinas that, like them, moved back and forth across vast distances and international borders reveals how traveling has become central to their identity.

By travelling-as-placemaking, I mean to highlight both the way that places are produced through connections made with elsewheres and how mobility constitutes an important part of that placemaking process. This chapter explores the materiality of this mobility along snow-covered highways in Alaska and Canada, in airports and airplane cabins, and up steep roads into the mountains of rural Mexico. Along the way, Acuitzences encounter what Anna Tsing (2005) has called “frictions” that inflect their mobility, giving it form and meaning. These frictions can also provide traction, allowing mobility between Anchorage and Acuitzio to continue over time but in some cases also creating obstacles to mobility.

I analyze the mobilities of Acuitzences in terms of their engagement with social, geographical, and imaginative landscapes. Along the way I theorize the production of sociospatial distance between Anchorage and Acuitzio. On the one hand, distance between these two locations is socially produced. However, distance is also a fact of terrain across the 8000 kilometres between Anchorage and Acuitzio. The materiality of this distance over mountains, across rivers, through cities, along highways and between airports cannot be exhausted by how it is socially appropriated or politically controlled (Gordillo 2013). Alaska and Mexico are seen as socially distant, experienced as locations where people live very differently, within different nation-states. However, Alaska and Mexico are also geographically distant, far away from each other across the surface of the earth. Even though corridors of travel have been constructed between these two points, facilitating rapid mobility between them, Alaska and Mexico are still experienced as spatially distant from one another. These two forms of distance are entangled with one another, so that people experience distance as both social and spatial. Even in an era of
globalization, the experience of sociospatial distance remains important when considering how the people who traverse long distances perceive how mobility shapes placemaking.

This chapter is divided into three sections, each of which analyzes different forms of mobility between Anchorage and Acuitzio: air travel, border crossing, and land travel along highways. Attention to friction means attention to interaction, to the materiality of travel, the engagement between the traveler and the route and mode of travel. I analyze experiences of travel along specific routes, specifically, the Benito Juárez International Airport in Mexico City to the Los Angeles International Airport (LAX), the Alaska Highway, and the roads from Morelia to Acuitzio. These routes reorganize the landscape and the mobilities that move along them. The construction of highways and airports, likewise, significantly change experiences of a place as well as mobility to, from, and within it. Routes are pathways or corridors that make motion easier and more efficient, but they are also a structure of confinement, limiting other potential routes (Tsing 2005:6).

Studies of mobility between Mexico and the United States typically focus on the US-Mexico border region, and particularly on the vast stretches of desert that most illegal migrants cross by foot. However, the lines of mobility that connect the United States and Mexico also include ports of entry along highways (Striffler 2007), airline routes, and even ferry crossings at points on corridors that stretch all the way to Alaska. As well, the border itself and practices of boundary enforcement have been spatially dispersed to airports, checkpoints, and workplaces throughout the United States (Stephen 2007). In this chapter, I trace the mobilities of Acuitzences along corridors that extend well past the physical geography of the Mexico-US border, to include airports and highways at different locations between Acuitzio and Anchorage, some of them located in Canada.
Although transnationality depends on mobility, the intricacies of transnational mobilities are not often explored in detail. In this chapter, I contribute ethnographic analysis of mobility for Mexican-US transnationality, mobility that extends past the border region and throughout the continent on flight routes, highways, and across borders. Even when mobile Acuitzences are dual Mexico-US citizens, their mobility is not fluid or flow-like. It is inflected by moments of friction based on who is travelling, the mode of travel, and the interaction of the traveller with the terrain. I analyze the friction of distance as a major component of mobility between Acuitzio and Anchorage. Moreover, I illustrate the paradox of mobility whereby citizenship, as a process and status that intends to fix people to place and tie them to a particular nation state, facilitates mobility or even requires it as a matter of bureaucratic process. As such, for many Acuitzences, the potential to move is always there, and as I will show in later chapters, mobility is required for producing a sense of belonging in both Acuitzio and Anchorage. The back and forth trip, la vuelta, is essential for the production of a social space extending from Mexico to Alaska and for the creation of a sense of belonging based on multiple points. This, then, is travelling-as-placemaking: the production of time-space that requires repeated trips, voyages, movements, vueltas. In the pages that follow, I explore traveling-as-placemaking by air, across borders, and by road.

**Frictions of Distance**

By choosing to use the term “friction” to refer to the effects of sociospatial distance that people experience as they move between Michoacán and Alaska, I draw upon work by anthropologist Anna Tsing who has proposed this concept to study globalization. More specifically, she explains how aspirations for global connection come to life in friction which she
defines as “the grip of worldly encounter” or the awkward, unequal, unstable, creative qualities of interconnection across difference (Tsing 2005). For her, studying the “productive friction of global connections” means emphasizing the unexpected and unstable aspects of global interaction, realizing that cultures are continually co-produced in these interactions of friction. She also highlights the importance of interaction in defining movement, cultural form, and agency along pathways, when encountering barriers, and in the production of exclusions or facilitations (Tsing 2005:6). Her work is thus an ethnographic account of global interconnection and she shows how forces that are often treated as abstractions like capitalism, science, and politics depend on global connections and spread through aspirations to fulfill universal dreams and schemes. These universals can only be charged and enacted in the sticky materiality of practical encounters. Tsing’s concept of friction allows her to get at how the local and the global are continually co-produced and co-implicated in one another. In this chapter, I analyze the friction of sociospatial distance created through travels between Acuitzio and Anchorage.

Sociospatial distance shapes and guides mobilities. Perceptions of distance are always socially produced, and are always experienced as relational: one location is perceived as “distant” only in relation to another location. In fact, Alaska is often imagined as an exceptionally separate space, a wilderness land or Last Frontier located far away and physically disconnected from the rest of the United States (Willis 2010; Kollin 2001).

My research participants expressed their own experiences of distance, saying things like “we’re so far away”, or “we’ve thought about moving closer to Mexico.” Juana Bravo talked about arriving in Alaska, and feeling so far away from her family in Acuitzio: “When we arrived, my children were happy, but I felt somewhere between happy and sad. Sad because I left my family and I didn’t know when I would be able to go back there. And then, it’s so far away. So
far away.” Juana’s sister-in-law Gloria also related how hard it is to be so far away from family and that sometimes her family talks about moving closer to Mexico, “Sometimes we want to move a little closer to Mexico, to the Lower 48.” She continued explaining some of the frictions encountered when traveling to Acuitzio from Anchorage by air:

“It frustrates you, because we’re so far away and there are only one or two departures per day. From Anchorage you go to Seattle or Dallas or another airport like Houston or Los Angeles. But almost always Seattle or Salt Lake City first, and then to Mexico, to Guadalajara. But now that we fly a lot with Alaska Airlines it’s Seattle, Los Angeles and then Guadalajara. Or to Ixtapa-Zihuatenejo, Guerrero, which is a beach resort on the Pacific Ocean. It’s four hours from Acuitzio now that they’ve opened the toll highway. It’s easy, but also it’s a little complicated because you can bring fewer suitcases leaving from Ixtapa-Zihuatenejo. You can only bring one suitcase or something like that. From Guadalajara, since it isn’t the beach, you can bring two suitcases.”

First, it is worth noting that the distance involved in air travel evokes a whole constellation of towns and airports scattered along several regions of the United States and Mexico, which create multiple options for mobility. But she also explained that when there is a family emergency, such as when her parents in Mexico were very ill, this distance is felt as especially frustrating.

“Among families who are very close, if something happens, or someone passes away, at that point you are so far away and all you want to do is fly there right then. But, if it happens over Spring Break, or over Christmas or any holiday, there are no flights out of Anchorage. You cannot move as you want to. There are good things here in Alaska but we have suffered too.”

Geographical, economic, institutional, and temporal factors (such as the time of the year) make it so that Gloria cannot move as freely she wants to, potentially spatially disconnecting her from important events across the life course and creating the sense that she is, indeed, “very far” from loved ones still living in Mexico.

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29 No puedes trasladarte como tu quisieras.
Distance is also an index for difference. In Anchorage, people say they feel far away from Mexico not only spatially but also culturally. As Gloria Bravo put it: “It makes it hard because when you are so far away you become disconnected from your roots, and the nostalgia, like on the 15th of September, the fiestas in Mexico. You know, Sarita, you’ve seen how they are. Mariachis, all of that. And here you are, so far away, ay. You get nostalgic, no?”

In addition to being an index of difference, the distance between Anchorage and Acuitzio is thus also a fact of the vast terrain of the North American continent stretching between the two places. The distance made material in the actual terrain is a major consideration when talking about travel by road between Anchorage and Acuitzio, located 8,000 kilometres apart and separated by a vast expanse of desert, urban, forested, and mountainous terrain and three international borders involving Mexico, the United States, and Canada. Even if one drives every day, for 24 hours per day, the trip would take at least eight days, not including essential stops along the way for sleep, food, or fuel, or the need to slow down due to the contours of the landscape as the road traverses sharp folds or is diverted around features of the terrain. It also does not include weather, and the possibility of animals on the road, traffic, a landslide, road construction or other obstacles that one might encounter along the way. Additionally, travel by land involves stops at border crossings between the United States and Canada and the United States and Mexico.

There are limited routes available into or out of Alaska by road, air, or water, for non-cargo movements into and out of the state. By road, you may cross the border into Alaska from Yukon Territory, Canada year-round at Beaver Creek or during the summer months at the Top of the World crossing between Chicken, Alaska, and Dawson City, Yukon (Canada). You can access the “panhandle” of South Eastern Alaska along the Pacific coast at Haines or Hyder year
round from British Columbia (Canada) and at Skagway in the summertime. But from there, you cannot access the rest of the state by road. By boat, you can travel north into Alaska along the inside passage by the Alaska Marine Highway ferry system, on a cruise ship, or in your own craft. Better yet, send your car by commercial barge from the Port of Anchorage and fly from Anchorage to Seattle to pick up the car and drive to Mexico from there.30

People argue that the benefit of driving the whole way between Anchorage and Acuitzio is that you can bring more things with you. An additional benefit is that one can arrive in Mexico in a car with Alaska plates. Not only are automobiles cheaper in the United States than in Mexico, but having Alaska license plates has its own prestige. In Acuitzio, you can see license plates from all over the United States, but owners of vehicles with Alaska plates are particularly proud of their navy-blue-on-yellow plates, with the Alaska flag depicting the big dipper and north star.

There are no direct passenger flights between Alaska and any airport in Mexico, so flights are usually expensive, and always time consuming. Travel between Anchorage and Acuitzio by plane generally takes all day, since you have to stop in Seattle or Los Angeles (or both), and then arrange a ride with family or friends or take a bus or taxi from Guadalajara or Mexico City, or less preferably, Morelia. Ferries do link Whittier, Alaska to points further south, but these are expensive, and seasonal.

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30 In fact, some Acuitzences have done this.
Figure 3: Air and Road Routes Between Mexico and Anchorage, AK. Map by Paul Hackett.
More than geographical distance in terms of a Cartesian rendering of number of kilometres between points on a map, people also experience distance in terms of the time it takes to travel, the modes of travel available, as well as the cost. David Harvey (1990) uses the term of “time-space compression” to refer to how technologies of travel have compressed spatial barriers like distance. He means that the Internet or intercontinental airline travel make the world feel smaller. However, it is clear that time-space compression is not evenly experienced. Not all points on the globe are experienced as uniformly ‘close’ or ‘distant’ to one another (see also Gordillo 2014). For example, although people from Acuitzio move within a social field that links Alaska and Mexico, these two locations are still experienced as distant. Distance, then, is always social. It is possible for two locations that are distant in abstract space, as represented on a map, to be experienced as close to one another. It also depends on who is experiencing distance. New York and London, for example, which have daily flights between them, and linked markets and elite lifestyles may be experienced as close for the wealthy socialite who travels between them. On the other hand, two locations located very near to each other may be experienced as different worlds, like East Harlem and the Upper East Side (Bourgois 2003). More to the point here, that people live in the same transnational social field that extends between Acuitzio and Anchorage means that these locations are in some ways experienced as close to one another. However, they are also felt to be far away, and distant from one another.

Due to the power-geometry of mobility (Massey 1994), some social groups and things move much more easily between Alaska and Mexico than others. Among Acuitzences moving between Michoacán and Alaska, immigration status as defined by US Citizenship and Immigration, social class and standing in the community in both Anchorage and Acuitzio, and gender and position in a multigenerational family network are all factors that can smooth out the
trip, making it easier to move. Moreover, some people travel faster than others along more direct corridors. Workers in northern oil fields or coastal salmon canneries arrive and travel through the state on charter flights, and thus move more quickly. Alaska’s ports are also very busy, shipping consumer goods into Anchorage and beyond. Semi trucks regularly drive the Alaska Highway bringing cargo into the state. Wal-Mart for instance supplies its eight Alaska stores by truck, and when mudslides washed out portions of the Alaska Highway in spring 2012, Wal-Mart stores in Anchorage were out of produce. As well, Anchorage-area grocery stores receive shipments at the Port of Anchorage on a particular day of the week, and stores may run low on particular items, say apples, until the following week. All of this is to say that frictions between Alaska and ‘Outside’ are not evenly produced nor experienced for Acuitzences who move between Mexico and Alaska or for other kinds of mobile agents that move into or through Alaska.

The production of sociospatial distance is therefore key to understanding mobility between Anchorage and Acuitzio. Any moving object will always encounter friction from the surface it interacts with, and over long distances it may slow or stop. As well, the social status of what is moving and the technology available to it influences how smooth the trip will be. The point is, there is no totally smooth space. Striations constantly cross cut the smoothness and although corridors might facilitate movement, and minimize friction, this productive friction-in-movement still exists. In fact, friction is necessary for mobility. You need the grip of encounter to move and gain traction to keep moving. Friction also inflects the speed of travel, the frequency of trips, the corridors by which people move, and the affective experience of the trip.
Figure 4: Air Crossroads of the World, Downtown Anchorage, 2012. Photo by Author.
Air Crossroads of the World

On Fourth Avenue in downtown Anchorage, amidst hot dog vendors and souvenir stores, is the Old Log Cabin, one of Anchorage’s oldest buildings, now converted into a visitor’s centre. In front stands a post with arrows pointing in all directions, noting distances to cities like New York, London, San Francisco, and Seattle, in addition to points within Alaska like Nome, Fairbanks, and Valdez. On the top, a sign proclaims: “Anchorage: Air Crossroads of the World.” Indeed, air travel has been essential for traveling to and within Alaska, opening up the state to new residents, workers, and capital. Located within or very near to the city are Ted Stevens International Airport, Lake Hood float plane airport, Elmendorf Air Force Base, as well as two smaller airfields: Merrill Field and Campbell Airstrip. By air, Anchorage is roughly equidistant from Europe and Asia, making it a strategic location for international air commerce. In fact, its airport is one of the busiest in the world, not from commercial passenger flights, but due to freight traffic to and from Asia. The globe has a smaller circumference near the poles, so the distance of a flight from Asia to Alaska is much less then a flight that travels around the wider parts of the globe. Consumer goods are routed from points in Asia, through Ted Stevens International Airport in Anchorage, then to points in the Lower 48 states. Fed Ex and UPS each have major warehouses at the Anchorage airport. When the weather is good, the sky buzzes with smaller airplanes that service vast parts of Alaska which are not easily accessible by road or water, locations that can be reached faster by air.

Air travel is certainly the main means by which Acuitzenes move back and forth between Alaska and Mexico. Air travel is also the travel technology most associated with time-

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31 In fact, in 2013, Airports Council International reported that Ted Stevens International Airport in Anchorage was the 6th busiest airport in the world for cargo traffic. It did not rank in the top 30 for passenger traffic (ACI 2014).
space compression and the acceleration of the global flow of people, things, and ideas (Harvey 1990). In the 1990s, globalization theory focused on flows and frictionless motion (e.g. Appadurai 1990, 1996a, 1996b) and implied that everyone would have the freedom to travel everywhere (Tsing 2005:5). Stuart Rockefeller critiques this use of the idea of “flow” in anthropology, pointing out that, as an image of agentless movement with no starting point and no telos, it can elide agency and privilege the large scale over the small. For him, the most distinctive thing about the keyword is the way it tends to privilege a form of unbroken, agentless movement and implies a disconnection from place or movement (Rockefeller 2011). It takes the reproduction of fixed space like airports, roads, or train tracks to “annihilate space through time” (Harvey 1990). So, it is possible to move faster, but only along particular corridors (Virilio 2006). Travel also involves more than just the infrastructure of travel: “How we run depends on what shoes we have to run in” (Tsing 2005:5). Security lineups, insufficient funds, late planes, and informal lines of segregation all slow down movement and produce a sense of distance; highways, airline routes, and railway tracks expedite travel but confine trajectories within fixed corridors. People may be coerced to move, take up mobility out of necessity, or are brought along with their parents. In other words, even when travelling by air, there is no agentless flow, and in this section I analyze how this is the case involving people who fly back and forth between Mexico and Alaska.

In August of 2011, I traveled with the Bravo family from Acuitzio to Morelia by car, from Morelia to Mexico City by bus, and from Mexico City to Los Angeles and Seattle by airplane. In the remainder of this section, I reconstruct our trip from my field notes to illustrate that even air travel, the smoothest and fastest form of travel available today, is inflected with
friction. Along our way, my travel companions and I experienced stops and starts, we moved faster and slower, and at times our mobility stopped completely.

**From Morelia to Mexico City to Los Angeles to Seattle**

On the night before Juana, Vero, Sophia, and I left Mexico, we were trying to figure out how to get to the airport in Mexico City. We had already traveled from Acuitzio to Morelia with Juana’s brother by car, from Morelia to Mexico City by bus, and then to Juana’s sister’s place with another brother in his van. Juana and her sisters were debating what we should do in terms of getting to the airport. Should we take two taxis? No, it’s not safe to split up, they said. An airport van? Maybe we should find someone to take us, the neighbor perhaps? Juana went to ask him and he said he’d be happy to. But he was drinking, so he might forget by tomorrow afternoon. He asked Juana where we were going, and when she said “Alaska,” he asked her to bring him “a penguin.” “But there aren’t any penguins there,” Juana said, laughing.

“OK, a bear skin rug, then,” said the neighbor.

Everyone laughed then and each time the story was re-told for those who missed it.

In the morning, Juana was re-packing her suitcase, arranging clothing, food, and souvenirs so that each bag would not be too heavy, and so that fragile items like bread wouldn’t get squished. She called her sister who lives across the street to ask if she knew anyone who could give us a ride. She didn’t, so Juana called the airport taxi and since it was less costly than she’d expected, she made a reservation for it to pick us up at 1pm. The van would be safe and would have enough space for the four of us and our suitcases. Concerns about crime and security in a huge city such as Mexico City were certainly factors shaping their decisions on how to move, and by what means.
With that part of our journey planned, Juana, her sister, and I went to get tamales from a street vendor nearby. “You don’t see this over there, do you?” Juana’s sister said, as she kicked a piece of garbage, “There’s garbage and dog shit everywhere here.” Juana explained how “there,” often used as shorthand for “Alaska”, dogs go out only with their owners and their owners pick up after them. Moreover, dogs are not allowed alone in the street. Her sister marveled at how clean Anchorage must be. However, it’s all about perception. I know that if Juana’s sister visited Anchorage as the snow is melting she would see plenty of garbage. Meanwhile, in Mexico, I saw most people sweep the sidewalks in front of their home and business every morning. Already in our preparations to leave for the airport there is a sense of the difference between “here” and “there,” the bumps and irregularities of movement, the frictions that condition and direct our movement.

We purchased the tamales, prepared Oaxacan style, with the corn dough and filling wrapped in banana leaves instead of the cornhusks usually used to make tamales in Acuitzio. Juana said, “Sarita, we will make these in Alaska!”32 After returning to the house and eating the tamales, washing them down with glasses of Coca-Cola, we re-packed our suitcases, and Juana’s sister brought a scale so we could weigh them. Verónica and Sophia wanted to go on a last-minute shopping trip to a nearby market to buy some candy to take back to Alaska. Their cousins took us to buy candy ice cream cones filled with marshmallows, chile flavoured cigarette-shaped candies, and some gummy sticks.

The taxi van that Juana booked rolled up outside the house just after 1pm. Hugs all around, kisses on cheeks, promises to keep in touch, waves goodbye from the windows of the

32 Sure enough, we did get together to make Oaxacan style tamales shortly after my arrival in Anchorage. As we made them, we reminisced about our time in Mexico City, and the tamales we bought there.
van. We were all pretty quiet in the taxi. We drove past streets lined with low concrete houses, painted in a rainbow of colours. Grocery stores, soccer fields, and auto repair shops moved by the windows. As we got closer to the airport, we exited onto the freeway, and sped up to keep pace with the traffic around us. Verónica and Sophia said they don’t like coming to Mexico City, there’s too much traffic, everything looks the same, and it stinks in the way only a huge city can. They prefer smaller towns and cities like Acuitzio and Anchorage, valuing a slower pace of life and the natural beauty that both towns share.

We slowed down as we exited the freeway and turned onto the road that accesses the passenger terminals at Benito Juárez International Airport. The taxi driver broke the silence to ask what airline we were traveling with. “Alaska Airlines,” Juana said. The taxi stopped and Juana handed him the money as the rest of us got out of the van. A valet came to ask if he could carry our luggage, and Juana told him to go ahead, and then leaned over to say, “I have too many suitcases!” Indeed, between the four of us we were traveling with seven large suitcases, plus carry on bags. Verónica and Sophia had even left clothes behind in Acuitzio, either giving them away to friends and family, or leaving them hung in the closet in their house to wear when they return the following summer.

In the lineup at the baggage counter, Juana said she felt nervous. She said her husband, Luis, usually handles all the passports and stuff when they travel. But, like his daughters, Luis doesn’t like going to Mexico City, he prefers to fly into Guadalajara or Ixtapa. Juana likes traveling through Mexico City because her family lives there. While we waited in line to check

33 This is a major international airport, located in Mexico City. Originally built as a military airport in 1928, it was converted into a commercial airport in 1939 (AICM 2013). In 2006, it was renamed after Benito Juárez, who served as president of Mexico for five terms from 1852 to 1872.
in, Vero and Sophia put luggage tags on the checked luggage and carry-on bags. After checking in, we lined up for the security review, and went through a procedure familiar to anyone who travels by air: place your bag on the conveyor belt to be scanned, make sure your computer is out if you have one, pass your boarding pass and passport to the officer, wait to be waved through the metal detection device, wait anxiously as another officer reviews the image of the inside of your suitcase. Since this was not the United States, we didn’t have to remove our shoes. This was also less arduous than the process at some smaller airports in Mexico, where passengers line up at the gate to have their luggage reviewed in person. When traveling through the United States, the Transportation and Security Agency may review your luggage without your presence, leaving a notification inside so that you are aware that a Transportation Security Administration (TSA) agent reviewed your bag.

Once in the waiting area, we found a place to sit and Juana propped her legs up on her wheeled carry-on suitcase. She told me earlier that she purchased that suitcase in particular because she could put her feet up like that. Juana said she felt happy to be going to Alaska with her kids, and excited to see her husband. Even though she felt sad to be leaving her family, she said that being away makes her want to come back to Anchorage even more.

We decided to get something to eat because the girls don’t like to eat on airplanes – they feel kind of airsick in flight. Juana and I had ham and cheese croissant sandwiches and bottled water, Sophia had a cheeseburger with chips and an apple soda and Verónica had *flautas*, rolled up tortillas filled with meat and then deep fried. She told me later she got flautas because she loves flautas and this would be her last meal in Mexico. Unfortunately they were disappointing, and very expensive, compared to the ones you can buy in Acuitzio or Morelia. After we ate
Juana and I walked around the airport, talking. I commented on how time passes so quickly in an airport, and Juana agreed. It does: the three hours passed rapidly.

When the announcement was made to board our plane we waited until our rows were called. In the meantime Juana helped some of the other people in the waiting room who approached her for help deciphering their tickets. Some of them seemed like they had not traveled by air before, and perhaps some could not read, but Juana spoke with authority. Indeed, she is an experienced traveler who makes this trip every year. It is possible to take for granted the knowledge required to travel back and forth – moving to and through airports, navigating customs and immigration, booking flights, securing the appropriate paperwork, all of this requires knowledge that is typically gained through practice. Migrant Acuitzences have been socialized to be mobile and are well acquainted with the practice of air travel, but this is not the case for everyone. Again, differences between people can produce friction along the way.

They called our rows and we got up to stand in line. Juana said “And we don’t have to get vaccinations!” We all smiled with relief. Earlier in the summer, Mexican health authorities had been vaccinating everyone leaving Mexico because of an outbreak of the H1N1 flu virus, creating yet another (if brief) interruption in global patterns of mobility. Although the vaccination was not a requirement for travel, we did not realize this at the time. This is an example of another friction, the management of border crossing, which extends to biomedical concerns. We didn’t have to get vaccinated, but medical examinations and vaccinations are required for US permanent residency applications, and for visa applications in many countries around the world. Being sick could potentially stop movement between nation states.

We boarded the aircraft and located our seats. The flight attendants handed out the customs and immigration cards early on. Juana filled it out for her family and then read the in
flight magazine. The girls brought stuffed animals and blankets. We were served tamales and churros in-flight and I noticed that it was a very sociable flight. I wrote fieldnotes as the sound of voices in Spanish and English chattered around me, above the voice of the engines. My travel companions fell asleep and I changed my watch to Pacific Time, two hours earlier.

Doing research while traveling has its own rhythm. At times you are moving through the airport, waiting in line, getting your luggage, finding your gate. Other times, the airplane is moving through the air while you are stationary, buckled into an airplane seat. For that reason, my notes about this trip were mostly taken in-flight. The logistics of arranging travel with research participants beforehand was also challenging, confirming their itineraries by telephone and then trying to book flights on the same carrier, at the same time. I was traveling on a Canadian passport, meaning I traveled separately from them through the US Customs and Border Protection checkpoint within LAX. However, experiencing mobility provides important insights into the experience of the trip. The common experience of mobility between the United States and Mexico is something that Striffler (2007) says is essential for building transnational community. Indeed, mobility is essential for transnational life. Transnational lives and communities are constructed and sustained, not only at the end points or at the ‘nodes’ in the networks, but along the lines, routes, trajectories, or corridors that connect them. The shared experience of travel along these routes is important for a sense of belonging in transnational space.

We landed in LA about a half an hour early, disembarked, and entered the terminal. LAX is a hub for many national and international airlines, including Alaska Airlines. The hub system of air travel organizes air traffic connections so that all routes are connected to hubs like spokes
on a wheel. Alaska Airlines has hubs in Anchorage, Seattle, Portland, and Los Angeles, which means that anyone flying to other destinations will need to switch airplanes at the hub.

Verónica turned on her US phone to check text messages and Facebook updates, meaning that she quickly activated the networks of connectivity grounded in US territory. She had been using a different phone in Mexico, one with an Acuitzio number. She takes that Mexican cell phone back to Anchorage so that friends and family can text her from Mexico without paying extra. To get extra cell phone credit while in Anchorage, she asks an aunt in Acuitzio to buy it, and then pays her back later. Some people leave money with a friend or family member when they head back to the United States to buy cell credit on their behalf while they are away. This is one way that people can easily stay connected to close friends and family in Acuitzio without those in Acuitzio having to pay the long distance charges. It is very common to have multiple phones. In fact, by the end of my fieldwork, I had three cellphones – a Canadian one with a Vancouver number, a Mexican one with an Acuitzio number, and a United States one with an Anchorage number.

We passed through the United States Customs and Border Protection review checkpoint in the airport. Juana, Verónica, and Sophia, who hold both Mexican and US citizenship, and who were traveling with US passports went through the line for citizens while I, a Canadian citizen traveling with a Canadian passport, went through the line for visitors, or “aliens” in the terminology of US Homeland Security. Afterwards, I asked Juana if they question her in English or in Spanish. She said, “Always in English.” I later asked her if they travel with Mexican or US passports, and she said that they always travel with the US ones, “it’s easier that way.” The US

34 My colleague Erin Jonasson outlined some other strategies for using and maximizing cell phone credit among Acuitzences in her MA thesis (Jonasson 2008).
Department of Homeland Security oversees entry of people and goods to the national spatial formation of the United States, and this is a point of geopolitical friction that can bring many non-US citizens to a stop entirely if they are determined not to have appropriate paperwork or reasons to enter the United States.\textsuperscript{35} Other common reasons for being denied entry include: having a communicable disease, having a criminal record for “crimes of moral turpitude,” for possession or trafficking in a controlled substance, any involvement with terrorism or terrorist organizations, for human trafficking, if you have been involved with money laundering, if you have limited financial resources, or if you have been previously deported or previously overstayed a period of admission to the US (US Department of State n.d.).

We met up after being admitted to the United States of America and I noticed that Juana seemed both stressed and rushed as we hurried to the baggage carousel. All of the suitcases came pretty quickly except one. Meanwhile, Verónica was stacking the suitcases on a cart, placing a particularly large one on the bottom. Her mom said, “No hija, there’s bread in that one”. Many people travel with food from Mexico to Alaska, and as I have described elsewhere, traveling with food is a spatial practice that helps people get used to life in transnational space (Komarnisky 2009). There are many regulations around traveling with food to the United States, but Aciuizences in general are aware of what they are allowed to travel with and what they are not\textsuperscript{36}. One of Juana’s very large suitcases was stuffed with not only bread, but with two large

\textsuperscript{35} In fact, this happened to me on my very first trip to Alaska to start fieldwork for my MA thesis. In Vancouver I was turned back because I did not have a round trip flight booked. I flew to Anchorage without incident the following week, after booking a round trip ticket and collecting paperwork from my university and bank to show that I had plans to return to Canada, and the money to fund my stay in the United States.

\textsuperscript{36} I analyze this further in Chapter 5.
blocks of cheese wrapped in foil, plastic bags full of rich dark mole paste,\textsuperscript{37} pinole,\textsuperscript{38} candy of all kinds, crispy churros,\textsuperscript{39} chamoy chile sauce, handicrafts to decorate their home with, and souvenirs for friends in Alaska. Verónica rolled her eyes and moved it. Juana watched anxiously for the last bag. After a few minutes, she spotted it as it rolled down the chute and onto the conveyor belt and she immediately ran to grab it off of the carousel.

After collecting our bags, we left the international terminal and transferred to terminal 3. We had a bit of time for a restroom break and some phone calls. Vero called her older brother, Toño, and chatted briefly with him before passing the phone to Juana. He told her that he was cleaning the house and she laughed at this. Her son Toño and husband Luis had gone back from Mexico to Anchorage about two weeks earlier. Her husband had to get back to work, and her son went with him because his ticket was purchased as a companion fare to Luis’s ticket. The Bravo family and many other families that I met in Alaska usually fly Alaska Airlines, and many carry Alaska Airlines credit cards which allow you to collect points to redeem for travel. As well, every year cardholders receive a companion fare ticket. For the Bravos, this means purchasing only three full price tickets for all five family members. This makes moving back and forth much cheaper and easier for them.

We stopped an airport employee to ask how to get to our terminal. “What airline?” he asked, “Where are you going?”

Juana said, “Alaska Airlines, to Anchorage.”

\textsuperscript{37} In Acuitzio, the usual type of mole people eat and buy is mole poblano which although the sauce is famously from Puebla, many people in Acuitzio make it to sell, and many Acuitzences buy mole sauce in town to take to Alaska with them.

\textsuperscript{38} Pinole is toasted and lightly sweetened corn meal. It can be made into a thick beverage, similar to atole, or eaten like porridge.

\textsuperscript{39} Juana bought bags of small crispy churros, not the large soft ones that the reader might be more familiar with.
The man said, “Oh, Anchorage – you gonna see Sarah Palin there?”

Juana replied, “No, I never see her.”

They both laughed. He gave us directions and as we walked away Juana turned to me and said, “No one likes Sarah Palin, do they?” “No, it doesn’t seem like it,” I replied. This was two years after Sarah Palin’s Vice-Presidential campaign, and she was well on her way to being discredited as a politician after being impersonated by Tina Fey on Saturday Night Live and making multiple controversial comments in interviews. Nevertheless, her image remains firmly tied to that of Alaska and she remains one of the most famous Alaskans today.

My flight to Vancouver was due to depart from gate 31, and theirs to Anchorage from gate 30, with a difference of about five minutes between the departure times listed on our boarding passes. Initially we thought our gates would be side by side, but they weren’t. I said, “Well, I’ll walk to your gate and then say goodbye”.

Juana said “Ay, how I dislike goodbyes. No one likes them, do they?” We walked to their gate and waited and talked.

Finally, it was time to board. I hugged Juana, then Verónica, then Sophia. Juana said “Take care of yourself, we’ll see you in Alaska soon.” I walked to my gate, boarded, and settled into my window seat where I watched their airplane slowly back away and depart. They arrived in Anchorage late that night and I knew they had made it home when I saw Vero update her Facebook status.

In my description of this trip, subtle forms of friction inflected our mobility, even if nothing serious interrupted our travel plans. The small trip to the airport requires a lot of logistics to work out, and the trip is sometimes uneven. There is tension between fast and slow forms of speed and mobility, smooth and rough spaces, “here” and “there” throughout the trip. Frictions
and obstacles are produced and need to be navigated at multiple levels throughout our trip, particularly when nation-states manage movement across borders, but also involving individual characteristics and skills required to move (for instance, the knowledge of how to navigate security at the airport). At whatever level they are produced, friction affects the speed of movement, frequency of trips, and the corridors of travel for Acuitzences who move between Alaska and Michoacán.

Rather than taking for granted the experience of mobility between distant locations, in this section I explored the strategies, social implications, and factors conditioning mobility by airplane between Alaska and Mexico (Cresswell 2006; Ingold 2007). A growing number of scholars have analyzed the importance of movement in the production of space. Doreen Massey for instance, envisions space as the product of interrelations constituted through interactions, of the simultaneity of “stories so far,” of the meeting up of trajectories (Massey 2005). Deleuze and Guattari have also examined patterns of mobility and their relationship with power through the concepts of deterritorialization and reterritorialization, two inseparable moments marked by deterritorializing movement by non-state actors along what they call “lines of flight” and the codifying, stratifying, territorializing, organizing process of reterritorialization conducted by states (Deleuze and Guattari 1987:4). Movements of deterritorialization are always entangled with processes of reterritorialization, and migrations across international borders are one of the processes of mobility whose flow the state tries to code and regulate, but not always successfully (Gordillo 2011). While my travel companions were moving across vast distanced legally and therefore without challenging the state territorializations, they were at the same time deterritorializing the alleged boundedness of Mexican bodies, food patterns, and objects within the spatiality of the Mexican territory.
Mobility between Mexico and Alaska is thus a sticky counterpoint to the notion of aspatial flows evoked by authors like Appadurai (1990). Following Henri Lefebvre (1991), Doreen Massey (2005), and Anna Tsing (2005), I conceptualize mobility as productive, material, embodied, grounded, and inflected by friction. That is, people do not simply move across space, they engage with the landscape, the weather, and the airplane or automobile as they go. In the next sections, I analyze how this is the case when people move across international borders, and beyond.
Figure 5: Canada-USA Border Along the Alaska Highway, 2011. Photo by Author.
Crossing Borders

Most academic analyses of the materiality of mobility between the United States and Mexico focus on the US-Mexico border itself, where people cross at one of 45 designated checkpoints or surreptitiously along the over 3,000 kilometre line. The border traverses a variety of terrains, from dense urban areas to inhospitable deserts. Today, over 46% of US borderland environments are federally owned or managed lands, vast wilderness areas which are the legacy of historico-geographical processes of dispossession and protected area legislation (Sundberg 2011:324). From the Gulf of Mexico, the border follows the course of the Rio Grande to the crossing between El Paso, Texas, and Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua before heading west to cross vast tracts of the Sonoran and Chihuahuan and Colorado deserts to another urban crossing between San Diego, California, and Tijuana, Baja California, finally reaching the Pacific Ocean. Much popular and academic coverage of border mobility focuses on undocumented crossings made by Mexican migrants, many assisted by coyotes, the middlemen who are paid to guide potential crossers through the border region on foot across mountains and deserts to finally arrive in the United States (Hellman 2002). Jason De Léon (2012) writes about the technologies and objects used during undocumented border crossings between Sonora, Mexico, and Southern Arizona.40 He analyzes ordinary items like clothes, shoes, and water bottles that have been shaped by the institutionalized border enforcement practices of the U.S. government, the human smuggling industry in Mexico, and by undocumented migrants into a unique set of tools used for

40 Due to the construction of border fences in areas along the border where observed “illegal” crossings were highest, migrants have been forced to travel through corridors that run through more remote areas (Sündberg and Kaserman 2007). In Arizona, for instance, migrants must walk more than 80 kilometres through the Sonoran desert before arriving at the nearest road on the United States-side of the border, a journey that has cost thousands of people their lives.
both subterfuge and survival (De Léon 2012:478). Moreover, environmental features of the landscape, like deserts, rivers, plants, and animals can inflect and disrupt daily practices of boundary enforcement and crossing (Sundberg 2011).

The trajectories of border-crossers extend well past the border region itself, however, and across the continent people use technology and engage with the terrain as they move between the United States and Mexico. Acuitzio and Anchorage are separated, when travelling by road, by the US-Mexico border and two Canada-USA borders, meaning that the experience of land travel involves three different border crossings. By air, in contrast, you would experience only one border crossing: the Mexico-USA border, physically relocated away from the actual geopolitical border to whichever airport you land in when leaving one country and entering another. This means that the experience of driving south from Alaska involves more friction points controlled by border officials, so that some people or things may not move as easily as others, and may not be able to move in certain ways at all.

Gupta and Ferguson (1992) argue that representations of space in dominant discourses and also in the social science are dependent on images of break, rupture, and disjunction so that each society, nation, or culture is presented as occupying its own discontinuous space (Gupta and Ferguson 1992:6). Nation-states are also formed based on the idea of territorial separation and boundedness (Anderson 1991; Gupta and Ferguson 1992) and a “sedentarist metaphysics” where “people are often thought of, and think of themselves, as being rooted in place and as deriving their identity from that rootedness” (Malkki 1992). The back and forth movements of many Acuitzences erode this sedentarist metaphysics and emphasize the contingent, entangled, interconnected, and co-produced nature of spaces, undermining the apparent stability, boundedness, and timelessness (Gordillo 2004; Gupta and Ferguson 1992; Massey 2005;
Rockefeller 2010; Tsing 2005). But as policed spaces, borders split and maintain territorial imperatives through nation-state politics while at the same time regulating, constricting, and allowing for the movement of people and things across them (Alvarez 1995). The border thus, as part of the terrain between the United States and Mexico, has the capacity to inflect mobility with significant geopolitical friction, and even to stop mobility altogether. How that friction is experienced depends on positionality along lines of gender, class and age, positions that determine what resources and technologies the person traveling can access, possibly even including luck.

**Lemons for Good Luck: Citizenship and Mobility**

While interacting with Claudia in Anchorage, she told me about the first time they came to Alaska. The first time, we were informally chatting at her house, and the second during a tape-recorded interview in my apartment in Anchorage. Her family has made a complicated series of moves between Mexico and Alaska, beginning with her grandfather’s trip north to work on the Alaska pipeline in 1966 through 1977, followed by her father’s move north in 1987 to pay off his debts. After a few years of living apart, Claudia’s mother wanted to reunite the family in Alaska, so she and her four children crossed the Mexico-USA border as undocumented immigrants in 1985. Claudia was about four years old, but she remembers the day they crossed the border and traveled to Alaska for the first time, crossing illegally and without papers, but with the assistance of her grandfather’s friend, who he met while he was working in Alaska in the 1970s and 1980s.

“I remember that we traveled by bus from Acuitzio to Tijuana, which took forever because the bus was stopping in every little town. It was not like a direct bus. I remember that there were lot of people, some of them had seats and some of them were just standing in the
middle so the bus was full at all times. And then I remember, my grandpa’s friend, she’s from Nicaragua and she went to Tijuana with her sister and she crossed the border with us.”

Claudia and her family crossed the border in two cars. Claudia was in the back seat with her aunt who was so nervous that she put lemons under her arms for luck, “for protection or whatever she was calling it.” Her aunt needed protection because they were all crossing the border “illegally,” without US visas or Green Cards or documentation of any kind. Their immigration status, and the fact of the border slowed and could have stopped Claudia and her family in Tijuana. Claudia’s aunt was hoping that the lemons under their arms would help them cross the border without incident, and it seems to have worked. The friend from Nicaragua who helped them cross was a US citizen, and Claudia believes that this helped even more than the lemons. Claudia was a small child at this time, however, and she doesn’t recall much about actually crossing the border herself.

The undocumented status of Claudia and her family also affected their speed of movement. They did not fly directly to Anchorage; they took a bus to the border, and crossed by car with a family friend. That is, they were required to move through longer, slower, and more roundabout corridors, and in addition, the experience of the border crossing required both luck and protection, at least for Claudia’s aunt. Their mobility, although slower than flying directly, extended past the border in both directions, on buses and airplanes that expanded northwards from Acuitzio.

Salvador’s trip from Mexico to Alaska was even slower because of more roundabout corridors. I first interviewed him in Acuitzio in 2005, and we met again in Anchorage when I lived there for fieldwork in 2011 and 2012. At our first meeting, he was working in Anchorage, while his wife and young son lived in Acuitzio. By 2011, they had added a daughter to their
family and they were all living in Anchorage together. However, his initial trip there was long and fraught as he crossed the US-Mexico border illegally, walking and running through the desert to eventually arrive in California. He described the crossing as follows:

“It’s good to believe in luck, and I was lucky when I crossed. We crossed at Tijuana through the hills, and it took about 5 or 6 hours. At dawn. So this guy, I don’t remember his name because, or well he said he wouldn’t give us his name, right? So this guy told us how we were going to cross and he told us that we were going to walk for a really long time but that we should have faith in him, that we’d cross, and nothing bad would happen to us. And we were lucky that nothing happened while we were walking in the hills. There was another group of about 60 or 70 people in another group. In our case, it was just two of us, with the man. That bigger group, they were people just like us. Illegals, I mean. And well, I guess they had trouble, and maybe that helped us. Like they were a bigger group so immigration was more focused on them than us. Anyway, in the end everything turned out OK. We were lucky. I believe in luck. And luck because the other group of people ran but we were calm, we were relaxed, and we made it. There are people that run from one side to the other but this man said just go across calmly and nothing will happen.”

After that, Salvador worked in California from 1988 until 1993 when his brother invited him to come and work in Alaska. By this time he had attained legal status as a resident of the United States (as a Green Card holder) and could move more freely.

This leads me to another aspect of the impact of friction on mobility – frequency. Frictions of movement lead to differential speed and use of different corridors of travel, but they also affect the frequency of travel. For instance, as I described earlier, for an undocumented migrant, the friction of the border makes movement slow, and travel must be by alternate corridors, especially across the border zone itself. This increased friction means that many people decrease the number of trips they take. Some people that I interviewed in Anchorage who are undocumented are not able to return home. They perceive the risk of travel back and forth across the border to be too great. The distance also limits the ability to travel regularly home, since the trip back is long and expensive. So, as migrants gain legal status and capital in Alaska,
they are able to overcome the friction of distance to travel back and forth more often than previously. Indeed, among the Acuitzences I worked with in Anchorage, there is a pattern of increasing trips home. With more time spent living in Alaska, people are able to travel back to Acuitzio more often. With more time spent living transnationally, people are able to develop the skills, statuses, and capital that enable them to travel more freely.\textsuperscript{41} Citizenship thus makes it possible to move more freely as it also ties people to a particular nation state.\textsuperscript{42}

My discussion with Octavio exemplifies these dynamics. Octavio now owns a restaurant in Anchorage, and has dual citizenship. However, he came to Alaska without papers and told me about how US immigration came after him more than once in Anchorage. “Before you got your Green Card, did you go back and forth between Acuitzio and Alaska many times?”

“No, not many times. Because I couldn’t leave the country. I traveled about two or three times with the same passport but every time I traveled I had to travel without documents. So when I traveled, I traveled by plane. Like nowadays they won’t let someone get on if they don’t have documents. But back then there weren’t the same problems like there are now. If I arrived in Los Angeles, for example, they would ask me where I was going, and I would tell them I was going to Mexico. Someone who didn’t have a passport could show an ID proving they were mexicano and they would let them go.”

Octavio points out that getting back into Mexico wasn’t easy either: When I arrived in Mexico City, I always had to save some money to give them to let me into Mexico.” Octavio means a bribe, explaining that because he didn’t have any documents and until he paid them, the border guards would tell him to go and talk to Mexican immigration since he couldn’t prove where he was from. “I didn’t want to travel very often because it was a lot of trouble to travel. It

\textsuperscript{41} I will elaborate further on the concept of traction in Chapter 4, and on how people acostumbrarse or “get used to” transnational life this way in Chapter 5.

\textsuperscript{42} Of course, it depends on where you have citizenship and where you are traveling. Citizenship from the United States, for example, means that you can travel without a visa to many countries around the world. However, to visit other countries (like Russia for example), someone traveling on a US passport would need a visa.
was better to stay here in Anchorage, *ya*. Because every time I went, it was just all immigration problems.”

I asked Octavio about how he felt once he got a Green Card: “And so it was a total difference once you got your papers?”

Octavio replied, “Yes, it ended the feeling that when you go around they’re going to surprise you, and take you away.” When he didn’t have papers, Octavio described carrying that feeling with him all the time, and even said he had trouble sleeping. He continued, “finally the day arrived where, I felt like, free. *Estuviera libre.* Well it’s exactly that, free. After that, I came back to Alaska and I started to work again because I could work and I wouldn’t have any problems.”

However, getting permanent residency also involves a lot of travel. Citizenship *requires* mobility as a matter of process. For example, Green Card or Permanent Residency applicants living in the United States need to exit the United States and re-enter as US residents. Many Acuitzences talked about having to travel to facilitate paperwork for their Permanent Residency applications. In 2012, I met with Salvador and Inés at their townhouse apartment in South Anchorage for dinner and an interview. We had not spoken in depth since the last time I was in Acuitzio in 2005. At that time, Inés and their son lived in Mexico, while Salvador lived in Anchorage, working in landscaping during the summer months, and returning to Acuitzio over the winter. Salvador and Inés had to travel a lot to arrange papers for the family. He got his residency in 2002, and in 2005 he became a naturalized US Citizen so that he could apply for his family to join him in Anchorage. People had told him that once he was a citizen it would be easy,

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43 My participants used the term *residencia* (residency) most of the time, and infrequently the English term Green Card. I use the term residency in English to mean Green Card or US Permanent Residency.
in six months his wife and child would be with him in Anchorage. However, six months became six years as they waited for a decision. They waited and wrote letters to Alaska’s governor, to a senator, and even to then-US President George W. Bush. Meanwhile, Salvador continued to travel back and forth between Anchorage and Acuitzio. During this time, his daughter was born.

After six years, a letter finally arrived, directing them to be present for an appointment at the American Consulate in Ciudad Juárez so that their son could get his Green Card. Salvador flew to Mexico, and then the whole family traveled from Acuitzio to Ciudad Juárez together for the appointment. Acuitzio and Ciudad Juarez are about 1700 kilometres apart, a drive that would take at least 18 hours by automobile, and likely much longer by bus. At the Consulate, they found out that because Salvador was a US citizen his daughter was also already a US citizen, even though she was born outside of the United States. So, they had to go to Mexico City to the US Embassy to get a passport for their daughter. They went from Ciudad Juárez, to Acuitzio, and then to Mexico City a few days later. Acuitzio del Canje is located about 325 kilometres from Mexico City, along toll highways from Morelia. Salvador and Inés were in a rush to arrange their papers because as Salvador put it: “As we say in Mexico, la cosa era calientita, we had to strike while the iron was hot.” However, they couldn’t get an appointment until three days later, so they went back to Acuitzio, and then back to Mexico City again, leaving their son with his grandmother until they returned. Finally, all they were waiting for was his wife’s residency. “We were wondering when she would get an appointment.” Again they waited, and wrote letters. The time came for Salvador to return to Alaska to go back to work and he once again left Acuitzio for Anchorage. Exactly one year after the letter arrived for his son, his wife’s letter arrived, and they went back to Ciudad Juarez for another interview. Finally, the whole family was able to relocate to Anchorage to live together in 2008. Because they all have either US citizenship or residency,
now they are all able to travel together to Acuitzio as well. Citizenship then, facilitates mobility between Mexico and the United States but the process of becoming a US citizen requires long-distance mobility among multiple places. You not only have to leave the spatial boundaries of the United States to re-enter as a resident but also do paperwork in US immigration offices based in very different places within Mexico, and very far from each other as Mexico City, in the center of the country, and Ciudad Juárez on the northern border.

The large anthropological body of work on transnational links and identities (Appadurai 1990, 1996a; Basch et al. 1994; Ong 1999; Schiller et al. 1995; Tsing 2005) and, in particular, on the transnational networks woven by Mexican migrants in the United States (Cohen 2001, 2004; De Genova 2005; Hirsch 2003; Kearney 2004; Rouse 1992, 2002; Stephen 2007; Striffler 2007) illustrates that movement is necessary and crucial for transnational life. Roger Rouse, for instance, argues that the circulation of people, money, goods, and information between places across the globe creates settlements that become so closely woven together that they constitute a single community spread across a variety of sites (Rouse 2002). Lynn Stephen uses the term “transborder,” instead of transnational, to emphasize that people originally from Mexico living in the United States cross ethnic, class, cultural, and state borders in Mexico and in different regions of the US to live within multiple localities and discontinuous social, economic, and cultural spaces (Stephen 2007). Transborder lives are lived across borders and in multiple sites of all types, and transborder migrants move between nation-states as well as between different social economic and cultural spaces (Stephen 2007:23, my emphasis). In the next section, I analyze how this mobility confronts the friction created by the long and diverse roads that one is required to drive in order to reach Michoacán from Alaska.
Figure 6: Road Between Tiripetio and Acuitzio, 1966 (© Raymond E. Wiest).
Highways of North America

Anchorage and Acuitzio are connected by the vast network of roads that stretches across the continent, producing a web of lines that directs traffic along particular corridors. Roads, whether gravel trails, city streets, or multi-lane highways reorient social relations along them because they change how people move to, through, and beyond places, and how and where they encounter one another.

Building a road in North America is usually the domain of the state, as it requires engineering and a high level of investment and organization (Wilson 2004). Moreover, roads do not only need to be planned and engineered but once built, they also need to be maintained: potholes need to be filled, cracks repaired, snow or debris cleared in order to keep the way smooth and the traffic flowing. All of this work makes roads appear as fixed and permanent parts of the landscape. However, Arguonova-Low’s (2012a) work on winter roads in Siberia illustrates that roads and what it means to move along them can be more fluid. Winter roads in Siberia are seasonal, and are built by truck drivers themselves, who beat down the snow into a compacted road with partially deflated tires. This technique transforms a direction into a road through the slow movement of a vehicle on snow and ice. In general, all roads are constructed and traveled along through the interaction between technology and terrain.

Attention to roads necessarily means attention to driving, and the practice of driving in Mexico is somewhat different from driving in Canada or the United States although the rules of the road are similar. For example, in Mexico, drivers often treat a two-lane highway with paved

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44 There are exceptions, of course. Private property owners may build a road to their home, and roads are built by corporations for access to resources. The roads that Gonzalo travels along were built by the State, although to facilitate economic and military access to territory.
shoulders as a four-lane road, using the shoulders as an extra lane for passing. In Acuitzio, many people do not know how to drive and do not have a driver’s license, since their daily needs can be met by walking or traveling by bus. Many women that I interviewed in Alaska said that they never drove a car while living in Mexico, but had to learn once moving to the United States. In Anchorage, public transit is limited, so people learn to drive in order to go to work, school, shopping, and for leisure. However, given that driving in Anchorage is experienced as different than driving in Acuitzio, many people prefer not to drive when they are in Mexico even though they know how to do it. For example, Oscar talked about how driving is one of the things that is hard to get used to when he goes back to Mexico:

“I came [to Alaska] in 1987. And you have the idea that you’re going to go back and that things will be more or less the same as you left them. And the truth is that they aren’t the same and sometimes things are very different. So you get used to the salaries there [in the United States] and well it’s difficult because now you have another way of life. And the customs, manners, or education or laws, whatever, sometimes in this country are different and in Mexico it’s a lot of work to adapt to the organized crime and corruption. For example, I have even had problems driving. I don’t like it because I give someone the right of way and no one gives it to me, everyone honks at me, and so it’s really difficult even to drive!”

For Oscar, driving indexes a completely different and sociospatially distant way of life that is so difficult to get used to, that he prefers not to drive when he is in Mexico.

Driving means engaging with the terrain through the technology of the automobile. The characteristics of your car (weight, aerodynamics, tires) interacts with the materiality of the smoothed road as you slow to ascend or maneuver around corners, accelerate on descents or to pass a slower automobile. Weather has an effect on the speed because ice, snow, wind, and rain

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45 My own experience getting around Anchorage without a car was challenging. The city is spread out over a huge area so walking is not an option to access many areas. The bus system is limited. There are taxis, but they are quite expensive. Cycling is possible, but challenging in the wintertime.

46 I write about how people “get used to” transnational life between Alaska and Mexico in Chapter 5.
affect mobility by road, and potentially increase risks. Frost heaves along the Alaska Highway mean a bumpy ride as you travel along the border of Kluane National Park in Yukon Territory. Wet lowlands on the road from Morelia to Acuitzio near Tiripetio mean the road could flood. As well, drivers follow the formal and informal rules of the road. In Mexico, people might pass you on either side, as Oscar said. Traveling along northern highways might mean traveling with extra gasoline and tires just in case you cannot reach a service station or repair shop. In this section, I draw on two travel stories from Gonzalo Calderón to explore the experience of moving along roads to travel from Alaska to Mexico. I analyze his experience along two specific roads, the route from Morelia to Acuitzio del Canje in Mexico and on the Alaska Highway. For Gonzalo, the road is much more than a connection between points (Argounova-Low 2012b). It narrates his experience of the sociospatial distance between Mexico and Alaska.

**Out of Place: Roads to Acuitzio**

In January 2012, I interviewed Gonzalo Calderón over the telephone from a boardroom office at the University of Alaska, Anchorage. Gonzalo spoke to me from his home in Southern California, where he now lives. He told me about the first time he went back to his hometown in Michoacán in 1957. He had saved a bit of money while working in Alaska, and he wanted to keep studying even though it had been five years since he left medical school in Morelia to go to Alaska. He had been working in a Distant Early Warning (DEW) Line construction camp along the Yukon River, cooking for the workers in the camp kitchen, revealing the ways in which the Cold War required a particular infrastructure in Alaska that demanded a large amount of
workers. When he decided to go back to Mexico, he left the camp and went to Fairbanks by car. Then, he drove to Anchorage also by car, where he boarded a plane to fly to Los Angeles where two of his sisters lived. When he arrived in LA, he purchased a brand new car and left for Mexico with plans to continue his medical school training. He said, “But really quickly I crossed the border and I had already forgotten where I came from!” He continued, “Crossing the border I started to see the differences. I had already forgotten the poverty of Mexico. I saw the poverty and I started to feel a lot of compassion for the people.” He arrived in Morelia, “llegué a mi tierra,” as he puts it, “I arrived in my homeland.” Since at that time there was no highway to Acuitzio he said “Well, how am I going to get this car into town?” He explained how only half of the highway up into the mountains was paved, and that at that time, the rest was basically a dirt road, where nothing traveled but big trucks and buses. His new car was fast, brand new, and low to the ground, but it couldn’t really drive on dirt roads like that. “I thought about it and I drove through the cultivated fields [instead of on the road] and well, I don’t know how I did it but I made it to town with my car. What do you think of that?”

In Acuitzio at that time, only the main street was paved, and it was paved with cobblestones that had been laid by hand. “And that’s where I arrived in my town, on Riva Palacio Street” Gonzalo said,

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47 DEW stands for Distant Early Warning, and the DEW Line was a cold-war era series of radar stations built across the North American Arctic to detect a Soviet invasion by air, sea, or land. Military projects like this, along with resource extraction projects and tourism, have brought people to Alaska and produced connections to elsewheres. However, although we know people came to Alaska from many parts of the world seeking work and fortune, the typical sourdough (long time Alaskan) narrative does not include much diversity, and certainly not the stories of Mexican migrants working on Cold War-era military projects (like Gonzalo Calderón) or the trans-Alaska pipeline (like Oscar Cárdenas Sr.) or roads and railways throughout the state (like Luis Bravo). I discuss this further in Chapter 4.

48 In a 2012 publication, I said that Gonzalo’s car was a convertible (Komarnisky 2012). More recently, he corrected me: it was a 1958 Chevrolet Bel Air.
“When I arrived I saw the poverty there and it embarrassed me, right? No one there had ever seen a new car; there were no cars because there was no highway. And a brand new car, nobody had seen one like that in the pueblito. I was embarrassed by my new car, the clothes I wore, and the money I brought. I felt out of place. And I started to think: should I stay here to study, or should I go back to Alaska to keep working, back to where I had been developing?”

In this story, you get a sense of the ways that frictions and spatial counterpoints inflect Gonzalo’s trip from Alaska to Acuitzio. Particularly as he gets closer to his hometown, he slows down and his sense of feeling of being out of place increases as he crosses the border and experiences the difference between life in Mexico and Alaska, the sociospatial distance between those locations, and the difficulty of the terrain on his trip.

The slowest part of Gonzalo’s trip is the road up the mountain to Acuitzio along a highway is known as Federal Highway 14 (Michoacán) or the Morelia-Uruapan highway. This federal highway begins at the bottom of the Guayangareo Valley where Morelia, the capital city of Michoacán, sprawls out. Almost immediately after leaving Morelia, the four lanes of Highway 14 gain elevation rapidly, leveling off before passing the Cointzeo Dam. The road between Morelia and the dam was paved during the Cárdenas administration (1934-1940), but the road from Cointzeo to Villa Madero through Acuitzio was only opened and graded between 1952 and 1954 (Wiest 1970:12). In Gonzalo’s day, and when my MA supervisor Dr. Raymond Wiest went to Acuitzio to do dissertation research there in 1966, this road was little more than a dirt trail, difficult to move along, especially in the rainy season. Dr. Wiest writes:

“We had considerable difficulty driving through the very wet section south of Tiripetio, but also had difficulty getting up the rise to Acuitzio due to exposed rocks and boulders, which made it difficult to maneuver between and around the changing obstacles. We were fortunate to have the Datsun Bluebird station wagon because it was relatively high off the ground. Nonetheless, the 25 kilometres

49 Fuera del lugar.
would take between 2 and 3 hours to traverse. Often in those days, buses got stuck in the lower wet section and/or on that relatively steep incline. And beyond Acuitzio in those days it was often impossible for buses to reach Villa Madero since the road was barely graded” (Wiest 2014, personal communication).

As a result, travel to Morelia used to take hours along an ungraded dirt road. The entire route between Acuitzio and Morelia was paved sometime between 1970 and 1972, making travel faster and easier by personal automobile or bus. Building the road therefore took some time. Although road construction greatly improved travel for local residents moving into, out of, and through Acuitzio, the road was likely improved to facilitate resource extraction and manufacturing, specifically timber extraction and processing. By the time I first went to Acuitzio in 2005, the road was paved the entire way from Morelia to Acuitzio and beyond. The distance from Acuitzio to Morelia is now easily traversed by car or bus in about half an hour.

So far in this section I have written about Gonzalo’s trip from Los Angeles to Acuitzio in 1957, focusing on the counterpoints that he encountered due to the difference he felt upon crossing the border into Mexico and the difficult terrain on the road from Morelia to Acuitzio. But a few years later, once he was back in Alaska, Gonzalo also drove once between Alaska and

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50 Raymond Wiest wrote in his dissertation (1970), that the road between Presa (Reservoir) Cointzio to Villa Madero had not yet been paved. Wiest’s personal correspondence with his friend and research participant Carlos shows that the road from Morelia to Lagunillas was nearly completed in March 1970, and the road from Lagunillas to Tiripetio was nearly completed a year later. In November 1971, Carlos said that the road to Acuitzio might be completed as early as 1972, and plans were to continue paving the road to Villa Madero. Wiest and several grad students returned to Acuitzio from May through August 1972 and he remembers taking pictures of the very muddy road just outside La Colonia at the southern end of Acuitzio. Dr. Wiest’s student, John Ames, later wrote that “Acuitzio is connected to Morelia by paved road as of 1972” (Ames 1973). Past Acuitzio, the road to Villa Madero remained unpaved as of 1972. In a book about Acuitzio published in 1988, Carlos Arenas García writes about the completion of the Tiripetio-Acuitzio-Villa Madero under the administration of Governor Chávez Hernández whose term ran from 1974-1980 (Arenas García 1988:14).

51 Around 1975, PROFORMICH (Productos Forestales de Michoacán) began major lumber extraction for the new sawmill in Villa Madero and the furniture factory in Acuitzio. Leading up to this, in 1972 and 1973 Carlos reported to Raymond Wiest that the Independiente Company, who had offices in Acuitzio, was working on the road to Villa Madero.
Acuitzio and therefore travelled through vast sections of northern wilderness, which added a different dimension to his experience of mobility and distance.

**A Beautiful and Tragic Voyage: Traveling the Alaska Highway**

I visited Gonzalo Calderón at his home in Long Beach, California, in 2012. He is retired, and lives with his wife in a tidy trailer home. I visited Long Beach specifically to learn more from him about his time in Alaska, and he showed me photographs and newspaper clippings as he reminisced about his time in the north. One such story was about a trip he took, driving from Anchorage to Acuitzio in the winter of 1964. As he spoke, he was standing, motioning out the narrative, animating everything with his voice, his hands, and the movement of his whole body. I later asked him to write the story down for me, and he sent it as a letter a few months later, describing his trip as both “tragic and beautiful.” This account draws on both the spoken version, as he told it to me in Long Beach, and the written version, typed into the computer, printed, and sent to me in Edmonton.

Gonzalo decided to visit Mexico to visit his young son, who was living with his mother and sister in Morelia at the time. Before leaving, he readied his Chevy 1500 and offered a free ride to any volunteer. A religious man contacted him, saying how he wished to return to California but he didn’t have enough money. The man, who Gonzalo described as “short and around 60 years old,” without commenting on his nationality, had driven from Los Angeles to Anchorage in the summer, and began looking for work upon his arrival. He was unsuccessful, and when winter came, he didn’t have any way to get home. Gonzalo agreed to take him, since he would appreciate the company.

Gonzalo said he knew that driving in the winter was risky due to the possibility of dangers like blizzards or ice on the highway, but he felt confident that his vehicle was in good
condition and besides that he had studded tires so he would not need to carry tire chains for steep icy sections. And so, he got together some provisions for the trip, and “on December 10 at 4 in the morning, we left towards Palmer on the Glenn Highway. The morning was dark and cold at -38 F below zero and a terrible freezing blizzard was blowing.” At Eklutna, they rescued a man whose car had broken down, dropping him off in Palmer before carrying on to Glenallen, “where it was much colder and I felt like maybe we should turn back, but we carried on along a narrow and mountainous road that looked untouched.”

“Finally”, Gonzalo writes, “we crossed a metal landmark that said on one side “Alaska, USA” and on the other “Yukon Territory, Canada.” I thought that we were still far from there, and the old man yelled “So long Alaska, we’re in Canada now!” In his telling of the story, and in the written version he sent me later, Gonzalo did not mention this border crossing in any more detail than this. His lack of emphasis on the border and the apparent ease of crossing indicate that it was not experienced as an obstacle for him and his travel partner, in fact, he does not even mention slowing down. For Gonzalo, the international borders he crossed did not produce any friction on his trip. In fact, he only mentions crossing the border to Canada, describing the marker as he drove past, but not any review of his passport or other documents, nor those of his travel companion. At this time, Gonzalo was already a US citizen, presumably traveling with a US passport. At any rate, he didn’t mention that aspect of the border crossing. For him, the obstacles involved in his drive from Alaska to Morelia were not of a geopolitical nature but produced by weather, fatigue, and distance across difficult terrain. Gonzalo continued,

“Driving was very stressful because it was night and the highway was deserted and icy and full of snow. The old man noticed the danger that we were in and began to sing. We had coffee and sandwiches with us and we only stopped to refill with gasoline and coffee. And so we went in this white and lonely darkness, without encountering a single vehicle.”
They arrived in Whitehorse, the main town in the Yukon, late at night, but decided to carry on. On the way out of town, the police stopped them, “Where are you going?”

“To Los Angeles, sir.”

“Very good. But no one is heading that direction because up ahead there’s a blizzard that’s covering the highway with packed snow. It’s like sand, you know.”

“Yes sir, I’ve been through blizzards like that, but I have studded tires, and two extra just in case. I’ve made it through blizzards without too much trouble, so if it’s alright with you, could I drive a few more miles and if it looks bad, I’ll come back here to stay the night.”

“OK, it’s all up to you!”

Gonzalo continued the story, describing what it was like to drive through a blizzard,

“I carried on with caution, challenging and then making it past every snowdrift. If you don’t make it through the drift in one go, you’re stuck and there’s nothing you can do about it. I felt how the tires slipped, those tires covered in ice. And so I kept driving ahead little by little until I was far away from town, and it was too late to turn back! My companion was afraid, and out of pure fear he started to sing, a song that my father liked, La Pajarera. The song brought back memories, and then I wanted to be in my rancho. At the end of the song, my friend covered himself up with blankets and went to sleep, while I kept driving. I only drove 30 miles per hour maximum, the temperature was -71 F but with such a wind, it felt as if it were -110 F! You could see the northern lights in all their splendor. What a rare and indescribable marvel!”

Gonzalo describes driving uphill and feeling afraid because of the snow and ice, and how the tires kept sliding, making him more nervous. He arrived at a curve in the road and it was

52 La Pajarera means ‘The Birdcage’ and is a popular Mexican song that narrates the story of a man and his sweetheart who catch birds in the wild and then go to Mexico City to sell them. There are many versions of the song on YouTube.

53 A rancho in Mexico is a small farm, usually with humble accommodations and plot of land, where people may keep livestock as well as grow corn and other produce for their own use. Some Acuitzences have a house in town and a rancho outside of town. Other municipality residents live full time on their rancho. The rural hamlets outside of the town of Acuitzio del Canje are also called ranchos, for example. Gonzalo is from the rancho of Huajumbo. I believe here Gonzalo is referring to rancho in both ways – as his own farm, and the rancho of Huajumbo where he is from.
there that the pick up truck slid off the road and into the ditch. Panicking, he got out of the truck and onto the road,

“My whole body was shaking. I knew that soon I would freeze. I looked up, and between the pines I saw the northern lights once again. I looked down, and noticed that the road was winding downhill. I felt a terrible fear and desperation, and I wanted to cry, but I thought of God, knowing that death was certain. What a shame, so far from mi tierra\textsuperscript{54} and knowing that my body would surely be torn apart by wolves and coyotes before anyone found us.”

Lucky for him and his traveling companion, they soon saw headlights! He flashed a flashlight on and off to get their attention, and it turned out to be a police car. The police took them to a café just up ahead, where he found a long-haul trucker willing to pull his truck out of the ditch.

Disaster averted, they carried on: “It started to snow, and soon I couldn’t see the highway at all.” To stay on the road, he followed the tracks and distant taillights of the semi truck that had pulled them out. Once he couldn’t see the truck anymore, he used the rows of trees on each side of the road as a guide, steering his automobile down the middle and hoping to stay on the road. Gonzalo continues, “I drove slowly and cautiously all day. Although we didn’t have any food left, we didn’t stop. The old man slept, and I didn’t feel well. Night fell and I noticed that my hands were jumping involuntarily on the wheel from two days and one night without any sleep or food. Finally I saw lights and a sign: Fort Nelson, British Columbia.” They pulled into the parking lot of the first motel they saw, and drank coffee and ate sandwiches before falling asleep. Gonzalo said, “I woke up at 5am, only thinking of the road ahead. I couldn’t stay in bed so we

\textsuperscript{54} My homeland.
got up and continued along the Alaska Highway\textsuperscript{55} until Vancouver, driving with more confidence now that the weather was better.”

In Gonzalo’s retelling of his trip, the terrain that he travels through appears as a vast wilderness, uninhabitable and empty. However, this would be in direct contradiction to the experience of the land for some local residents, especially Alaska Natives, and First Nations in Yukon and Northern British Columbia who have lived in these regions forever, and for whom the landscape has immense significance (Cruikshank 2005). Instead, Gonzalo experiences the land and weather as obstacles. While the length and terrain of the highway makes for a long and tiring drive, the very existence of the highway makes it possible to travel by car between Alaska and the rest of the continent. Gonzalo, in fact, drove down to Mexico several times. Once, he did so just because he was missing his rancho. He said that once he got it into his head that he wanted to be back at his rancho, and could think of nothing else. For this reason, “like a madman,” he would drive all the way from Anchorage to LA non-stop, drinking coffee and smoking cigarettes, hands jumping on the wheel. Being on the road therefore connected him powerfully to the rancho, and eventually let him get there by simply jumping into his car and driving.

A few hours later, they arrived in Dawson Creek, BC where they ate and rested well. Gonzalo drove the whole day and the entire night, without stopping in any of the towns along the way: “I remember that for many hours the highway went along a valley and a river where a drizzle of rain fell from the sky and the highway looked dangerous and I didn’t like it.” They arrived in Vancouver by night, picked up supplies and carried on to Seattle, Washington. The

\textsuperscript{55} Technically the Alaska Highway does not go all the way to Vancouver, but many people refer to the whole route as the Alaska Highway, a highway to Alaska.
border crossing was uneventful, again only mentioned in passing by Gonzalo, and they arrived in Seattle early the next morning to eat breakfast and rest and refuel the truck. At the gas station “we washed away the snow and ice which was still four inches thick behind the tailgate of my pickup truck. What a surprise! My suitcases were still covered with snow and stuck together with ice, so that I couldn’t even move them.”

Gonzalo continued,

“I felt glorious in such a beautiful climate and I took Interstate 5 heading south. Later we took the picturesque Highway 101 along the coast and arrived in Crescent City, California to view the majestic giant redwoods that grow all over this region from Eureka until San Francisco. We decided to pass by a place where the highway went through a tunnel that the engineers had put right through the trunk of a massive tree. And we also passed by the celebrated sequoia tree and the place with the tallest trees in the world. Later we crossed the beautiful Golden Gate Bridge.”

They carried on, talking about the trip and all that they had survived. Gonzalo said to his friend, “By the grace of God we have survived this beautiful nightmare and we’re about to arrive in Los Angeles!” Upon arriving in LA, Gonzalo gave the man some money “to take a taxi home, hombre!” He took off a gold medallion with an image of the Virgin of Guadalupe on it, and said, “Don Gonzalo, I don’t have anything to pay you with, but please accept this gift.”

Gonzalo said to him, “No hombre! You don’t owe me anything, as a matter of fact, thank you for accompanying me!”

The man insisted that Gonzalo take the gift, and eventually he took it and gave the medallion to his sister, who still has it today. Gonzalo spent three days with his sister in LA, when she said, “I’ll come with you to Mexico.” They left for Mexico City, arriving in the Colonia where Gonzalo’s brother Elfego and his family lived. According to Gonzalo, “Elfego was the first michoacano to arrive in Anchorage, Alaska. He was the one who made it possible
for me to go there as well.” They celebrated the baptism of one of Elfego’s children in Mexico City, and Gonzalo later sold the pickup truck to a friend of his in Acuitzio.

Gonzalo’s rendering of his road trip repeatedly reiterated the excruciatingly long distance between Anchorage and Acuitzio and, in particularly, the roughness of the terrain one needs to drive through in wintertime. Indeed, in his telling and re-telling of the story, the detail and events along the road from Anchorage to Dawson Creek take up the majority of his tale, and in comparison, they seem to have travelled quickly from Seattle to Los Angeles and later, to Mexico, even though this stretch involved thousands of kilometres. Especially in the northern part of his trip, he experienced many stops and starts, some of which almost ended his trip completely. The cold, ice, and snow of the northern winter added another level of friction, one that almost brought his trip to an end.

Most of Gonzalo’s trip took place along the Alaska Highway, which begins in British Columbia at Mile 0 at Dawson Creek and continues along over 2349 kilometres of mountainous and forested terrain to the historical end of the highway at Fairbanks. Prior to the construction of this highway, Alaska could only be reached by air or sea. This became a military concern after Pearl Harbor was bombed in December 1941, as the United States became anxious about the vulnerabilities of Alaska to an attack by Japan. Since building the highway meant crossing through Canada, the US government agreed to pay for everything and Canada agreed to provide the right of way (Willis 2010). In March 1942, construction by US army troops began, starting

56 The first 987 kilometres are in British Columbia, traveling in a northwesterly direction to the Yukon Territory border near Watson Lake. From there, the highway continues through 929 kilometres of Yukon Territory to Port Alcan on the Alaska Border. From the border, it is about 320 kilometres to Delta Junction, the official end of the highway and 476 kilometres to Fairbanks, the unofficial end of the highway (The Milepost 2011).
from Dawson Creek, Whitehorse, and Big Delta simultaneously, all locations that were difficult to get supplies to (Willis 2010). The road was finished just over eight months later.

Ideas about how Alaska fit with the national narrative shaped the project in profound ways (Willis 2010: 72). At the time, the construction of the highway had great symbolic importance, especially as Alaska became a place on the forefront of national defense during the Second World War. The road was important for protecting the nation from Japanese attack, demonstrating political will, and providing a wartime success story (Willis 2010). However, the highway can also be seen as part of the ongoing attempts by the US to settle and develop the Alaskan landscape, conceptualized as the “Last Frontier” (Willis 2010). Ultimately, according to Willis, the road served neither an economic nor a military purpose (Willis 2010:72). The highway failed to link Alaska meaningfully with large cities or connect Alaska with the Pacific Northwest.

However, the road fundamentally reoriented Alaska as a space accessible by automobile bringing the state into the network of roads that stretch across the continent. For Yukon First Nations, who never had fixed boundaries between them, roads are part of an ongoing colonial process that has changed the relationship between humans, land, and animals (Cruikshank 2014).

Apart from one or two men who were hired as ‘guides’ Yukon First Nations didn’t actually work on the construction of the highway, but they were nevertheless drawn to the highway. At the time, the construction of the road was a ‘gravel magnet’ that drew people to it in anticipation of short-term jobs. Fur prices had fallen in the early 1940s, and people were looking for other options to support their families. The highway actually drew Yukon First Nations away from hunting territories towards the construction of the road. New villages were established along it and the people became ‘stuck’ or more fixed in place, with more limited mobility than
they had experienced before. It was not until fifty years later that the highway provided routes for visiting family, access to hunting, gathering and fishing sites, and even to document territory and mobilize for land claims (Cruikshank 2014). It is therefore ironic (though not surprising) that the overlapping boundaries claimed by different Yukon First Nations overlap along highway routes (Cruikshank 2014). This disruptive, dividing, and boundary-making aspect of the highway is one way in which social relations were reorganized in the North by the Alaska Highway. The highway also facilitated mobility into the region by newcomers, including those from Acuitzio who travel along the same highway all the way south. After its construction, people like Gonzalo Calderón could travel along it on their way to Mexico.

**Conclusion: A Farewell Song**

After our flight together from Mexico City to Los Angeles, Juana, her daughters Verónica and Sophia, and I were at our gates at LAX about to go our separate ways: me to Vancouver and they onward to Anchorage via Seattle. When we arrived at our gate, music was playing at a low volume from speakers built into the ceiling of the airport. Juana heard the music and said to me, “This song is called ‘Golondrinas’. It’s sad. They play it at the end of school or things like that”. I said, “like a farewell?” “Yes,” she replied.

“Is it like saying goodbye to the golondrinas at the end of the season?” I asked. She said yes, it’s a very sad song, and it makes her feel sad just to hear it.

This is a different song from the one I described at the beginning of this chapter, the one Luis told me about while we were watching the soccer game in Acuitzio. As I described earlier in the chapter, golondrinas are long distance migrants too, making this moment particularly
They are a lovely allegory for long distance, annual travel. Indeed, the lyrics of the song that Juana pointed out to me in the airport are about leaving home and, considering the fact that my traveling companions and I were in the midst of leaving one homeland for another one, it’s no wonder that hearing it affected Juana. The song was written in 1862 by Narciso Serradell Sevilla, who was in exile in France at the time. It became the anthem of Mexicans in exile then, and has since been recorded and re-recorded by many artists in Mexico and beyond. And, as Juana said, it is played to say farewell – at graduations, at funerals, and at airports too. Consider the final two verses of the song:

I have also left
My beloved homeland
That home
That saw my birth
My life today
Is wandering and anguished
And I can no longer
Return home

Dear bird
Beloved pilgrim
My heart
Is close to yours
Remember
Kind swallow
Remember
My homeland and cry

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57 My colleague Ana Vivaldi alerted me to the wider significance of *golondrinas* as a metaphor in Latin America. For example, in Argentina there is an almost formal concept of *migrantes golondrinas* that people use to name the temporary rural workers who travel from harvest to harvest.


59 *Deje también/mi patria idolatrada/esa mansión/que me miró nacer/mi vida es hoy/errante y angustiada/y ya no puedo/a mi mansión volver/Ave querida/amada peregrina/mi corazón/al tuyo acercar/voy recordando/tierna golondrina/recordaré/mi patria y lloraré*
Spatial practice includes how the material conditions of travel are perceived, felt, and understood by those traveling (see Lefebvre 1991). This is the affective experience of the trip, the encounter between a body in motion and a place. For Juana, the affective experience of travel, and of life lived between places located so far apart from each other is expressed in the song through the metaphor of the swallow. In this chapter I have traced the mobilities of Acuitzences through space: on airplanes, across borders, and along highways. As Acuitzences move, they engage with social, political, and imaginative landscapes, technologies of travel as well as with the unevenness of the terrain. Mobility between Mexico and Alaska therefore means experiencing friction, and especially the friction of socio-spatial distance, since these two locations are geographically located as far away from one another, and are socially produced as dramatically different ways of life within different nation-states. I have shown how citizenship facilitates mobility, and how the bureaucratic process that leads to citizenship may even encourage mobility. Mobile individuals experience the socio-spatial distance between Mexico and the United States, perhaps as a sense of sadness when hearing a particular song like Juana or as overwhelming fatigue manifested in jumping hands, like Gonzalo. Friction, the grip of encounter, is essential for transnational mobility and the production of transnational space between Anchorage and Acuitzio.

In the next chapter, I continue to analyze the mobilities of Acuitzences who move between Mexico and Alaska, but rather than focusing on the materiality of mobility through space, I explore mobility through time and across generations. I show how multigenerational family networks have spatially expanded from Acuitzio to Alaska, and how this connection has gained traction over time.
Juana’s children had their US citizenship interview in Anchorage in 2005. Her youngest daughter Sophia was about five years old. Their father Luis had told them beforehand to say “yes” to every question, and the two older Bravo siblings – Verónica and Luis Jr. – said, “Ok papá, we will”.

Since the children didn’t speak much English yet, a Tejano immigration officer interviewed them in Spanish. He asked them: “Do you accept this country as your own? Do you feel like this is your primary country, that you’ll no longer be Mexicans, you will be Estadounidenses, Americans?” Then the officer said to them, “Do you understand what I am asking you?”

Toño said, “Yes.”

“OK, sign your certificate of nationality. Verónica, do you understand?”

“Yes.”

And Sophia. The officer asked her, “Do you understand what I am saying?”

“No.”

Juana protested, “Sophia!”

But the officer said, “No, it’s ok, let her be, she’s young and it will be more difficult for her to understand, it’s ok. She can sign her certificate.”

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A Texan of Spanish or Mexican heritage.
The family left the immigration office and Luis said, “Ay, hija,⁶¹ what did I tell you?”

Sophia said, “I understood the questions. But, well,” she paused, “if I sign that paper, do I stop being Mexican?”

Luis said, “No hija, no. If you sign it means you accept this country because we live here in this country, this country that gave us the opportunity to have what we have, to work, and to study. But you will always be a mexicana in your heart. It’s what we have inside of us, it’s another country that we also love.”

“Ah, good,” Sophia said, “But they didn’t say that! Because I said, I’m going to sign and if I sign and I’m not going to be Mexican anymore then I don’t want to sign! But the man didn’t say that.”

Juana concluded the story, “Sophia was so worried, she felt that by signing the paper she wouldn’t be Mexican anymore. At 5 years old, Sarita.”

In this chapter, I show how multigenerational families who move between Acuitzio and Alaska create and maintain a transnational social space across time and different generations. Migration is not a linear or unidirectional movement nor is it a progression from Mexican to US-American identities over time. Instead, people orient their lives to the circuit as a whole and maintain distinct ways of life where “current lives and future possibilities involve simultaneous engagements in places associated with markedly different forms of experience” (Rouse 2002: 163). This type of process offers a counterpoint to the idea that someone could ‘lose’ their mexicanidad and become US-American, an idea which is taken up in the language of citizenship,

⁶¹ Daughter, also used as an expression of affection.
and in studies that investigate acculturation or level of belonging in a new country. Instead, I show how, over time, generations of Acuitzences orient themselves to both locations within a transnational social field and the common experience of mobility between them. In Chapter 3, I wrote about mobility between Acuitzio and Anchorage. In this chapter, I focus on the history of mobility through time between Michoacán and Alaska within multi-generational family and compadrazgo networks, networks whose members differ along key lines of gender and generation. Over time, relationships are spatialized between Anchorage and Acuitzio, and people move within a social world that links these two locations.

Migrants do not act alone but as members of families and households (Boehm 2012; Cohen 2004; Stephen 2007; Wiest 1973), and the history of migration from Acuitzio to Alaska is family history. Members of multigenerational family units who live in Anchorage and Acuitzio today tell it this way. Because many Acuitzences who have travelled to Alaska to work and live are connected through kin relationships, I focus on the multi-generational family unit to explore mobility between Alaska and Mexico over time. I use the term “generation” to identify the fact that there is a kin relationship and a genealogical lineage between members of the multigenerational family unit (Hareven 2000) Since the “agency and experiences of migrants across generations [are] necessarily intertwined” (Boehm 2012:120), my analysis traces migration within family and kin relations. This chapter therefore explores mobility between Acuitzio and Anchorage as embedded in family histories. The frictions that characterize the movements of Acuitzences to and from Alaska are differentially experienced depending on individual subjectivities, experiences, and circumstances, along lines of gender and age, US

62 Compadrazgo means “co-parenthood” and refers to the tie between the parents and godparents of a child.
immigration status, and socio-economic status (Boehm 2012). Age and intergenerational changes thus link “world-historical economic and social change with intimate spaces of caring and obligation in the family” (Cole and Durham 2007; see also Hareven 2000; Hirsch 2003; Lewis and Watson-Gegeo 2008; and Parreñas 2005).

I also take the opportunity to describe the initial expansive movements between Acuitzio and Anchorage began in the 1950s that have continued through the generations to the present moment. Early migrants produced a social space between Acuitzio and Alaska as they moved between these places, and they also made it possible for that spatial formation to gain traction and persist over time. Moreover, they also literally produced Alaska as it is today, working on projects that are today considered iconic parts of Alaska history and identity – Alaska’s highways, pipelines, fisheries, and military projects. These early migrants facilitated the movement of subsequent generations of Acuitzences, forging trajectories for new generations to move along.

People draw from and work within their positionality within family networks as well as other resources, systems, and structures in Alaska and Michoacán to keep moving between “here” and “there.” Differences emerge over time between individuals along lines of gender and generation that condition mobility and everyday life in Alaska and Michoacán. Lines of gender, age, and position within the multigenerational family network thus help to explain some mobility patterns. Mobilities fit to the shape of a person’s life stage and key moments such as coming of age, marriage, birth of children, and retirement give form to these narratives so that a person’s position within the life course and within a family network can explain when and why they move. An important family event that is temporally marked and has implications in transnational mobility is the quinceañera, the celebration of a young woman’s fifteenth birthday marking her
transition to womanhood, for parents may decide to celebrate their daughters’ quinceañeras in Acuitzio. Young people seek and maintain relationships – friends and romantic partners – in both locations. Visiting parents, grandparents, and extended family often means travel between Anchorage and Acuitzio, and so do celebrations of weddings, funerals, or baptisms.

The trip between Anchorage and Acuitzio is thus repeated over and over again across the generations. This repetitive aspect of multigenerational travel specifically is important because over time, those who have moved between Anchorage and Acuitzio build up a social space based on the experience of each location and of the mobilities between them. Grandparents, children, and grandchildren have all experienced life in both Anchorage and Acuitzio. Or to put it another way, the habitus of transnational life between Anchorage and Acuitzio is the “product of a chronologically ordered series of structuring determinations” which integrates similar experiences together (Bourdieu 2002:86). Over time, individuals in multigenerational family units orient themselves to the transnational social field as a whole, and both Anchorage and Acuitzio within it. As in Karen Olwig’s ethnography of three multigenerational family networks in the Caribbean, England, Canada and the USA, “places involved in the migratory moves will be viewed through the lens of social relations making up the migrants’ social field” (Olwig 2007:12). Family, kinship, and place do not exist in and of themselves; they become defined and attain meaning as individuals’ lives take social form and place within specific networks of social relations (Olwig 2007). Indeed, places like Acuitzio and Anchorage remain important sites of personal belonging only as long as migrants maintain close relations with people there (Olwig 2007:12). Within one multigenerational family, I show how over time, Acuitzio and Anchorage both become key sites of personal belonging, along with the common experience of travel between them.
I describe this in terms of *traction*. Over time, mobilities between Anchorage and Acuitzio have gained traction within these multigenerational family networks. In Chapter 3, I wrote about how points of friction inflect mobilities of Acuitzences who travel between Anchorage and Acuitzio. In this chapter, these points of friction lead to traction. “Provisional points of friction shift across uneven landscapes, historical moments, and the differential abilities of specific subjects to establish footholds that gain ground” (Moore 2005:281). That is, the unevenness of the terrain, the specificity of the historical moment, and the characteristics and abilities of the individual have allowed these family networks to establish footholds that gain ground. Traction “seeks to convey how the efficacy of situated practices articulates with contingent constellations of geography, history, and environment” (Moore 2005:282). Although Moore is not explicitly talking about globalization, his “traction” and Tsing’s “friction” do similar things: they highlight the importance of emplaced agency in activating and informing global universals and power relations and they each highlight the importance of interconnection across difference or translocality in producing culture and places. They also emphasize agency and the particularities of individuals. Both friction and traction are metaphors of movement, evoking the unevenness of physical movement. Traction, in this regard, refers to the resilience of certain patterns of mobility over time. In the pages that follow, the initial trajectories of individual Bravo family members, and other Acuitzences, gained traction over time, engaging with changing geography, economies, and citizenship regimes to eventually produce the more resilient mobility patterns or “corridors” between Acuitzio and Anchorage. Over time and across generations, Bravo family members orient themselves more to the network as a whole, with both Acuitzio and Anchorage as essential reference points for a sense of belonging.
Figure 7: The Bravo Family, 2012. Figure by Author. Black indicates that the individual has lived in Alaska.
The Bravo Family: Spatializing Kinship

I focus on the Bravo family network, an extended multigenerational family which has moved between Acuitzio and Anchorage since the early 1960s and whose relations are spatialized across the continent. Members of the Bravo family orient themselves to be able to take advantage of opportunities on both sides of the border, moving between Alaska and Acuitzio, re-establishing a primary residence in Acuitzio, or expanding northwards once again are all possibilities that are taken up in alignment with shifting life circumstances. It is important to note that the Bravo family is only one such network. Other families I worked with, such as the Cárdenas family and the Madero family, share similar patterns of mobility and the spatialization of kin relations. These three family networks are also interconnected through compadrazgo relationships. All of these families share a similar pattern of spatial expansion, with a grandfather who went to Alaska first, to *arreglar*[^63] US Permanent Residency[^64] papers for his children before returning to Mexico to retire as the second generation moved to Alaska to live and work. When the second generation sons and daughters married and had children, they sought US Citizenship so that they could bring their spouses and children with them to Alaska. At this time, the grandparents remain retired in Mexico, while their children and grandchildren live in Anchorage. Over time, even as primary residence shifts, multigenerational family networks orient themselves more to the transnational social field as a whole, with both Anchorage and Acuitzio as essential points of reference for belonging and identity.

[^63]: People use the verb *arreglar* (to fix, or to arrange) as shorthand for the application for United States Permanent Residency. For example, someone might say, *mi papa me arregló* (my father arranged [the paperwork] for me) or like Luis said, *voy a tratar de arreglarles*.

[^64]: As I described in Chapter 3, my participants usually used the term *residencia* or residency to refer to US Permanent Residency status, or having a Green Card.
It is kinship, constellations of relations created through alliance and descent, that provides access to travel and work and creates the traction that keeps people moving between Mexico and Alaska. People move as a member of families and communities, as a network of kin, *compadres*, and *paisanos* expanding and contracting as members of the network move. The sustained, repetitive, multigenerational travel to and fro, with implications for family and community reproduction in both Mexico and Alaska makes these mobilities spatially *productive*, and which leads to the production of a social space that extends between Michoacán to Alaska. To borrow an observation made by Lynn Stephen in her work with an extended family from San Agustín:

“Within this one extended family there is shared knowledge and experience about these places, even if everyone has not been to every place. Most important, the ability to construct space, time, and social relations in more than one place simultaneously is a part of the daily framing of life in this extended family as well as in others. And it has been for quite some time” (Stephen 2007:5).

Likewise, the ability to work in Alaska is somewhat passed down through the generations. I mean this in a few different ways. The US immigration system prioritizes family reunification along increasingly strict definitions of “family” but family members may have had their papers arranged by fathers who worked in Alaska before them. Having family members and contacts in Alaska also gives migrant-immigrants a place to start out in Alaska, and often people arrive with an offer to work with a family member. Younger generations are socialized to live in both locations, acquiring the necessary language and social skills to move between social contexts and nation states. Members of the Bravo family network have been able to travel back and forth at first with no legal status in the US, then with residency, and now with both US and Mexican citizenship over three generations. This relative privilege creates a traction that allows them to travel faster, along more direct corridors, and more often. Not that they do not experience friction – certainly they do feel the effect of distance between Alaska and Mexico in
their everyday lives. However, the material conditions of the trip differ in part because of who is traveling, and their gender, age and status within their families and communities, as well as US immigration status.

While living in Anchorage, I asked about relationships between Acuitzences – family, compadres, friends, or just paisanos or conocidos. Compadres are the parents and godparents of a child. This is an important relationship between people from Acuitzio, and it usually reinforces a prior kin or friendship relationship. A paisano is someone who is from the same place, although this could mean from the same neighbourhood, town, region, state, or even another mexicano. A conocido is an acquaintance. This was formalized in a participant network form that I used with a subset of participants to get a sense of how many Acuitzences were living in Alaska, and how they described their relationships to each other. In Anchorage, people draw on Acuitzio-Alaska centred social relationships for practical reasons like finding work, a place to live, or childcare. Acuitzences who I asked, “Tell me how you ended up in Alaska” mentioned a family member, friend, or conocido who they were in contact with, and who “invited” them to come to Alaska in the first place. The context of an “invitation” varies, however, from a suggestion like vamos pa’ Alaska, compa’! to the implication that they will be totally cared for while there, such as when close family members decide to move to Alaska together. In fact, it is usually described as such by my research contacts. When someone describes how and why they are in Alaska, it is because of a family member. Individual interviewees who had a long family history of migration to Alaska often said with pride that their father or grandfather was either “the first” or “one of the first” people from Acuitzio to go to Alaska. Just as family relationships

\[\text{\textsuperscript{65}} \text{Let’s go to Alaska, compadre!}\]
are spatially extended, so too are long-standing social and class divides. Divisions between individuals and families that originated in Acuitzio persist in Anchorage.

Earlier generations produce corridors for later generations to move along and the repeated mobilities of Bravo family members has resulted in a spatializing of kin relations, so that families and networks of kin and *compadres* are extended across international borders. I have chosen to use the term corridor here, because it implies a relatively fixed trajectory, along which mobility is smoother. The first generation of Acuitzences in Alaska built corridors for automobiles and oil when they constructed highways and pipelines, and they also produced corridors for family members to move along by securing documentation, social capital, and money to facilitate ongoing travel to Alaska. I prefer the term “corridor” because the mobilities of multigenerational families have been more or less confined to Alaska and Acuitzio. Most members of these multigenerational families have not lived elsewhere in the United States; they have only lived and worked in either Acuitzio or Anchorage.

Spatializing kin this way, with older generations returning to the *pueblo* to care for property and family, while others work to earn money in Alaska and prepare new generations to operate in social contexts at either end of the continent, allows the family network as a whole to maximize options on both sides of the border. This is the best of both worlds, in spite of the melancholy for Mexico that living in Alaska can produce, often with dreams of “going home” that might never be realized (Wiest 2009).

This is also a form of spatial flexibility, which can be seen as an “effect of articulations between regimes of family, state, and capital,” (Ong 1999:3). The Bravo family network interacts with larger structural forces both in North America and globally which shape and condition abilities or necessities to expand northwards. For example, an ongoing lack of labour
opportunities in rural Mexico has given young men few options to get ahead for decades now. The unequal exchange rate from Mexican pesos to US dollars makes working in the United States for dollars look attractive. This is especially so considering the unequal purchasing power of pesos vis-à-vis dollars, where food, cellphones, and consumer goods command relatively high prices in Mexico compared to the United States. Peso devaluations in the 1980s and 1990s and the incorporation of Mexico into the neoliberal global economy again sent people north when prices on products like livestock and corn dropped as the market opened up. Fears for personal safety in Michoacán or in Mexico as a whole also send people northwards. The mobility of individuals in family networks is also profoundly shaped by the changing citizenship and immigration regime in the United States. To accommodate these conditions, the Bravo family network is able to expand to Alaska for work, pay in US dollars, and good educational opportunities are available. However, they maintain a connection to Acuitzio, and therefore maintain the opportunity to return to Mexico for summer vacations, special occasions, or even relocation of primary residence for retirement or to raise a family.

Mobility is never a given; it is a possibility that is sometimes taken up in alignment with particular life circumstances at particular historical moments. Indeed, Massey (1994) writes about the power-geometry of time-space compression where different social groups are placed in very distinct ways in relation to flows and interconnections. In other words, it is not just about who moves and who doesn’t: mobility is also about power in relation to the flows and movement (Massey 1994:149). Depending on US and Mexican Citizenship or US Green Card status, class, age, gender, and position within a multigenerational migrant family, an individual migrant may

66 Fears about security are commonly expressed in conversations in Alaska, with some people speculating on the level of danger from drug cartels in Acuitzio, and others assuring them that the town is as peaceful as it ever was.
be more or less “in charge” of their mobility (Massey 1994:149). Over time, as members of these family networks gain dual US-Mexico citizenship and social and economic capital in Anchorage and Acuitzio, they are increasingly able to be flexible, and explore opportunities in either location for social and economic mobility. As such, they are able to spatialize family relations to economic and social advantage, more like Ong’s “Flexible Citizens” (1999) or Olwig’s family networks (2007) than transnational Mexican families who experience the US/Mexico border as a barrier to family reunification (Boehm 2008). In the case of the Bravo family, the first generation of men produced corridors for future generations as they built corridors toward Alaska. The second generation brought their families with them and prioritized not only work, but also being together. The third generation has been socialized to live between Alaska and Mexico and orient themselves to the transnational space as a whole. Throughout, the US state structures the ways transnational Mexicans, of all ages, navigate the shifting terrain of state power, building lives and kin relations in the US-Mexico transnation” (Boehm 2008:778).

The First Generation

Luis Bravo Sr. talks with a unique rhythm. He is a man of few words but as he speaks his voice dramatically changes cadence and volume to emphasize what he is saying. I met with him for recorded interviews over two afternoons in his living room in Acuitzio, and we visited informally at family events, in the plaza, or while he was driving his shiny pickup truck around town. At his home, he sat in a burgundy armchair, the walls around him adorned with photographs of family members, Alaska souvenirs new and old, and tapestries, one depicting a dogsled team running across the snow. His wife sat on the couch across from them, and the three of us talked as their pet parrot chattered in the other room. The doors to their living room opened
to a patio, and sounds of the plaza and the rumblings of an afternoon thunderstorm drifted in as we talked.

“How did you end up working in Alaska?” I asked. Some friends he knew in California, one from Acuitzio, invited him to Alaska and he went there to work there in 1960. He had been earning $2.50/hour in California, but in Anchorage they told him you could earn $4.50/hour washing dishes in a restaurant. The first time he went, he flew to Anchorage on an airplane. There was no job waiting for him, but he found one easily once he got there. He started out by washing dishes in a restaurant and at night he and a group of other *paisanos* worked as janitors, cleaning banks and offices in downtown Anchorage. They didn’t go to bed until 4 or 5 in the morning and then started working again at 5 in the afternoon. After the Good Friday earthquake in 1964\(^\text{67}\) there was a lot of work in construction, to fix train tracks, re-build the port, and re-build the city, which had been shaken apart. This work paid even better, about $8 per hour. Luis joined a union and worked in construction for the rest of his time in Alaska. In fact, he still collects a substantial pension cheque from the union.\(^\text{68}\)

Men like Luis Sr. are part of the first cohort of Acitzences who lived and worked in Alaska. I met and interviewed five men of this cohort\(^\text{69}\) and I asked other interlocutors in both Acuitzio and Alaska for stories they heard about *los primeros*, the first ones to go to Alaska. All of the men in this cohort are similar in age and similarity of experiences and type of work in Alaska. As well, each of these five men worked in Alaska before 1980. By 1980, the Alaska

\[^{67}\text{The 1964 earthquake was the most powerful ever recorded in North American history and was followed by tsunamis that wreaked additional destruction along the West Coast of North America.}\]

\[^{68}\text{When I visited his home in 2011, he showed me the statement of all of the pension payments he received.}\]

\[^{69}\text{I was unable to reach some men who were part of this group, and there were other Acitzences who traveled between Acuitzio and Alaska at this time, but they have since passed away.}\]
pipeline had been built, ANCSA\textsuperscript{70} had been signed, and Alaska as we know it today had been formed. Mexico was becoming more integrated into the North American economy and levels of migration to the United States remained high. As well, all of these men traveled without wives, girlfriends or children, either because they had not married yet or because their wives remained in Acuitzio.

**Producing Alaska**

Luis Sr. worked in construction in the summer and as a janitor in the winter, and even worked on the Alaska pipeline for a time. In fact, he has a book about the construction of the Alaska pipeline that he purchased in Anchorage and brought back to Acuitzio to have in his home (Allen 1975). The Trans-Alaska pipeline was built to transport oil from the remote North Slope of Alaska to the ice-free port of Valdez. Construction began in 1974 and involved not only building the pipeline, but also building roads and camps to the oil fields and the work camps along the pipeline route (Willis 2010:124). The pipeline was built to accommodate unique factors of the Alaska terrain: almost half of the nearly 1300 kilometre long pipeline was built above ground to avoid thawing the permafrost and it was constructed in a zigzag pattern to absorb shock from thermal expansion or seismic activity. It was also constructed with animal crossings. The terminal at Valdez, where Luis Bravo Sr. worked, was built to withstand even major earthquakes (Willis 2010:124).

Luis Sr. also worked on highways and bridges around the state, living in camps and working outdoors everyday. He described working at one camp along the Richardson Highway:

\textsuperscript{70} Discovery of oil and rising oil prices prompted intense corporate pressure to clarify land claims and the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA) was passed in 1971 to settle and extinguish all outstanding land claims of Alaska Natives. Cash payments of $980 million, and 40 million acres of land were transferred to 12 Alaska Native Regional Corporations and many village corporations. A 13\textsuperscript{th} corporation was later created for Alaska Natives no longer residing in the state. The rest of the land became property of the state (Dombrowski 2001).
“There was one camp on the way to Valdez and I was working where there was a steep valley and to get the highway through they had to build a viaduct. I was a flag person there for three or four months, *fijate*. As the flag person, I directed traffic: big trucks bringing building material and the passenger traffic heading to Valdez. *Hijole!* It was cold up there. It rained, and the wind blew, and up above us was what they call Thompson Pass’.

He also worked to build a bridge along the same route:

“The bridge was about a block long, *así*, in length. They already had the braces down below, and I just went to help them pour cement there, with trolleys and cement trucks, to take cement there and pour it out. I spent about two months there. And after that, we installed the railing for the sides of the bridge. And if you were to go over the edge, ayyyyy, it dropped so far down below. The bridge was wide and long and it was on the highway that goes from Valdez to Fairbanks.”

He talked about working in construction within the city of Anchorage too, and described patching the pavement on city streets, building new roads, and laying water and drainage pipes in new Anchorage neighborhoods:

“We made buildings and roads. I went around the city fixing the pavement. We would fix up wherever there was a pothole, adding dirt, then asphalt to fix it up, *pues*. And I went around doing that with the construction company, putting down asphalt and smoothing it out with a rake. With the same company in Anchorage, I don’t know, is there a photo of us putting, putting pipes below the ground? *This company also laid pipes, and when they made a new neighbourhood, we put in the water pipes, and the drainage pipes*.”

The *primeros*, then, represent an initial expansion from Acuitzio to the Last Frontier in Alaska, not only to Anchorage, but to points in rural areas of the state as well. Like Luis, these men worked on highways, bridges, in canneries, on Amchitka Island, and constructing the pipeline. In this way, this generation of men was literally producing Alaska as a new kind of place in the 1960s and 70s. No longer a territory, Alaska had to be produced as a state, and

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71 Luis shared his photo albums with me, and there are a lot of photos taken of him at work. This is not surprising, considering that he worked most of the time he was in Alaska, and had little time off. When he did have time off, he went to Mexico.
connections were *built* to facilitate travel to the Lower 48 and out into the expanding global
economy. Part of that meant producing corridors through which such connections could be made.
Men like Luis, and many other workers who were attracted to Alaska by relatively high wages
there, were literally building corridors to move oil, fish, products and people around the state,
and to points “Outside”: roads and bridges, pipelines, military facilities, and homes. Many of
these were iconic projects that are key to the history and identity of the state.

One Acuitzence who now lives in Morelia, while many of his children and grandchildren
live in Alaska, also worked on the pipeline, and showed me a commemorative trophy made out
of a piece of the pipeline when I visited him at his home in Morelia, the capital of Michoacán.
Another Acuitzence worked in the king crab fishery in Dutch Harbor, and at Ft. Richardson
Military Base just outside of Anchorage. Gonzalo Calderón worked on Amchitka Island as a
cook during the nuclear tests there.\(^{72}\) He also worked to build Cold War-era Distant Early
Warning radar stations, and helped to re-construct parts of the Alaska railroad, built in haste
during World War Two, and re-constructed in the 1950s. These are iconic events and projects
that are mentioned when narrating the big picture history of Alaska, and Acuitzences were part
of them because they were part of the labour force that built them.

**Aligning Lifecourse with the Landscape**

Some of the men from this first generation align their lifecourse with the landscape,
describing their own coming of age and adulthood alongside the development of the state of

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\(^{72}\) Between 1965 and 1971, the United States Atomic Energy Commission carried out three underground nuclear
tests on Amchitka Island, a small island in the Aleutian Chain of Alaska (Kohlhoff 2002). These tests were done in
the context of the nuclear arms race during the Cold War. During World War 2, due to the Japanese occupation of
Kiska and Attu Islands, also in the Aleutian Chain, the US military occupied Amchitka Island and built facilities
there. For more on Amchitka Island and nuclear testing there see *Amchitka and the Bomb* (Kohlhoff 2002).
Alaska. For example, Octavio described how he grew up alongside the state: “Alaska has been somewhere where I progressed because it has opened up doors to the whole world for me.” Gonzalo made a similar point, he said, “Crecí yo con Alaska, I grew up with Alaska”, and went on to explain what he meant. In Alaska, he worked in places that he described as inhospitable, like Amchitka Island, and Iliamna. Places where the temperature would drop to -60 degrees Celsius, like in Fort Yukon, where Gonzalo worked as a cook in a DEW line construction camp. As he tells it, “I knew and lived exactly when Alaska started to progress and develop and I saw myself developing too, developing in an environment that was developing at the same time as me, right?” Like other Alaska sourdoughs, these men emphasize their experience with iconic Alaska projects, critical events in Alaska history, and time spent in the wilderness. Their stories thus fit in with established Alaska lore and legend, and yet to date the stories and experiences of Mexicans in Alaska have been totally excluded from dominant narratives about Alaska.

These iconic events are always described in terms of work. After all, these men were in Alaska to work, and spent most of their time doing exactly that. Luis’s experience of the 1964 earthquake is a good example. “Did you hear about the big earthquake in Alaska in 1964?” Luis asked me when I interviewed him at his home in Acuitzio, “We were there.” He said that they were just about to start work at a restaurant downtown called La Cabaña when it hit. He said the earth cracked and rose up all down Fourth Avenue from the Denali Cinema to the post office. After the earthquake, a month passed before he could contact his wife to let her know he was OK. She had heard about it on the radio, and that when she heard about she cried. Luis wasn’t the only one who mentioned the 1964 Good Friday Earthquake in their narratives; many men referred to it as an important historical event in their own history and in Alaska’s too.
Narrating key events in terms of work reminds us that these mobilities were profoundly shaped by a class experience and by the labour inequalities between Mexico and the USA, where then as now, men faced few prospects for jobs at home but could brincar or “jump” the border to earn a lot more compared to what they could earn at home. They certainly started out with more resources relative to others in Acuitzio. For example, they had enough money to get to Alaska at the very least, as well as the social contacts to facilitate that. Acuitzio is after all, a small town. Going to Alaska meant good work, good pay, and adventure. These young men left Acuitzio for Alaska as they were entering adulthood, and many of them aligned their lifecourse with the remaking of the Alaskan landscape as they worked and grew up in “the Last Frontier.”

**Repetitive Trips**

Mobilities between Acuitzio and Anchorage are repetitive and rhythmic not only by individuals over the course of their lives but by different generations over time (Lefebvre 2004). Indeed, repetition and recurrence is key in how these men described their working lives spent traveling between Alaska and Michoacán. Luis worked in Alaska until about 1985, traveling back to Acuitzio every year or every two years and staying there for 2 or 3 months each time. He described his working life as, “echarle vueltas y vueltas y vueltas, going back and forth and back and forth.” Dávid said about his work in California and trips home to Acuitzio: “Así está uno yendo y viniendo: That’s how one is, [always] coming and going”.

This rhythm of travel back and forth was also important for encouraging others to make the trip north. Those who came back to Acuitzio showed people in their hometown what was possible to gain by going to Alaska. For example, as I described in Chapter 3, Gonzalo said that his first trip back to Mexico was pivotal. For one, it assured him that he did not want to continue his training in medical school. As well, some Acuitzences who saw his fancy car, his new
clothes, and his plentiful spending money decided to follow his path north. As he tells it, “when I arrived to Mexico with the car, after being a poor student, and after five years arriving with a new car and with a lot of money, it aroused tremendous interest in Acuitzio. And all of a sudden everyone wanted to go to Alaska! Everyone who wanted to go to the United States wanted to go to Alaska specifically.” Not everyone could go to Alaska, however, since the trip to the northernmost state required significant social and economic capital. The perception of Alaska as a place where people can do well for themselves continues today.

Dávid, who is about the same age as Gonzalo but who didn’t go to Alaska to work until 1988 remembers Gonzalo showing up in town with his new car: “Gonzalo was in Alaska for many years and he came back to Acuitzio in about 1957 with a car of that year, well it was the novelty of it. It was really beautiful and so new, here we’re in 1957 and he’s got a ’58 model, imagine!”

Gonzalo told me that he helped some family members and paisanos to go to Alaska, some of whom are still there with residency or US citizenship. “I helped them in Alaska, and they started to bring their family and friends”. His brother brought him and he brought all the others and “that’s how we started to go to Alaska.” Over time, “the number of people started to grow, and as you know, there’s almost a colonia or neighbourhood of Acuitzences en Alaska.”

Ernesto and Octavio both said that they wanted to go to Alaska because they saw that others from town had done well for themselves there. For example, Ernesto, who went to Alaska in

73 Gonzalo is here talking more about numbers of Acuitzences in Anchorage, and not about people living in a spatially defined area or neighbourhood. In fact, one of the notable characteristics of city life in Anchorage is that people do not seem to live in ethnic enclaves as they do in bigger cities in the Lower 48 states like Chicago or Los Angeles. Instead, demographers found that the neighbourhood of Mountain View in Anchorage was the single most diverse census tract in the entire United States in 2010, even surpassing the highest diversity tracts in Seattle and New York City (Farrell, personal communication 2012).
1965, had seen that “paisanos who had gone to Alaska, among them my compadre Humberto, mi compadre Luis, and others that went to Alaska, they did well for themselves there. And I said well, I’m going too to see how it is too, ha! And so I went”. I asked what his paisanos had said about Alaska and he said “Well, just that one day you should come, you can do well for yourself, right? I understood simply that things went well and I said, I am going there too.”

These men often explained their ongoing back and forth movements in terms of contingency or serendipity. As they tell it, it is only partly by chance that they went to Alaska in the first place and ended up staying on. Luis Sr. said that when he was initially invited to go to Alaska by a friend in California, he also had an invitation to go to work in Australia. Sr. Jaime initially worked as an ice road trucker in Canada, and when the season ended, he decided to follow his friend north to work in the king crab fishery in the Aleutian Islands of Alaska. Gonzalo and Octavio both talked about making plans to leave Alaska when finding work was difficult, but unforeseen opportunities came up that led them to stay. Over and over again, Gonzalo said that he was about to give up and head back to Mexico when he reunited with a friend or met a new acquaintance who offered him work and he took them up on it and stayed. Octavio has a similar kind of story, where he thought he would have to go back to Mexico, at first due to lack of work but then due to problems with immigration, but his social network helped with jobs and since he also developed a close friendship with a well-connected North American woman, he also got help with his immigration problems.

Producing Corridors for Future Generations

Men like Luis also produced corridors for future generations of Acuitzences to move along. I use the term “corridor” because it denotes a pathway that makes movement smoother and more direct. The first generation produced corridors for following generations through the
traction provided by immigration status and social capital, namely contacts in Alaska, US permanent residency, and raising children in a household oriented towards migration.

In terms of relationships, strengthening existing relationships and building new ones was key for reproducing ongoing forms of mobility between Alaska and Mexico, and also to pave the way for future generations. For instance, many of the first generation of men are compadres with one another and their ahijados, or godchildren, later worked in Alaska too. It is unclear to me whether these relationships were close before going to Alaska, or reinforced because all of these men worked together, but whatever the reason, these compadrazgo relationships link these men with each other through a mutual experience at a baptism, shared experiences of mobility between Acuitzio and Anchorage, and likely the time they spent together in Alaska, as well.

However, these men also built entirely new relationships in Alaska. Gonzalo met and married his first wife in Anchorage, the Anglo-American daughter of a powerful local businessman. Other men made friends who helped their children out later on, helping them to cross the border, to get settled upon arrival in Alaska, or in one case, even to sponsor them for residency. These relationships made it easier to live and move between Acuitzio and Anchorage for the first generations, and for those that followed.

Arranging immigration status was also key for the mobility of future generations. In 1980 or so, Luis Bravo Sr.’s daughter Gloria asked him for a trip to Alaska instead of a quinceañera party and to facilitate that, he applied for residency for his wife and daughter so that they could visit him. Later, he arranged residency for his two sons. Luis himself never became a US citizen, and explained that since he didn’t need to be a citizen to arrange papers for his children, he didn’t bother. Today, three of his four children live and work in Anchorage, while he himself moved back to Acuitzio in 1985 to enjoy his retirement there. “Those kids are there now, they
made their money and bought their house there, but always with the dream to come back here.” In contrast to other Acuitzences who left and don’t like it in Acuitzio anymore, his grandchildren always want to come back to Acuitzio, “my son’s kids want to be here. So they come and go every so often”.

A final way in which the first generation made it possible for the next to follow them to Alaska was by raising them in a household oriented towards migration. Raymond Wiest wrote a dissertation about outmigration and household economics in Acuitzio, based on fieldwork conducted in the town in 1967. In his sample of 70 households, three individuals were working in Alaska as what he classified as “temporary migrants” (Wiest 1970). He found that those migrating to the United States at that time were major income contributors to their household incomes, and moreover, that United States-migration households strongly tended to be single-contributor households. Migration to the United States was also shown to be associated with above-median household income, whether considered in terms of the total income of the household, or as a per-capita measure. United States-migration households at that time were least bound to a subsistence level of living and were more economically independent. Male household heads who migrated to the US maintained their headship and aside from spatial expansion of the household to wherever he had migrated to, there were no changes in residence or composition of the family unit (Wiest 1970:211-212).

Wiest concludes as follows: “The data clearly show that wage-labour migration to the United States results in maintenance of normative domestic groups, continued economic support by the husband-father, and general economic betterment of the household” (Wiest 1970:215). He

74 “Siempre con la ilusión de regresar.” Many people used this phrase in my conversations with them to express that they left Acuitzio with the intention to go back to Mexico someday.
goes on to say that wage labour migration to the United States provides the primary income for most households where the husband-father is the migrant. Migratory wage labour, he writes, *does* provide a substantially higher income than these households would receive without it. However, he sees this migration as unsustainable. “Migration to the United States does not represent *long term* reliable income. Provision for the migration of Mexicans to the United States may be abruptly cut off” (Wiest 1970:215, his emphasis). As we know now however, migration has not been cut off, and *has* become long term and somewhat reliable income for future generations of Acuitzences. Wiest also notes that a large portion of the earnings of US-bound migrants is spent on consumer goods such as television sets, household appliances and furnishings, or improvement of the house. Many migrants to the United States in 1967 also invested their earnings in land or livestock. However, this investment does not provide a basis for maintaining the household unit at a level similar to that based on wage-labour migration to the United States. Moreover, for those who remain, prices of land and livestock prices are higher because of US-migrant demand for them (Wiest 1970:216). Finally, “few technical skills are acquired in the United States that are applicable to the present state of development in Acuitzio” (Wiest 1970:216). For instance, large-scale industrial agriculture in the US is different from small scale Acuitzio agriculture. The types of crops differ greatly as well: fruit and vegetable in the United States, and cereal crops in Mexico. “Semi-skilled factory labour in the United States … does not prepare one for life in the small Mexican community, but instead it prepares the labourer for eventual permanent relocation” (Wiest 1970:217).

I discuss these findings at length because in 1967 all of the first generation of Acuitzences that I introduced above were already working in Alaska. This out-migration was a way for individual families to *superarse*, or get ahead. As a result of their success in paving the
way for their family members, for many of these men, now retired, their connection to Alaska is ongoing. Most of Luis’s children and grandchildren, for example, currently spend most of the year in Anchorage. Another man, Ernesto Cárdenas Sr., has also retired in Michoacán while most of his children and grandchildren live and work in Anchorage. Gonzalo’s nephew lived in Alaska for a long period of time, and is married to one of Ernesto’s grandchildren. Octavio continues to live in Alaska full time, and vacations in Puerto Vallarta although he owns property and homes in Acuitzio. Many from his kin network have worked for him in his Anchorage restaurant. Moreover, Luis Bravo and Ernesto Cárdenas Sr., both retired in Mexico, continue to collect pension cheques from their work with the labour union.

The Second Generation

While suffering the absences of their fathers, the sons and daughters of these first migrants to Alaska were likely to have grown up in a more favourable economic setting. They also grew up within households oriented towards migration, in which the idea of moving across borders became part of an inculcated habit. Indeed, in all likelihood, these households would not be able to support themselves any other way. No wonder then, that some in the next generation grew up saying things like “I always knew I would go to Alaska.” By “the second generation” I refer to a cohort who were born in the 1950s and 1960s, and whose fathers also worked in Alaska. This generation first went to Alaska in the 1980s and 1990s, and most of them currently reside in Anchorage with their spouses and children and make annual trips to Acuitzio. Many of them own homes in both Anchorage and Acuitzio. Most Acuitzences of this age work in the
service industry – at Costco, in restaurants, or in landscaping. Some work in the construction industry. A few families own their own restaurants, landscaping, or janitorial companies in Anchorage. People say that working at Costco is a good job because they pay well and provide good benefits to their workers. However, you don’t get much vacation time. On the other hand, landscaping work is seasonal with long days of hard labour in the summer, but with winters free to be spent in Acuitzio. In general, there seems to have been a shift from construction work to service work from the first to the second generation that echoes a broader shift in type of work in the United States in general. Usually people start doing “whatever” (usually, washing dishes) and move on to more preferred kinds of occupations in Anchorage, like work at Costco which has good benefits, construction work that pays well, owning one’s own business which is preferable to working for someone else, or positions with the school district, which coincide with the school year meaning that employees have summers off for travel to Acuitzio. As with the first generation, many who live in Alaska are linked as kin or compadres of one another. Many of the men went to school together, migrated to the United States together, and have nicknames or apodos for each other.

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75 So many Acuitzences work in Costco, in fact, that it is known to be a source of town gossip. People joke that you can hear all the news from el pueblo in Costco sooner than you can in the town itself. One woman who lives in Acuitzio and has 2 children living in Anchorage told me that she hears gossip from her Alaskan children before she hears it from anyone in town. So, the town chisme spans the continent.

76 Earlier I wrote that Alaska is different as a receiving region, and perhaps the many Mexican-owned businesses in Anchorage illustrate that. Dayra Velázquez completed a Master’s thesis about the Mexican community in Anchorage reporting high levels of entrepreneurship (Velázquez 2007). In personal communication she shared with me that she had originally come to Alaska with a survey that had been used in Southern California and other traditional US “receiving regions” but she couldn’t use it in Alaska because she found that Mexicans in Anchorage had very high levels of social and economic capital that could not be accounted for in the survey, which was developed for use low-skill laborers and farm workers. She told me that this surprised her.

77 For outsiders to the community of Acuitzences, including the ethnographer, knowing nicknames is important not only for socialization into the group, but also for avoiding embarrassment. For example, one woman who is married to an Acuitzence once found herself talking about a man she knew only by his nickname to the man himself!
This cohort expanded the Anchorage-Acuitzio network significantly. For example, replacing Luis Bravo in Alaska were two sons, a daughter, their spouses, and seven grandchildren. In this section, I introduce you to Luis’s three “Alaskan” children and their spouses and how their mobile lives interact with broader social forces like the North American economy, the US Citizenship regime, improvements in travel and communications technologies, and changing ideas about love, marriage, and family.

Coming of Age in Alaska

The transition to adulthood is where gender and generation intersect. Deborah Boehm (2012) writes about how for men, migration to the United States represents a coming of age, while for women, it is a quinceañera. In her book, the transition to adulthood for men is mobility, whereas for women it is stasis because in contrast to boys and men, young women’s mobilities are controlled more closely (Boehm 2012:124; Striffler 2007). However, Gloria first visited Alaska in the summer of 1980 when she asked her father to take her there for her quinceañera present. Gloria’s coming of age was also associated with mobility, although in a significantly different way from that of her brothers. She told me about this trip during an interview at her home in Anchorage in 2011:

“I told my father that I didn’t want a fiesta for my quinceañera, that I wanted to come to Alaska. I wanted to see snow, to see something different. So my father started to investigate how he could arreglar, or arrange papers for me. So he did the application for resident for my mother and for me. A letter arrived for us, saying that we had to cross the border in mid to late July. At that time we didn’t have a telephone in the house, everything was done by mail and we very rarely spoke by telephone with my father. We advised my dad that the papers were ready and he said to come. So my mother, she said, “well, let’s go” and so we went, ready to go to Alaska. We arrived to the border at McAllen, Texas where my father had a friend. The friend was working in Alaska and his family lived in McAllen, Texas. So, we took the bus from Acuitzio to McAllen and in McAllen we had to pass the, the immigration. And so there they gave us the permiso and the paperwork and we had to cross the border. After that, the wife of my father’s
friend bought us the plane tickets with my mother’s money and told us that we leave for Alaska the next day. She put down for us that we didn’t speak English and arranged it so that we would come directly to Alaska”.

Gloria said that she wanted to come to Alaska because her father had worked there and she was really excited to see where he worked. She continued, “My father worked here for 30 years. He always sent postcards, he sent photos, he brought us photos and it looked so beautiful. The snow, the scenery, as if they were paintings. You’ve seen how it is. In the summer and in the snow too, and I really wanted to come to know Alaska for myself.” Her father said that she could come to Alaska on the condition that she went back to Mexico to continue her studies. She agreed, and Gloria and her mother visited Anchorage in July and August, returning in September so that Gloria could continue her studies.

In Gloria’s narrative, coming of age was associated with travel to Alaska, in that instead of a quinceañera, she asked for a trip to Alaska.\textsuperscript{78} She chose to mark this point in her life with a trip instead of a party. Later, quinceañeras were held in Acuitzio for her daughters and nieces. For Gloria and her daughter and nieces, their fifteenth birthdays were a time where relationships were built and connections were made between Acuitzio and Anchorage. Overall, looking at the life course of my participants across generations, it is clear that life events inflect mobilities – adulthood, marriage, birth of children, baptism, the death of parents or older family members, and retirement.

However, within each generation, experiences of mobility are further influenced by gender. The mobilities of second generation men and women from Acuitzio show how geography and gender intersect and mutually influence each other (Massey 1994). For one,

\textsuperscript{78} Later in this chapter I discuss a quinceañera where travel is in the opposite direction – to celebrate her coming-of-age, Sophia traveled from Anchorage to Acuitzio, where her party was held with friends and family in Acuitzio. Many of her closest relatives traveled from Alaska to be there.
geography matters to gender: gender relations vary over space and the construction of gender relations varies between places. Moreover, places are themselves gendered, and in being so, reflect and affect how gender is constructed and understood (Massey 1994). Other researchers have drawn attention to gender as a key part of the migrant experience (Constable 2003; Gamburd 2000; Hirsch 2003; Massey 1994; Stephen 2007; Zavella 2011) and gender relations shape mobilities within multigenerational family networks and uneven experiences of place in Alaska and to Mexico so that the social construction of gender changes with both migration and generation (Hirsch 2003). For instance, Steve Striffler describes how whereas for Mexican men the annual trip from Arkansas back “home” to Santo Domingo in Mexico is an experience that reaffirms their masculinity and sense of freedom, for women this trip means returning to a place marked by strict gender hierarchies that restrict their movements and freedom (Striffler 2007).

For example, after visiting Alaska to celebrate her coming of age, Gloria was encouraged to return to Mexico to study. Her brothers chose to leave school early to go to work in Alaska. The experience of migration to the United States can be seen as a kind of coming-of-age for young men in Acuitzio, a rite of passage that many young men go through as they enter adulthood. Among this cohort, women from Acuitzio achieved higher levels of education, often completing high school and some postsecondary training. Men, on the other hand, left school early to work.

Another Acuitzence man who has been moving between Acuitzio and Anchorage since 1983 talked about the implications of the difference in education between him and his wife. He has been a waiter for many years, and he told me that he feels he is only qualified to take an order, take it to the kitchen, and bring the food back to the table. His wife, on the other hand, has a university degree, and feels comfortable taking on new tasks. He said he believes this is because she went to university, while he worked in restaurants. In general, women from Acuitzio
had higher levels of education than men, who often left high school early to seek work in the United States. Nevertheless, upon arrival in Anchorage, both men and women start out working in low-skill, low-paying jobs. In the following chapter, I explain that this is because there are different opportunity structures for men and women in Acuitzio and in Anchorage. Moreover, labour mobility is profoundly gendered, as men say they went to Alaska seeking work, while women said they went to Alaska to be with family.

Gender is also implicated in the construction of geography. Alaska has been gendered as a masculine space due to the historical emphasis on wilderness, adventure, frontier life and resource exploration and the domination of nature implicit in those pursuits. It is a place where “historical identities are still being formed but where the domination of nature and the ability to survive in a challenging landscape are key signifiers of masculine fitness” (Hogan and Pursell 2008:68). This is also why the first generation of migration was male-centered. But this changed with the second generation.

For example, Gloria and her husband decided to come to Alaska after another life stage: marriage. By that time, her brothers were already working in Anchorage. Meanwhile, Gloria had finished her degree in dentistry, got married, and gave birth to her oldest daughter. However, in 1995 there was an economic crisis in Mexico, one of two peso devaluations that rocked the nation’s economy after the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) was signed in 1994. Her husband didn’t fare well, since he was involved with raising and selling livestock. They lost a lot of money. Gloria’s father, Luis Bravo Sr., had already arranged Green Cards for his children, meaning that Gloria would be able to travel to the United States with the Green Card her father arranged for her, and she could apply for her husband to accompany her. This led Gloria to say to her husband, “Pues, let’s go to the United States to work”.
They traveled to Tijuana and then crossed into California, where they stayed for one week to visit family before departing for Alaska. “The idea was to come to work here in Alaska, since I had already come here, I had an idea of what it was like. My husband wanted to go to Texas because he had family there. But I wasn’t interested in Texas. No, I was more interested in coming to Alaska since I already knew the place, a little bit.” Gloria, her husband, and their daughters arrived in Alaska in 1995, where her younger brothers were already working.

**Changing Political Economy of North America**

The mobility of different generations has also been affected by changing national immigration policies. The 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) granted a path towards legalisation for some Mexican migrants, allowing them to gain US citizenship. Moreover, a change to Mexican law in 1997 allowed dual citizenship, meaning that individuals could acquire US citizenship without relinquishing their Mexican citizenship (Overmyer-Velázquez 2011). Since 1965 the United States has emphasised a family reunification policy in immigration law, which is supposed to allow spouses and young children to join family members in the US. This emphasis on family reunification’ no doubt provided some traction, making it easier for immediate family members to acquire legal immigration status and move more freely between Alaska and Michoacán.

However, the larger dynamic of the North American economy also had an impact on this generation’s mobility patterns. These young men often left school early, foregoing any postsecondary study opportunities to work in the United States. They cite limited job opportunities in Acuitzio and the ease in traveling to work in the US with the papers that their fathers had arranged for them. In Alaska they started off working mostly in restaurant kitchens or as janitors, or in lo que sea (whatever there was) and made annual trips home to Acuitzio. At this
time, Mexico was becoming fully incorporated into the global economy, with serious repercussions locally. In previous decades, there was contentious opposition to outmigration in Mexico, reflected in bumper stickers on vehicles in Acuitzio in the 1980s that said *Y no fui al Norte,* implying that the individual driving the truck didn’t have to migrate to the United States to buy it. Then, with the onset of the Mexican debt crisis in 1983 and with the negative impact of NAFTA many Acitzences were back to warm and uncritical embrace of migration as a strategy that continues unabated today (Wiest 1979:95).

Many of the people in the second generation left Mexico to begin working in Alaska in the context of this debt crisis. However, in the late 1980s and early 1990s, after working in Alaska for a number of years many of my participants married in Acuitzio and made plans to stay there to raise their families. To facilitate this, many people took out loans to start livestock operations in Acuitzio, but market crashes and the peso devaluations in the late 1980s and early 1990s meant that many lost their shirts. NAFTA was signed in 1994, and small agricultural operations in Mexico suffered greatly due to the lower prices of the products of industrial agriculture in the United States and Canada (Overmyer-Velázquez 2011). Livestock all of a sudden was worth nothing, and for Luis Bravo Jr. as well as other men of his generation, it meant they had to go back to Alaska to work and pay off their debts.

“I Always Come and Go”

Luis Jr. arrived in Anchorage in May 1983. Unlike his sister Gloria, he left high school early, and first came to Alaska at age 18. Luis told me that his father wanted to arrange papers for all of his children, so that they would have the option to go the United States later in life.

79 And I didn’t go north [to buy this].
However, “[my father] didn’t want us to come here, he wanted us to stay in Mexico and study.” But Luis wanted to go “al otro lado, to the other side” because his father had traveled back and forth between Mexico and Alaska, and Luis said to himself “when I grow up, I better go there too.” Because he had the option to go to work in the United States, he said he didn’t try very hard at school and as soon as his papers came in, he went to Alaska.

When he arrived in Anchorage, he was disappointed because the snow had already melted. He said, “I wanted to see snow! But no, they said no, right now there’s only snow in the mountains. By the time I came back in November the snow had fallen. I didn’t know how to say snow in English! I said to one of the waitresses who worked in the restaurant, ‘Come, look, ice cream is falling!’ and the old lady smiled and said, ‘no that is called snow.’”

Luis’s father had arranged papers for him, but he also benefitted from having a relative in Alaska – Octavio. When he first arrived in Anchorage, he worked at his uncle’s Mexican restaurant and lived at his uncle’s house, and then later moved into an apartment with friends from Acuitzio. “We all chipped in for the rent and but yes, everyone was from Acuitzio. Well, birds of a feather flock together.” And as you know, there are plenty from Acuitzio here.”

People move between Mexico and Alaska within a wider network of relationships often expressed as kin or compadrazgo relationships. Indeed – Gloria, Luis, and Miguel came to Alaska because their father arranged papers for them, and upon first arriving there, Luis and

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80 In Mexican Spanish, the word for ice cream and snow is the same: nieve.
81 Luis calls Octavio his uncle, reflecting the common use of “uncle” to refer to any male relative of an older generation.
82 Luis actually said uno se junta de la misma gente, one gets together with the same kind of people, but I think it fits his personality and way of speaking to use a more colloquial phrase.
Miguel both lived with and worked with their uncle Octavio. It is useful to point out here how access to work and mobility is produced through maintaining or building relationships with people in different sites. This holds true through the generations. As we have seen, multigenerational families like the Bravo family have been especially successful at creating corridors for family members and other close relations to move through, as well as for access to work. Moreover, the families with the longest experience in Alaska intertwine with one another so that in Anchorage, people move within a network that is tightly bound up with kin and compadre relationships.

The network facilitates access to work, as well. Among the Bravo family at least, all of the women (Juana, Gloria, and Ana) work at the same place: a large industrial food services centre that provides cafeterias in institutions across Anchorage with pre-prepared food. They all enjoy working there for many reasons, but especially because it is run by the school board, which means they always get the summers off. Luis and Miguel work in the same restaurant, a Mexican restaurant co-owned by Miguel Bravo and Bernardo Cárdenas, both of multigenerational Acuitzio-Anchorage family networks.

Octavio in particular has been instrumental in hiring Acuitzences at his restaurant on Old Seward Highway. For example, both Luis and Ricardo Bravo worked as dishwashers at his restaurant when they first arrived. Many other Acuitzences have worked for him too. Octavio says,

“"Well, most of the people who come from Acuitzio [have worked for me]. I had both of Luis’s sons, the sons of all of those who have been immigrants to the

83 In Acuitzio, people use the term ‘uncle’ to refer to those one generation older than themselves, however related. So for example, someone is an uncle if they are your mother’s or father’s brother, or if they are your grandmother and grandfather’s nieces and nephews.
United States. Well, they already emigrated, and they haven’t brought me problems with immigration. But now look, they have their own business. They worked with me, they started out washing dishes. Yes, and they learned the business that’s why the food is the same as mine (laughs). Everyone has worked here with me including both Luis and Miguel Bravo, among others.”

Multigenerational family networks like that of the Bravo Family thus structure opportunities for mobility to Alaska, and to work upon arriving there. Over time, trajectories became formalized into corridors whereby close family members move between Acuitzio and Anchorage and build their lives in both locations.

**To Be Together**

In this cohort, there is a pattern of couples meeting each other in Acuitzio, and after marriage, husbands arranging to bring their wives and children with them to Alaska after a certain period of time *para estar juntos*, to be together. Intimate practices of marriage and performances of “love“ have emerged as key aspects of transnational mobility, enabling long-term transnational circuits, and illustrating how global capitalism is redefining personal lives (Bloch 2011). Indeed, research about transnationality, love, and marriage show that migrants enmeshed in shifting structures of feeling and constrained by immigration and citizenship regimes use intimate relationships to provide for family members but also to fulfill their own needs for meaningful relationships (Bloch 2011; see also Boehm 2012; Hirsch 2003).

For example, Luis and Juana met on one of Luis’s annual visits back to his hometown from Alaska. After they married and had their first child, and with the money Luis had saved from his work in Alaska, he decided to stay in Acuitzio, investing in livestock, much like Gloria’s husband and many other men in Acuitzio did at that time. He had taken out loans to

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84 I think these men were buying young animals and raising them up to sell at a profit once they were grown.
finance his operation but after the currency devaluation, Luis found that his livestock wasn’t worth as much as before, feed was more expensive, and he had to find a way to pay his creditors. Juana said, “At that time many people lost property. Luis had put up his father’s rancho as collateral. Since he didn’t want to lose his father’s rancho, and he had the option to come back to Alaska again, to work here, he decided to leave.” Luis went back to Alaska to work and pay his debts, but it was only supposed to be temporary. He tried another time to return to Mexico and hacer la lucha, try to make things work, by returning to Acuitzio and selling leather after a difficult summer in Alaska.\(^8^5\) Luis said, “I knew that if things went bad, I could come back here [to Alaska]”. Unfortunately, selling leather didn’t work out either. “I had my papers, there wasn’t anything for me [in Mexico] and, after that, I went back to coming back [to Alaska].” He explained that Juana had said, “I don’t want you to come and go and come and go because little Toño is upset a lot when you’re there and we’ve stayed behind, I feel bad.” He decided, “OK, I’m going to go, but I’m going to try to arrange papers for my family”.

To do that, he first applied for citizenship for himself, which he received in 1995. After that, he applied for residency for his wife and their young children. The family arrived in Anchorage in 1996 and ever since then, they take annual vacations to their hometown, lasting one or two months. As Luis put it, “I almost always come and go, you know.”\(^8^6\) Most Acuitzences with dual citizenship travel once per year between Anchorage and Acuitzio with

\(^8^5\) Luis had a hard time finding work in Alaska that summer, and during this time he not only worked in Anchorage, he also worked at a Mexican restaurant in Barrow and at a restaurant in Homer. Acuitzences continue to work at the restaurant in Barrow, which was featured (under a different name) in the 2012 movie “Big Miracle” starring Drew Barrymore. In a funny coincidence, the restaurant where they actually filmed the scenes is Mexico in Alaska (Chapter 6) where some Acuitzences also work.

\(^8^6\) Casi siempre voy y vengo, ya ves.
additional trips for special occasions or family emergencies. Travel opportunities, by which I mean the number of trips taken per year, increase for many people the longer they are in Alaska.

For instance, the Bravo family was not able to travel very often during their early years in Alaska, due to financial constraints and lack of US citizenship, which restricted the amount of time they could spend outside of the US. They used to go only every two years, in the winter, for the fiestas that happen throughout December. The switch from winter travel to summer was one that worked better with the school schedule, as the children grew up and couldn’t miss as many weeks of school during the winter holiday. The switch from travel once every two years to every year represents the family’s increased income over time, and Juana, Luis and all the children also now all work in the service industry. Nowadays, however, they have attained a level of financial security that allows them to travel annually and they all have US citizenship and US passports. Many Acuitzences hold Alaska Airlines credit cards which allow travelers to collect points and receive an annual companion fare: the first ticket is full price, but a companion ticket is $99.00. For the Bravo Family, it means that they can all travel to Mexico for the cost of 3 full-price tickets, and two companion fare tickets. Acuitzences like the Bravo family may also use the annual Alaska Permanent Fund Dividend (PFD) cheque to pay for travel to Mexico. The Permanent Fund Dividend is paid to all Alaska residents on an annual basis. The amount varies each year since the money comes from investment earnings of state mineral royalties (State of

87 Permanent residents are only allowed to be outside of the United States for 3 months per year, meaning that for those who wish to spend more time with families in Mexico, US citizenship is an attractive option, as is bringing their families to the US. Many people do both.
88 The town’s “Día del Canje” falls on December 5, Día de Guadalupe on December 12, and then there are the posadas, Christmas, and finally Three Kings Day on January 6.
Luis works at the same restaurant as his brother, but they arrange their trips with each other so they aren’t both gone at the same time. With work and school, they are skilled at finding a time to leave that works for everyone. People tend to describe these trips as “a vacation.”

Even though many consider it ideal to move between the two places, some are in the midst of planning a more permanent move to Mexico. Luis said that nowadays he feels comfortable, “me siento a gusto,” in both Alaska and Acuitzio. In the future, however, he says he wants to move back to Acuitzio:

“I want to do like my dad, and go. Take myself over there [to Acuitzio] when I’m older, to live peacefully and relax. Here [in Anchorage] it’s good, a person can work and everything is good. We don’t have a big house like in Mexico, but we don’t need much space since we spend most of the time working, and you just come home to sleep.”

I spent a lot of time with Juana during fieldwork in both Acuitzio and Anchorage, and we sat down for a formal interview at their home in Anchorage during the spring of 2011. We talked about many of the same things that I discussed with Luis, but Juana had a different perspective. When I asked Juana how it is that she came to Alaska, she said, “Well, I married Luis” and then laughed. I asked for more details and she explained that Luis, since he was 18 years old, “he came here [to Alaska] and since then he has made his life here.” She explained how they met in Mexico, began dating, and then married. After that “supposedly he wasn’t going to keep coming here” However, she also referenced the currency devaluation that had caused him to lose money on livestock he had invested in, and since he had always worked in Alaska, he went back there “supposedly” only to save money and pay the debt he had with the bank before coming back.

89 As of 2015, the lowest amount was $331.29 in 1984 and the highest was $2,069 in 2008. In most years, residents received between $800 and $1000, enough for a return ticket from Anchorage to Mexico City or Guadalajara (Alaska Permanent Fund Corporation n.d.).
Juana thinks that he was also used to the relatively high salaries in Anchorage, and was uncomfortable with the comparatively small amount he earned in Mexico. Juana’s statement – “supposedly he wasn’t going to come here” – was echoed by other women who married Alaska-migrating men and intended to live together as a conjugal couple in Mexico after the wedding.

Living together as a family was really important to both Juana and Luis. One day in Acuitzio, Luis told me how hard it was to grow up without a father, since Luis Sr. was always away, working in Alaska. Tears in his eyes, he described acting out as a young man before meeting Juana, who helped straighten him out. Juana said that once she asked Luis about how he felt about being away since his own father was always away in the United States, and he only saw him for a few months a year. Juana told him that she was lucky to grow up with both her parents and because of this she knows what it is like to have the support of both parents, and she wants that for her children. She asked Luis how he felt when he was a child and his father wasn’t there, and encouraged him think about what he wants for his children.

Luis and Juana decided to move the whole family to Anchorage, but this was very difficult for Juana, who was – and is – very close to her siblings and parents. She said,

“For me, it was really difficult to come here. Because, well my whole family is there [in Mexico] and I’ve never been apart from them. I knew it would be difficult to separate me from my family but I wanted my children to be with their father. That they lived what I had lived with father, mother, and children together. And not to live only seeing their father every 2 months, or every few months, no. In fact, my mother said, “hija, my soul aches to see you go, but I prefer it even though I will only see you when you visit, than see you here with your children alone”. Ay, mama. And it’s true, because when I would go to my mothers house I went with my 3 children and sometimes I felt so alone. Alone.”

So, “he arranged the papers for us and then he brought us here.” He told her that in Alaska it’s very lonely and cold, and really you’re there for the work more than anything. “Even so, we decided to come here. And I said well, let’s see what happens.” In the second generation,
Bravo family mobility shifted to focus on keeping the family together, the most important concern for Luis and Juana. Once they had submitted the applications for permanent residency for Juana and the children, and had interviews and appointments scheduled in Ciudad Juarez, they made arrangements to move. At the time, Luis was working at a supermarket in Anchorage, and he asked for time off so he could travel to Acuitzio, then Ciudad Juarez where the family had immigration interviews and medical exams scheduled, and finally to Anchorage, where Luis had already rented an apartment for the family. Juana explains: “What happened is they only gave my husband a few days off of work. He hadn’t been working at the supermarket very long. He left Anchorage on Friday after work, and arrived on Saturday afternoon to Guadalajara. My brothers went to pick him up and they arrived in Acuitzio that night. Meanwhile, I had organized a baptism for the baby, because we hadn’t done it yet, and we didn’t want to leave it. So, on Sunday we baptized our youngest daughter, we had a comida and spent time with our family, and it was also a way to say goodbye. My brothers took us to the bus station on Monday morning and we left, in order to make it to Ciudad Juarez in time for the appointments”. Again, life events and mobilities across vast distances are intertwined. In this case, they felt they couldn’t leave Acuitzio until the baby was baptized, and as part of the intense mobilities demanded by the US bureaucracy as part of their application for permanent residency.

In Ciudad Juarez they had to undergo medical examinations and have photos taken for their Green Cards. Juana says:

“You have to arrive one day before the medical exam. So we arrived the day before our appointment on the 4th of December. Luis already had our flight to

90 People have to go to Ciudad Juarez for medical exams and immigration interviews before their applications are approved. No matter where you are planning to live in the United States, it seems you must spend a few days in Ciudad Juarez for exams, interviews, and paperwork.
Alaska booked, even though we didn’t know if they were going to give us the Green Card or not. After our medical appointment on the 4th of December, we went to the Consulate on the afternoon of the 5th of December. A man in line told us, ‘Oh I hope I don’t get that one’. And we said, ‘why not?’ He said, ‘he almost never gives anyone residency. He always asks so many questions’. Well we got him. And later Luis told me that as a resident you’re not supposed to be out of the United States for more than three months. And when we were dating, well he was in Mexico for longer than that. In fact, when we got married he was out of the United States for a year! Anyway, the interviewer asked me how did I stand it, being alone all the time? I said, ‘well when we were dating and when we married, I wasn’t always alone’. Luis said, ‘no but the longest I was there was 3 months’. I said, ‘no’. He said ‘yes, three months’. And I said, ‘really? I guess I got used to being alone because when you were there it seemed like more time’. And the interviewer laughed! Anyway, the joke is that he approved us anyway.”

Other people tell similar stories about how they got an immigration interviewer who was reputed to never approve anyone, but somehow they were approved anyway. This is again an emphasis on the contingency of their experience, that it could very easily have been different. It also shows that mobilities are profoundly shaped by state agents. What happened next was decided by the US immigration officer and the legal apparatus that defines immigration rules and status, and approves or denies applications. As well, Juana is not the only spouse who was not knowledgeable about immigration rules and requirements upon application. Other people as well mention “not knowing” and making errors but it worked out for them anyway.

Later Luis, Juana and their children had to go to El Paso, across the border in Texas, to drop off el paquete, an envelope filled with all of the necessary paperwork to complete their application for residency. Juana said that after you were approved, you had a month to take it to El Paso. They took a taxi to El Paso to drop it off, and then went straight to the airport, where they flew to Los Angeles, then Seattle, and finally to Anchorage. “Finally we arrived here [in Anchorage] at 6 in the morning on the 6th of December. And I remember it was a Friday because
Luis left to go to work at the grocery store.” This was December of 1996, and they didn’t travel back to Acuitzio until 1998.

**Gendered Mobilities**

Women and men of the second generation talk about travelling back to Acuitzio for different reasons (see also Striffler 2007). Women emphasize the importance of mobility to visit extended family. For example, Juana said, “when I am in Acuitzio I spend pretty much all my time with my mother.” Ana also visits her mother every day when she is in Acuitzio. And many of the women I interviewed told me that being with family was one of the things they miss the most about their hometown. Some women also described visits back to Mexico as necessary to endure life in Anchorage. For example, Serefina, who moved to Anchorage with her husband, and is also part of a multigenerational family network, said, “when you go back to Mexico you recharge your batteries so that you can make it through the year in Anchorage.” Men, on the other hand, talk about enjoying life in town, visiting the plaza and spending time with friends.

In her interview, Juana described how Luis went back and forth between Acuitzio and Alaska during the time when she was in Acuitzio giving birth to and caring for their young children. She said, “I stayed behind in Acuitzio, pregnant with Sophia, and I think this is when he realized, or like I had said that I didn’t want to live life like that, separated. Him there and us here, him here and me there.” It was at this point, Luis’s wife Juana told me, that she issued her husband an ultimatum after a few years of this renewed migration-related separation: “Either you come back to Acuitzio to live with us, or you find a way to bring us with you.” She said that life in Acuitzio without him was very lonely, and that she felt her children needed their father. Luis was particularly attentive to this, since he grew up with a migrant father as well. He, like others of his generation, chose to bring his wife and children with him to Alaska. This may be due to
the personal experience of growing up in a migrant household with his father absent for most of his life, changing ideas about marriage (Hirsch 2003), changing political-economic circumstances in North America, and technological advancements that have made it cheaper or easier to travel. Such a statement also illustrates the profoundly gendered nature of migration/immigration from Mexico to the United States. Women and men draw on discourses that are available to them and socially appropriate to explain their mobility (Muehlmann 2014).

For women, adventure is not a socially appropriate reason to move to Alaska. But, traveling “for family” or “to be together” are explanations that work within their social world. And indeed, although women framed their initial mobility as being “brought by their husbands”, of course they directed their mobilities as well. Gloria decided where they would go, and Juana issued an ultimatum to her husband. For all of the women in this extended family network, they explain that they came to Alaska because of their husbands. As Ana said, “because my husband brought me.” Even Gloria, who arranged papers for her husband, said that she came to Alaska so that her husband could find work.91 Interviewees with a long family history of migration to Alaska, and even many of those who don’t, fall into a gendered pattern where men come to Alaska to work, and then later bring their wives and children. However, it is obvious that even though these movements are framed this way, the women are key decision makers, and the decision to go to Alaska is negotiated within the marriage, and often follows an attempt by the family to stay in Mexico. Recall how Luis attempted to stay in Mexico, and Juana’s ultimatum: either stay in Mexico or take us with you. At any rate, the way people describe their travel between Mexico

91 In another case, from a different family network that I do not have space to discuss in detail here, both the husband and the wife had extended family network contacts in Alaska – i.e. both of their fathers had worked in Alaska.
and Alaska is gendered: men travel primarily for work or adventure, women travel to keep the family together. Indeed, alongside structural changes in United States immigration policy and the North American political economy, ideas about love, marriage, and family changed between the generation represented by Luis Sr. and that of Luis Jr. with impacts on mobility and the experience of both Anchorage and Acuitzio.

“First I Dreamed of Coming Here, Then I Dreamed of Going Back”

The youngest brother in the Bravo family, Miguel, came to Alaska two years after Luis did. I asked him how he came to Alaska in the first place and he said “Well, to improve my life and to work. My father worked here, he was the one who arranged papers for us and he brought us. Or like, it was to find work, right? A better way of life.” But when he finally arrived “on January 15, 1985,” he felt disappointed.² “When I arrived here, I said, this is el norte? I didn’t see anyone. There was no one at all in the street, it looked so lonely. No, I wanted to go back after eight days!” He paused to laugh, and then continued, “First my dream was to come here and then my dream was to go back.³ First my dream was ay, when am I going to go to the United States! But as soon as I arrived here, I dreamed of going back. But now I have more than half of my life here, 27 years. It’s a long time, already.”

Miguel’s statement about how “first he dreamed of coming here and then he dreamed of going back” is key for understanding the experience of this generation. As I have described, members of this second generation have attempted to retract the network and stay in Acuitzio. However, there are diverse life circumstances and contingencies that interact with larger social forces that lead to people becoming migrants in the first place, but to continue migrating also.

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² In fact, many Acuitzences that I interviewed recall the exact day that they came to the United States.
³ Primero soñaba con venir y después soñaba con regresar
Nevertheless, some still plan to go back: Luis talks about going back to Acuitzio to live someday, but his wife Juana isn’t so sure – she doesn’t want to be apart from their children who she expects will continue to live in Alaska (see also Wiest 2009:33-34).

The Third Generation

The third generation of Acuitzences who move between Anchorage and Acuitzio were born between 1980 and 2000. In some cases, like Toño, Véro, and Sophia, these youth were born in Mexico and spent the early years of their life there, before moving to Alaska with their families as young children. They currently spend most of the year in Anchorage, making annual trips back to Acuitzio to visit family and friends there. Others were born in Alaska, but move between Anchorage and Acuitzio in a similar way. Some have more complicated mobilities, and have relocated their primary residence multiple times throughout their lives. Others have stopped moving between Anchorage and Acuitzio, but move between Alaska and other locations in the Lower 48 where they have built their lives. It is now well understood that children play an important role in guiding transnational migration decisions so that “children’s perceived needs, interests, and desires influence the decisions families make within the constraints of particular circumstances” (Orellana et al. 2001:587; see also Boehm 2008, 2012; Cole and Durham 2007; Dreby 2006; Parreñas 2005).

94 There is a fourth generation now, however these are very young children and babies. Some of these families have traveled to Acuitzio together, and others have not.
95 One example is Claudia, who went to elementary school in Anchorage, then high school in Acuitzio, and then moved back to Alaska after graduation. Gloria’s daughter Renata also relocated multiple times as she was growing up and might move again as she is living in Anchorage but recently married someone who lived in Acuitzio before they wed.
This group in general experiences the tension between “here” and “there” most strongly. This generation has to work to build relationships, find out where they belong, and imagine where their future might be. Some dream of “going back” to Mexico, and others slowly lose ties to the hometown of their parents and grandparents. In terms of mobility though, younger Acuitzences in Anchorage have often have lived their entire lives moving back and forth between Mexico and Alaska. As a result they orient themselves to a transnational way of life that depends on mobility more than past generations did. When adults make decisions about leaving children behind, bringing them along to Alaska, or sending them back to Mexico, “adults are actively engaged in the process of ‘developing’ their children towards the goals and values they hold for them” (Orellana et al. 2001: 587). Indeed, these children have grown up orienting themselves to the transnational social field as a whole, and see their potential futures in both locations, with ongoing mobilities between them.

**Sophia’s Quinceañera**

Sophia was really nervous about her quinceañera in the days leading up to it. For one thing, her uncle was sick, and I knew she had been worried about getting everything done and learning the dances that she and her *chambelanes* or escorts would perform at the reception. Today, however, she looked beautiful and confident in her strapless red gown with a full skirt and sequins across the bodice. Her escorts were dressed in black tuxedoes with red cummerbunds and bow ties that matched her dress. Over the past weeks, I had helped Sophia, her sister and her mother to glue red and white flowers onto salt shakers, baskets, and napkin

96 The young woman celebrating her quinceañera selects formal escorts. *Chambelanes* are *male* escorts and *damas* are female. The number of chambelanes and damas in a young woman’s court can vary. At the quinceañera I went to in 2011, there were four escorts and no damas. All of the escorts but one were family members (brother and maternal cousins) and the final one was a friend of another maternal cousin.
holders to place on the tables at the fiesta, as well as on plastic wine glasses to toast Sophia with at the party. I had also watched Sophia and her escorts practice their dances, and talked to her family about who would be invited to the party.

Sophia Bravo was born in Morelia, and lived in Acuitzio for the first months of her life. Her father worked in Alaska and moved back and forth between Acuitzio and Anchorage until 1996 when the whole family moved to Anchorage. At that time, Sophia was a small baby, and does not remember living in Acuitzio full time. However, the family visits Acuitzio every year and Sophia said that she always knew her quinceañera would take place in Acuitzio. After all, she said, “most of my family is in Mexico and if I had it in Alaska, not very many people would be able to come”.

Her party was a transnational affair. After the mass, as is customary at quinceañeras and weddings that I have attended in Acuitzio, guests came up to the front of the church to take photographs with Sophia. Many of them live in Anchorage and had come to Acuitzio for the summer, timed so that they would be able to attend Sophia’s quinceañera. All but one of her father’s siblings live in Anchorage with their families. As well, some of her extended family members who were at the party also live in Anchorage (Appendix A). But, as Sophia said, it was very important to her to celebrate this special day with her mother’s family, most of whom live in Mexico. Sophia’s mother, Juana, said that having a quinceañera means to “give thanks to God that you are well, that your family is well, and to share that with your family.”

Her celebration was in part about re-affirming social ties within a kin network that has expanded to include both Acuitzio and Anchorage. Juana said that so far every year there has been a quinceañera, wedding, baptism, or anniversary party to go to in Acuitzio when they visit. In fact, people say that they intentionally schedule these fiestas during the summer months or in
December when most migrant family members come back to town. Indeed, for the third generation, re-affirming social ties and developing new relationships in Acuitzio is key to maintaining a connection there.

Although vital conjunctures like quinceañeras and other milestones such as baptisms, weddings, or funerals re-affirm social relationships and trace the boundaries of kin groups (Johnson-Hanks 2002; Mazzucatto et al. 2006; Olwig 2002), these events can also produce new relationships. For example, Verónica is Sophia’s older sister. She celebrated her own quinceañera two years earlier. She said originally she wanted her dress to be coral, but she ended up choosing a beautiful creamy yellow dress instead. In an interview on a snowy winter day in Anchorage, Verónica told me that her quinceañera was when she made friends her age in town. Since she did not go to school in Acuitzio, making non-familial relationships in Mexico could have been difficult. However, as she explains it, she started meeting different people because of her escorts. A young woman who is being celebrated with a quinceañera is expected to learn and perform dances with her escorts and so they will meet for practice on a regular basis leading up to the quince. In this case, Verónica said that her close friend and cousin initially suggested possible escorts to her. After practice she would hang out with her escorts, who then introduced her to their friends and “that’s how I started meeting people over there.” Although I realized that a fiesta like a quinceañera reaffirmed and solidified existing bonds of family and friendship, I had not thought of a quinceañera as an opportunity to build new social relationships in the hometown. But for some young women, it seems, choosing escorts, getting to know them while

97 On my first fieldwork trip to Acuitzio in 2005, I lived with a family who owns a grocery store and rents a party room and supplies like tables, chairs, and tablecloths for fiestas. They also say that summer and December are the busiest time for their rental business.
practicing the dances for the quince, and meeting their friends becomes the basis for a whole new social network in Acuitzio.

Her brother, Toño, has made friends his own age through the weekly *cabalgatas*, or horse parades in Acuitzio. These are Tuesday evening man-only rides into the mountains, followed by food, drinking, and socializing. Toño told me he met his oldest friend in Acuitzio there, and soon got introduced to other young people in town. “That’s how I started making friends,” he said, and he met even more people when his younger sisters had their quinceañeras. Toño and his sisters have dated people from Acuitzio over the summer, and sometimes their relationships continue long-distance. Sometimes these relationships become even more serious, and third generation migrant-immigrants visiting Acuitzio meet and marry their spouses there. As explained earlier, many couples in their parents’ generation also met in Acuitzio, when men were in town on a break from work in Alaska. However, other young people with a connection to Acuitzio have met and married people they met in Alaska, some from Acuitzio, some from different parts of Mexico, and some of other backgrounds entirely.

Across all generations, spatializing relationships between Acuitzio and Anchorage is essential for maintaining mobility between these points. For young people in this network especially, who have lived most of their lives in Anchorage with annual trips back to Mexico, developing these kinds of new relationships is critical for maintaining a connection to their hometown.

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98 I am not sure how rigidly this gender divide is enforced, since I have never gone to a *cabalgata* myself. Juana told me that she went once in place of her husband, who had already paid but could not go. She said, “Honestly Sarita, it was quite boring.”
“The First Thing I Can Remember”

Verónica Bravo is Luis and Juana’s oldest daughter. She is under twenty years of age, born in Mexico but raised in Alaska after moving there when she was age two. We met for a recorded interview on a cold winter afternoon in Anchorage. The sun that time of year is permanently low in the sky, as though it is always dusk or dawn. Vero was dressed for the weather in typical Anchorage style – a puffy North Face jacket, jeans, and brown leather boots. We ordered coffee and I sat the digital recorder on the lacquered wooden table between us. We read through the consent form, I pushed record, and asked: what is the first thing that you can remember?

She said, “the first thing I actually remember is the first time we went back to Mexico”. This was in December 1998, when Verónica was around five years old. She remembers being in the airport a lot, waiting, traveling. She remembers actually leaving Anchorage on an airplane, and then going to parades and holiday festivities in Acuitzio. Veronica’s brother is named Luis like his father and grandfather but his family calls him Toño, a short form of his middle name, Antonio. He also remembers the family’s initial move to Alaska:

“I don’t remember the plane but I remember stopping somewhere, maybe California. And we waited in a long line, I’m pretty sure it was something about paperwork for like visas and all that stuff. But, we were just in a big line, like waiting, waiting, I remember I was getting frustrated. I was, like, a little kid, and I hated standing still. The next thing I remember is actually waking up, getting out of the cab, and going to the apartment where we used to live. And seeing this white stuff and water all over the ground. I was like, ‘what is that?’ My dad was carrying me cause I had these little shoes that were gonna get wet so he was carrying me. And I was just like, ‘what is that?’ He’s like, ‘that’s snow’, I’m just like ‘snow? What is, what’s snow?’ And that’s my first memory of Alaska.”

Toño describes how, over time, as he and his sisters grew up, the family traveled to Mexico more often:
“At first we started going like maybe once every few years, then once every two years, then maybe once every year. And when I hit high school, that’s when we started like, we stopped going for Christmas and for New Year’s cause I had finals. So then we started going every summer. At first since most of our cousins used to live in the same town, they’d show us around and introduce us to their friends. But then they started moving away too. They got older, we got older, some moved to US, some moved to Morelia. So then we just started actually, having to actually meet people.”

Considering Verónica and Toño’s individual life histories and their family’s multigenerational mobility, the fact that their earliest memories are of travel is not all that surprising. For over fifty years now, her family members have been moving between Anchorage and Acuitzio and back, tracing long lines across the continent.

“My dad mostly told me stories about working in Alaska, and I’ve seen a lot of pictures too, like my grandpa when he was on the pipeline or, like in the middle of snow. They would send a lot of pictures back to Acuitzio, a lot of the pictures would be outside of a store or next to like a huge pile of snow. And that’s like what they would send over there to Mexico. My dad mostly talks about how much snow there was and how his dad had always been in Alaska on and off, and I guess that’s basically why he brought us here too because he didn’t want to be like on and off coming and visiting, so he just wanted to like have everybody be here, in the same place, yeah.”

Vero’s sister, Sophia, described her family’s long-term connection to Alaska:

“I say we’re here because my grandpa came to work, he came to work on the pipeline or something like that? From California he came here and then, yeah. People kind of ask me why, and I say I have no idea, you should ask my parents. But I think it was just ‘cause of work. Like they needed work and they had jobs here, so.”

Sophia is right, past generations do talk about going to Alaska for work, for better paying jobs and more opportunity. As I have shown, keeping family together was also important for Vero’s parents, the second generation. So how does this third generation explain why they are in Alaska? And where do they imagine their future?

**Ambivalent Mobilities**

It is Verónica who wants to go back to Acuitzio most often, her mother says:
“If she could go every vacation she would, spring break, in December, in the summer. I said, no hija, you can’t. Plus, it’s so far and aside from that, like Luis says, hija, it’s another country, right now you can’t but you can go when you are older.”

Her parents attempt to restrict her mobility because the distance and difference is too great, but “you can go when you’re older.”99 Here age intersects with socio-spatial distance, a key aspect of transnational life between Acuitzio and Anchorage. Verónica and her siblings express an ambivalence: although they want to go to Acuitzio whenever possible, they also echo the concerns of their parents – it’s too far, and too different for them to go on their own.

However, there is an irony here: although youth are discouraged from traveling to Acuitzio alone, they experience much more freedom in terms of mobility once they are there. Striffler described how young women experienced more freedom in the United States, and young men in their hometown in Mexico (Striffler 2007). However, I found that young people in general experience more freedom in Acuitzio than in Anchorage. For example, Alina Cárdenas’s 9-year-old daughter would play with her cousins all day in Acuitzio, not returning home until dusk. Alina would tell her not to get used to it, “acá es puro calle pero allá es puro casa,” here it’s all street but there it’s all house.” In Anchorage every day after school Alina’s daughter returned home and wasn’t allowed out alone. Similarly, the Bravo children were afforded a lot of liberty to go out and stay out late while in Acuitzio, as long as they checked in with Juana regularly by text message.

Verónica talked about the possibility of living in Mexico one day when I asked her what kind of life she imagines for her future, if she will stay in Alaska or not, and she said,

99 In fact, the two older Bravo siblings did go to Acuitzio without their parents for the first time in December 2013 and they have continued to travel alone to Acuitzio since then.
“I’ve never really thought if I’m going to stay here or not because a big thing was that I wanted to go to college in Mexico. I feel like the easier thing to do is just stay here because I know how everything works here and then over there, like, everything is just so different. Getting used to being over there. Cause like a lot of people tell me that the only reason why I like it is because we’re just there for vacation, like, actually living there is like way harder.”

I often heard this sentiment from young Acuitzences in Alaska, and I asked Verónica,

“Do you think it’s true? Would it be harder to live there?” I asked, before taking a sip of my coffee.

“I think so. Yeah, but also I don’t think that you need that much. I dunno, over here [in Anchorage] you, like, you have to have a car to get around and stuff and then over there it’s not really that necessary. And then,” Vero pauses, and continues,

“There are a lot of things in Mexico where I just don’t know how they work, so. I would think about moving back but then what’s the point of my parents bringing me over here? They wanted me to have a better lifestyle, so I feel like it would be pointless to go back if they’re the ones that like brought me over here, so. But I know they want to go back, like, my parents want to move to Acuitzio someday. After they’re retired and stuff. I think I could do that, like, many years from now.”

“Yeah totally, but then what if you have kids?”

“They can come visit,” Vero says, laughing.

Vero aims to continue to travel between Alaska and Michoacán, and if she does retire in Mexico, her children “can come visit”, as she said.

In an interview with Sophia at the Bravo family home in Spenard, Anchorage, I asked,

“Where do you feel most at home, do you think?” Sophia immediately replied, “Acuitzio” but

100 I asked this question many times during my fieldwork. Most people found it difficult to reply to. Most people said both places, but they expressed this in different ways. I explore this further in Chapter 5. Raymond Wiest also drew attention to this, finding that “virtually all participants from Acuitzio said they were “Acuitzences” who happened to be living abroad for particular reasons” (Wiest 2009:37).
then went on to explain: “I don’t know, it’s weird. I’ve had that question asked before, like,
where do you feel at home and I don’t know. I guess you could say Acuitzio is my home, but my
life’s here. If you kinda get it.” She said she hopes she always goes back:

“I don’t know, I hope when I’m older and when I have kids of my own I’d want
them to go visit Acuitzio. I’m not saying I’d take them every single year but I’d
want them definitely to visit Mexico and tell them stories about, have them know
where they came from, just as much as I know where I’m from.”

Like his sisters, Toño is ambivalent about the future:

“I really don’t know. That’s the thing, like I, I love it over there and everything,
but I know that over here I have a great opportunity and I shouldn’t just waste it.
Cause a lot of friends that I have over there really wish they could be up here. I
have a couple of friends that have come up here, that have come up illegally and it
is just like a really terrible journey for them. When I was younger I couldn’t
appreciate that, you know, it’s like I have all this paperwork handed to me when I
was little, but now I can’t, I really can’t, I know that I can’t just move back to
Acuitzio. I don’t know. Not when there’s all these people trying to come over
here.”

To me, this ambivalence indicates that Vero, Sophia, and Toño have built a social
network that stretches between Anchorage and Acuitzio, a way of life that depends on mobility
between these places. They imagine a future whereby they are able to keep moving between both
Anchorage and Acuitzio. For them, home is found in both places, and in the shared experience of
moving between them.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have examined the ongoing expansion of a network of Acuitzences to
Alaska through the narratives of people in an extended family network. Using the example of the
Bravo family, I have traced the ongoing mobility within these extended family networks of
Acuitzences in Alaska to explore how differences over time have led to generational and
gendered experiences of mobility in and between Acuitzio and Anchorage. This shows that there
is no linear movement, nor straightforward progression over time from Mexico to Alaska or from Mexican to US-American identities. Instead, mobilities are ongoing, and people increasingly orient themselves to the social field as a whole, to a transnational setting that spans the continent. Processes like citizenship, land ownership, and life events that give people roots also provide traction and paradoxically facilitate mobility between both points.

Mobility between Anchorage and Acuitzio has continued over time, and will likely continue as the youngest generations are socialized into a transnational social world oriented around mobility. However, this mobility is contingent and not all extended family networks continue to maintain a connection to Alaska. Other family groups have not been as successful at working the sociospatial distance between Anchorage and Acuitzio. For example, I visited Sr. Jaime at his home many times when I was in Acuitzio. From the outside, it is a low, nondescript building. However, once welcomed inside, windows along one wall open onto an expansive view of the town going down the hill, ranchos and fields in the valley, and avocado farms at higher elevations. Jaime himself is an imposing but soft-spoken man, tall, with white hair and a full moustache. He worked in Alaska beginning in 1960 but returned to Acuitzio after receiving a deportation order in 1968 and he never went to work in the United States again. Neither did any of his children. “The vagabond’s wings were clipped,” he said.

As well, not all members of the Bravo family have moved to Alaska. Don Luis also arranged papers for his eldest daughter, Yolanda. Her sister’s papers came in just after she was married, but her husband would not let her go. While members of multigenerational family networks have been very successful at working the border, using mobility to take advantage of opportunities on both sides, it is worth noting that most of the first generation of Acuitzences who moved to Alaska has moved back to Mexico to retire. Second generation middle-aged men
and women talk about going back to Acuitzio to live “someday,” but are ambivalent about leaving their children behind in Alaska. The youngest generations dream about moving back to Acuitzio but their life is in Anchorage as well. Actually moving back to Mexico happens due to family circumstances and stage in the life course, such as an individual reaching retirement age and the shifting dynamics of the US and global economy. Larger structural forces in North America and globally shape and condition abilities or necessities to expand northwards (Boehm 2012; Kearney 2004; Ong 1999; Stephen 2007; Wiest 1979, 2009). This is what it means to live transnationally: moving between Alaska and Acuitzio, re-establishing a primary residence in Acuitzio, or expanding northwards once again are all possibilities that are taken up in alignment with life circumstances within a transnational social field.

In the next chapter I will move from a focus on mobility as spatial practice, to other kinds of spatial practices that people use to acostumbrarse, or “get used to” life in Alaska. I analyze acostumbrarse as the everyday practices indicative of the development of a transnational habitus. I show how Acuitzences in Alaska develop habits that produce a lived space that extends between Anchorage and Acuitzio, and argue that they are part of a transnational class whose mode of production and reproduction extends across the borders of nation states. People work across borders and boundaries to secure not only a livelihood, but also a way of life.
Chapter 5: “You Have To Get Used To It” – The Making of a Transnational Habitus

On the day of Sophia’s quinceañera in Acuitzio, I got dressed, did my hair and makeup and then went to the store to buy some potato chips to eat as a snack before Sophia’s mass at the Parroquia de San Nicolás Tolentino. The store next door was closed so I went to the next closest abarrotes on Melchor Ocampo. I chose a bag of lime flavoured potato chips and as I was counting out pesos, the man working there asked me where I am from. I told him that I am from Canada, and I am in Acuitzio working on a project about Acuitzences who live and work in Alaska.

He said, “I worked in Alaska, in Barrow on the North Slope\textsuperscript{101} or however you say it,” and took an Alaska ID card out of his wallet to prove it. “I’m Diego. I was in Barrow when the Alaska Natives had a whale hunt there, I even have photos. Let me go and get them.”

He came back with a photo album with a map of Alaska on the front, the kind I have seen for sale all over Anchorage in tourist shops and grocery stores. He pointed out the locations where he worked: Barrow, Anchorage, Kotzebue. Then he flipped through to a photo of himself in front of a giant whale on the shores of the Bering Sea, in Barrow. This whale was likely hunted by local Iñupiat whalers who have been harvesting bowhead whale for thousands of years and continue subsistence hunting activities today. Diego told me that he worked in Alaska for 12

\textsuperscript{101} The North Slope is a region of Alaska located in Northern Alaska between the Brooks Range to the south and the Arctic Ocean to the north. The area includes the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge as well as large and productive oil fields. It is also the ancestral and present day home of Inupiat people. Barrow is the northernmost city in the United States and is accessible by air or sea.
years in total: at a Mexican restaurant in Barrow, building a school in Kotzebue, and working in construction all over Anchorage.

I met Diego at his store again the following week for an interview. He talked about how when he was in Anchorage “I remembered Acuitzio like it was a dream.” When he came back to Acuitzio and thought about Anchorage “everywhere that I went and all that I saw, everything seemed just like a dream. That’s what happened once I came back here.” He explained that when he leaves Mexico, it’s like his life there is cut off but when he comes back “it’s like starting over again from when I left.”

“I understand,” I said, “you carry on where you left off.”

“Yes, I carry on from there. And when I went back to Anchorage, I went back to the same house, my same things, I left my clothes, my bed, my blanket, my room, everything. I went back to it. But,” he continued, “it takes a few days to get used to those same things again, to feel normal again, so that the memories of Acuitzio become just a memory, like something that happens in a dream.”

Many Acuitzences talked about having to adaptarse, acostumbrarse, or get used to living life between Acuitzio and Anchorage. In this chapter I move from a focus on mobility as spatial practice to other kinds of practices that people use to get used to transnational life. As I illustrate, such practices lead to the development of a transnational habitus and lead to gendered class identities. Through the process of transnational class formation and the development of a transnational habitus, Acuitzences connect Anchorage and Acuitzio in their everyday lives, bridging the socio-spatial distance between these places, building identities that draw from difference, and livelihoods that use the social divisions between these locations to their
advantage. In this chapter, I show how people develop a transnational habitus and maintain affective and spatial links in both Anchorage and Acuitzio.

Pierre Bourdieu defined habitus as “a system of lasting, transposable dispositions, which, integrating past experiences, functions at every moment as a matrix of perceptions, appreciations, and actions, and makes possible the achievement of infinitely diversified tasks” (Bourdieu 1977:82). My work builds on Bourdieu and also on Lefebvre in the prioritization of practice, the things people do to make and transform the social world in which they live as a major source of habits. This is a process of territorialization whereby getting used to living between Anchorage and Acuitzio means creating a new type of habitus.

These spatial practices link into wider processes of transnational class formation that draws from the inequality of the US-Mexico border for social mobility across generations. Since upward class mobility is seen as difficult to achieve in Mexico, people go to the USA to get ahead, with plans to return to Mexico and live comfortably someday. By virtue of their mobility between Anchorage and Acuitzio, people have been able to achieve some upward mobility in terms of class position in their Mexican hometown, sometimes owning land, property, and businesses. Most of the Acuitzences in this dissertation are working class people with a relatively good standard of living and patterns of consumption and with middle-class aspirations in terms of buying property and sending their children to college. However, they have achieved this class status through transnational mobility across generations. This is why this is a transnational class formation created through movement across borders to secure a livelihood and a way of life.

This chapter engages a growing literature on transnational class formation. But rather than focusing on elites, such as Indian IT professionals or Chinese capitalists (Ong 1999; Radhakrishnan 2011), I focus on the lived experience of the transnational working class. This is
a topic that has been extensively analyzed regarding migrants from Mexico to the United States (Boehm 2012; Cohen 2004; De Genova 2005; Rouse 2002; Stephen 2007; Striffler 2007), from the Philippines to the homes of affluent elites worldwide (Freznoza-Flot 2009; Parreñas 2001, 2005) and between other unequal geographies (e.g. Basch et al. 1994; Chu 2010; Gamburd 2000; Miles 2010; Zontini 2010). Yet in this chapter I also analyze how, in case of the networks created between Mexico and Alaska, this uneven process of class formation is profoundly gendered, since migration is shaped by the relative opportunities and dimensions of experience available to men and women (Zavella 2011:58). Gender positionings, entangled with generation, citizenship status, and language skills, shape how people negotiate their class status and the strategies that they use to bridge the socio-spatial distance between Anchorage and Acuitzio.

Expression of class varies depending on position within the multigenerational family unit, vis-à-vis the state, and whether or not the practice is located in Anchorage or Acuitzio.

Transnational class positionings are experienced as a contradictory sense of home. Over time, people produce a lived space that extends between Anchorage and Acuitzio, for they are not only trying to “get used” to life in Anchorage but also developing a habitus, a class identity, and a lived space oriented to the transnational social field as a whole. Yet the fact that people argued that they “have to get used to” this transnational life indicates that this is not a smooth process but one fraught with tensions and difficulties, in which this habituation has to be gradually created through repetitive practices and experiences. Their transnational habitus is thus built on uneven attachments to place, expressed by Acuitzences in contradictory statements like: “I feel like my home is Mexico, but I would never live there”; or, “First I dreamed of coming to Alaska, and after that I dreamed of going back”; or “My heart is in Mexico but my money is in the United States.” These quotes are important because they reveal that many people do not feel
entirely at home in Alaska, and therefore maintain their home town in Mexico as an important spatial and affective point of reference. Yet as we have seen, and as I show next, some people no longer feel entirely at home in Mexico either.

Lynn Stephen alluded to these tensions when she wrote in her book *Transborder Lives* about the “floating nature of the border” (2007:33). She argues that the discrimination and segregation of the US-Mexico border are recreated away from its physical location to points within the United States. Individual workers living in the United States struggle to reconcile the fact that they have physically crossed the border, but need to appear invisible, or appear not to have crossed the border by creating alternate identities and securing (false) documents. The border thus moves “with the person who crossed it,” something which is key to understanding the experience of Indigenous migrant and immigrant agricultural workers in California and Oregon. So, at the same time that people build transborder communities between the United States and Mexico, they are positioned by state agencies in a contradictory framework of simultaneous surveillance and invisibility in the United States (Stephen 2007:144-145). Along similar lines, Deborah Boehm notes that “the intimacy of transnationality has been and continues to be characterized by both continuity and fragmentation: flows, connections, and linkages characterize transnational lives as do breaks, shifts, dislocations, and disruptions” (Boehm 2012:15). In “getting used” to these dislocations, Acuitzences in Alaska produce a transnational spatial formation, what I am calling “Mexican Alaska,” after De Genova’s Mexican Chicago, which he sees as “a transnational conjectural space” whereby Chicago is practically and materially implicated in Mexico, and that belongs meaningfully to Latin America (De Genova 2005:7). Mexican Alaska, like Mexican Chicago, is “a conjuncture of the national and
transnational and constituted through everyday social relations and meaningful practices of racialized labour migration, capitalist enterprises, and the US nation-state” (De Genova 2005:7).

This chapter is therefore about how people need to work to produce a sense of belonging in Alaska, and they do this by finding ways to connect the two places in their everyday present lives and imagined futures. “Getting used to it” is about working across socio-spatial distance and the contradictions between nation-states. As I will elaborate throughout this chapter, this happens across all aspects of life, from adjusting to the weather, to building relationships, to clothing, to owning homes and property, to language, to seeking statuses, and to developing skills that facilitate transnational life. A key marker of transnational class status is not only the ability to gain a livelihood across borders, but also the ability to live within and between two very different societies. Acuitzences can explain the differences in informal rules and norms between these places, and they have developed identities based on their uneven spatial attachments to Anchorage and Acuitzio. These people produce a lived space that extends to both Anchorage and Acuitzio, developing a transnational habitus oriented to the transnational social field as a whole.

**Everyday Practices of “Getting Used to It”**

Acuitzences engage in a variety of everyday spatial practices to get used to life between Mexico and Alaska. Verónica Bravo talked about adjusting to life in Acuitzio and Anchorage when I asked her where she feels most at home. She answered that she feels at home in both places but that she has to get used to life in Acuitzio when she goes there to visit: “Like I told you, the first couple days are kinda weird like, I have to get used to being over there again. And, you know how it is to live over there too, like, I don’t even know how to turn on the boiler at our house in Mexico!” She laughed.
“Do you feel like when you come back here to Anchorage that you have to adjust too?” I asked.

“Yeah. I definitely miss it over there when I come back. I mean, I still do right now.”

Verónica is talking about adjusting to the everyday life in Acuitzio when she goes there every summer, and again adjusting back to everyday life in Anchorage upon her return. Doing this requires the development of a habitus that allows Vero to adjust to everyday life within a transnational social field that includes both Anchorage and Acuitzio. This process of adjustment is not smooth, for it requires negotiating very different types of weather, social life, rules and regulations governing immigration and work, and language, among other things. People se acostumbra by learning what to do and how to be in both Anchorage and Acuitzio.

Weather figures prominently in people’s spatial perceptions of this transnational field. In interviews and informal conversations, I asked Acuitzences what it was like when they first came to Alaska and they emphasized how hard it was getting used to the cold weather and darkness in the far northern latitudes. Getting used to the weather happens at the level of the body, and people not only talk about getting used to the cold and dressing appropriately for it, but also the long, dark winter nights, and adjusting to effects on the body like dry skin from the winter air and a lighter complexion from less time spent in the sun. Oscar said, “Alaska has helped us a lot because we have always had work, but like I told you, it is not the weather for us. When I arrive in Acuitzio I feel totally different, I feel ready to do things, I have more energy and here, like I told you, everything is different.”

Like Oscar, when people talk about getting used to the weather, it is with reference to its effect on the body. I met Esteban and Laura at their cozy home in Anchorage in the middle of winter, with snow piled high on the street and either side of the driveway. They are both from
Michoacán, and Esteban is from Acuitzio. They met and married in Anchorage, and have since had two children. The whole family lives together in Anchorage, and travels to Acuitzio and Morelia every year or so. In an interview, Esteban and Laura told me about how, after living in Alaska for many years, their bodies got used to cooler temperatures and they were no longer accustomed to hot weather when they visited Mexico. Laura talked about a recent trip to Morelia when they decided to take the tourist bus around town. Her sons were dressed up in suits for a fiesta and she took advantage of the nice clothes the boys were wearing to take photos around town before their suits had to be returned. The boys were mad because it was May, and it gets very hot in Morelia at that time of the year. “Y ya no estamos acostumbrados a la calor de allá. We’re not used to the heat there anymore. We felt like we were drowning.”

Her husband continued, “Here in the summer sometimes we are at 50° Fahrenheit [10° C] and we are in shorts and sweating! No, we don’t feel the cold as much, or maybe a little chill, but no. One December we went to Mexicali to visit my mother’s brother and it was in December, right?”

Laura said, “Yes, it was in December.”

Esteban continued, “We went around like that, in shorts and a t-shirt! We said let’s go out to eat somewhere. My uncle said, let me go and get a sweater, it’s starting to get cold. And us, nothing! We just went like that. He said, I’m going to get a sweater, don’t the children need one? I said no, uncle, they’re fine.”

I said, “So, you get used to a place, like that.”

Esteban nodded, “The body does.”

Women I interviewed in Anchorage talked about getting used to a different way of life in Anchorage, captured in the phrase “feeling encerrado”: closed in and at home all of the time.
This is partly related to weather and geography, especially the cold temperatures and short hours of daylight during the winter, which are not conducive to spending a lot of time on the streets. It also has to do with a different rhythm of everyday life, and a different way of living in and moving through a city. For example, in Acuitzio, many people, and especially women, do not drive. It is possible to walk or take transit like bus or collective taxis to travel within and from Acuitzio, to Morelia, and to destinations around Michoacán or even Mexico. However, as I explained in Chapter 1, Anchorage is spread out over a large area and walking or taking the bus is less convenient. So, most people in Anchorage consider it necessary to drive to work, to school, and for shopping and leisure activities. In Anchorage, and many other places in the United States, automobiles are considered essential for everyday life and a symbol of individual freedom, as in the phrase “freedom of the open road” (Seiler 2008). Women who arrived in Anchorage unable to drive or speak English could not work, and thus felt closed in, or encerrado in their homes. This adds an important gender difference to the experience of “getting used” to living in Alaska upon arriving from Mexico.

To illustrate this gendered process for women from Acuitzio, consider what Serefina told me about what it was like when she first arrived in Anchorage. I talked to Serefina at her home as she prepared breakfast for her children, and she explained how things were very difficult for her when she first arrived. Serefina was in her early 30s when I interviewed her in 2012, and she told me about how she met her husband in Acuitzio, when he was there on vacation from work in Anchorage. He had already worked in Anchorage for many years before they met, and most of his brothers did too. At the time, they planned to live in Morelia together after they married, but that didn’t work out and they moved to Anchorage together in 2002. When she first came to Alaska, she said life was very difficult for her because she has always been very independent.
“But,” she continued, “when I arrived in Anchorage, it was difficult because I depended on my husband for everything.” She described how she couldn’t communicate by herself since she only spoke Spanish, so she couldn’t go to the store alone, or ask any questions. If she wanted something she couldn’t ask for it. “It was really hard for me because I had to depend on my husband for everything and this was one of the things that made me really frustrated. I wanted to go back to my country because I felt like there wasn’t anyone here, and I couldn’t do anything.”

“How long was it until you felt more independent again?” I asked. Serefina replied,

“When I started to drive. I came to Anchorage with a visa and so I couldn’t have a driver’s license until my husband arranged papers for me. Since I didn’t have a license my husband didn’t want me to risk driving without a license. But sometimes when he arrived home from work and went to sleep, I would take his truck. I would drive around the block even though the truck was a standard, and I had never driven a standard. The poor truck! I think I was the one who broke it!”

Another way people feel *encerrado* is because of the different ways in which people use public spaces in Acuitzio and Anchorage. In Acuitzio, people are accustomed to going to the plaza to visit with townspeople. There are regular fiestas in town, celebrated with food, music, and socializing. The spatial importance of the plaza in Latin America has been analyzed by many anthropologists (Ames 1973; Low 2000; Richardson 1982). In Anchorage, there is no plaza, and social activities acquire a different dynamic and rhythm, and this takes some getting used to. For example, Ivan and I met for an interview at his kitchen table on his birthday. He and his wife Claudia have two children, a cat, and a dog, and when I came over that day, the house was unusually quiet with Claudia at work and the kids at school. Ivan’s uncle is Gonzalo Calderón, one of the very first Acuitzences to go to Alaska and Claudia’s father and grandfather have both worked in Alaska too. However, Ivan didn’t come to Anchorage until after he and Claudia got
married. Ivan and Claudia often told me about how much they both appreciated the relaxed
attitude of people in Anchorage. For example, he said, you don’t have to dress fancy or drive a
nice car to fit in. In the interview, Ivan reiterated how much he likes Anchorage, especially in the
summer. “There are many things to do in Anchorage. You have to know how to live in the place
where you are. Even the winter is nice if you know how to enjoy it. But being from the south,
you don’t enjoy it the same. Because it is sometimes extremely cold, too cold for the activities
you were used to doing.”

“Like what?” I asked.

“Well, you’re used to going out more, to the calle. In the south there are more places
where a person can go, like to the beach. More than anything you’re used to going out, a pasear
por afuera.” In Anchorage, it’s more difficult to go out because of the cold and the short hours of
daylight in the winter. Ivan continued, “You feel a little, not depressed, but sometimes your
energy level changes. And it’s difficult sometimes, and that’s why I said, me estoy yendo desde
que llegué!” Ivan laughed, and explained, “I’ve been leaving since I got here! And I haven’t been
able to go back yet!” He stopped to laugh again and this time I joined in.

Ivan continued, “But we are here now, and anyway I think it’s really nice in Anchorage.
It’s really nice to raise a family here because there isn’t much violence, and it’s far from the big
cities where there is more corruption and violence.” I know as he speaks he is thinking of Los
Angeles, where he lived and worked as a young man, but also of Michoacán and other parts of
Mexico and the violence attributed to drug cartels. He continues, “But it’s so different here. On

102 Calle literally means “street” but people often use it to mean “out” or “out of the house.”
this side of the border, well it’s difficult because you wish for things that aren’t here. But, you get used to it. *Se acostumbra uno hacer otras cosas.* You get used to doing other things.”

In Ivan’s narrative, even though he is used to life in Alaska, he still doesn’t feel completely at home there. Instead, he maintains his hometown in Mexico, or even Mexico in general as an important spatial and affective point of reference.

Feeling *encerrado* has to do with feeling closed in because of being unable to drive, and a different rhythm of social life, but it also explicitly has to do with one’s ability to work in Anchorage. For example, Lola told me that she doesn’t feel completely at home in Anchorage. She described life in Anchorage like living on an island, especially when she first arrived there. We met in Acuitzio after she finished work, and we talked on a bench in front of the municipal buildings on one side of the plaza as cars, buses, and trucks drove by on their way into town. In her early 40’s, Lola was smartly dressed with carefully applied makeup. She explained that she married someone who worked in Alaska, and spent the first 10 years of her marriage there. She since moved back to Acuitzio with her two children because she believes that educational opportunities are better in Mexico than in the United States. Meanwhile, her husband continued to travel back and forth between Anchorage and Acuitzio, working as a server at a restaurant in Anchorage, and running his own restaurant near the highway at the entrance to Acuitzio.

She said that living in Alaska frustrated her, and described herself as the kind of person who’s “always doing things.” In Anchorage, however, she felt like she couldn’t go out, especially in the winter. She said it’s “another way of life” and explained:

“At first I wasn’t very happy with such a big change. It was a big change in my life because I studied accounting and I’m an executive secretary. I worked here in Acuitzio and when I arrived in Anchorage, well, I didn’t know the language and I couldn’t work because of that but also because my husband was arranging the
documents for me. So I had to stay home, and it was so boring. It was a very unpleasant experience for me because I was used to being productive.”

With time, she got used to life in Anchorage, “Después se acostumbra uno, one gets used to it, and I felt more productive when I started to work, take my children to soccer, get involved with the dance group at the church. I kept busy and this gave me stability and peace. I was content. But I always planned to go back to Mexico to live.” In fact, she did go back to Acuitzio to live, and became involved with municipal politics while her sons went to school and her husband continued to work in Alaska. However, in 2012, she moved back to Anchorage to open a restaurant with her husband. Lola shows how getting used to life in Anchorage means that for her and her family, Anchorage is always an important spatial point of reference, and it is possible to relocate her permanent residence to either Acuitzio or Anchorage to pursue professional or educational opportunities, like sending her children to university in Mexico, relocating there to become involved in politics, and moving back to Anchorage to open a restaurant. However, it is not that easy, and there is a long process whereby Lola and others have had to get used to the differences in weather and ways of life, or like Acitzences say, acostumbrarse. This takes time and the development of a transnational habitus at the level of the body and the rhythm of everyday life. This is a profoundly gendered process, as Serefina and Lola attest. Over time, both men and women orient themselves to the wage labour economy in Alaska, and some, like Lola and her husband, have been able to own their own businesses in Anchorage and Acuitzio. People start to feel less encerrado once they are able to move around within Anchorage, get used to a different rhythm of life, and are able to secure a livelihood through wage labour or entrepreneurship.
Another major difference between Anchorage and Acuitzio that people have to get used to is language. More so than in states further south with larger Spanish-speaking populations, everyday life outside the home in Anchorage is conducted in English. Especially among those who moved to the United States as adults, most do not feel comfortable speaking English. I asked interviewees what languages they speak and which they felt most comfortable in. Most of those in the second generation, as described in Chapter 4, said they know enough to defenderme (defend themselves or get by). It can take a long time to learn a new language, and some people spend a lot of time and energy taking classes. Young people in the third generation were more likely to say they felt comfortable in both languages. However, their parents are concerned their children do not speak Spanish well enough and work to ensure their children are able to speak Spanish, because they want their children to be able to go back to Mexico and communicate easily with family members there. Clearly, then, speaking both Spanish and English is the ideal for people oriented to transnational life. However, it is not easy or possible for everyone to become perfectly bilingual. People used the same verb, acostumbrar or “to get used to,” to refer to speaking English or Spanish.

Soledad and Efrén were very active in the dance group Xochiquetzal-Tiqun and I met them for an interview at their home in South Anchorage to talk about their experiences with the dance group, and about life in Anchorage and Acuitzio. Efrén had started out working at a salmon cannery in Alaska, but now works as a manager of a janitorial services company with contracts throughout Alaska. Most of Efrén’s brothers also live in Alaska, while his mother and father move back and forth, spending the summer months in Anchorage and the winter in Acuitzio. Soledad is from Mexico City but her grandparents live in Acuitzio. She and Efrén met
through mutual acquaintances at a comida\textsuperscript{103} in Acuitzio when she was there visiting family, and he was temporarily back from Alaska. I asked Efrén about speaking English at work, “Do you have to speak English at work?”

He said, “Yes.”

Soledad said, “He speaks English really well.”

“I had to learn,” Efrén clarified, “\textit{A martillazos}, it was drilled into me, as we say”

Everyone laughed, and Soledad continued, “No, but he speaks it. Me, I can just defend myself. I talk a little crooked, I can understand and everything, but it’s still a little more difficult to speak.”

“It’s more difficult to speak, yes,” I agreed, “You have to practice, I think”

Soledad continued, “Yes, \textit{ya te vas acostumbrando}. You get used to it as you go. Now all that’s missing for me is to speak it. I’ve become used to English, but my mouth doesn’t listen! \textit{Falta la boca}!” She laughs, “But I carry on studying, I carry on.”

Soledad works to learn English in Anchorage, but like other Acuitzences in Alaska, she also works to ensure that their children can speak Spanish. For example, I met two parents of school-aged children who were considering moving temporarily to Mexico so that their children could attend school there for a year or two, and thereby become more fluent in Spanish. Going to school in Spanish is important not only for spoken fluency, but especially for reading and writing Spanish correctly. Anchorage also has a Spanish Immersion program at Government Hill School, and some parents from Acuitzio have enrolled their children there. Many high schools in Anchorage offer Spanish language classes for fluent speakers, which are different from classes

\textsuperscript{103} \textit{Comida} means “food” but also refers to the main meal of the day. It is also used to refer to a social event organized around a meal, and it was at this kind of event where Soledad and Efrén met.
that teach Spanish as a new language. A final concern for parents is that children are able speak Spanish without an accent. Parents are proud when their children can speak Spanish in Michoacán with the right accent, and people comment negatively when young people come to Acuitzio speaking Spanish with a US accent.

It is not easy to move between nation-states, school systems, and languages as a child, however. As I explained in Chapter 3, Claudia has experienced a lot of mobility in her life, and when I interviewed her at my Anchorage apartment, she talked about moving back and forth between Anchorage and Acuitzio and the difficulties she experienced adjusting to the shifts in language and to everyday life in both places. They arrived in Anchorage in 1985, when Claudia was four years old, and her father already had an apartment set up for them. “But everything looked so weird to me, you know.”

“How come?” I asked.

Claudia said, “I don’t know, it was a shock, probably like a culture shock. When I first came to Anchorage, the houses were different, the streets, like everything was different. And when I go back to Mexico it’s like,” she paused and took a sharp breath in, “it’s completely different then Anchorage because I got used to this type of lifestyle or whatever, where the roads are more clean and the houses are more well taken care of and stuff like that.”

Claudia’s family lived in an apartment on Northern Lights Boulevard in Anchorage for four years, until 1989 when Claudia’s grandmother got sick and their mother decided to move back to Acuitzio to be closer to her, taking all four children along. On the way, they stopped in California to visit family. They also went to San Francisco, and Disneyland, and other places in California. They flew from Los Angeles to Mexico City, then to Acuitzio, where they lived until
Claudia finished high school. Meanwhile, her father continued to work in Alaska and travel back and forth between Anchorage and Acuitzio.

She said, “I don’t know how to explain it. Like my grandma and grandpa, I hadn’t seen them for so long, I had cousins who I did not know. It was like adjusting to the family too, to my family that I had never seen. And then also, just to the system. The school was very different, and the people are very different. We’re used to, well my mom and my dad are always like minding their own business and over there everybody’s in the business of everybody.” She paused to laugh, then continued, drawing attention to the differences: “Over here in Anchorage people mind their own business, they don’t get into your stuff or whatever.” Claudia points out the differences between Anchorage and Acuitzio in terms of architecture, the school system, and, importantly, what she perceives as increased individualism or how “people mind their own business.” Navigating these systems is a skill necessary for the formation of a transnational class identity, and to live across boundaries and borders. However, living across social and geographic distance is not easy.

Claudia talked at length about moving back to Acuitzio at age 11 after living in Alaska for 4 years. I asked her if she remembers being excited to go back to Mexico or not. She talked about this in terms of language.

She replied, “No, we were not excited,” and explained that it was primarily because of the language barrier. “First of all, we knew how to speak Spanish but we did not know how to write it.” She explained that she felt anxious about how she would be able to go to school in Spanish, and that people would laugh at her. “It did happen, they did laugh because for Mexico we said Mexico not México. So they laughed at us. It was kinda hard but then we had this teacher
who gave us school on the morning and the evenings so we had double schooling every day. We stayed in Acuitzio and we had to adjust so that’s what we did. We didn’t have a lot of friends though.”

In 2012, Claudia, her husband Ivan, and her young children moved back to Mexico after living in Anchorage for many years. Based on the difficulties she faced moving back to Mexico as a child, she was worried about her own children adjusting to life in Spanish, since they weren’t fluent speakers and could not read or write at all. They enrolled the children in an English school, at least for the first year so that they could get used to everyday life in Spanish before having to go to school in Spanish too.

Being able to speak both English and Spanish is one way that people manage the difference between Anchorage and Acuitzio, and ensure that future generations are also able to move between English and Spanish speaking social spaces in both the United States and Mexico. Although language is one way that people get used to the difference between places, they also create spaces that produce socio-spatially distant locations as linguistically connected. For example, Luis and Juana Bravo only speak Spanish at home and with their children. Alina only speaks Spanish with her children. Parties and events in Anchorage may be Spanish only, Spanish mass is available twice every Sunday at Our Lady of Guadalupe Church and the Holy Family Cathedral, and Spanish speaking businesses and services are available throughout Anchorage.

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104 In schools in Acuitzio there is usually a morning schedule and an afternoon one, and children attend either. Claudia and her siblings attended both daily sessions for a while after moving back to Mexico.
Situated Processes of Class Formation

My friend Alina described Anchorage and Acuitzio as “different worlds,” and this is partly true. Over the years, research participants have talked about navigating these different worlds in many ways, including food and cooking, work and salary, attitudes towards drinking and drug use, dating, and celebrating important events, for example. Spatial practices like these give insight into the texture of transnational life and are representative of wider practices of transnational class formation. Transnational class formation is about how, over time, Acuitzences work across the boundaries of nation states to secure a livelihood and build a way of life.

However, how people strategize in transnational space has an important gendered dimension. There are different opportunities and dimensions of experience available to men and women as they get used to life between Mexico and Alaska. Earlier in this dissertation I wrote about how men’s mobility is explicitly tied to labour, while women move across the continent to be with family. In Chapter 3, I wrote about how Luis Bravo tried to return to Mexico to live and work. Recall that Luis’s attempts to secure a livelihood in Michoacán were unsuccessful and the whole family ended up moving to Anchorage together. Juana suspected that Luis had gotten used to the salaries in Alaska, and earning less money, in pesos and not US dollars, was a big change for him. Ernesto Cárdenas expressed something similar when I interviewed him at his home on a winter day in Anchorage. Ernesto’s father had worked in Alaska for many years in the 1960s and 1970s, including work to build the Trans-Alaska Pipeline, but Ernesto himself didn’t come to Alaska until 1987. This was supposed to be temporary. But, as Ernesto said,

“You get used to the salaries, and it’s difficult because you have another way of life, another way of living. And the customs, the education system, the laws, whatever, sometimes here in the United States they’re different and the people respect them more, whereas in Mexico right now there’s a lot of organized crime, there’s more corruption, and it’s hard to adapt to all of that.”
He went on to explain that his mother was born in the United States but his father is from Acuitzio. His mother and her family moved back to Mexico when she was very young, and later on she met Ernesto’s father and they married. When they had children, “there weren’t any good economic opportunities and my mother decided to go back to the United States and help my father emigrate.” Meanwhile, Ernesto and his siblings lived with their paternal grandmother in Acuitzio. “Later, they emigrated all of us.” So for Ernesto to go to Anchorage, he just had to buy his airline ticket since he was already a resident of the United States. Now he is a citizen. He explained that when he was young and once everyone in his family had papers, they would go to the US for vacation, but their lives were more tied to Mexico because the children were enrolled in school there. When he finished school and had to make his own life and find work, he wasn’t interested in going to any other state but Alaska. For one thing, his sister and brothers all lived in Alaska by then and he knew about the place, from what his father told him. “I have adapted, I think it’s good,” he continued, “because Alaska has been a great option for me, and for many people from my town. A lot of money that people have earned here in Alaska has been invested in the town, in houses, in a better standard of living for the people, for everyone, no? So, it’s good. Alaska has helped Acuitzio del Canje a lot.”

Ernesto thought maybe it would be better to live closer to the border since it’s a little more similar to Mexico. However, “You also earn less, you have to commute long distances, and I don’t know if jobs would be as easy to find, right?” In Alaska, however, Ernesto says, nos

105 Some Acuitzences would disagree, saying that money invested by individuals in the town only benefits themselves and their families, and not the town in general or the poorest or most needy townspeople. The Acuitzio migrant club and the 3x1 program that I discuss in Chapter 6 takes a different approach to community development, soliciting contributions from migrants for community projects. However, many people fear government corruption and believe that they know best how to spend their money.
hemos adaptado bastante bien. We have adapted pretty well and we have managed to get ahead. We have had to work really hard, but all in all, we live pretty well.”

He went on to explain that even if he spent his life working in Michoacán instead of Alaska, he wouldn’t have been able to get ahead. “Life in Mexico, from what I have seen, it isn’t very cheap. To live more or less like we have been living in Alaska is not cheap. Because if I go to Costco in Morelia, for example, I spend about the same, it costs about the same there as it does here for many things. Igual. So I need to earn almost the same, and it isn’t…”

I interrupted, “and in pesos.”

Ernesto responded, “In pesos, yes, and it’s more difficult because the salaries are so low, right? Entonces tiene uno que tener un ritmo de vida mas bajo también para poder adaptarse.”

Translated, Ernesto implies that moving back to Mexico would mean adapting to a lower standard of living. He points to the fact that consumer goods and food in Mexico are not very cheap, nor is cellphone credit, or property, or many other things that are necessary to live “more or less like in Alaska.” For a long time now, one way to get ahead has been to go to the United States, and exploit the inequality between the economies and the disparity between the peso and the dollar. Like Gloria Bravo said, “There isn’t money [in Mexico], here in Alaska there’s work and so we’ve adapted [to that].” According to Ernesto, Gloria, and Luis’s logic, the way to get ahead, secure a livelihood, and live well is to cross the border to work in the US, but continue to return to Acuitzio. To do this, Acuitzences have drawn on a variety of strategies to live transnationally. This includes seeking US Citizenship or other official statuses, developing skills and certifications to work in a chosen field both here and there, traveling with things to feel at home in transnational space, and purchasing homes and property in Acuitzio and Anchorage.
Seeking US Citizenship and Other Official Statuses

People also try to manage difference between Alaska and Mexico by working to get the official statuses that facilitate mobility and the ability to work and live in both nation states. Indeed, the development of a transnational habitus is facilitated by the ability to gain US citizenship and other official statuses that make it easier to live and work across borders. However, individuals are limited in what they can do when they come up against state regulations and the bureaucracies that enforce them. In Anchorage, midway through my fieldwork there, I complained to Ana Bravo when I found out my Canadian insurance company would no longer insure our vehicle and that I would have to somehow get an Alaska driver’s license and insurance. She said, “The same kind of things happen to us in Mexico, Sarita, because we don’t live there all the time.” She told me about how her husband was trying to get a Mexican voter registration card, commonly used as identification in Mexico, to facilitate business now that he has an avocado orchard and is involved with selling avocados in Mexico. When he tried to get his ID, they said he couldn’t have one because it was municipal election time and there was a blackout period before elections. It was also challenging for him to get an ID in Mexico because they don’t live there all the time, Ana said. In the end Miguel couldn’t cash the cheque and as a result they had no cash when they went on vacation to Ixtapa that year. Miguel gave the cheque to his father, who cashed it and deposited the funds into his account in Mexico. Bureaucracies work to fix people in place by making it difficult to live places temporarily or seasonally, for example, making it difficult for a Mexican citizen visiting Mexico temporarily to get the proper ID card and open a bank account. For Miguel, this obviously makes it difficult to run a business in Acuitzio from Alaska. He is able to do it by relying on family members in Mexico, and so maintaining relationships in Acuitzio is important.
The most obvious obstacle is the difficulty some people face in getting legal immigration status in the United States such as a Green Card or US citizenship. As I have discussed in other chapters so far, getting US Citizenship is a big part of this. In other chapters I analyzed the process of getting US Citizenship in relation to mobility, how citizenship makes it possible to move more easily, and how the very business and bureaucracy of citizenship requires mobility as a matter of procedure. However, it is not citizenship per se that is important, it is the ability to come and go that people seek (Boehm 2012; Ong 1999). The process of seeking citizenship is gendered for Acuitzences, as Alina and Oscar show; and Oscar sought citizenship so that he could arrange papers for his family. Alina, however, sought citizenship for herself, so that she wouldn’t have to always go in the other lineup at the airport, as she explains.

When I was in Acuitzio in 2011, Alina Cárdenas was studying for her US citizenship test all summer. One rainy evening in her house, she showed me her study materials and explained the tricks she was using to remember the answers. For example, one sample question asks her to name two Native American groups. She remembers “Pueblo” because it’s a Spanish word. At her immigration interview, Alina will have to speak, read, and write one sentence each in English because there is a formal requirement that all potential US citizens demonstrate their ability to speak, read, and write in English. After 14 years in Alaska, Alina relies on her youngest daughter to translate for her. However, to prepare for the citizenship exam, she took an English class in Anchorage and used an iPhone app to help her practice as well. Although she is critical of US policy (“Can you believe they ask kids to show their immigration status in schools in Arizona, Sarita?”) and food system (“The fruit tastes like cardboard in Alaska, and it’s so expensive!”), becoming a US citizen is important to her. For one thing, she’s “tired of going in the other lineup.” After all, her husband Ernesto and most of her children are US citizens, while she holds
a Green Card as a Permanent Resident. At the airport when passing through immigration review, Alina must go in the line for visitors, while her family can go in the line for citizens. However, she just renewed her Green Card for 10 years, so either way, she says, it will be OK.

After studying for her citizenship exam for about two years, Alina took the written test. A few weeks later, she received a letter notifying her that she passed and asking her to visit US Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) for her interview. Alina went to the interview, answered the questions, and waited to hear back. However, unlike other Acuitzences that she knew who had become US citizens, Alina was invited back for a second interview, and this worried her.

The reason why she was worried was that she had come to the United States before, illegally and without papers. I wrote about this in Chapter 3 from the perspective of Alina’s daughter, Claudia. While they were there, Alina got a traffic ticket, and she believed that because of it, the authorities knew she had been to Alaska before and could possibly deny her citizenship as a result.

She invited me to come with her to the second interview, and she and her husband picked me up at my apartment in Fairview in their white minivan. She was dressed up, wearing makeup, and she carried a folder with her paperwork in it but I could tell she was pretty nervous. She showed me the letter that she received which instructed her that her appointment would consist of an interview which could take up to two hours, and advised her not to arrive too early because there is limited space in the waiting room. Finally, it asked her to bring her paperwork (Green card and Passport) for review.

We sat in the waiting room, Alina, Ernesto and I, watching other people exit from interviews or ask questions at the windows. It was very quiet, except for the beeping from the
metal detector at the entrance to the building, or the odd bit of conversation from outside the door that drifted in. I looked around and saw an American flag and patriotic framed photos on display alongside framed posters in English and Spanish about immigration fraud. Ernesto and I talked, while Alina sat quietly, fidgeting and turning a ring around on her finger repeatedly, until she got called in for her interview. We wished her good luck.

While Alina was being interviewed, Ernesto reminisced about getting his own citizenship in the late 1990s. He said it was in very the same building but in a smaller room, and at that time there was no security; you could just walk in for your appointment. He described the process of getting citizenship as easy, even though the whole process took about a year. First he sent in the paperwork, then he was interviewed, then he attended the naturalization ceremony at the courthouse, and then later the official certificate arrived in the mail and he could get his US passport. Many men from Acuitzio told me that they sought Permanent Residency or Citizenship in order to facilitate mobility for themselves and their families. After Ernesto received his own citizenship, he applied for his family to come to Alaska, which took probably another year. He said to arrange papers for his family was expensive because they had to make multiple trips to Ciudad Juárez, and he had to find a sponsor in Alaska, and a lawyer, and so on.  

He said that all five of his kids are now US citizens except for one: she’s a resident but married to an American, so she could naturalize if she wanted to. He said that his youngest daughter jokes that she’s different from her Mexican brothers and sisters because she was born in Alaska. But really, she

106 Ernesto and his family didn’t have to wait very long for their papers compared to some other families for whom the process took many years. For example, Oscar’s father lived and worked in California for most of his life. He became a permanent resident in the US and got his green card, and eventually applied for papers for all seven of his children. Oscar said that his own papers took 8 or 9 years to arrive.
is a dual citizen, as Ernesto told me, because they arranged for her to have Mexican nationality as well.

Alina returned to the waiting room after her interview, which lasted about an hour. She explained that she should receive a letter in two weeks and described her interview, which was with the same person who interviewed her previously. She was asked a series of questions: Did you come here illegally? Have you ever sold drugs? And then she had to read some sentences in English.

Three weeks later Alina called me on my cell phone. I asked if she had received the letter from USCIS. She had, and unfortunately her application for citizenship was declined. She explained that at first she was really sad but, “It’s their decision, there’s nothing I can do. But I passed the test, Sarita! I did everything I needed to do to be a citizen, I passed the test and all of it, but they said no.” I could hear her holding back tears at the other end of the line. “At least I can go back and forth easily, I don’t have to cross through the desert, in dangerous conditions, and all of that.”

Alina’s story illustrates how differences between the US and Mexico are produced at the institutional and governmental level through immigration law and her unsuccessful attempts to manage that difference by applying for citizenship. Alina said that the denial of citizenship status would not change anything, for she is a legal Permanent Resident with a Green Card and she can still move back and forth, but she was clearly upset and disappointed. Many Acuitzences have applied for citizenship and received it, and like Alina, they see it as important for living between Alaska and Mexico as well as a point of pride. Alina was clearly proud of having passed it, even if her application turned out to be unsuccessful. Echoing the same sentiment, Juana Bravo said about her successful application for citizenship, “I felt like if I could do that I could do
anything.” Octavio talked about feeling “free” after getting a US Green Card, and eventually becoming a US citizen. More specifically, he talked about how he felt free to travel, to move. Now he says that he feels the same in Alaska as in Mexico, now that he has his papers. He said when you don’t have papers “you have to be someone really quiet,” he laughed. “But since I got my papers I feel the same here as I do in Mexico. And in whatever place.” Developing a transnational class habitus rests on the ability to come and go and build a livelihood across borders. Obviously, to work across the borders of nation-states, people seek official statuses that allow them to move. Traveling with a US passport reduces the friction of the US-Mexico border and makes it possible to move back and forth, without limits to the length of time a person is permitted outside of the country (as for US Green Card holders) or the possibility that they will not be able to cross back in either direction. In seeking official statuses, people seek the ability to come and go, to build lives and livelihoods between Acuitzio and Anchorage. Even though she was unsuccessful at her application for citizenship, Alina continues to move between Mexico and Alaska.

The Importance of Skills and Certifications

To live within a transnational social space, people work to get not only official statuses, like ID cards in Mexico or US citizenship, but they also develop skills and certifications that serve them both here and there. Men of the first two generations of Acuitzences in Alaska often arrived with the equivalent of a high school education, or sometimes less. They began working as dishwashers or labourers, and working their way up to more preferable jobs. Women that I interviewed were more likely to have more advanced education, and sought skills and statuses that would serve them in both Anchorage and Acuitzio. I talked at length with Serefina about how she came to Alaska to be with her husband, and how she later decided to study hairdressing
there. She had been a hairdresser in Mexico, but to work as a stylist in Alaska means re-certifying in the state and meeting the requirements set by the state Board of Barbers and Hairdressers. Being a hairdresser was important to her, and she worked hard to study and get the credentials she needed to work in her field in Alaska. “Since I started studying hairdressing in Mexico, I really identified with it because part of me loved it; I loved doing what I did as a hair stylist. That was why I was focused on studying it here in Alaska.” However, it wasn’t easy for Serefina to become a hair stylist in Alaska. She explains all of the difficulties she faced:

“At first the doors were closed to me in every way first of all because of the language, because I didn’t speak English. Second, I didn’t have a social security number. And the third reason was because I didn’t have the money to pay for additional training.”

With time, her husband arranged her papers, and she got a social security number and started working, cleaning houses and offices. By then she was making money, and she could speak some English, so she told her husband that she still wanted to study hairdressing in Alaska. Serefina continued,

“He didn’t want me to. He said, but it’s a lot of time, how will you do it while working? Also, it’s all in English, how will you do it? But I said to him, look, it’s something that I’ve already invested in. It’s something that I carry with me, that I already know how to do. The only thing I need is to be able to say here in the state of Alaska, look, I have the license, I can work. I already knew how to do everything, I had already worked in Mexico for 3 years. And so I had brought the practice with me, ya.”

“Well you had your own salon,” I said

Serefina replied, “Yes. My salon. I had my own salon in Mexico for three years. So I already knew the techniques, I knew what I was doing. The only thing was that I had to demonstrate to the state of Alaska that I knew how with a license, with a piece of paper.”

Serefina described the frustrations of this bureaucratic process:
“I applied for a license and they asked me to send in the documentation and transcripts so I sent the hours that I already worked in Mexico. No, but after so much work, and all the money I spent to get the papers sent to me and translated into English because they didn’t understand Spanish. All of that, took five months or so, like 5 months fighting with this. And finally they told me no, they couldn’t count those hours because it had been more than two years since I studied there and that here they just count the past two years of your studies. It had been about five years since I had studied there, and so for that reason they didn’t want to count them.”

Since they wouldn’t count her training and hours in Mexico, Serefina had to complete a training program in Anchorage, a very expensive and time-consuming endeavor. However, she did complete it, and is now certified to work as a hair stylist in the state of Alaska. It is not only immigration status that makes it possible to get used to life in a transnational social field. The process of getting used to living in Alaska also involves developing other skills and statuses that facilitate it. Serefina also had to shift the expectations of her husband, who did not want her to study to become a hairdresser in Alaska. However, for Serefina, being a hairdresser is a key part of who she is, whether in Acuitzio or in Anchorage.

Just as not everyone is able to get dual citizenship, not everyone is able to get the correct certification that they need in Alaska. For Serefina, to become certified as a hairdresser took a lot of time, money, and additional education. Getting used to life in Alaska thus means either investing in the requirements and certifications that you need to continue in your career, or switching to something else altogether. In the case of Juana Bravo, although she had completed high school in Mexico, and then trained and worked as a social worker in Mexico City, when she came to Alaska, potential employers did not recognize those credentials and skills. She said she decided to get her GED\textsuperscript{107} in Alaska because “I didn’t bring any paperwork with me from

\textsuperscript{107} GED stands for General Educational Development, and is a series of tests that indicate that a person has high school level skills. An individual who passes the GED tests in reading, writing, social studies, mathematics, and
Mexico about my studies for social work. And so when applying for jobs, to say that you have only high school, well I thought it would be better to get my GED so I have a paper to prove it.”

As Gloria said,

“I know people who come from Morelia to Anchorage who have a career in Mexico already, like a dentist or a doctor, but your training doesn’t count for anything here. Because you don’t start to work in your career here, you start here in whatever. In a restaurant, as a waiter, whatever. I know that when you study, you always have that and it’s training that you always have. But to develop your career here in Alaska, it doesn’t do anything for you. And eventually you forget.”

Recall that Gloria first visited Alaska as a quinceañera present. She herself studied dentistry in Morelia, but in Alaska she works in an industrial food preparation facility. She thinks she would have been more well prepared if she had stayed longer the first time. Gloria says,

“I should have stayed here when I came to Anchorage the first time. I could have asked my father if I could stay. I could have perfected my English. I was 16 years old, I could have finished high school here. But no, I didn’t, and my father didn’t think of it. I could have been making a career here by now. Who would have known that I was going to come back? Life is like that, I guess.”

Training in Mexico may not be recognized by US employers, whether for a hairdresser, social worker, or someone who studied dentistry. On the other hand, moving to Mexico with a US education also presents challenges. I spoke to Araceli about the possibility of attending school in Mexico. When we met for an interview in Anchorage, Araceli was just about to graduate from high school in Anchorage. She was born in Alaska, but like her cousins Vero, Sophia, and Toño, she travels back to Acuitzio every year with her parents. We met for coffee and she said that the “first semester of high school is always the worst because I’m not into anything, I don’t want to do anything because I just came back from Mexico, it’s so depressing.

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That whole entire first semester. Finally when the new year hits it’s like, I’m kind of, I don’t know, *adapting* again I guess.”

“So you think you feel more at home in Mexico than here in Anchorage, or it depends?”

Araceli immediately replied, “No I kinda like it more over there. I like it more but school wise, I think I wouldn’t be able to stay over there. I mean I’ve already gone to school here my whole life so it’d be kind of a hard transition. Even though I did take Spanish, like AP Spanish you know, I don’t know if it would be enough to go to school there.”

In her narrative, Araceli oscillates between feeling at home in Acuitzio and Anchorage, and the difficulties of getting used to life at each point in the transnational social field. Although she says she feels more at home in Acuitzio, she realizes that in other ways, like at school, she is more accustomed to the school system in Alaska. The educational and certification structures in Alaska and Michoacán do not match up, and moving between them and navigating their ambiguities is challenging from either side of the border, as Serefina, Gloria, and Araceli all show.

Managing difference by obtaining skills and statuses that make it possible to live either in Mexico or Alaska is very challenging, and takes a lot of time and money. Even for people who have dual citizenship, they may not have other skills or training that allow them to live seamlessly between places. This difference is enacted by laws and regulations at the level of the federal and state governments and enforced by bureaucracies that require demonstration of citizenship, of *credenciales electorales* in Mexico, or certifications to work as a hairdresser, dentist, or in other occupations. As I have shown in this section, Acuitzences try to get used to transnational life and manage the friction of bureaucratically enforced difference by seeking
skills and statuses that allow them to move between and work within regulatory frameworks in both Mexico and Alaska.

**Roosters and Other Objects That Travel**

As is becoming clear, the process of transnational class formation entails a number of strategies that facilitate life across borders and boundaries. These range from seeking official statuses to facilitate mobility, to understanding how to dress appropriately depending on one’s location within the transnational social field. One important spatial practice is traveling with objects, literally bringing important things with you when you travel.

I visited Oscar a few times in Anchorage during the winter of 2011, before he went back to Mexico. He and his brother have a good system worked out. They both drive a taxi in each place, so they alternate: Oscar spends four months working the taxi in Anchorage, while his brother spends four months driving the taxi in Acuitzio. Then they switch. Their boss is happy because the cab runs all year, just with a different brother at the wheel. In Anchorage, Oscar lives in a yellow single wide trailer in a mobile home park across from a mall. In the mobile home park, the streets loop around on each other, and I found it difficult to find his place, especially with tall drifts of snow on either side of the narrow road. When I arrived, I parked my Jeep at an angle behind the two vehicles already parked in the driveway. I walked through the little gate, down the sidewalk, and to the front door, which was located to one side of the trailer in little open-air porch.

I didn’t immediately notice the pet carrier to one side of the porch the first time I visited, and instead walked straight up to the front door to knock. As I waited for Oscar to answer the door, I heard some clucking sounds. I turned around and peeked into the pet carrier. “A chicken!” I thought, “How odd.” Oscar answered the door and invited me inside. I sat down on a
leather sofa across from the one he sat on and after a few moments of conversation, with the TV on in the background, he asked if I would mind if his rooster came inside.

“No, of course not,” I said, “I thought it was a chicken!”

Oscar explained, “No, in fact it’s a rooster bred for fighting, a gallo de pelea, of a line that I created myself.”

As we spoke his rooster walked around the living room and I asked Oscar if I could take a picture of them together.
Figure 8: "Oscar" and His Rooster, 2012. Photo by Author.
In Acuitzio, his hometown, and the other site of this multi-sited project, he has a farm where he breeds, raises, and sells his roosters. However, he also brought some eggs with him to Alaska to hatch and keep. He said that the roosters that live here can handle the weather, but bringing a live bird from Mexico to live in this cold would be difficult. The one walking around the living room was brought to Alaska as an egg, and incubated, then hatched in Anchorage.

Taxi driving pays the bills, but roosters are his passion. He advertises his champion fighting roosters and keeps in contact with clients on both sides of the border and all over the world through specialty magazines and the Internet, specifically on Facebook and YouTube. In fact, he said that, “I have many friends from many places that I never think about going to visit. I don’t need to travel the world, the roosters have brought the world to me.” Oscar told me that he doesn’t feel like himself without these roosters, and that is why he brought them with him all the way to Alaska. He keeps most of them in a trailer in a storage yard elsewhere in Anchorage, but sometimes he brings a younger one home, to keep him company. When they get old enough to crow, and for the neighbours to notice, he takes it to live with the rest.

Oscar explains,

“When I decided to bring my business here to Alaska, I had a friend who also likes animals. And I proposed to him that we try to have some of my animals here, the kind of rooster that I raise. I have very few animals here because the climate doesn’t help us at all. But I raise them here anyway even just because when I’m here in Anchorage, and I start to miss Acuitzio, and I start to miss my animals, and the people, I go and see the roosters and this helps me a lot. The roosters have helped me a lot psychologically because with them, when I’m with them, I forget my problems, I forget the bills.”

“So that’s why you have one here with you?” I asked him.

He replied,

“Well, right now my brother is in Acuitzio, my parents also left to spend the winter there and so I happen to be here by myself. And I’ve raised this particular
rooster since it was born. When I had the chance to go to Mexico, I left it with my friend. And now that I’m back, he knows me so I brought him here and when I get home from work, I spend time with him. He makes good company. He’s like, like a pet.”

I continued, “Yeah and like you said, he knows when you come home and all that. “

“Yes,” Oscar said, “he’s like a dog, he makes sounds and he knows me when I open the door. It makes me happy because he comes in and sings and like I said, psychologically it’s helped me a lot. I give him his food, and some water, I clean the cage, and it helps me a lot.”

Although there has been much academic and policy research on remittances, or money sent by migrants in the United States to family members in Mexico, there has been less interest on the things that move between these two nation states (Ferry 2013). The movement of material goods is embedded in social relations, whether barbecue grills sent to Haiti as a statement of social success (Basch et al. 1994), or mothers who send boxes of consumer goods to their children as an expression of transnational mothering (Freznoza-Flot 2009), or, in this case, a single man who brings eggs with him to Alaska to raise as pet roosters. In interviews in both Acuitzio and Anchorage, I asked what kinds of objects people bring with them when they travel. Oscar’s roosters are certainly one of the most exceptional things that travel. A traveling rooster also emphasizes the lengths that people will go to make a place for themselves, to feel they belong, to feel like themselves, as Oscar put it. For him, getting used to transnational life means having roosters around in Anchorage, the same stock that he keeps in Acuitzio.

Many objects that people travel with to Alaska in order to feel more at home are more everyday – food, makeup, home decorations, or Alaskan souvenirs for family members. Even though the staples of Mexican cooking are now available in Anchorage, food remains something that people travel with. Food thus connects places as it literally moves, is packed in suitcases and
taken from one place to another. But food is also intimately connected to place. Many people say the flavor of many foods is not the same if you buy it in Anchorage. Food grown and prepared in a specific location in a specific way is *emplaced*, and brings the flavor of that place with it. Other items are just not available in Anchorage at all. Foodstuffs like candy or dried chiles are available in Anchorage and taste the same, but are much more expensive in Alaska than in Mexico.

I have been interested in objects that travel since I first started fieldwork in Anchorage and Acuitzio in 2005. I first went to the field with an interest in everyday dimensions of transnational life, and specifically food. Once in Anchorage, I realized that food was one of the things that traveled in people’s suitcases on trips from Mexico to Alaska, primarily because people say that food doesn’t taste the same in Anchorage – especially *mole*, bread, and cheese. The *mole* that people usually make in Acuitzio and other people purchase to take with them to Anchorage is *mole poblano*, a rich, dark sauce that can be purchased either *en polvo*, dried as a powder, or *en pasta*, as a paste. The movement of foods, like *mole*, cheese, bread and candy, as well as other objects, are wrapped up in configurations of power that attempt to facilitate, constrain, or limit the movement of people, commodities, technology, ideas, finance capital, and the media (among other things) in extremely complex ways (Appadurai 1990). Things that people travel with are a material reality of people’s daily lives, as well as a symbol, a marker of those lives, articulating through them both place and movement and through place and movement, identity and identification (Law 2001:280). Things that move, then, are both a marker and material reality of transnationality, a symbol of mobility as well as an item that has literally traveled between Mexico and Alaska (Komarnisky 2006, 2009). The things that people
choose to travel with provide insight into what is necessary, important, and valued enough to be packed in a suitcase and brought along on the trip.

A focus on objects that travel thus comes out of the ethnographic context and provides insight into the material culture of transnational life and the mobility of things. As I followed the people, I also followed the objects. For example, at a meal at her home, Ana pointed out to me that the mole she had used was from Acuitzio, and that was why it was so delicious. Gloria invited me over for enchiladas, and she promised to use the cheese she brought from Acuitzio and keeps frozen for use throughout the year.

The movement of food across the Mexico-US border involves dealing with the bureaucracy of US Customs and Immigration, which restricts the type of food items one is allow to bring to the country from abroad. People who travel without papers and who are considered “undocumented” in the United States are likely to travel with nothing at all. Some citizens or permanent residents often travel with foods, fully realizing that they may still be taken away and disposed of at customs if their suitcase is inspected and the food item is deemed inadmissible. Serefina complained about this when I interviewed her in 2012: “Right now they’re not letting you bring much. They add more requirements all the time.”

“Do you think they are stricter at the border now?” I asked.

Serefina replied, “Yes, yes. If you bring a cheese, they search you thoroughly. Because they think that you might have something there inside the cheese. You can’t get mad about it because it’s their rules, and it’s for the best for everyone, or whatever.”

Sometimes, it seemed obvious that an item had traveled between Mexico and Alaska, but the route of travel and the social form that led to its travel was not so clear. For example, my friend Adán in Acuitzio has extended family in Alaska. He really wanted to go to Alaska to work
himself and took interest in my research as a result. One day he was wearing a t-shirt that had a picture of a moose with ‘Alaska’ screen-printed underneath. I knew he had relatives who worked there, and they had brought him a hat with an eagle flying over a mountain and the word ‘Alaska’ stitched on it. He wore the hat often, and I assumed they had brought him the t-shirt as well. However, when I asked him about it, he said that he had actually gotten the shirt from the second-hand clothing store that he and his wife own in Acuitzio. Indeed, that shirt followed a much different path to Mexico, likely first donated as second hand clothing, then sold as part of a large pallet of used clothing, brought to Mexico for re-sale, and finally ending up at Adán’s store.

Oscar and his rooster are also exceptional because it is usually women who emphasize the importance of traveling with things. Women bring much more than men, especially food, and men often downplay the object they do travel with. For example, when I interviewed Esteban and Laura, I asked them what they bring with them when they travel from Mexico to Alaska:

The husband, Esteban said, “Nah, nothing.”
Laura protested, “Yes, we bring things!”
He said, “Well she does, I don’t.” And they both cracked up laughing. Esteban continued, “When we go to Mexico we just bring our clothes, and we leave some things there because we forget them. I got a hat that I took to Mexico and I left it there and no one knows what happened to it! But from Mexico…”
Laura finished his sentence “We always bring, we always bring things from there. Always. Food…”
Esteban cut in, “huaraches”.
Their son said, “This guitar.”
Esteban said, as he gestured around the room in their brightly decorated home, “All of this. The painting, many things. The little house decoration above the kitchen door, the painting of Morelia.”

“This photo is from Morelia too!” Laura said.

Young people don’t travel with many things, and in fact their parents may use extra space in their suitcases. For example, when Alina travels with her youngest daughter, her daughter takes 2 suitcases, one of which is full of things that Alina wants to bring back. Both human and non-human actors move back and forth between Acuitzio and Anchorage: people, things, pets, ideas, currency, and candy.\(^\text{108}\) It is the movement of people that leads to the movement of the other objects but it is the whole network of human and non-human movers that gives this transnational space stability and longevity over time. Some items found in a suitcase can cause problems and slow travel, like fresh chile peppers, which are not allowed to travel across the border into the United States due to regulations from the United States Department of Agriculture that are enforced by US Customs and Border Protection.\(^\text{109}\) A person could attempt to bring them to the United States illicitly, perhaps taping them to her body, concealing them under her clothing. People more often find a way to bring them that is permitted by the rules and regulations of the state. With chiles, people will sometimes put them in vinegar so that they are

\(^{108}\) To get a sense of the breadth of items that people bring with them as they travel between Acuitzio and Alaska, see Appendix B.

\(^{109}\) Food products are permitted to travel into the United States in personal baggage. Which food products depends on where an individual is traveling from and the restrictions are intended to “protect community health, preserve the environment and prevent the introduction of devastating diseases to domestic plants and animals.” (US Customs and Border Protection 2014) Travelers are supposed to declare food products, or face fines and penalties up to $10,000. Regulations about which foods can be brought into the United States change over time, and determining exactly what is allowed means consulting an online database (US Customs and Border Protection 2014). People from Acuitzio are well versed in what is allowed and what is not, and perceive the biggest risk as losing the food item when the border guards throw it away if disallowed.
permitted through customs even though this changes the flavor. People travel with things that are necessary to “feel like yourself,” as Oscar put it. These are mostly everyday items like food, which doesn’t have the right flavor in Alaska, or personal care items like mascara of a particular brand that is not available in Alaska.

Many of these items are brought as gifts for friends and family members in Acuitzio or Anchorage instead of sending things by mail or courier, which is considered unreliable and expensive. People from Acuitzio bring items themselves when they travel, or ask friends and family to carry things for them. These items build social relationships within the transnational social field. At the same time, they also tie people to place. For example, souvenir items that say ‘Alaska’ on them are given as gifts from a particular place. In Acuitzio I saw Juana Bravo give an acquaintance a fridge magnet that said ‘Alaska’ on it across an image of polar bears frolicking in an icy landscape. When she gave it to the acquaintance, she said, “Here you go, un recuerdo de mi, something to remember me by!” People identify themselves with places through the things they choose to travel with, such as decorating the home with pictures of Alaska, as I will describe in the next section, or putting a bumper sticker on the back of their vehicles that says “Acuitzio del Canje, Mich.” along with a picture of a horse. I’ve seen the same sticker on vehicles in both Mexico and in Anchorage. Luis Bravo got his made in Acuitzio, and took it back to Anchorage for his pickup truck there.

110 In fact, when I traveled from Anchorage to Acuitzio to 2006, I carried a backpack full of clothes and other gifts on behalf of a research participant. Juana Bravo said that she used to always take things to Acuitzio for people, but she doesn’t do that as much anymore.

111 Luis’s car fits in well in Anchorage, where people emblazon their cars with multiple bumper stickers and messages. I am not sure if this is an “Alaska” or a “USA” practice, but it is a notable aspect of the car culture in Anchorage. In fact, one friend in Anchorage who was called up for jury duty told me that as part of the process everyone was asked to describe the bumper stickers that they had on their car, since that would likely indicate what strong opinions or alliances a person had.
People also very often give family members clothing as gifts, and explain that this is because clothing is expensive in Mexico, relative to the cost in Alaska. Juana and Claudia both know when clothing is on sale in Anchorage so that they can purchase items in Alaska stores at very discounted prices to take to Mexico. Serefina does too:

“What I take the most, or bring for people is clothing because here clothes are much cheaper in Anchorage than there. Brand name and everything. You go to the stores and when they have a sale you can get a huge bag for $50 and bring clothes as gifts for 7 or 8 people. And there in Mexico if you’re going to buy a blouse, it costs the equivalent of $50, or maybe $25.”

I said, “Yes, if you earn dollars it doesn’t seem so expensive. But if you earn pesos, pues ay. It’s a lot!”

“Es mucho!” she agreed, and continued, “When I go to Mexico, I’m surprised. Really, I’m surprised by how the people are able to live there, and like I told you, the salaries are so low, but food is so expensive, and clothing is too.”

“Yes and here it’s a rich country, with lots of money, but everything is cheaper.” I offered.

Serefina said,

“I think that it’s because of the competition there is here between stores. And aside from that, the fashions are in and out quickly. When winter starts, winter things are in the store, and they take away all the fall and summer clothing. At the end of winter, the spring clothes are out. They are always changing and that’s why they’re always lowering prices, I don’t know. In Mexico you almost never encounter cheap clothing. The prices in Mexico, at the same stores, are the same. It costs the same as here. If you go to Wal-Mart, Costco, you go and compare prices. They are sometimes, they are more expensive in Mexico than here.”

As a spatial practice that indicates transnational class formation, traveling with things is one way that people can use the border to get ahead and help their families. People can purchase consumer goods for a lower relative price in the United States and bring them to Mexico.

However, this reinforces socioeconomic inequalities within Acuitzio, since only those with dual
citizenship or US residency would be able to travel so freely, and feel confident enough to travel with a lot of stuff.

People also travel back to Mexico with photographs that they took in Alaska. This is true across generations. Diego kept his photos in a souvenir photo album with an outline of the State of Alaska on the front, and other people I met in Acuitzio had similar photo albums containing collections of images taken in Alaska. These photographs say “I was there” and show friends and family what Alaska is like. Don Luis Bravo, for example, has a series of photographs of himself at work. Of course, most people go to Alaska for work so it makes sense to take photos of their labour experience. The other kinds of photographs that people commonly have are photos of themselves with ice and snow in order to highlight the specificity of the weather conditions in Alaska. Don Luis and his son both have photos of themselves in the snow, Don Luis in front of a large snowdrift in the 1960s, and Luis Jr. pretending to take a bite out of a piece of ice from a frozen waterfall in the 1980s. Diego showed me a photo of himself in Barrow, Alaska posing on the sea ice with his shirt off. Wearing only a tank top and smiling in spite of the cold. “Weren’t you cold, Diego?” I asked.

He smiled and said “Sure, but I look tough, don’t I?”

These photographs, and the kinds of souvenir items that people travel with are often stereotypical images that reinforce perception of Alaska as a frozen, wilderness land. For Acuitzences who have not been to Anchorage, Alaska is an exotic and distant place, and the image of the Last Frontier as an icy wilderness where people live in igloos persist even as the mobility of Acuitzences to Alaska disrupts these stereotypes.
What to Wear, Here and There

When I interviewed Sophia Bravo, she talked about dressing appropriately at different points in the transnational social field. I had asked her about the differences that she noticed in Anchorage and Acuitzio. Sophia talked about clothing, and how people dress in both places,

“This is actually gonna sound pretty weird but I know here in Anchorage, people care if you repeat your outfit. Like if you wear something once and you wear it the next day people are going to be like ‘oh my god she wore that yesterday’ or something like that. But you could wear two different pairs of sweat pants and look like a bum but people wouldn’t judge you cause they’re different outfits. But in Mexico, if you wear sweat pants, people would pay more attention to you for that than if you wore the same thing twice. Do you get it?”

I clarified, “So in Anchorage it doesn’t really matter how nice you look as long as you wear something different. And in Acuitzio if you’re dressed in like sloppy clothes, like sweat pants, people are going to notice that more than whether or not you’re wearing something new, right?

Sophia said, “Yeah.”

I continued, “So in Mexico it’s more important, even if you wear the same thing every day, that it’s clean and you’re not wrinkly and everything like that and you look nice.

“Yeah.”

“Whereas here it doesn’t even matter if you’re wrinkly or whatever, just as long as you’re wearing different stuff. Is that kind of what you mean?” I said.

Sophia said, “Yeah kind of, yeah that’s exactly what I mean.”

“That makes sense,” I said, “I always feel bad when I’m wearing wrinkly clothes in Acuitzio”

Sophia laughed and said that she wore what she later realized were socially inappropriate shoes in Acuitzio once:
“I remember one time in Acuitzio I wore flip flops,” Sophia continued, “Here in Anchorage I’d wear them all the time in the summer but in Mexico my cousin asked me, ‘why are you wearing your bath slippers out in the street?’ And I was just like…” Sophia laughed out loud.

Sophia identifies a distinction between how someone of her gender and class position would dress depending on their location. She identifies the need to dress differently in Alaska, as opposed to in Acuitzio. In Alaska, new clothing is valued above all else, whereas in Acuitzio, clean, pressed, and more formal clothing is valued. On the other hand, men like Luis Bravo, Sophia’s father, use clothing to identify their rural roots in Mexico or Alaska. At special events in Anchorage with mostly Acuitzences, men swap the t-shirts and running shoes they wear every day for cowboy shirts, decorative belts, and cowboy boots. Acuitzio is a rural town, and men dress to express their identification with rural ranchero culture when they are in Acuitzio and at events in Anchorage like a Jenny Rivera concert, or a new year’s party, for example.

Along similar lines, Jaime told me that he brought a charro suit with him to Anchorage in the 1960s:

“I only brought clothes with me when I went to Alaska, and what I liked to bring were my charro suits because I always liked to dress like that, in the clothes I wore for charreía.¹¹² That was the sport that I liked the most in Mexico, and so that’s what I brought with me. Charro shoes, the whole suit of clothing. Because it was a traje de gala, what they call formal wear, what they use for fiestas and parades and that.”

He showed me a photo of a friend of his in a charro suit, and he pointed at it as he talked, “You see how it has a button design made of silver? Mine was the same style.”

“Like the mariachis wear?” I asked.

¹¹² Charreía is a competitive event, similar to the North American rodeo.
Jaime continued, “Yes, like the ones the mariachis wear but the charro suit is something else, more beautiful, more formal. And you only wear it to formal events, nothing else.” He also brought chaps with him to Alaska, which is a good thing because he was invited to participate in the State Fair in Palmer. “They invited me to ride a bucking bronco, coarse and wild.”

Women of all generations dress up for events. Whatever the age, wearing short skirts and high heels with expertly applied makeup and beautifully styled hair is appropriate for women at special events in Acuitzio or Anchorage. Across the transnational social field, clothing can signify a point of connection to a rural Mexican hometown, like for Jaime and other men from Acuitzio, and social norms around clothing and what is appropriate to wear is another set of differences that Sophia says she has to navigate to live between Michoacán and Alaska. As a signifier of transnational class, people have to know how to dress appropriately, depending on their location in the transnational social field.

**Homes and Property in Acuitzio and Anchorage**

Another spatial strategy to facilitate transnational life is the acquisition of homes and property in both Acuitzio and Alaska. Debra Lattanzi Shutika (2011) wrote about *casas vacías* in Textitlán, Guanajuato, houses left empty by migrants who live and work in Kennett Square, Pennsylvania. She writes about how people from Textitlán in Pennsylvania have maintained their homes in Mexico as the centre of their existence, indicating a desire to maintain connection to Textitlán while building a life in Pennsylvania (Lattanzi Shutika 2011). Many immigrants worldwide maintain multiple attachments to places, and develop identities and senses of belonging based on those multiple attachments, in part through maintaining homes in both places. The same is true for many Acuitzences who live and work in the United States, including in Alaska. In Chapter 4, I wrote about how owning property as a process of territorialization
intended to fix people to specific places paradoxically makes it possible to be more *mobile* within the transnational social field by having somewhere to live in each location. By decorating their Mexican homes with items from Alaska, and their Anchorage homes with items from Mexico, they demonstrate their multiple attachments to each place. And finally, by relying on local relatives to care for their homes while they are away, they strengthen social relationships that extend between Anchorage and Acuitzio.

With the money earned in Alaska, some people have also reinvested in Acuitzio in land and property. Indeed, I was told that the price of property in Acuitzio is artificially high because of the amount of out-migration and the resulting interest in property (Wiest 1973). Many Acuitzences say that they decided to go to the United States is to invest in land and build or improve their house, and this has been the case for a long time now (Wiest 1970:216). People will send back money or save up to build one wall at a time, then the roof, then the floor, and so on so that some houses seem permanently under construction. Those who are more established in the United States will buy property as an investment or for future generations to live in. However, this creates a cycle. The fact that US migrants and immigrants primarily want to purchase property in their Mexican hometowns means that property in the area is expensive. This means that for the poorest Acuitzences, owning land and a house is out of reach without migrating to the US (Wiest 1970:216). This is another paradox of mobility, whereby through migration people become landowners and therefore change their class positioning. Indeed, the longer people are outside of Mexico, the more able they are to afford land in their hometown. Thus increased mobility means people more able to afford to create roots, in terms of land ownership and house construction. Indeed, Luis Sr. purchased several houses in his hometown with money earned over decades of work in Alaska: the house that he lives in, one house for
each of his sons, and their family rancho at Parapio. Having a home in Acuitzio means that his children have a place there, something to come back to. Processes that lead people to develop roots in a place, such as citizenship or land ownership, simultaneously and paradoxically facilitate a mobile and transnational way of life between Mexico and Alaska.

In Anchorage, many Acuitzences decorate their homes with arts and crafts brought from Mexico or images of Acuitzio. Both men and women do this. For example, one woman commissioned a painter in Acuitzio to paint a scene of the street just outside of her husband’s mother’s house in Acuitzio, where he grew up. They hung it on a stairwell so that when he was leaving the house, it was exactly the right perspective as it is when leaving his childhood home (Wiest 2009:32-33). Another family also owns paintings of street scenes in Acuitzio by the same painter, displayed prominently in their home in Anchorage. Others have photographs or calendars hanging up that feature Acuitzio.

In Acuitzio, on the other hand, people have decorated their homes with posters and images of Alaska. When I was doing fieldwork there, I was struck by how the homes of Alaska migrant-immigrants were decorated with images of Alaska: Denali, the Anchorage city skyline and its spectacular mountain backdrop, the northern lights, dog sleds, moose, bears, and so on. An ice cream shop owned by Juana Bravo’s brother and sister-in-law had Alaska postcards framed and on display, icy scenes appropriate for a shop selling frozen treats. Other people had ulus, posters, and magnets on display in their homes. I often asked people about this. For instance, I said to Luis, “In your house in Mexico you have a lot of decorations from Alaska, like posters of Denali or other things.”
He replied, “We don’t have those pictures on our walls here in Anchorage, well those things are located here. We also have them in Mexico so people can see what it is like here. And have you noticed that here we have stuff from Mexico? Y allá de aquí, and there from here.”

I asked his sister Gloria about the things that she brings to Mexico from Alaska and she said,

“We bring a lot of things. When we were building the house in Acuitzio, we took all the things for the bathroom from Alaska, because here they are cheaper here than in Mexico. All that that we could carry we took to Mexico. What else did we take? I took lots of decorations from here, lamps that had a bear’s head on them. I took a moose decoration. Mostly decorative details.”

“So you have like an Alaska theme in your home in Mexico?”

Gloria replied, “Yes I have decorations in the house in Mexico, things from here, from Alaska. I have paintings, pictures on the walls, all from Alaska.”

I was curious, so I asked, “Why do you take these things with moose and mountains and all of that to decorate your house with?”

“Well, because you have the idea to one day return to your country and remember, remember all that was part of your life here, right? And I like to bring things from Mexico to Anchorage, to decorate my house here. Like all these hearts that I have here, look, almost all of the decorations I have.” She gestured to some ceramic decorations painted in a Mexican style, perhaps from Jalisco. “I have all of these little things from Mexico to remember with.”

Oscar, who brought his roosters with him to Alaska, also has some decorations from Mexico in his mobile home. I asked him about them and he said,

“To live this life you have to be in both places, so that when you're there, you try to remember here, so these things help you to remember. Or even just when friends or family come to your house, you can show them and explain: look, this is where I live. And just like here, too. As you say, here I have only things from Mexico. And in Acuitzio, there, I have too many things from Alaska.”
“My Heart is in Mexico but my Money is in the United States”

At the beginning of the chapter, I introduced Diego, who described his experience of moving between Anchorage and Acuitzio as cutting off his life in one place and picking up where he left off in the other place. This is one way of describing transnationality, but other people who have become used to living between Anchorage and Acuitzio use other expressions.

In interviews and conversations with Acuitzences in Alaska, I asked them where they felt most at home and where they say they are from. For many people, these were difficult questions, and they told me as much. For example, Serefina said, “What a question! That’s very difficult to answer, I’ve never even asked myself that. Ay, I don’t know.” Like others that I spoke to, she explained that she says that she lives in Alaska but is from Mexico. “Vives en Alaska…pero eres pues, de México.” When it comes to feeling at home, Serefina says,

“I go to Mexico, I spend my time there feeling really content, really happy with my family, with my parents, with everything. But I have to tell you, after four or five weeks, I am desperate to come back to my house in Anchorage! And my husband says, why? I don’t know. You tell me, because I can’t tell you! It’s something about how you are already accustomed to your routine, your work, your things. And so I say, no, mi amor, let’s go! I don’t know. I prefer it more here already? I go to Mexico, I’m happy there, content for four weeks. After four weeks I want to go, go back to mi casa.”

These are two senses of belonging in contradiction. People say that they are from Mexico, and that their roots are there but that they feel more at home in Alaska, where they have created daily routines, where they have become used to everyday life. People have built a livelihood across the continent by seeking US citizenship and other statuses, developing and documenting skills and training, traveling with the things they need to feel like themselves, purchasing homes and property, dressing appropriately, learning languages, and all of the other spatial practices outlined in this chapter. When people describe where they feel at home and
where they are from, it is possible to see the contradiction inherent to the process of transnational class formation lived out in an everyday way, where the rhythms of life depend on back and forth movement and the maintenance of a fraught tension between here and there.

For example, I asked Juana, “When someone asks you where you’re from, what do you say?” She replied, “That I’m from Mexico but I live in Alaska. Or like, I’m from Mexico with US nationality and I feel like I have both. But more Mexico,” and then burst into laughter.

I asked Juana’s niece, Renata, what she says if someone asks where she is from. She said, “Mexico” without hesitation, but then went on to explain:

“But people say to me, yeah you were born there but your homeland is here. And I tell them no, my homeland is Mexico. And they just don’t understand that, they’re like no, you’re wrong, you’re from here. And I was like, okay yeah, I might be a citizen and I have my house here, but I also have my house in Mexico and my culture and everything is from Mexico.”

“Where do you think your future will be?” I asked.

“When I was graduating from high school my dream was to take a year off. I said, I’m just gonna go to Mexico, spend it with my family and everything. But that didn’t come true,” she laughed and continued, “But my hopes are that I finish school here and get my degree and everything, but I don’t see myself living in Mexico, I’d rather just go visit and everything.”

For Renata, although she feels like her home is in Mexico, she says she can’t see herself living there. Instead, she sees herself living between Anchorage and Acuitzio, moving back and forth. Indeed, once Renata finished her studies as a massage therapist in Alaska, she went to Mexico for additional training there. She since moved back to Anchorage and opened her own massage studio, featuring techniques she learned in Mexico along with those she learned during her training in Alaska.

On the other hand, Renata’s mother, Gloria, spoke with painful nostalgia about Mexico and about the difficulty of the winters in Alaska. She said in Mexico, life is very different but
there is no work. “There isn’t money there, but here there’s work and we’ve adapted. The United States has given us everything, verdad? It’s given us food, it’s given us work, but our roots, our heart is in Mexico. Así es nuestra vida. That is our life.” Like Renata and many other Acuitzences, Gloria went on to explain how she doesn’t really feel at home in either place.

“I go to Mexico and for a few days with all the family I am a gusto, happy. But the time passes and I want to leave, like I am not a gusto anymore, I am no longer content. I’ve gotten used to the routine here in Alaska and I want to leave. Or maybe it’s the security that it gives you here, the tranquilidad, more than anything. The tranquility. In Acuitzio, even though the family is there and you know everywhere because you have lived all your life there you still want to leave. So, it, it’s really difficult. No te puedes adaptar ya ni allá ni acá. Estás en la mitad. You can’t adapt to it here or there anymore, you’re in the middle.”

Laura talks about how part of her is always in Mexico. “This is where we live, and we have adapted. But we can’t deny that we live here only 75% and the other 25% of the mind is there in Mexico. That’s how we are. Así nos tocó.” Pascual described how most Acuitzences in Anchorage live, “They live and talk about what happened in Acuitzio yesterday. About the wedding of who knows who. Did you know so-and-so died? Or like they still live in el pueblo, like they don’t really live in Anchorage. Or like, they’re there physically but their mind is in Acuitzio.”

People express the fraught contradictions of transnational life in a variety of ways, then. For Diego, he cuts off one life and picks up another. Serefina feels at home in both places, but in Alaska she feels at home in terms of a sense of daily routine, whereas in Mexico she feels at home in terms of her roots. Renata feels more at home in Mexico but she would never live there, and her mother feels somewhat “stuck in the middle.” Laura’s mind is divided between ‘here’ and ‘there’
Watching soccer games, especially matches between Mexico and the United States, often bring out this contradiction. In 2005 when I was in Anchorage for the first time, my MA supervisor and I were invited to watch a World Cup qualifying match between Mexico and the United States. We were watching it at an A-frame house in South Anchorage where some single, male Acuitzences lived together at the time. During that game my supervisor asked one of the men who he was cheering for. The man explained, in a perfect expression of transnational class status, that he was cheering for both: “My heart is in Mexico but my money is in the United States.” Similarly, while I was in Acuitzio in 2011, USA played Mexico in the finals of the Gold Cup, which determines the regional champion of North America, South America, and the Caribbean. Juana, Luis, Toño, and Juana’s brother were there, and we sat in Toño’s room because he had the biggest television and a couch to sit on. Toño wore a Mexican national team jersey while we watched the game. Luis asked me who I was cheering for, and I said, “Mexico.”

Luis was surprised, “I thought you would go for the USA.”

“No, I said, Canada and the USA are very competitive with each other in sports,” I paused, “Who are you cheering for Luis?”

He said, “Yo soy mitad-mitad, I’m half and half.” At the time, the game was tied, and Luis’s brother-in-law said, “Oh, then this is perfect for your!” In the end, Mexico won. Toño yelled, “We’re champions!” raising his fist in the air.

113 Soccer is also a field where the division between migrant and non-migrant is literally played out in Acuitzio. Acuitzio celebrates January 2 as the Day of the Northerners and at least once they have had a migrant vs. non-migrant soccer match. When I was in Acuitzio in 2011, my friend Edgar was wearing a red soccer shirt that said: “migrante de Acuitzio” in faded white letters. I asked him what the shirt was for and he said about 4 or 5 years ago, they had a migrants vs. locals soccer match. The migrants wore red shirts like the one Edgar wore, and the locals wore a blue one that said “bienvenida paisano”. I asked who won, and he said he doesn’t remember – but that they organized it with the head of the migrant association in Alaska.
All of these expressions of transnationality imply that people rely on both locations for a sense of identity and belonging – Acuitzences in Alaska don’t feel completely at home in either location, but they have built lives and livelihoods that require both locations. As explored in this chapter, through the process of transnational class formation, people draw on the contradictions between Acuitzio and Anchorage to produce a livelihood and a sense of self. For example, as discussed above, people do things to “feel like themselves” in Alaska. For Oscar this meant raising roosters on both sides of the border, and for Serefina it meant getting the necessary requirements to be a hair stylist and esthetician. Being “the same here and there” is a point of pride for some people. Leonardo, for example, repeated again and again “I’m the same here and there, it doesn’t matter where I am.”

However, there are differences in how people express this transnationality. When I met Leonardo for two interviews at his home in Alaska he explained his role as president of the Club de Migrantes de Acuitzio del Canje en Alaska, which raises money among Acuitzences in Alaska for projects in Acuitzio and which I will discuss further in Chapter 6. I had asked him to tell me about the work of the club, and how he contacts other Acuitzences in Alaska for their fundraising efforts. He explained, “I phone everyone, and no matter what, they always give what they can. Pero no todos.” Not everyone contributes. Leonardo said, “Some people don’t want to help, they have all this money and they won’t help”. With frustration in his voice, he said, “I’ve written them off. They aren’t good people, although they may seem nice”. At the time I sensed a rift between those who had papers arranged for them and those who worked hard, crossed illegally, suffered, and finally came to Alaska like Leo did. Leonardo said, “They have all this money but they don’t want to help,” shaking his head and frowning, “they act like they’re the
kings of the town”. I know what he’s talking about to some extent, for I have seen migrants in Acuitzio showing off: fancy clothes, fancy car, lots of money, a bit of a swagger.

Others have mentioned how people act differently in different places. Adán, who has worked in California but was really interested in working in Alaska was certainly worried about that. He has uncles who work in Alaska, and said that he could possibly rely on them for a place to stay and help finding a job, but “I don’t know if they’d be the same.” He only knows how they are in Acuitzio. He explained how when someone goes first and gets a job and saves some money and then they help you by giving you a job or money to join them, they change, they’re not the same. Perhaps this is another way that people transnationalize. Making a living and a live across borders is all about negotiating the contradictions between Mexico and the United States, and one way to live “here and there” is to try to be the same in both places, like Oscar does with his rooster. But another way to do this can be acting differently in Mexico and the United States, and depending on gender, generation, and citizenship, emphasizing wealth in Acuitzio is one way to show off a transnational class status.

Even so, the central contradiction of transnational life that people express is productive, as it creates a collective if often fraught sense of belonging that draws on multiple spatial points, the transnational social space I call “Mexican Alaska.” This social space also helps individuals achieve personal, familial, or even collective goals. As I have shown, alongside efforts to produce a connection between Mexico and Alaska in order to acostumbrarse, the state also produces distance and difference and enforces it through bureaucracy, for example, by requiring certain skills and statuses, or by restricting movement of some things. Nevertheless some Acuitzences have been very successful at working the border, developing a transnational class
livelhood and identity to produce value by exploiting the inequality and difference that the US-Mexico border represents.

As people orient themselves more to a transnational way of life, travel becomes necessary for feeling “at home”. For example, to feel at home in Anchorage you have to travel to Acuitzio to buy mole, to “recharge your batteries,” and to reconnect with the transnational social network. To feel at home in Acuitzio, you have to earn enough money to maintain your home and property so it is necessary to continue living in Alaska to work, earn, and save. Mobility between Anchorage and Acuitzio, managing difference between both places while making connections between them are necessary for belonging in place at any site within the transnational network.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have explored spatial practices as a mode of territorialization and gendered process of class formation used by migrants from Acuitzio who have lived and worked in Alaska to get used to life in both places. People draw on the connections between their hometowns as well as experiences of sociospatial distance between Alaska and Mexico to produce a sense of belonging within a transnational social field. People talk about having to acostumbrarse or get used to a new way of life. On the one hand, they work to connect Mexico and Alaska in their everyday lives and develop a transnational habitus. However, people also live within a system that keeps the two separate. Managing this distance and difference are essential for transnational class formation and also a source of tensions and feelings of liminality. Belonging in transnational space means feeling at home within that space as a whole, even if these feelings vary considerably depending on the positionality of each individual according to gender and generation. Statements that appear contradictory thus make sense as expressions of
transnational class status, where lives and livelihoods are made across borders. For example, Renata said: “I feel like my home is Mexico, but I would never live there.” People are not necessarily assimilating to Alaskan or US life; many of them are getting used to living *between* Alaska and Mexico, moving between these spaces and drawing from both to produce a social world that extends between them, and includes both Acuitzio and Anchorage. Rather than understanding Alaska and Mexico as bounded and separate from one another, these spatial strategies emphasize the contingent, entangled, and interconnected nature of northern spaces and extend the US-Mexico borderlands to “the Last Frontier.” In the next chapter I move on to discuss territorialization at the level of the Mexican community in Anchorage and how people create their own categories to make a collective sense of belonging. The Mexican Consulate in Alaska, the dance group Xochiquetzal-Tiqun, restaurants like Mexico in Alaska, and the Club de Migrantes de Acuitzio del Canje en Alaska are some of the organizations that produce Mexican Alaska through images and collective action.
Chapter 6: “It Freezes the People Together” – Producing a Mexican Alaska

My friend Edgar was working for the ayuntamiento, or municipal council, in Acuitzio when I was there to start fieldwork in the summer of 2011. He suggested that I meet with Lola, who was the Councillor of Migrant Issues for the municipality. Edgar gave me her cell phone number, and we arranged a time to meet at the palacio municipal by text message. Located at the south end of the plaza, the building features a clock tower, which is a symbol for the town. It is not only visible from many locations in town due to its height, but it can also be heard ringing on the hour and half hour and playing songs at certain times of day. When I arrived, I asked for Lola, and went upstairs where the regidores have their offices. I walked in to the shared office space and Lola stood up to greet me, shaking hands before we sat down to talk, periodically interrupted by other staff.

Lola asked me about my project and I told her that I was interested in migration between Acuitzio and Alaska, and how people are often surprised to hear there are Mexicans in Alaska at all. “To counteract that idea”, I said, “I want to write a history of mobility between Acuitzio and Anchorage.” “Casi todo Acuitzio vive allá!” she said, “Almost all of Acuitzio lives there!” and went on to talk about the Club de Migrantes de Acuitzio del Canje en Alaska, the Acuitzio del Canje Migrant Club in Alaska, hereafter referred to as the Migrant Club. “The goal of the club is to improve the town. Part of the reason for doing that is because when people come back to Acuitzio from US cities, all of the things they have become accustomed to there, they don’t have here. So they should improve the town.”

Lola was active in local politics and cultural production in both Anchorage and Acuitzio. She lived in Anchorage with her husband for ten years, but moved back in 2001 while he
continued to go back and forth between Anchorage, where he worked at a restaurant, and Acuitzio, where he and Lola operate their own small restaurant. In 2011, aside from being the Councillor of Migrant Issues for the municipal council, Lola also ran for Mexican federal office, and eventually moved back to Anchorage to open a restaurant with her husband in 2013. Her sons stayed in Mexico to continue their studies. In both Anchorage and Acuitzio she has been very involved with the Migrant Club. And in Anchorage, she helped to start a dance group at Our Lady of Guadalupe Church. Lola said that these groups help to “bring the community together in Alaska,” she paused, and then said, “maybe for Alaska you could say se congela la gente, it freezes the people together”. She laughed and clarified, “Yes, se congela la gente, because it’s so cold there and life can be difficult, so we need to freeze the people together.”

In this chapter, I analyze the institutions, groups, places, and practices that “freeze the people together” in Anchorage and Mexico, such as the Mexican Consulate, the dance and culture group Xochiquetzal-Tiqun, restaurants such as “Mexico in Alaska,” and the Migrant Club. Lola’s phrase is ironic, and evokes a sense of bonding in a very cold place. Although “freezing the people together” evokes something rigid and static, the examples I discuss in this chapter show a community in action. In particular, I explore how each of these groups produce representations of a “Mexican Alaska” through images and collective action. By using the term “representations of space,” I again draw on the work of Henri Lefebvre (1991). In previous

114 In her interview, Lola said that she moved back to Acuitzio in part so that her children could go to school there. She wanted to be sure they finished university, and that they had the best chance to do so in Mexico. As well, she believes the quality of education is much higher in Mexico. In Alaska, Lola said that no one from Acuitzio has graduated from university, something she attributes to multiple factors, including: the tendency to prioritize working over studying in migrant families, the inability for Spanish-language speaking parents to help their children navigate the English university system, the inability for parents to afford the high tuition, and the tendency for young people to get married or move in together and not complete their studies. She is unique in that she feels the best chance for her children’s education lies in Mexico, in contrast to most other Acuitzences who say that the best education is in the United States.
chapters, I focused on the spatial practice of Acuitzences who move between Mexico and Alaska, and the frictions that mediate their mobility, the everyday production of a transnational social world, and the connections people make between Acuitzio and Anchorage as they manage the difference and distance between them. Here, I analyze collective representations of what I call “Mexican Alaska” more generally. Representations of space are tied to the relations of production and to the order which those relations impose (Lefebvre 1991:33). In Chapter 1, I wrote about how Alaska has been produced as an exceptionally separate space, geographically distant from the 48 contiguous United States, and conceptually separate as a wilderness frontier. Within this representation produced by popular culture, academic discourse, and dominant political power, people from Mexico appear out of place in Alaska. This dissertation endeavors to show otherwise, and in this chapter, I specifically analyze how people of Mexican background in Anchorage produce their own spatial categories and claims in order to claim Alaska as a place of their own. These groups work to stabilize, visualize, and mark a particular kind of place in an attempts to root collective identity in transnational space. By raising money among Acuitzences in Alaska for community projects in Acuitzio, dancing Mexican baile folklórico\textsuperscript{115} in traditional regional dress in Anchorage, visually placing “Mexico in Alaska” at a restaurant, and extending the influence of the Mexican state to Anchorage, these groups intervene in the usual representations of both Alaska and Mexico to produce transnational representations of space. These groups thus re-categorize space, and attempt to diminish the effect of distance to produce transborder, transnational representations of space.

\textsuperscript{115} Mexican folk dancing.
The four organizations and places I will analyze touch on overlapping themes. Both Xochiquetzal-Tiqun and the restaurant “Mexico in Alaska” create a sense of unexpectedness by bringing together Mexico and Alaska into the same frame, two places kept profoundly separate by distance and the production of difference. The Migrant Club, the Mexican Consulate in Alaska, and Xochiquetzal-Tiqun all create new connections between Mexico and Alaska.\footnote{116 Although there are other possible examples where representations of space have been produced in Alaska, for example the television program “Latinos en Alaska,” Our Lady of Guadalupe Parish in Anchorage, or the (now defunct) Pan-American Club I have chosen to focus here on the four examples which I am most knowledgeable about.}

\textbf{Club de Migrantes de Acuitzio del Canje en Alaska}

The Club de Migrantes de Acuitzio del Canje en Alaska, hereafter referred to as the Migrant Club, meet informally at a local Mexican restaurant. The club has a registered membership of about ten Acuitzences who participate regularly, but draw on a larger group of approximately thirty members who participate in fundraising events. An even larger group participates occasionally. I interviewed Leonardo Aldama, the soft-spoken president of the club in Anchorage in 2011. He told me that he wanted to come to Alaska since he was a child, and finally came to Alaska in 1989 to work in a fish processing camp after working in California, Oregon, and Washington state for many years. After a difficult summer working in Chignik at a fish plant, he decided to stay in Anchorage, where he started out washing dishes in a restaurant before getting a job in the construction industry. When I interviewed him, he had been working in construction in Alaska for 19 years, and all of his children were born and raised in Alaska. I asked him how he became president of the Migrant Club, and he replied, “Well, it was going to
be someone else. I was in bed already and someone with the Migrant Club phoned me and said they were at the restaurant to talk to the other person but he didn’t show up. But the club was already there, ready to meet, and so that’s how they made me president.”

Leonardo and Lola, as friends and colleagues who have both lived in Anchorage and Acuitzio, work together to administer the club: Leonardo in Anchorage, and Lola in Acuitzio. Leonardo said that Lola usually decides what they should do, based on who needs it the most. He said they collect donations from people, on a give what you can basis, *lo que uno puede uno da*. They use that money to buy supplies to make *carnitas* to sell as a fundraiser. Carnitas are braised pork, and are often served at special events in Acuitzio, and sold every Sunday in the plaza. Buying carnitas on Sunday in the plaza is something that many Acuitzences living abroad look forward to on visits to their hometown.

I also asked Lola how the club started, when I interviewed her in Acuitzio in 2011,

“When did the Migrant Club start? Who started it?”

Lola replied,

“The club? Look, I was invited to participate in politics in 2007, for el PAN, the Partido Acción Nacional [the conservative party then ruling Mexico under President Calderón]. And I never thought that I would end up in the municipal council. Our party didn’t win the municipal presidency but, since we ended up in second place, two councillors from PAN got in. I was the second one, and they assigned me to be the Councillor of Migrant Issues for the municipality. I didn’t know where I was going to start, because there was no work done. There had never been a Councillor of Migrant Issues for Acuitzio. I am the first one, and a woman.”

“Oh wow Lola, good for you,” I said.

Lola continued, as automobiles continued to rumble around the plaza and onto Riva Palacio, “So, I started to see what I could do, There was a Secretariat of Migrants in the state government of Michoacán, and I got in touch with them. Also, there are people from Acuitzio in Chicago who
have clubs, in Texas, in California, and in the state of Alaska, as well as in other places. But these clubs didn’t work with the municipality because they mistrust the authorities.” In 2008, the year she was elected, Lola went to Alaska and while there, met with Leonardo and another member of the club. Another man was the president at that time, but they hadn’t done anything in Acuitzio. Lola continued, “I contacted them and we decided to form a Migrant Club of Acuitzences in Alaska. With a few members we started to work together. I proposed that we organize a migrant fair in Acuitzio and as part of that, donate something for the community of Acuitzio.” To Lola, migrants should work to improve their hometowns, and the Migrant Club is one way to do this. She said, “That is the function of the migrant, and of the Migrant Clubs, to improve your municipality in Mexico.” Along those lines, the Migrant Club has raised funds in Anchorage for a variety of projects intended to improve some aspect of life in Acuitzio. As Lola said in the introduction, this creates social bonding among Acuitzences in Anchorage, but it also links people back to their town.

In 2008, which was also the first year of Lola’s term as Councillor of Migrant Issues in Acuitzio, Lola said that she proposed that they donate jackets to the poorest communities in the municipality of Acuitzio. “The others in the club thought that was a good idea, and we got together, or they said de coperacha.” Lola laughed.117 The club chose a poor community in the mountains called El Tzintzun and they chose jackets as an appropriate item to donate because, Lola said, “Alaska is cold, and therefore has a lot of jackets, and in El Tzintzun it gets really cold as well.” Restaurants in Anchorage owned by Acuitzences collaborated to make carnitas, “which is a typical food for special events in Acuitzio,” Lola pointed out, “and they sold them at the

117 De coperacha is informally used to refer to the creation of a collective fund, similar to the idea of “chipping in” in English.
church in Anchorage after mass.” All of the profits went to purchase jackets and they made enough money to buy 100 jackets to send there. However, the logistics proved difficult: because Alaska is so far it would be expensive to send the jackets. Another problem, according to Lola, is that people don’t trust authority because of corruption throughout Mexico. She said this is the case not only among Acuitzences in Alaska, but everywhere in the United States. So, they made the donation of jackets in December when many people came back to town so that they could see for themselves that the money that was donated was used as intended. She said, “it’s really important that the people see what they give and how much they give so that people can have faith in our organization.” In fact, Leonardo went to Acuitzio himself to hand out the jackets and he invited other people along to observe how it went. Leonardo said, “They saw that all the money went where it was supposed to, so people began to trust me.” Lola said, “At the first migrant fair they gave out 100 jackets to the community of El Tzintzun and to neighbouring communities of El Varal y La Peñita, which are the coldest places in the region. When people who live in Alaska who are from Acuitzio saw that we are working to do what we promised to do, they were encouraged by it. After that, more people registered in the Club.”

In 2008, the group also registered in the 3x1 program to raise money that would be matched by funds from the Mexican Federal Government and the State of Michoacán to improve the Chapel of the Señor de la Expiración in Paramo and build a fence and washrooms at the site. The Señor de la Expiración is celebrated each year in Paramo in May, and is considered one of the oldest ceremonial rituals of the community.118

By the second year, 2009, the Migrant Club in Anchorage chose the community and what to do. They chose to give blankets to people in the village of Paramo, also located at higher elevation than the town of Acuitzio del Canje. They again fundraised by soliciting donations and selling carnitas in Anchorage, and donated 100 blankets to people in Paramo, and another 25 blankets to elderly people in Acuitzio. Again, Leonardo went to Acuitzio and encouraged observers to join him to make the presentation of the blankets. In 2009 they also raised money to purchase wireless microphones to use in the town’s annual Holy Week procession.

Lola explained that she often receives requests for help from groups in Acuitzio, “For example, we have a dance group Ballet Folkloriko Tzintzuni Uarhari who are an independent dance group here in the municipality.” When Lola lived in Alaska, she participated in a baile folklórico group affiliated with Our Lady of Guadalupe Church. Leonardo also participated in this dance group. Because they both value traditional dance, Lola said she phoned Leonardo in Alaska to say, “We have a request from this club; they are asking if we can help them with something. He loved the idea and sent them a recorder, which is what they needed.” They also donated funds to another group, Danzantes Tradicionales de Acuitzio, and a band called Acuitzence to help them attend a dance competition in Veracruz. The Danzantes Tradicionales de Acuitzio group has revived a traditional dance called “Los Frasicos,” or “Los Carboneros” after extensive consultation with older community members.119

Lola says that the activities of the Migrant Club help young people in both Acuitzio and Alaska to maintain their culture. She said, “it’s really good because it helps the young people who are growing up here in Acuitzio, so that they don’t lose their culture. Because that was one

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119 I have never seen the dance performed in person; however, it is possible to view it on YouTube. I believe the name of the dance references coal miners, and they dance wearing black masks.
of the intentions I had when I organized the dance group in Alaska at the church. So our children
didn’t lose their culture and their roots. So that they learn,” Lola pauses, “But it’s difficult, very
difficult. Especially when no one has time. *Viven trabajando,* they live to work in Alaska. And
the young people are interested in other things.”

Indeed, the Migrant Club chooses activities that either help those less fortunate in the
hometown, or that help to ensure that traditional events and fiestas in Acuitzio continue, such as
the *Fiesta del Señor de la Expiración,* the *Semana Santa* or Holy Week procession, and the
dance groups. It’s interesting to hear Lola say that her concerns are the same on either side of the
border: in both Acuitzio and Anchorage, she worries about young people “losing their culture,
their roots” and works to keep tradition alive both in the municipality, and thousands of miles
away in Anchorage.

Leonardo organizes fundraisers in Anchorage to help those Mexican people in need in
Alaska as well. I attended a fundraiser organized for a family who had lost everything to a house
fire. Anita had told me about it and I followed up with her by text message. The fundraiser would
be held after the 11:30 Spanish mass in the Lunney Centre, a small community hall that is
attached to Our Lady of Guadalupe Church. The church has beautiful skylights and windows and
that morning the sun shone in to light up the congregation. Many Acuitzences attend Catholic
services and special events at Our Lady of Guadalupe Church or at the Cathedral downtown, and
it is one of the few places in Anchorage where people from Acuitzio meet informally.
Community events are usually announced after mass, and that day the announcer said,
“Leonardo Aldama and some *compañeros* are raising funds for a family who lost everything in a
fire. There will be a meal after mass, and it costs $8.”
After mass, I spent some time in the lobby greeting friends and acquaintances before walking along the covered sidewalk to the Lunney Centre. Once inside, I lined up at the window to order my meal. I saw two men I knew from Acuitzio taking orders and payment, and Leonardo at the back cutting up meat. At that time, I hadn’t seen one of the men, César, for some time, and I asked him if he recognized me. “Of course!” he said, smiling, “have you been back to Acuitzio?”

“Yes, I was there last summer,” I said. “Have you?”

“No, I haven’t been back for many years now.” César doesn’t have papers in the United States, and although he has had success in his career in Anchorage, having worked his way up to sous-chef at a local restaurant, he doesn’t want to risk crossing the border.

I got my carnitas, served with beans, rice, pickled jalapeños, a few tortillas, and a slice of lime, and sat down at a large round table with some people I didn’t know, an older husband and wife from Guadalajara and a middle aged man from Guerrero. I opened a can of pop and took a sip as they told me that they were surprised both that I was from Canada and could speak Spanish. Another man joined us, “I know the guys in the kitchen, I’m just waiting for them to finish so we can have some drinks and enjoy the afternoon.” The woman laughed and said, “Apunetelo, write that down!” As we talked, I ate some of my carnitas. When it was time to go, I packaged them back into the styrofoam container, said hello to Anita and Inés who were sitting at another table nearby, and left.

When I arrived in Anchorage later that year, after interviewing Lola in Acuitzio, I hoped to attend Migrant Club meetings and events. I assumed they would meet regularly and have an organized structure. However, I soon learned that the club is organized informally, something which is essential for its legitimacy. César, who is a member of the Migrant Club, emphasized
that everything the group does is informal, and almost nothing is written down. They don’t have any formal affiliation with the town administration or state or federal governments. The organization is small, something that helps to alleviate concerns about the money being spent inappropriately. César said, “it doesn’t happen because it’s just them and then Lola in Acuitzio and that’s it.” They meet at their unofficial headquarters, a local Mexican restaurant “have a beer and talk and that’s it”. Or as another club member put it, “we just get together when we need to.” César said they could go to the consulate to formalize things but they haven’t done it. They could take advantage of the 3x1 Program and receive financial contributions from the Mexican Federal Government and the State of Michoacán, but they haven’t bothered. This works for now. Keeping the club informal means that undocumented Acuitzences in Alaska feel more comfortable participating. Lola pointed out that Acuitzences living in Alaska without papers are afraid to formally register because they don’t want to give their information. However, Lola says, “they still participate. Or like, they contribute but their names and information don’t appear on the list.”

The emphasis on keeping the club informal also illustrates that the mistrust of authorities is mirrored on both sides of the border. I have heard many people in both Acuitzio and Alaska complain about those in positions of political power or even in organized groups. For example, one man told me that people organizing events in Acuitzio ask him directly for a contribution, and he has given money for them to host a jaripeo or a baile, “something for the people to have fun.” He does this instead of contributing to the Migrant Club, because with the club, there is more uncertainty about where the money goes. Another contact said that she knows about the club in Alaska and compared it to the Father of a church that asked for donations for those in need. She said, “I would never give money to the father, he has money, better to give it to poor
people directly. When people go around like that collecting money, they are just doing it to benefit themselves.”

And indeed, many Acuitzences in Alaska choose not to participate in the migrant club due to the mistrust that extends throughout the transnational social field. Leonardo said, “I tell people that we can fix things, but no. They haven’t changed their mind. Even though no one has said anything about us doing things badly or anything, many people don’t believe in us even though we have tried to provide proof that the money has gone where it was promised. Those people who didn’t go to oversee the distribution of jackets and blankets are the ones who don’t believe in the group. The people that help us, they believe in us. Many people like what we’re doing, and they understand that what we are doing is good. Or like, well done, we are doing a good job.”

“It must be nice to be there to present the jackets or blankets,” I said.

“Oh yes, well you almost feel like you’re going to cry! Or well, I guess that depends on the person.”

Leonardo said that for each project, he calls everyone he knows in Anchorage from Acuitzio to ask them to participate. They either say yes or no, “I talk to everyone; I am the one that they talk to if they want to contribute any money or not, if they want to participate or not. I am pretty much in charge of calling everyone and if they say no, I don’t get upset. They’re my friends and I can’t stop talking to them just because they can’t help.” Although Leonardo is resentful about those who never contribute but flaunt their wealth (Chapter 4), he recognizes that those who do support the activities of the club may not be able to support every fundraising endeavor.

There is also a possible disconnect between the function of the Migrant Club and more individualistic migrant-immigrants who seek to improve life for themselves and close family members. For Lola, Leonardo, and others in the Migrant Club, successful migrants in Anchorage
should work to improve their hometowns and help those less fortunate. However, not everyone believes they have the responsibility to contribute funds to the well being of their hometown.

Lola said that not all of the people in the Migrant Club in Alaska are from Acuitzio, and there’s another club in Anchorage organized by people from Zacatecas. She is also involved in coordinating activities with clubs in Texas, California, and in one area of Chicago. She explained that Acuitzences are in charge of the clubs in all of the places she liaises with. In Texas, her brother is in charge. The group in Chicago contacted her for support, although she’s never been to Chicago. “But,” Lola concluded, “la fuente es de Alaska, the main source is Alaska”. These clubs not only “freeze the people together” within Anchorage and between Anchorage and Acuitzio, they also provide a map of the geography of Acuitzences in the United States, and insight into what kinds of projects are considered important by those who live transnationally, namely: making donations to those less fortunate in Acuitzio and in Alaska, and ensuring that future generations know their culture, and their roots in Mexico.

Performing Mexico: Xochiquetzal-Tiqun

The Anchorage museum celebrates Hispanic Heritage Month\textsuperscript{120} with a day of special events in October, and Xochiquetzal-Tiqun Mexican Folkloric Ballet of Alaska is always invited to perform. When I attended in 2011, Xochiquetzal-Tiqun danced in the large atrium in the middle of the museum. On the stage, young children, teenage girls, and adult women danced regional dances of Mexico, decked out in ribbons and lace. Their performance culminated in a

\textsuperscript{120} National Hispanic Heritage Month in the United States is observed from September 15 to October 15 by celebrating the histories, cultures and contributions of American citizens whose ancestors came from Spain, Mexico, the Caribbean and Central and South America. US President Lyndon Johnson established Hispanic Heritage Week in 1968, and in 1988 US President Ronald Reagan expanded it to cover a 30-day period starting on September 15 and ending on October 15 (http://hispanicheritagemonth.gov/about/, accessed October 15, 2014).
dance to a song called Cascabel, with everyone on stage. I thought back to a recent dance practice, where Ana told the students that this song was Mexico’s contribution to the Voyager Golden Record,\textsuperscript{121} “it was sent all the way into space,” she said. It has also been sent all the way to Alaska, and performed by people from Mexico in Alaska.

After the performance, the whole group moved to one of the galleries to take a photo underneath a large painting of Mt. McKinley, or Denali, by Alaskan painter Sydney Laurence. The effect was great – the large purple-blue mountain rises up behind the smiling dancers, dressed in ribbons and braids and brightly coloured clothing. Parents and interested museum patrons snapped photos. I was one of them.

\textsuperscript{121} The Voyager Golden Records are phonograph records which were included aboard both Voyager spacecraft, launched by NASA in 1977. They contain sounds and images selected to portray the diversity of life and culture on Earth, and are intended for any intelligent extraterrestrial life form, or for future humans, who may find them (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Voyager_Golden_Record, accessed October 15, 2014).
Figure 9: Xochiquetzal-Tiqun at the Anchorage Museum, 2011. Photo by Author.
They have repeated this scene after other performances at the museum, and so this is only one of a series of similar photographs, marking the years of the group and their changes in front of the steady, solid, eternally snowy Denali. I think also, the group really likes to play on the juxtaposition of their costumes in front of this huge painting. In fact, I think their consistency of photographing in front of this particular painting at the museum visually represents the story they tell about themselves as a group – bringing Mexico and Alaska together. This is how the group introduces itself on the Xochiquetzal-Tiqun website:

“Our name comes from two cultures: Mexican and Athabascan. Xochiquetzal means “Flower Feather” in the Nahuatl language spoken by the Aztecs and other native Mexican groups. Tiqun means “Wolf” in the Athabascan Dena’ina language spoken by original inhabitants of this region in Alaska. We are based in Anchorage, Alaska. We got together in 2002 in an effort to honor and preserve our Mexican roots as well as to honor Alaska the place that opened its arms to us and where most of our children were born or raised.”

In interviews, the co-directors of the group talked about how they chose the name. Ana Gutiérrez-Scholl said that they thought about what they wanted the name of the group to reflect. With the name Xochiquetzal, “We chose to reflect something cultural, with the Aztec goddess Xochiquetzal, who is the Aztec goddess of women, flowers, feathers, and the arts.” She continued, explaining what the other half of their name, Tiqun, represents:

“The way that we saw it was that the wolf is a source of great strength in this climate, right? So we thought that the wolf was something really strong that could stand the weather here. Without offending the Athabascan people either, because they also have an important

122 They have also taken a photograph in front of a large painting by Tlingit artist Jim Schoppert. Although here I focus on the photos of the group in front of the Denali painting, I believe that taking a photo in front of the Schoppert painting produces a similar re-categorization of space, bringing contemporary Native Alaska and Mexican folk dance together.

and grand culture.” Together, “Xochiquetzal could represent the culture of the people, and Tiqun, the wolf, la fortaleza humana, the strength of humanity.”

The other director, Ana Del Real, also talked about choosing the name of the group. “Since many of our children have been born here, we were thinking of something very representative of Mexico, and since we have always admired the Aztec culture, we thought of Xochiquetzal.” However, they were also hoping to represent Alaska, and chose Tiqun for the north wolf. Ana continued, “We were thinking about how Alaska is so far away and so far north, but the wolf can stand the temperatures. Our children are going to have the strength both from Mexico and from Alaska, a place which is so extreme in terms of cold.” For Ana, being far away from Mexico makes it important that she teaches her children where they are from. “Sometimes my children ask me where they are from and I tell them, you are American because you were born in the United States but your parents are Mexicans and your roots are Mexican. You are Mexico-americano.”

In the photographs they take at the museum, in their name and the description of how they chose it, and at other times, such as the dance in the parking lot I described in the introduction, Xochiquetzal-Tiqun puts stereotypical representations of both Mexico and Alaska within the same frame. These representations draw on wilderness and indigeneity, themes common to nation building efforts in both Mexico and the United States.\textsuperscript{124} Indigeneity has long been appropriated for nation-building in states across the Americas, relegating Indigenous peoples themselves to the past and justifying ongoing colonial schemes of modernization and

\textsuperscript{124} This is also true of the postcards produced by Mexico in Alaska Restaurant, discussed later in this chapter. The postcards use Mayan ruins and images of the Alaskan landscape to re-categorize space, but could also be critiqued on the same grounds: that these images use mestizo nationalism in transnational nation-building, reinforcing ethnoracial inequality in the same way that the Mexican and US nation-states do.
assimilation (e.g. Bonfil Batalla 1996; Fienup-Riordan 1990) By drawing their name from Mexican and Alaskan Indigenous cultures, Xochiquetzal-Tiqun explicitly builds on the association of the state and indigeneity for transnational nation-building. Xochiquetzal-Tiqun thus continues a tradition of “mestizo nationalism” where “linguistic hybridization, aesthetic mixing, and cultural boundary crossing in Mexico and the Americas have coexisted with ethnoracial inequality and are bound up with it” (Alonso 2004: 481). Even though the process of transnational nation building by groups like Xochiquetzal-Tiqun produce a sense of nation across the boundaries of states, they draw on the same logics of nationalism used by the state.

The juxtaposition of Aztec with Athabascan unsettles nation-state representations and re-categorizes space to diminish the socio-spatial distance between Alaska and Mexico. They also produce new connections between these places, and produce a transnational sense of belonging for younger generations, helping to orient them to both locations, and the transnational social formation as a whole. However, such representations draw on a Mexican nationalism that erases the dance and culture of Acuitzio specifically or of indigenous groups in Michoacán like the P’urhépecha. In this section I draw on interviews with the directors and dancers of Xochiquetzal-Tiqun and my participant observation as a member of the group.

I first met many of my closest research contacts from Acuitzio through their involvement in Xochiquetzal-Tiqun in 2005. During fieldwork in Anchorage in 2011-2012, I attended all Saturday dance practices and performances of the group. I even learned to dance some of the regional dances of Veracruz, and performed with the group at events in Anchorage during the spring of 2012, including one performance at the very busy Summer Solstice Festival in downtown Anchorage, where we posed for tourist photographs on busy 4th Avenue in downtown Anchorage. Many Acuitzences in Anchorage have been involved with the group from the
beginning, including Juana Bravo and her family, Esteban and Laura and their family, and many Acuitzences with the group today including Soledad and her children and Serefina and her young son. However, the group is open to anyone of any background, as long as they are willing to perform. Ana Gutiérrez told me that they have had Athabascan/Mexican, Puerto Rican American, Albanian, Croatian/Mexican, and African American/Mexican participants. When I was in Anchorage for fieldwork, however, all of the participants were of Mexican background.

Xochiquetzal-Tiqun is an art and culture group that has been active for just over ten years, since 2003 when two dance teachers and a small group of parents – all from Mexico – decided to form a group. Ana Del Real had lived in Alaska since 1993, when she came to work and raise money to attend university in Mexico. She was part of a dance group called Alma Latina when she first arrived, but returned to Mexico to continue her studies as planned. While there, she got married and she and her husband returned to Anchorage in 1997 where most of his family lived. Ana Del Real reunited with Ana Gutiérrez-Scholl in a bilingual computing for small business class at the YMCA. I met with Ana Gutiérrez-Scholl for an interview at a coffee shop one afternoon, and we talked about how the group began. She talked about that computer class, which she taught: “It was the first time that I got to know a few Hispanic people, Mexican people, here in Alaska. And on our breaks, when we weren’t studying, we talked about Mexico, and how we missed the folk customs, and all of those things, no?”

Ana Gutiérrez-Scholl continued,

“It turned out that Ana Del Real had a lot of training in folklore, and so did I. Along with another person who attended the class we talked about forming a group. Ideologically we conceived of it as something that would never cost anything to participate in. But that was really difficult, mostly because we had to cover our costs and so instead we did it in a way that didn’t cost very much.”

In her interview, Ana Del Real said,
“Ana Gutiérrez said to me, we have to get together to make a group. We have to get together. And so the initiators of the group became Ana Gutiérrez, two other women, one from Morelia, Michoacán who still lives here in Alaska, and another who has since moved back to Mexico, and me. Ana said that we have to get together because we always talk about how much we miss Mexico, about the dances, about the traditions, about all of that. So we decided to get together one time, to try to do something so that the children learn their culture. Although we would only be able to teach them the little bit that we know, that was how we started the group. Since then it’s become more formal but we started and we continue to meet primarily to teach the children.”

“For the children,” I said, “and to have a little bit of Mexico for you too.”

Ana said, “Exactly, because well, you know, it’s so far away and you always miss everything”

From the beginning, and for more than a decade now, Xochiquetzal-Tiqun has worked to bring Mexican cultural practices, specifically regional dance, to Alaska both to help the adult members of the group to deal with a sense of nostalgia for and distance from Mexico, as well as to teach their children about Mexico. By providing a space for participants to interact in Spanish, and share knowledge and memories about hometowns in Mexico, the group actively re-categorizes space, attempting to diminish the felt distance between where they are, and where they’re from. They also work to create roots for their children in Mexico, but they do this primarily from Alaska.

A good friend of mine in Anchorage, who also dances with Xochiquetzal-Tiqun, told me about going to Cancun with her Texan husband for their honeymoon, where they watched a very touristy display of Mexican regional dance at a theme park called Xcaret. My friend is from Aguascalientes, Mexico and she described the music, the costumes and the dance at Xcaret and how it nearly moved her to tears. Afterwards, she mentioned this to her husband. He said to her that he thought the dances were nice, but that he did not feel emotional about them. She realized
that if she does not raise her daughters around that kind of music, they wouldn’t feel the kind of nostalgia and emotion that she feels for it. For that reason, she enrolled them in the group.

Soledad, who dances in the group herself and who has enrolled all of her children, told me that Xochiquetzal-Tiqun is important to her “so that my children never forget the culture, and more than anything that they like it, and see how there are such beautiful things in our country. It’s also important to take the opportunity to share our culture with others. Because if we don’t help to do that, well other people won’t know about the beautiful culture that Mexico has. *La cultura tan bonita que tiene Mexico, no?* And it’s a really nice project, more than anything. Even though it’s a lot of work, I mean there are lots of headaches from running around, get up, you’re already late, it’s so early, you have to get ready. You’re always running around. Every time we have a performance, *es un corredero*, a race to the finish line, as they say. It’s a lot of work but for me I like it a lot and my children also really like to dance.”

In fact, all of the parents involved with the group said that they primarily participated to ensure that their children would not lose their culture or their roots in Mexico. Mothers and adult women enjoy dancing with the group to socialize with each other in Spanish, and to set an example for the kids.

They practice every Saturday, in a nondenominational Church rec room in a strip mall in South Anchorage. Each practice begins by laying out large squares of laminate flooring over the carpet, so that there is a hard surface for us to *zapatear*\(^{125}\) onto. The adult women and young children practice concurrently, followed by the teenagers. As dancers arrive for practice, they

\(^{125}\) *Zapatear,* “to tap one’s feet” refers to percussive footwork common in choreographed dances like *baile folklórico*, but also highly valued by Acuitzences and elsewhere in Mexico and the United States for informal popular dancing.
change out of their outdoor shoes and into shoes specifically for dancing, with metal on the heels to help the dancer’s footwork resonate loudly. Ana Gutiérrez teaches the adults and teenagers, while Ana Del Real teaches the young children in another room. As a member of the adult women’s dance group, I learned to dance three dances from Veracruz, enjoying the feel of my white shoes tapping on the floor. Ana uses the speakers of a large flat screen television to play the music, and we follow her steps and movements in the mirror as she leads us through each dance. Small children raced in and out of the room as we practiced, and the other women in the group made small talk about their week, events they were looking forward to, or made jokes that everyone enjoyed. The adult women were also referred to as las mamás or the mothers, even though only about half of the dancers had children. Our group practiced for an hour, and then the teen-age young women practiced. I always stayed to observe their practice, which started with the girls changing their shoes, putting on practice skirts, and hanging out on the small stage to one side of the room until Ana said it was time to start. The adult women’s lesson was delivered in exclusively Spanish, while the young women were instructed and responded to Ana in both English and Spanish. Ana Del Real taught the younger children in Spanish.

Children may begin dancing with Xochiquetzal-Tiqun when they are as young as four years old, and they start by learning regional dances of Jalisco. As teenagers, they take more advanced lessons, learning and performing dances from other regions. This parallels the activities of schoolchildren in Mexico who learn regional dances at school. In Acuitzio, at the clausura or end of school ceremonies each year, schoolchildren dance for parents and others in attendance. Children participating in Xochiquetzal-Tiqun, and children dancing in schools in Mexico are learning the same dances, and the same affiliations between region and traditional
dance. However, as Lola described earlier in the chapter, the need to preserve traditional culture is felt in Acuitzio as well as in other points in the transnational social field, including Alaska.

Another commonality between Xochiquetzal-Tiqun in Alaska and dance groups in Mexico is the difficulty retaining young male dancers in the group. In Xochiquetzal-Tiqun, young boys participate but young men find other things to do. Ana Gutiérrez says that it’s the same in Mexico:

“Well, it’s difficult to get muchachos to participate. At that age they’re working, or they are really busy, or they want to do other activities, like sports or school. We had one who was really dedicated to coming to practice, but now he’s away at university. So when they’re young, the little boys want to dance but when they grow up they don’t want to anymore. I give them time off if something comes up at school, or if they start to work and their priorities change. And it’s the same in Mexico. We always had more women than men. Always. It’s really hard. But, we have made do, right?”

Processes relating to gender and socialization of children thus extend across the transnational field (Boehm 2012; Hirsch 2003).

However, although Xochiquetzal-Tiqun works to teach children about their “roots” in Mexico, the group also fits into a longer tradition of Mexican dance in the United States. Mexican based communities have danced folklórico dances since at least the early 1900s when people raised in Mexico brought the knowledge and practice of regional dance to the United States, where they continued to perform them. As in Alaska, these presentations were featured as part of Fiestas Patrias (Mexican national holiday celebrations) or other ethnic celebrations throughout Greater Mexico (Nájera-Ramírez 2009). In the 1960s, folklórico dance flourished in the United States, as part of the Chicano movement and its search for ways to reaffirm, promote, and preserve Mexican identity and express opposition to cultural assimilation and discriminatory practices. Xochiquetzal-Tiqun continues this tradition in Alaska, where it provides a “means
through which Mexican culture could be recuperated and promoted” (Nájera-Ramírez 2009:283). Indeed, in other contexts as well, dance takes a key role in the formation of national identity (Masayo Doi 2002).

As well, the mission statement of the group is to “Work for Peace Through Cultural Understanding” and takes a broader frame, Celebrating all cultures of the world with emphasis in the Mexican culture (Gutiérrez 2014, personal communication). The directors of the group are committed to doing this in a non-essentializing way. Rather than emphasizing the timelessness of tradition, Ana Gutiérrez would point out the multiple influences from Europe and Indigenous America on “traditional” Mexican dance forms. A typical example is my conversation with her about the dances of Tamaulipas. Ana Gutiérrez said,

“I don’t know if you know this but the dances in Tamaulipas were influenced by people from Bavaria and the Apache people. Many Germans came to that part of Mexico, and to Texas, New Mexico, and Colorado. Because of the cold, they started to wear clothing made of leather, of suede. And they decorated their clothing like in Germany, in Bavaria, with flowers and things like that. And the Apaches dressed in a similar way, with leather pants with a fringe. So these Germans, the original cowboys, started to decorate with fringes too. And from there la cuera tamaulipeca was born! The polka came from Germany too, and for that reason we have a lot of polka in Durango and Tamaulipas.”

Ana Gutiérrez also talked at length about finding a balance between tradition and change within the dances that the group performs. For Ana, Mexico and its cultural forms are best understood in terms of their connections. How fitting then, that Xochiquetzal-Tiqun’s performances in Alaska continue to re-categorize space, and produce Alaska through connection as well. In our interview at Title Wave Books in Anchorage, a popular used book store in Spenard, Ana explained her ideas about how culture changes and the accommodations that have to be made in Alaska by Xochiquetzal-Tiqun specifically. She said they would really like to perform Las Tejuanas, which is a dance from the state of Oaxaca, in Southern Mexico. That style
of dance can be danced to a number of songs which, Ana says, “are not very well known, but are very beautiful.” The problem is the clothing, which is an embroidered *huipil* and skirt. The group doesn’t have the correct clothing and as Ana says, “we shouldn’t learn and dance something with a different dress.”

She hypothesizes, “I thought that perhaps we could dance a couple of the dances wearing the Chiapas regional dress. But it’s very difficult because, for example, if someone looks it up on the Internet, they’re going to say, they are ruining the culture, those aren’t songs and dances from Chiapas.” She continues with her point,

> “Many people don’t realize that culture evolves, it carries on with what is available. And that is probably the number one thing in how I think about it. How culture evolves. And the traditions. If you try to stay 100% true to tradition, well almost always you’re going to fail. Because, for example, something isn’t available. For example, *el mole de diciembre*. In Mexico City, where I’m from, we make a dish out of a wild plant that they call *romeros* or *romeritos*. Where are we going to find that here in Alaska? *I don’t think so!*”

The issue of authenticity is one of the principal distinctive features of this dance genre, and has yielded a variety of creative possibilities in terms of “what counts” as a valid and authentic connection to the folk practices of *mexicanos* (Nájera-Ramírez 2009). Ana’s point about how culture changes by making do shapes the activities of Xochiquetzal-Tiqun and their re-categorization of space in Alaska. The difficulty in retaining young male dancers makes it difficult to perform a dance like *Las Machetes*, where male dancers with a machete in each hand show off their footwork and machete skills. Ana says, “It’s very difficult to balance the tradition 100% and on the other hand, Ana Del Real is really tied to the tradition and I am more tied to evolution,” she laughs and then continues, “So we complement each other. Anyway, In Mexico men always dance *Los Machetes*. We don’t have any boys, but the girls want to dance *Los
Machetes. Ana Del Real said, ‘But Ana, how are we going to do this?’ I told her, the girls put on pants and a black shirt and dance Los Machetes! Why not?’

Another way in which the group makes do with what is available is in terms of clothing. When the group first formed, the women made all of the clothing themselves, spending hours embroidering blouses, sewing dresses, and attaching ribbons and lace. When they made the dresses for Tamaulipas, which are usually made of suede, they used microfiber instead, which is cheaper and readily available at fabric stores in Alaska. To make the decorative details on the suede, Ana said, “In my investigation of what we might use for the decoration, well something that they use a lot here in Alaska are the blackout shades, to block out the sun in the summertime. We used that to make all of the designs on the skirts and vests.” Ana’s emphasis on making do means that children are socialized into a transnational social world where their dances, dance costumes, and even identities are produced transnationally.

While Soledad said that Xochiquetzal-Tiqun was important so that her children would never forget Mexican culture, she also talked about the importance of sharing that culture with others, so that everyone knows about Mexico’s beautiful culture. Indeed, the group actively builds connections within Anchorage and performs at many public events throughout the year. During my fieldwork in 2011-2012, the group performed at: Mexican Independence Day, Hispanic Heritage Month Family Day at the Anchorage Museum, Xochiquetzal-Tiqun 9th Anniversary Performance at the Loussac Library, Día de los Muertos at Out North Contemporary Art House, Christmas Around the World at the Dena’ina Centre, Meet the World in Anchorage at the Anchorage Museum (as part of the Fur Rendezvous festival), Kid’s Day at the Egan Centre, Government Hill School Spring Cultural Festival, and the Anchorage Summer Solstice Festival. They also performed at the Alaska State Fair in Palmer. Ana and Ana carefully decide
which performances to do by first ensuring that there are enough dancers available and then checking to make sure that the performance is not too late for the children, not during school hours, is not commercial, and is not explicitly religious or political. They especially prefer events that promote intercultural cooperation and communication. Ana Del Real said that they have always given careful thought to accepting invitations to perform,

“In the first place, we never accept invitations for young children at night. We want to make sure that the children aren’t tired or anything because of their involvement in the group. Also, there should always be a cultural reason to participate, never an economic one. So the invitations that we accept are from the community, an event that is celebrating something culturally.”

Indeed, in this way, the group “freezes the people together” and creates connections with the wider community in Anchorage. It also emphasizes the uniqueness of points within this particular transnational formation. Since there is a high level of ethnic diversity of Anchorage, at community events where Xochiquetzal-Tiqun performs, groups of people with diverse backgrounds perform traditional dances as well. The group also has to work with the spatial practices of people living in a transnational social field, which means that they do not have many performances in the summer, when most of the members of the dance group have gone to Mexico.

Ana Del Real said that being invited to perform at events has helped the group to persist over time. “Before our group started, there was nothing that represented Mexico culturally in Alaska.” They began performing dances from Jalisco, the most recognizable regional dance outside of Mexico. I asked Ana Gutiérrez how they decided what dances to perform and she said, “In general the most well known in the whole world is Jalisco. So, Jalisco”

“You have to do it!” I said.
“Yes, Sarita, we have to do it,” she laughed, “And right away, right? And after Jalisco, we started to think, OK, which are the states or regions that are well known that we should emphasize. So Veracruz followed, which is also well known and has Caribbean and African roots and all of that. And later, Ana and I always think a lot about it and I do a lot of investigating. I investigate what is happening culturally and everything folklore.” She explains that they have also worked directly with the Secretariat of Public Education in Mexico and they have also brought three teachers from Mexico to Alaska to teach dance, one from Puebla, one from Zacatecas, and one from Durango. They haven’t done so recently, due to the cost, but the first teacher they brought was focused on teaching Mexican arts and crafts and Mexican readings to the children and the parents. One of the teachers from Mexico also taught the group a cuadro de Zacatecas that they still perform. “That wasn’t our decision, but we made the dresses and it’s very nice.” After that they brought another dance teacher, who has more than 20 years of experience and taught dance teachers in Mexico. “So she came, and this time we asked her to teach cuadro Veracruzano. I had already started to teach it, but I wanted a really well done version. So she came and we did that, and the next year I started to expand the cuadro Veracruzano. We started to do more of them, se ha extendido.” These are some of the dances I was fortunate enough to learn from Ana and the group. Ana said that a year later she came back, telling Ana that she’d like to teach dances from Durango. The teacher was from Durango, originally, and they wanted to do it, but the dances from Durango are danced in pairs. Again, since the group doesn’t have any men who dance with them, they decided to learn dances from Tierra Caliente instead. Ana said,

“So I thought that Tierra Caliente would be beautiful and like I told you, my mother is from Tierra Caliente and I have seen my grandmother dancing Tierra Caliente and I know a little about the region. So the teacher came and taught 3
songs from Tierra Caliente. And to the little children she taught Chiapanecas, but since they are so young, it was a simple version. She also taught some other songs from Durango and a song from the north, which we wanted to give some attention to, and oh yes! Also Baja California Norte y Sur. We had started one but we didn’t have it ready. So, for some regions we decided and for others the teachers decided which ones to do.”

By inviting dance teachers to visit Anchorage from very different parts of Mexico, the group has been able to spatially expand their repertoire to cover other regions from Mexico in their performances in Anchorage and therefore to create a more generic image of Mexico in Alaska. As well, bringing teachers from Mexico and working with the Mexican government also produces a connection between dance schools on both sides of the border and between Xochiquetzal-Tiqun and the Mexican State. Xochiquetzal-Tiqun has never invited a dance teacher to Alaska from elsewhere in the United States, for example. To audiences in Anchorage, the group presents Mexican culture writ large through regional dance.

Juana Bravo emphasized that the performances by the group are particularly well-received by Americans who attend the show:

“More than anything, or like Ana said, it’s about showing a little bit of our culture. You saw the presentation that we did, you saw how without a doubt when Xochiquetzal-Tiqun came on stage how people whistled and shouted, and it’s Americans! Or like, it’s not just our people. And it’s really nice to see that.”

In interviews with dance club members, I asked them if there were any performances that were exceptionally memorable for them. Everyone told me about the time the group was invited to perform at Quyana, Alaska, which takes place during the Alaska Federation of Natives (AFN) annual convention. Ana Gutiérrez said that they were the only non-Alaska Native group to participate at Quyana that year. She told me that she had talked to someone and told them, “you know, we are also part indigenous, and we consider ourselves your cousins.” And so they were invited to dance at Quyana.
Ana Del Real talked about the importance of dancing at the Quyana event “they invited us to perform at the celebration of the Indigenous people here, and they recognized us because we also use their language in our name, and they had seen us dance before.” She continued, explaining how many people were at the Egan Centre for the performance, “It was really something to be in a place that full, super-lleno. I have never seen the Egan Centre that full. And with such a big stage and people everywhere.” She continued, “It was really memorable because they applauded even though we made mistakes because we were so nervous.” Ana talked about the other performances at Quyana Alaska, “Really it was the first time that I saw the different clothing from different parts of Alaska. I had never seen all of those groups who dress differently from the Athabascan people. And how they dance differently too.” She went on to talk about their performance again,

“It’s especially impressive because we were there to perform dances from Mexico, and by invitation of the Alaska Native people who themselves dance really professionally. The most amazing moment for me was when they said the name of the group: “Now we present Xochiquetzal-Tiqun” and it’s something we are very proud of because imagine, you are dancing in their country, their state, and their culture. I think that was the most memorable moment for me.”

This could be seen as a potentially decolonizing moment, as the borders of North America fall away to welcome dancers from across the continent at the Dena’ina Centre. Or, perhaps it also brings together groups with a similar focus. Consider the statement on Quyana’s website,126 which in some ways echoes that of Xochiquetzal-Tiqun:

“Our traditional dances remain the lifeblood of our culture and our communities: they sustain us and connect us with our rich cultural history. Passed from generation to generation, our dances ensure that the many distinct Native cultures across Alaska remain connected to their origins. For over 20 years, Alaska

Natives have come together in dance to celebrate Quyana Alaska during AFN’s Annual Convention. First introduced at the 1982 Convention, Quyana Alaska was designed to restore our traditional dances and ensure that they were passed on to the future generations. To date, over 200 different dance groups have performed at Native gatherings across the state.”

In this section, I analyzed how the dance group Xochiquetzal-Tiqun brings together Alaska and Mexico in their practices and performances. In this way, they help to socialize children within a transnational social field, produce new connections in Anchorage, and unsettle stereotypical representations of space, re-categorizing representations of space to diminish the socio-spatial distance between these two places. In the next section, I write about the “Mexico in Alaska” restaurant and a set of postcards that also redefine space and produce a transnational representation of space.

**Postcards from “Mexico in Alaska”**

In addition to the Mexican consulate offices in downtown Anchorage, the most obvious physical traces of the Mexican presence in Anchorage are restaurants. During my fieldwork I counted 32 Mexican restaurants, not including national and international chains. Mexican food is commonplace throughout the United States, with most Anglo-Americans accustomed to the ready availability of margaritas, tacos, and enchiladas. In Anchorage, Mexican migrant-immigrants own many of these restaurants and some are actually owned by Acuitzences. These are important sites for employment, since restaurants often employ people from their hometowns, including family members, as described in Chapter 4. They are important places to advance a career in the food industry, for example. Acuitzences like Miguel Bravo advanced from working as a dishwasher, to learning to be a cook, to owning his own restaurant in Anchorage. They are also important meeting places for Acuitzences or other groups. For
example, most Mexican restaurants in Anchorage feature a party room that can be rented for celebrating baptisms, birthdays, or other special events. The Migrant Club meets informally at Carlos Mexican Restaurant, as discussed earlier in this chapter. These restaurants are also one of the meeting-up points for people of Mexican background and people of other backgrounds in Alaska. Finally, these restaurants also bring together the flavours and imaginaries of Mexico and Alaska in the food that they serve and the imagery they employ. The food served is a North American creation, cooked by Mexicans who learned some recipes from non-Mexican restaurant owners in Alaska and other recipes from people in their hometowns. You have to please a United States palate, but also a Mexican one. As a result, some dishes on the menus are more Mexican-American. People from Acuitzio say that the food in many of these restaurants is “not really Mexican,” and this is probably why. However, once cooks from Acuitzio began owning their own restaurants, they introduced dishes important to their community. For example, Miguel told me to attract the Mexican community to your restaurant, “you have to serve a good menudo.”

This section focuses on one restaurant in particular, “Mexico in Alaska.” More specifically, I will discuss a set of postcards produced by the restaurant. I first encountered these postcards in 2005 when I was in Anchorage for fieldwork for the first time (Komarnisky 2006). As a result of my focus on food, restaurants were a key field site for me, and I visited as many Mexican restaurants, and Mexican-run restaurants as I could. “Mexico in Alaska” was one of these and I purchased a set of postcards when I visited in 2005. In 2010 I visited Anchorage and met with and interviewed both Maria Elena Ball, the owner of Mexico in Alaska, and Bart Roberts, the photographer. During fieldwork in 2011-2012, I met with Bart and Maria Elena informally, and visited the restaurant.
Located on Old Seward Highway and operated by Maria Elena Ball, this restaurant’s claims to fame are that it is one of the oldest Mexican restaurants in Anchorage; it was recognized as “One of the Nation’s 50 best Hispanic Restaurants” as featured in Hispanic Magazine; and its interior was used as a stand-in for a Mexican restaurant in Barrow for the filming of the movie “Must Love Whales” starring Drew Barrymore. The restaurant also brings Mexico and Alaska together both in its name, its logo, and in a set of images produced as postcards and sold at the restaurant. As I will explain, bringing Mexico and Alaska together visually creates a spatial fold that that draws on recognizable images from Mexico and Alaska to create a representation of Mexican Alaska. This representation is also a claim to space, visually placing Mexico in Alaska.

I talked to Maria Elena in her restaurant. By her account it was the third Mexican restaurant in Anchorage, opened in 1972, four years after she arrived in Anchorage from Zitácuaro, Michoacán. By her account, “La Cabaña is the oldest Mexican restaurant in Anchorage, and then it’s La Mex, which used to be La Mexicana. But everybody would just pronounce La Mex, with emphasis on the x, they wouldn’t say La Mexicana. Eventually they did change the name. And Mexico in Alaska was opened next.” Maria Elena has curled silver hair, and a friendly demeanor. She is often at her restaurant, greeting customers or working at her office. When we met in 2010, she said that even before she knew what kind of business she

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127 Pepe’s North of the Border was likely the northernmost Mexican restaurant in the world, located in Barrow, Alaska. Diego (Chapter 5), Luis Bravo (Chapter 4), and other Acuitzences worked in the kitchen there, extending the network all the way to the edge of the Arctic Ocean. I read that Pepe’s unfortunately burned down in 2013.

128 The Mexico in Alaska logo depicts the shape of the State of Alaska in blue, with a gold Aztec calendar in the middle, set across a diagonal tri-colour ribbon (green, white, and red). Maria Elena gave me a business card with this logo on it, but it is also found on the restaurant’s line of prepared salsas and burritos which are sold in grocery stores like Carrs-Safeway and Costco in Anchorage.
would have, she knew it would be called Mexico in Alaska. She said: “I came to that name because I am from Mexico, because I’m proud of what I am and so I knew that’s what I was going to call it. But I didn’t know that it was going to be a restaurant”.

I asked, “How did you end up coming to Alaska?”

“That is a very long story,” she said, laughing. She explained that she ended up stopping in Anchorage because she had only $50 left and needed to start working. After three months, she decided that Anchorage was beautiful and she wanted to stay for the rest of her life, “it was like heaven to me because the people reminded me of my people in Mexico. Extremely friendly, willing to help you and when you’re here for the first time with nothing, it feels very good when somebody helps you out with advice, with everything.” The first thing she had to do was to make her life more comfortable so that she could survive in Anchorage, as she put it. First she purchased a house, and then she decided to open a business.

“Since my family’s all self employed in Mexico, that’s all I knew. And so even though no one else in my family has a restaurant, I figured if I was going to stay here I had to do something. Have my own business, I didn’t care what it was. So I did a little bit of studying about what I could do here and whatever and then finally I realized that there was no home cooked food available. It took me another 2 years and another 3 jobs to be able to open a tiny little bitty place.”

She opened the first location of Mexico in Alaska Restaurant in the Anchorage neighborhood of Mountain View in 1972, and then moved to the current, much larger location on Old Seward Highway in 1983. The building features custom stained glass windows with symbols of Michoacán, like dancers performing Los Viejitos¹²⁹ and the aqueduct in Morelia.

¹²⁹ *Los Viejitos* (The Old Men) is a dance from Michoacán where the dancers, dressed as old men, start out hunched over with restricted movements, play-acting as elderly people. However, as the music speeds up, so does the dancing of the viejitos.
Maria Elena said she had the idea for a series of images to visualize “Mexico in Alaska” around the same time that she thought of the name for the restaurant. She said, “back then, we’re talking about 38 years ago, things were very, very different and I didn’t have any money and even thought I had the idea from the very beginning just like I had the name, I couldn’t afford to do anything. It was expensive then because the technology that we have now was not available.”

Decades later, her cousin married Bart Roberts, whose hobby is photography, and Maria Elena visited them at their home:

“They were showing me their album of wedding pictures and Alaska pictures because Bart is a photographer. When I saw those pictures I told Bart, this is what I wanna do, what do you think? He says, oh yeah, it’s no problem doing that, [and so] he chose the pictures, put them together, and then showed them to me, to see what I liked. And I loved them all. And then we just had them printed and that was it, Mexico in Alaska postcards were born”.

Bart Roberts says the same thing,

“We were meeting with Maria Elena one day, she was talking about, oh the mountains that she loves here in Alaska and how she loves Mexico, so I ran downstairs, I just got the fire in my head! So I pulled up a picture of Chichén Itzá and I pulled up a picture of the Chugach Mountains here near Anchorage and did a quick Photoshop job on it, and pow! There’s the first one. And she just loved them, so she said please make some more. I want to make postcards out of them”.

Much like for the name of her restaurant, Maria Elena’s idea was to create an image whereby Mexico and Alaska were seamlessly integrated together into the same frame. Bart Roberts made five images that superimpose Mexican structures over the Alaska landscape. There are a set of four images that show buildings from the Chichén Itzá archaeological site in Yucatán, Mexico superimposed against the Chugach Mountains which are located to the east of Anchorage. One image shows the ball court at Chichén Itzá, another shows El Caracol, or the observatory, and the final one shows El Castillo, the largest pyramid at the Chichén Itzá archaeological sites, and probably one of the most well known pyramids in Mesoamerica, if not
the world. Another postcard shows the columns of the Temple of a Thousand Warriors, also at Chichén Itzá, superimposed over the tundra near the North Slope of Alaska where a caribou grazes serenely to one side, and the Trans-Alaska pipeline cuts across the background. There is another image that shows the plaza in Zitácuaro, Michoacán with the Chugach Range in the background. And another image, not yet produced as a postcard, depicts a statue of the Mexican independence hero El Pípila, again superimposed against the Chugach Mountains.

The images are striking, and all but the one featuring El Pípila are sold for $5 each at Mexico in Alaska restaurant. They measure four inches by six inches and on the back list the name and address of the restaurant, the recognition as one of the top 50 best Hispanic restaurants, the locations of the images, and a copyright for the photographer, Bart Roberts. Maria Elena also has enlarged, framed versions hanging in her restaurant. I exhibited large foam mounted versions of these at the Liu Institute at UBC in the spring of 2011, and gave them to Maria Elena when I arrived in Alaska for fieldwork that fall. She hung them in the restaurant’s banquet room.
Figure 10: Chichén Itzá-Chugach (© Bart Roberts).
Figure 11: Chichén Itzá-North Slope (© Bart Roberts).
Figure 12: Zitácuaro-Chugach (© Bart Roberts).
As I said, Bart Roberts is married to Maria Elena’s cousin, and both Maria Elena and her cousin are from Zitácuaro, Michoacán – hence the photo of Zitácuaro on one of the postcards. The photos of Chichén Itzá were taken on Bart’s honeymoon, and the photograph of El Pípila, the statue of an independence hero that overlooks Guanajuato, was taken on another trip to Mexico. Bart took most of the Alaska images around Anchorage in the Chugach Mountains, but he took the one of the caribou and the pipeline on the North Slope of Alaska when he was there for work.

Maria Elena also told me that she has learned from customers that these postcards have been sent to many locations in the USA and around the world. She says she tries to tell people who purchase them where the photographs are taken, because on the postcards themselves, it doesn’t give a country or a state; it just says, for example “Chugach Mountains-Chichén Itzá.” Maria Elena says that she tries to tell people where those places are, because otherwise they won’t understand:

“The postcard doesn’t give you a country, and it doesn’t give you a state, it just says Chugach Mountains, Chichén Itzá. Ok? So if you have no idea where Chichén Itzá is, which could be possible, then you’ll never find these places. I tell my customers or whoever buys the postcards, this is in Mexico, the peninsula of Yucatán, this is Mayan, and you know I go through the whole thing and this is the mountain close to Alyeska and so forth and I try to tell everybody, I do!”

Even so, these are postcards and have the capacity to travel and gather meaning as they move. Once in a while she will get a phone call about them. For example, she said:

“Once I got a telephone call from the Lower 48, from this lawyer who had a postcard of Mexico in Alaska. He said, where in the world is this place? He thought it was a real place!”

She continues:

“And a lot of people think it’s in South America, you know, because of the pyramids and the mountains, and then I’m sure they look for it over there and there’s no place like that, nowhere at all like that. I also received a letter from a
gentleman who sent me a picture of the postcard and very nicely asked me if I could tell him where the place was. And it just, at first somehow it doesn’t register that it’s Mexico in Alaska. Even though it says Mexico in Alaska Restaurant, so that right there you would think that people would know it is advertising or it belongs to the restaurant somehow.”

She also told a story about a young couple who came into the restaurant one time. To her it seemed obvious that the young man was interested in impressing his girlfriend. She said:

“As customers pass by the front of the restaurant there they see the pictures sometimes and so, this one couple came in and she said ‘oh what a beautiful place’, talking about the postcards, right? And he says ‘oh yeah it is, I’ve been there.’ I didn’t want to embarrass him or anything, so I said ‘yeah they’re really nice aren’t they,’ talking about the postcards. But I never told him anything, even though he was talking about it as if he had been there. I didn’t say anything at all. Which, I normally do, I finally tell them, you know. They try to guess where those places are.”

But not everyone is so confused, especially those who recognize the places:

“They try to guess where those places are.”

What does it mean that the location represented in these images is difficult for people to place? Even though Maria Elena tries to explain to people where the locations are, the postcards were intentionally made without listing the state or nation on the back where the location of a postcard usually goes. Mountains are used here as key emblems of Alaska, particularly in its “sublime wilderness” form. Indeed, in all of the Alaska parts of the images center on the landscape – mountains, tundra, and caribou. However, as with the series of photos taken by Xochiquetzal-Tiqun in front of the painting of Denali at the Anchorage Museum, these images rely on an intentional juxtaposition to unsettle this wilderness setting, to play with it, encourage the viewer to look at Alaska as a place that includes aspects of Mexico even as it is also a spectacular wilderness space. In these images, mountain-as-wilderness is deliberately unsettled by juxtaposing the mountain with something that doesn’t quite fit – Mayan ruins with the Alaska
pipeline running past, for example. Or an everyday scene of a plaza in a small town in Mexico. The plaza image is from Maria Elena’s hometown, and therefore likely most closely represents her own experience of transnationality. Social life in many Mexican towns centres on the plaza, and in fact many Acuitzences lament the fact that there is nowhere plaza-like in Anchorage to go. Independence heroes and Pre-Columbian Aztec and Mayan ruins have become symbols of Mexico writ large. Chichén Itzá operates as the embodiment of Maya cultures, a reified “Museum of Maya culture and civilization” produced out of the interplay between local Maya society, tourism and anthropology (Castaneda 1996; Gordillo 2014). Maria Elena and Bart’s choice to use Chichén Itzá on the postcards is in part coincidence – Bart and his wife went to the Yucatán for their honeymoon and he had photos available of the archaeological site. However, there is no question that Chichén Itzá is intended to stand in one of the ancient indigenous civilizations that are today associated with the image of Mexico writ large. By juxtaposing Chichén Itzá with the Alaskan landscape, the viewer is encouraged to ask: where is this? And thereby rethink and reconsider previously held notions about what Alaska is like.

Relocating Mexico, in the form of Chichén Itzá, El Pipila, or the plaza in Zitácuaro, to Alaska is also a way of placemaking and a way of claiming belonging in Alaska. These postcards are visual representations of Mexican Alaska, a transnational space produced through the movements and everyday practices of people of Mexican background in Alaska. An Alaska vitally interconnected to elsewhere, yet at the same time produced as extremely separate. These images fold the continent and diminish the distance across it, visually placing Mexico in Alaska. As postcards, it is possible to send this image to friends and family as a souvenir from Mexican Alaska. That images of Mexican Alaska are difficult to place, and even seen as unexpected is analogous to how many people react to the idea that there are Mexicans in Alaska. By putting
these places into the same frame, Maria Elena and Bart Roberts categorize back, and instead of Mexico being “out of place” in Alaska, the two locations come together in one image.

**The Mexican Consulate in Alaska**


I sat in the crowd at the AT&T Center in South Anchorage as the Consul General of Mexico in Alaska, Javier Abud Osuna, waved the Mexican flag and passionately shouted the *Grito de Dolores* in front of the audience. The *Grito* is performed by the President of Mexico each year on the evening of September 15 to commemorate the beginning of the Mexican War of Independence. The *Grito* is also shouted in cities and towns all over Mexico and in Mexican embassies and consulates worldwide, including in Anchorage.

I attended this Independence Day event in September 2011, after arriving in Alaska two weeks before. At the door we received a piece of paper with a poster of the event on the back and the Mexican national anthem on the front, “so you can sing with us”, the woman who gave it to me said. There were *papel picados* in red green and white strung across the room, and tables at the back. Rows of seats faced a stage decorated with an arc of red, green and white balloons.

I recognized one of the masters of ceremonies as someone I had met in Acuitzio over the summer and the other one as the co-host of a local television program called Latinos en Alaska.
They delivered the whole program in Spanish and English, and began the events by asking everyone to stand as the flags of the United States, Mexico, and Alaska were carried to the stage. Next, the Consul of Mexico spoke, and began by citing statistics from the 2010 US Census. He told us that “Mexicans are the most numerous foreign born group in Alaska, and the group which is increasing the fastest.” While he was speaking, Juana Bravo, and Toño, Veronica, and Sophia arrived. Juana sat in the seat next to me that I had saved for her.

Xochiquetzal-Tiqun then danced two dances, first a *jarabe* with the smallest children, and a second number that had the entire group on stage dancing to *Cascabel*. Next a mariachi group performed, dressed in *charro* suits. Juana said they’re called *Mariachi Agave Azul* and they started the group to sing for the Virgin of Guadalupe when she is celebrated on December 12 every year. Like in Mexico, the Día de Guadalupe is celebrated in Anchorage with early morning singing followed by mass at Our Lady of Guadalupe Church in Anchorage. After mass, there might be food served. Juana said that two of the mariachis are good friends with her brother-in-law, Miguel and they came to his house to sing for him on his birthday. Juana and I turned our attention back to the music as they sang *Viva Mexico* and some people in the audience joined in, shouting out “*Viva, viva!*” After the mariachi performance, there was a theatre piece about the war of independence, and a performance of a regional dance of Michoacán by another dance group, this one affiliated with Our Lady of Guadalupe Church. Finally there was a performance by a dance group from Oaxaca. Juana said there are many Oaxacans in Anchorage now and some don’t speak any Spanish at all.130

130 I found out later that many of these Oaxacans are Trique (Triqui), an Indigenous group from the Western part of Oaxaca, who have come to the United States seeking political asylum. How and why they came to Alaska and their precarious and undocumented experience as compared to Acuitzences is a topic for potential future research.
Many people at the event were wearing “traditional” Mexican clothes – embroidered tops, *rebozos*, ribbons in hair, charro suits. In fact, the consul himself was dressed in a charro suit and his wife was wearing an embroidered floral dress that Juana told me was from Chiapas. Many others were dressed in casual everyday style, in jeans and t-shirts and baseball caps. Those in attendance were mostly families with young children, but there were a few older people and some teenagers and young adults.

Finally it was time for the ceremony. A group of three young men in the row behind us had brought their own Mexican flag, and they unrolled it and held it up in front of them. The consul began by introducing all of the dignitaries who were there: the State Commissioner of Health, a representative for the Mayor of Anchorage, a representative of Canada in Alaska, a representative of the FBI, a professor at University of Alaska Anchorage, a representative of Telemundo in Alaska, someone from the office of Mark Begich (then a US Senator for the State of Alaska), and someone else from UAA. Then they thanked the sponsors and restaurants that were selling food at the rear of the room.

The State Commissioner of Health spoke, and said that seeing a celebration of independence of Mexico in Alaska is wonderful. He brought greetings from Alaska State Governor Sean Parnell and read a letter from Governor Parnell that celebrated friendship, trade and tourism with Mexico and best wishes for many more years of democracy. Then a representative from the Mayor’s Office spoke. She greeted the crowd in Spanish with a heavy English accent, before switching to English for the remainder of her speech. She admitted that she thought 5 de Mayo was Independence Day in Mexico, but that she has since educated herself. Juana nodded and whispered to me, “Most people think that here”. The speaker went on to say that May 5 represents independence from France, but September 16 celebrates
independence from Spain. She told the crowd that she was “impressed by your perseverance” and told a short story of conquest, how Cortéz arrived, how the indigenous people were enslaved and millions died, how after that were 300 years of colonial rule before Mexico finally achieved its “hard won independence” from Spain. She said that although we don’t know today what Hidalgo said, but she read about what he might have said, and that the last lines were especially important for her. Mixing in the rhetoric of US-style politics, she talked about “true patriots,” and then repeated Hidalgo’s words: “Long live the Lady of Guadalupe, and death to bad government!” She paused and said, “I think we can all agree on that.”

Juana, still sitting next to me, said, “Once I went to see the president give the Grito de Hidalgo.”

“Do they do it in Acuitzio too?” I asked. She said that they do, and that September 1 is also the Día de San Nicolás, and they celebrate it since the church in Acuitzio is named for him.

“Puro fiesta,” I said, “nothing but parties.”

Juana laughed, “Sí, Sarita, así es.” She continued, “We are having Mexican food for lunch tomorrow. I work with a lot of other Mexican women and we’re all making something to bring. I made a flan, and that’s why I was late to arrive here tonight.”

Next, the singer from Mariachi Agave Azul sang the American national anthem. Some people had their hands over their hearts, and a few people sang along. Lupe hummed along beside me. Then another Mexican flag was brought in and most people in the crowd and on the stage turned to face the flag and raised their arm and held it perpendicular to their chest like I had seen people do at official events in Mexico. A group of students in uniforms marched the flag to the stage, handed the flag to the Consul and he held it while he led the grito, which opened this section. The grito itself was very moving. “A powerful claim to space,” I wrote in my fieldnotes.
afterwards. The consul then led the singing of the *Himno Nacional*, the Mexican national anthem. I sang along on my handout, with Juana pointing out where we were on the page. Afterwards the MC encouraged everyone to “cheer loud enough that they can hear us in Mexico!” Before the Mariachi Agave Azul performed their next song, one of them spoke and said, “we need to teach our children about the richness of Mexican culture.”

A few weeks later, I walked downtown to the offices of the Consulate of Mexico in Alaska, which was established in Anchorage in February 2009 when the Mexican government realized that one was necessary due to the increasing numbers of Mexican nationals in Alaska. Before that there was an honorary consul in Anchorage but the services she could perform were limited and Mexican nationals in Alaska had to go to Seattle for access to many services. When I arrived, I was shown immediately to Consul Abud’s office where he shook my hand and greeted me warmly. Along one wall of his office are framed university degree parchments and certificates with his name on it and on the other wall is a bookcase with binders and books. One of the shelves was a small reproduction of a race-car mounted on a wood base, with a plaque below that says “Good luck in Alaska.” As well, on one wall I noticed a map of Alaska and behind his desk was a Mexican flag.

In his interview, Consul Abud talked about the official functions of the consulate and the services they provide to Mexican nationals in Alaska.

“I can tell you that basically we do the same things as any other Mexican Consulate in the United States, or anywhere else in the world. Our principal functions are consular assistance and protection. We also have the *emisión de documentación*, and we work to promote of trade between Mexico and Alaska. Moreover, we forge cultural relations and educational cooperation between Mexico and Alaska.”
They place emphasis on consular assistance and protection because many members of the Mexican community have problems that require legal assistance in terms of immigration or labour law. The consulate partners with a legal firm in Anchorage to provide access to legal services for Mexican nationals and dual citizens. The most common form of consular assistance and protection they provide is related to deportations and, in fact, Consul Abud described deportations as the “pan nuestro de cada día” or their daily bread. They have a fluid agreement with local Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) so that every time ICE detains someone, the consulate is notified. Consular staff interview the deportee and offer all of the assistance that they can. “Most people that we interview ask that we contact their families because they have been unable to communicate with them, and so we contact their families to tell them that the person is fine, in good health, their civil rights have been respected, but that, unfortunately, they have been deported and in a few days they will be with you there in Mexico.”

In terms of documentation, the Consul said that they issue passports, consular identification, power of attorney, dual nationality, and so on. “We also have birth registration and registration functions. And this is something that I haven’t done yet, but as consul I am able to perform marriages between Mexican nationals.” In other words, he can act as a judge of civil registration for marriages and births.

The consulate in Anchorage thus represents an official presence of the Mexican State in Anchorage. In fact, in 2013 Mexican President Enrique Peña Nieto stopped in Alaska on his return from Asia, when he was in Indonesia for APEC meetings. Since the consulate serves the entire state, it does a lot of mobile consular work. Its reach therefore extends throughout the state, wherever Mexican nationals reside. When I met with the consul, he explained that the jurisdiction for the Consulate is all of Alaska and is situated in Anchorage because there is the
largest number of Mexicans in the city and because it’s the largest city in the state. To reach other areas, he explained, they form a mobile consulate. “The last mobile consulate that we did was in Fairbanks for two days at the end of June this year. Even though Fairbanks is far north, there are Mexicans there as well and we provided some services to them there.”

“How do you know where the people are? Do you use census data or word of mouth?” I asked. Consul Abud replied that they use the results of the 2010 US Census (US Census Bureau 2010) to decide where to send the mobile consulate. For example, “The data show that Fairbanks, or the North Star Borough as a whole, which includes Fairbanks, is the borough with the second largest population of Mexicans or Hispanic people.” Fairbanks is the best choice for a mobile consulate not only because of its population of Mexican nationals, but because it is far from Anchorage, located about 6 hours away along the Parks Highway. The Matanuska-Susitna Valley, on the other hand, has the third highest population of Mexicans, but is located only 70 kilometres away, and those living in the Mat-Su Borough, in towns like Palmer or Wasilla, could easily come to Anchorage to access consular services. This is why Consul Abud prioritizes Fairbanks over the Mat-Su Valley for a mobile consulate. Consul Abud said that the Kenai Peninsula has the fourth highest population of hispanos and mexicanos and Juneau has the fifth largest population of Mexicans in the state.

Census data is one way to find out the number of people of Mexican background in different areas of Alaska, but another way is to document where people who contact the Consulate are located. Consul Abud said, “If someone telephones to ask us for requirements, we ask them where they are calling from. This is how we learned that there were many people phoning from Juneau who need our services, or in Dutch Harbor, where we have also visited to provide our services.” Consular services are only needed seasonally in Dutch Harbor, however,
“only when the fish processing plants are operating, which is normally from the end of the spring and throughout the summer.”

In Chapter 3 I wrote about how citizenship requires mobility as a matter of procedure. To become a US Permanent Resident, or US citizen requires the ability to travel to get documents and paperwork completed outside of the United States to re-enter with a new status. The mobile consulate, however, travels to points throughout Alaska to make sure that Mexican nationals in the state have an ID, are aware of their rights, and how to contact the consulate if they require assistance. In this case, it is the state bureaucracy that travels to facilitate the paperwork of individuals.

Consul Abud was previously stationed in Laredo, Texas, on the US-Mexico border. I asked him to describe the difference in his role as Consul in Alaska and Laredo. He described the difference in terms of scale and distance. By scale, he meant that there were so many more cases, and so much more trade between the United States and Mexico along the border with Texas. By distance, he meant the distance between consulates. In Laredo, there are consulates located in nearby cities, like McAllen, Texas, located about 150 miles along the US-Mexico border to the Southeast or Eagle Pass or Del Rio, Texas, located along the border to the Northwest. In total, there are 11 Mexican consulates in Texas, reflecting the larger population and the increased intensity of consular activities in the border region.

In contrast, the Consulate in Anchorage is the only one in a very large and sparsely populated state. Consul Abud said that although the role of consul is basically the same, “there are fundamental differences between the functions of a border consulate and a consulate in the north of the United States.” He said that in Alaska, so far north, there are no other consulates in the area. Some of the work that is different relates to the specifics of the Alaskan economy, and
the seasonal employment that many Mexicans work in: “we have to take special care to track those Mexicans who come here to work temporarily, for example in fish processing plants, as well as those who come to work in tourism and all of the seasonal jobs related to the tourism economy. So many of the jobs here are seasonal. All of the outdoor jobs, like construction, they start working in May and stop in September, because even now, at the end of September, it’s starting to feel cold and it’s impossible for people working to resist the cold of Alaska.” Finally, he talked about how the trade between Mexico and the United States along the border region is immense, and the work of the Consulate along the border was to facilitate that trade. He said, “The trade that crosses between Nuevo Laredo, Tamaulipas and Laredo, Texas is immense. When I left Laredo, for example, there was a daily transfer of goods every day in one way or another of around 9000 cargo vehicles daily. So the trade in that area is intense, and that intensity is transferred to the consulate, which functions to promote trade between that part of Texas and Mexico.” These are the general differences “between a border consulate like the one I worked at in Laredo and a northern consulate here in Alaska,” Consul Abud said.

An important consular function in Anchorage is to celebrate Mexican culture and bring together people of Mexican background in Alaska. The Consulate of Mexico was involved with the Independence Day event that I attended and they are involved with many other events that promote and celebrate Mexican culture in the city. During my fieldwork in 2011-2012, some examples of other events that the consulate was involved with include: the Day of the Dead, a gastronomic festival commemorating the 150th anniversary of the Battle of Puebla on 5 de Mayo,
Hispanic Heritage month, the Government Hill School culture fair, las posadas\textsuperscript{131} at the Our Lady of Guadalupe church, two events put on by “Anchorage Bridge Builders” (Police Naividad and Meet the World), a special program of Mexican cinema at the Anchorage International Film Festival, and an exhibit of maps from the era of Spanish exploration in Alaska. I asked Consul Abud about the Consulate’s role in these events when I interviewed him in his office. He spoke about how these activities are intended to bring people together,

“Our priority has been that the Mexican community participate in some of the activities of the consulate, and not just because these things are part of our activities within the laws guiding the Mexican Foreign Service. In the end, we also do it because one of my priorities was to unify the Mexican community. For example, the Independence Day celebration is an ideal opportunity to be able to link all the Mexicans or Mexican-Americans who live in Alaska, and in Anchorage in particular.”

Consul Abud continued, describing the event, “This year was the first where whether you have dance groups or also singers, we can integrate all of these together to celebrate the anniversary of our independence. You were there, you know what I am talking about.”

“Yes, definitely,” I said, nodding.

He continued, “For the first time, we presented the grupo folklórico Xochiquetzal-Tiqun, we also presented the dance groups from Our Lady of Guadalupe, we presented a Triqui dance group from Oaxaca, and we presented a few ranchero singers.” He went on to talk about the flag escorts at the event,

“The escort who handed me the flag for the ceremonia del grito was dressed in uniform, and I really appreciated that. The mothers of these young men arranged for these muchachos to volunteer and they were willing to spend their own money

\textsuperscript{131} Las posadas is a nine-day celebration beginning December 16 and ending December 24. It reenacts Mary and Joseph’s search for lodging before the birth of Jesus Christ. Those hosting the posada play the role of the innkeepers, and the guests play the role of the pilgrims. At the door these groups sing verses to each other before being welcomed inside to celebrate.
to make or purchase these uniforms so that the flag could be carried by uniformed escorts. The escort was there a few times, first bringing to the stage the flags of Alaska, of the United States, and Mexico, and placing them there. And just before the *ceremonia del grito*, they handed me the Mexican flag. So, it was really emotional and a real pleasure to see the escort dressed in uniform.”

He explained that this brought him joy because “it’s a sign that young people in the Mexican community, and older people as well, were willing to participate with us.” As an example, he said that around 80 people helped to organize the 2011 Mexican Independence Day celebration in Alaska.

He continued, talking about how they not only intended to bring people of Mexican background in Alaska together, but to share and build connections with other groups in Alaska: “Through the Consulate, our intent is to rescue our traditions and demonstrate and share them with other communities living in Alaska.” He talked about an event called the *Semana Binacional de Salud* or Binational Health Week where throughout the week they offer above all to the Mexican-American community services and information about health, mostly focused on prevention. So, for example, they provide free flu vaccinations, healthy cooking demonstrations, and things like that. However, the events are open to all *Hispanos* in Alaska. “And why for all Spanish-speakers?” Consul Abud asks, and then responds, “Simply because this effort nationwide involved various consulates from Spanish-speaking countries. *Hispanos* in general, and we are talking about Guatemala, El Salvador, Argentina.”

“Ah, and they don’t have consulates in Alaska,” I said.

“Exactly, there is no consulate here. Being the only Hispanic consulate in Alaska, we have been given the task of hosting the Binational Health Week for all *hispanos* in Alaska, whatever their nationality of origin.”
The Mexican consulate has therefore come to represent the “Hispanic” community writ large in Anchorage. As such, consular activities in the city not only produce a new representation of space as “Mexican Alaska,” it also extends the boundaries of all of Latin America northwards into Alaska. Another event that the Consulate participates in that similarly extends the boundaries of Latin America to Alaska is the celebration of Hispanic Heritage Month at the Anchorage Museum, described earlier in the section about Xochiquetzal-Tiqun. In 2011 it was held on October 2, the weekend after I met with Consul Abud, who said,

“We have been invited to participate as the only Hispanic consulate here in Anchorage, and I have been invited to give some words of welcome as I did last year. As well, Mexican-American singers and dancers will unite with all of the Hispanic nationalities that you find here in Alaska, and we will celebrate Hispanic Heritage Month that way.”

The space and actions of the Mexican consulate are important because they represent the spatial expansion into the geography of Alaska of the Mexican state. This is certainly what embassies and consulates of all nations do all over the world. But in this case it also shows that the actions and practices of the people examined in previous chapters, and earlier in the chapter, are often entangled with official narratives encouraged by Mexican officials in Alaska, such as the consul. The image of Consul Abud shouting the *Grito de Dolores* at the AT&T Center in Anchorage amid hundreds of Mexican people living in the city was emblematic of this entanglement. A few hours later, the president of Mexico did the same thing. This happened all over the United States and wherever there is a consular presence in the world. All of these locations become united by the same act performed publicly every September 15.

The consulate also creates new connections within Anchorage in terms of educational cooperation between Mexico and Alaska. Consul Abud talked about a recent memorandum of understanding that they had signed with the Adult Learning Centre (ALC) in Anchorage, which
has a lot of students who are of Mexican background. Since there are scholarships offered by the Instituto de los Mexicanos en el Exterior (IME), the consulate and the ALC signed a memorandum of understanding whereby the consulate transferred a few thousand dollars to the ALC so that they could distribute these scholarships among students who are Mexican nationals or dual citizens. “I’ve already selected the scholarship winners and in a few days we will have an official ceremony at which time our partnership will be in full operation.”

They have also partnered with the University of Alaska Anchorage for some activities. For example, Consul Abud gave a presentation there about early Spanish exploration in Alaska and the Mexican population today, as I described in the introduction. He was also invited to participate on a panel about the French Revolution, connecting it to the movement for Mexican independence and specifically how ideas about liberty and equality that led to the French Revolution also became a motivation for independence in Mexico.

The Consulate of Mexico in Anchorage then adds another institutional presence to the making of connections between Mexico and Alaska and makes a further claim to space there. Like Xochiquetzal-Tiqun and the Mexico in Alaska restaurant, these activities produce a new representation of space that once again brings Mexico and Alaska together. Other researchers have documented the reach of the US nation state across the border into Mexico and how nation-state power shapes everyday lives of transnational or transborder migrants on both sides of the border (Boehm 2012; Stephen 2007). However, it is important to note how, despite the clear power asymmetry between the two nations, the Mexican state has also expanded its borders by having a presence wherever there are substantial numbers of Mexican nationals living. The Consulate provides services to Mexican nationals throughout the state and thereby recognizes them as Mexican nationals in Alaska and facilitating any paperwork they may need.
The consulate has also taken an active role in “freezing the people together” or as Consul Abud put it, linking together the Mexican community in Anchorage and shaping a sense of community. In this way, like the Migrant Club, the consulate explicitly attempts to keep people invested in and linked to Mexico.

**Conclusion**

Back on the plaza bench in Acuitzio with Lola, we continued our conversation. Thunder rumbled as the clouds rolled in, threatening afternoon rain. I asked her what she liked the most about living in Anchorage. Lola replied, “I think for me, the nicest thing has been to take the culture with us, and support and rescue our culture because nobody else will do it for us. I was really happy, now that I’m not in Alaska, to hear that there are two more clubs, and they hosted an event for the 15th of September and a Latino Festival. It means that they learned a little of the importance of rescuing what is yours, and although I’m not there anymore, there’s someone else who is willing to do it. And that’s the important thing. That they take their culture with them and that they maintain it. *Que lleven su cultura y que la mantengan.* That they don’t lose their identity. Because it’s possible to get confused, and later we don’t belong anywhere, *no los ubicamos en ningún lugar.* Knowing clearly who you are and where you’re from helps you settle yourself in the place where you live. That’s how I think about it.”

In this chapter, I discussed different sites where representations of a “Mexican Alaska” are produced, and the strategies and practices that are used to intervene in dominant representations of space. The different organizations, places, and institutions examined in the previous pages draw on the unexpectedness, make new connections, and claim local spaces to produce a collective transnationality in Alaska. These practices and events make the connections
between Mexico and Alaska visualizable and tangible in everyday life in Anchorage by giving
structure to lived space for people who are living transnationally, and encouraging others to
consider alternative representations of Alaska as a space defined by multiplicity. However, the
dance group, the post cards, and the activities of the Consulate all draw on nation-state narratives
of Mexican nationalism which render the specificities of culture and dance from Acuitzio or even
Michoacán and the contemporary culture of indigenous people and afro-descendent peoples in
Mexico totally invisible\textsuperscript{132}. Although representations of Mexico in Alaska re-categorize space
and visualize Mexican Alaska, such representations draw on the same logics of nationalism and
patterns of erasure used by the state.

In the following, and concluding chapter, I review the findings of this dissertation in the
context of leaving Alaska for Mexico. As I have argued throughout this dissertation, people
orient their lives and mobilities to the transnational space that extends between Mexico and
Alaska. As circumstances change along the life course, within Acuitzio and Anchorage, in North
America, or globally, people are able to be flexible, and expand or contract the network as
necessary.

\textsuperscript{132} Thank you to Lynn Stephen for drawing my attention to these erasures.
Chapter 7: Conclusion – Freedom to Move

I hear the phone ring on the other end of the line, and Claudia picks up, “Bueno.”

“Claudia, it’s Sarita! How is Mexico so far? How was your trip?”

Claudia and her husband Ivan and their two children decided to move back to Mexico in 2013. Claudia and Ivan met in high school in Acuitzio, and Claudia had lived in Anchorage as a young girl, and again as a teenager. When they married and needed money to pay for the wedding and start their lives together, they moved to Alaska, where her grandfather had worked, and her parents, siblings, aunts, uncles and cousins had built their lives. Ivan’s great-uncle also worked in Alaska for many years, and both could list a large number of relatives in Anchorage.

However, as time went on both Claudia and Ivan were less sure that they wanted to stay in Anchorage. Their children weren’t very proficient in Spanish, since even though Claudia tried to speak only Spanish to them at home, she is bilingual and found herself slipping easily into English. Ivan was having trouble finding work, and the long, cold winters were draining.

In an interview in Anchorage, Claudia told me that she felt at home in Anchorage and the idea of moving again was scary to her. “I don’t know why but I just know the city and I know people I guess, I don’t know. I guess it’s my comfort zone,” she said, before laughing nervously. Even so, Claudia said they were thinking about moving to Mexico to seek other opportunities for their family, and to be close to her in-laws. “I always want to be where my family’s better and, I want to move for Ivan too. He has not been with his parents for a long time. You know, 19 years.

Claudia is part of a multigenerational family network which has spatially extended to Alaska, much like the Bravo family described in Chapter 4.
I’ve been with my parents here and I see them all the time. I can see that he’s not very happy. Well he’s happy but the winter is too long and I can see that in him. So I think it’s the right time for us to move.”

I also talked to Ivan about moving back to Mexico when I interviewed him in Anchorage. He said, “Like I told you, having been born and raised in Mexico, your roots are there and you are always tempted to go back.” He continued, explaining that he wants to go back to teach his children what he learned growing up in Mexico, to teach them about their roots and their Mexican heritage. But, he would like to be able to visit Alaska with his children too: “I would like to go back to Mexico someday, and live there. Live there and have the opportunity to come here even if it’s only for vacation, to spend time where my children were born, because they were born here in Alaska. They have the right to come and visit the place where they were born. So that they know their roots, more than anything. But yes, we are tempted to move back to Mexico one day, and retire over there.” Although Ivan wants to reorient his primary residence to another point within the Mexico-Alaska transnational social field, he wants to keep moving within it.

Claudia also wanted to leave the door open to ongoing mobility between Mexico and the United States. “We would come back for visits for sure. Especially if my dad and my mom are still over here in Alaska. So if we do move I will try to come every year with the whole family to see my mom and my dad.” Claudia explained how they would keep a house in Anchorage so that they would have options. “I told Ivan it’s better just to keep it, you never know. In the future if your kids want to come over here, or if something happens in Mexico, then we have a place. Then we can just kick the tenants out and go move in or whatever, you know?”
They considered moving somewhere further south, closer to the border and still within the boundaries of the United States, but by the summer I finished fieldwork and returned to Canada, they had chosen a medium-sized city in central Mexico to relocate to. They visited the city in advance and Claudia told me about the nice houses available for sale and the good schools, some of which even feature bilingual instruction in both English and Spanish. Her husband wanted to leave immediately but they decided to take their time to sell another property they owned in Anchorage and pack up or sell their possessions and let the kids finish their year in school. Claudia also wanted to help her mother start a business over the next year. She said she “wants to have something on both sides”, meaning on both sides of the border, in Anchorage and Mexico. “I want to keep something here,” she said.

When I talked to Claudia on the phone after they moved back to Mexico she told me about their new home, their new city, and invited me to visit as soon as I could. The children liked their school, and she and Ivan were selling clothes at the weekly outdoor market, called a tianguis in Mexico. Her youngest son’s Spanish was improving, and her daughter had made lots of friends. But Claudia seemed torn, and told me that she missed Alaska, and she missed her family. I think Claudia wishes she could go back sometimes, and she often posts status updates of the northern lights in starry skies or rows of salmon fishermen on the Kenai River on Facebook alongside candid snapshots of their new life in Mexico.

Throughout this dissertation, I argue that, over time, Acuitzences have oriented their lives and mobilities to a transnational social field that extends between Mexico and Alaska. Even

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134 As I described in Chapter 3, Claudia herself had moved back and forth between Mexico and Alaska as a child, and knew first hand the difficulties of getting used to the different school systems and languages in these countries.
though many of them often feel “neither here nor there” (Striffler 2007; Zavella 2011), I show that through uneven spatial practices like travel between Acuitzio and Anchorage, family networks, ways of “getting used to” new places, and new representations of space in Alaska, Acuitzences in Alaska at the same time live both here and there. Increasingly, it is the uneven experience of life in both places and mobility between them out of which a sense of belonging is built.

In this conclusion, I focus on two main threads examined in this dissertation. First, I show that people want the ability to move between the United States and Mexico, and can build lives within a transnational social field that contribute to both nation states (Boehm 2012). Many Acuitzences in Alaska structure their lives to leave their options open, and for them, freedom is the freedom to move. Second, although in the present moment we are witnessing a hardening of the boundaries between people and places, this dissertation advocates for a transnational frame that reconfigures expectations about people and places and criticizes the increasingly commonplace production of boundaries and walls, both symbolic and literal, that restrict mobility and separate peoples and places from one another. Instead, a transnational frame embraces the multiplicity of place and the multiple trajectories that construct all places. How might a transnational frame reconfigure expectations about people and places? And how might it shift policy and public opinion about migrant-immigrants in North America to accommodate the freedom to move?

Mexicans in Unexpected Places: Contributions, Limitations, and Future Research

I frame this dissertation using Deloria’s (2004) idea of “unexpectedness” as a way to rethink the history of expectation within a North American frame. Expectations about Alaska as
a place and Mexican migrant-immigrants in the United States are reconceptualized when viewed through the lives of Acuitzences in Alaska as they move through space (Chapter 3), build transnational lives over time (Chapter 4), and create a transnational habitus (Chapter 5). Mexicans in Alaska also re-conceptualize space, re-categorizing the continent to place Mexico in Alaska by organizing clubs, producing postcards, through dance, and at events (Chapter 6). This thesis also contributes toward a theory of distance as spatialized difference, and shows how distance, as produced within a North American frame, is key to the experience of Mexican migrant-immigrants in Alaska. They work across distance to connect Anchorage and Acuitzio, and often lament being “so far away” (Chapter 3, 5). Spaces of resource extraction, like Alaska and much of the circumpolar north today, are often produced as distant at the same time as they draw labour to them from all over the world. In Alaska, this was true in the past during the Klondike Gold Rush, during the oil boom of the 1970s, and continues today as people arrive to work in a natural resource-oriented economy. Furthermore, I interrogate the paradoxical relationship between citizenship and mobility, to show how citizenship, as a process intended to tie people to a nation state and therefore fix them to place, at the same time makes Acuitzences more mobile, or even requires mobility as a matter of bureaucratic process (Chapter 3, 4). Moreover, as Acuitzences spend more time in Alaska, they are more able to move, and orient themselves more to a transnational social field, even developing a habitus that requires mobility between Mexico and Alaska to build livelihoods and lives across borders (Chapter 3, 4, 5).

Although over time, some Acuitzences have been able to transcend the borders of the nation state to live transnationally between Mexico and Alaska, the irony is that they have needed to work within the boundaries and constraint of the state to do so, both practically in terms of seeking US citizenship in order to come and go across borders more freely (Chapter 4, 5), and imaginatively
in terms of “freezing the people together” by developing forms of transnational nationalism out of the symbols and mechanisms of the nation-state (Chapter 6).

Mexico and the United States are therefore profoundly entangled geographies, and not only along the US-Mexico border, or in southern regions more traditionally associated with Mexican immigration, culture, and transnationality, but all the way to Alaska. Alaska, and the circumpolar north more generally, can and should be conceptualized as uniquely situated, but interconnected to elsewhere. Rather than situating my work as a regional ethnography of either the circumpolar north or Latin America, I argue that these regions can be productively analyzed through their crossings, the links and mobilities that produce them. I show that over time, Acuitzences in Alaska build a transnational social field and orient themselves more to the field as a whole than to any one location in it. Acuitzio, Anchorage, and the common experience of mobility between the two are necessary to feel at home in the world.

Of course, every project has limitations. Mine has benefited immensely from a focus on Acuitzences who live, work, and move between Acuitzio and Anchorage, but as a result lacks insight from those who do not, or cannot move between Mexico and the United States. Other researchers have explored Acuitzio as a migratory town (Ames 1973; Jonasson 2008; Wiest 1970, 1973, 1979, 1980, 1984, 2009) and I do not present analysis here of my interactions with family members, friends, and townspeople who watch Acuitzences come and go, but never leave themselves. For Acuitzences who do not live in Alaska, their perception of their town and of those who come and go are totally different. Indeed, a focus on those who leave may run the risk of implying that the only option in Acuitzio is to migrate. Indeed, this became an issue for some town residents after a Mexican newspaper published two reports about Mexicans in Alaska in September 2014. In one article, the author cited a paper where I wrote about Gonzalo Calderón
arriving in Acuitzio with his new car, and how after that, “everyone wanted to go to Alaska.” That is how Gonzalo told me the story, and how I reported it. One woman who lives in Acuitzio, resented the characterization of the town as a *hormiguero*, or anthill, a word chosen by the reporter, with the implication that the people are ants with nothing to do but migrate to the United States (Michel 2014b). Some Acuitzences in Alaska were upset with the reporting because it made it seem as though everyone in Alaska made lots of money, or were even millionaires. (Michel 2014a) This made some people uneasy, considering that many already fear returning to Mexico, as I describe below, given the context of cartel intimidation and violence in Michoacán and lack of work opportunities cited for encouraging people to resort to kidnapping and crime. Obviously, an implication that everyone who goes to Alaska is rich poses a risk to those who wish to travel back and forth.

Indeed, my focus on one group of people who move between Alaska and Mexico, while it contributes to our understanding of mobility, the production of distance, transnationality between the United States and Mexico, and of places like rural Mexico and urban Alaska, elides other perspectives from Acuitzio. Similarly, in Alaska, I did not conduct research with Mexicans in Alaska in general, a diverse group including Triqui refugees from Oaxaca, highly educated professionals, temporary workers in salmon canneries and greenhouses, and undocumented workers in the restaurant industry, janitorial services, landscaping, and construction. It is therefore with caution that any of my findings be generalized to the larger community of Mexicans in Alaska. All of these groups would experience life there very differently. I also did not conduct research among Anchorageites outside of the Spanish-speaking community there.

Since I began this project, people have come to me with stories about migration and immigration elsewhere in the circumpolar world. Had I heard of the large number of Filipino
workers in Whitehorse, Yukon? Do I know the story of Jim Fiji, the Pacific Islander who boarded the wrong boat and wound up near Paulatuuq in the early 1900s and went on to work for the 1917 Canadian Arctic Expedition?\textsuperscript{135} Even my mother sent me a news story about Palestinian refugees in Iceland. Like my dissertation, all of these stories interrupt expectations about the circumpolar north and give insight into the multiplicity of trajectories that produce northern spaces. In this regard, my findings relate only to a very particular transnational social field, produced by a small group of Acuitzences who live between Michoacán and Alaska. These findings cannot be extended to other mobilities and locations within the circumpolar north, and further comparative research would be required to understand those trajectories and livelihoods on their own terms, as well as how such “unexpected” mobilities change our ideas about the circumpolar north. Comparative research would also shed light on what is uniquely northern about migratory trajectories, transnational lives, and urban arctic spaces that connect northern spaces with elsewhere. Moreover, comparative historical research would reject the framing of northern spaces as newly or surprisingly cosmopolitan (Binkowski 2014; Ridlington 2012; Warren 2015) and emphasize that north and south have always been interconnected and defined in relation to each other and linked by a multiplicity of mobilities. Indeed, emptying, frontier-making, and boundary making practices facilitate ongoing land dispossession and capitalist accumulation in the circumpolar north and make it so that diverse mobilities like Mexicans in Alaska, Filipinos in Yukon Territory, a Pacific Islander in the Canadian North, and Palestinians in Iceland become seen as novel, anomalous, and unexpected.

\textsuperscript{135} See the following website: http://www.historymuseum.ca/cmc/exhibitions/hist/cae/peo614e.shtml, accessed September 22, 2014. Thank you to Zoe Todd for telling me about Jim Fiji.
My work thus seeks to fill a gap in research on Alaska and the circumpolar north more generally, which to date has neglected to analyze spaces of ethnic diversity like cities or resource extraction projects (Feldman 2009). Instead, my work adds to the diverse experiences and conditions of migration-immigration, expanding “Greater Mexico” to Alaska, where Acuitzences have been living and working since at least the 1950s, and other Mexicans have lived and worked since the turn of the century. In contrast to the racialization of Mexicans in the United States as “illegal” (De Genova 2005; Stephen 2007), I add the experience of “legal” transnational migrant-immigrants who have more freedom to move between Acuitzio and Alaska. Moreover, I encourage a rethinking of the history of expectation not only for Alaska, but for the whole circumpolar north. In the remainder of the conclusion, I ask what these findings can contribute to policy debates about immigration in the United States, and academic conceptualizations of space.

**Transnational Futures**

Acuitzences in Alaska have built a social world and way of life that includes both Acuitzio and Anchorage, and they imagine their futures transnationally as well. In interviews, I asked Acuitzences in Anchorage directly where they imagine themselves in the future, and in most of their responses, like Claudia and Ivan, Acuitzences illustrate that they somehow hope to keep living between Anchorage and Acuitzio, perhaps changing their main residence but continuing to travel between the two. Even though deciding where to live is a fraught decision, Acuitzences in Alaska wish to keep moving within the transnational social field, even if they change their primary residence within it.

For example, Claudia’s mother Alina wants to move back to Mexico too. “We could rent our house like Claudia, maybe wait until my youngest daughter graduates from high school and
then go to Mexico. But I don’t know.” She paused, “I don’t know what’s going to happen but I
don’t want to be in Alaska anymore.” Alina’s husband, Ernesto, wants to come and go, “Maybe
someday we will move back, but I want to be realistic. I think my best option isn’t to totally
move back to Mexico. I think the best option for at least another 15 years I think would be to
split the time between the two. For example, I would go to Mexico for January, February and
March, come back to Anchorage in April. I would be there for 3 months, or I could even stay for
4 or 5 months, no? But I could spend a bit more time there, and enjoy our homeland while
continuing to come back to Alaska as well. Because my grandchildren are here, my children, my
sons-in-law, you know they have married and built their lives here in Alaska.”

Others say the same thing, they would like to continue to come and go. For example,
Joaquín told his wife that in 10 years “we’re going to Mexico” where he’s got his house and his
ranch, his horses. They can come to Alaska in the summertime, stay in a holiday trailer, kayak,
hike, and fish, before returning to Mexico. Octavio plans to retire soon, and when he does he will
split his time between a home in Anchorage, a condo on the Pacific Ocean in Mexico, and a
house in Acuitzio.

In Chapter 4 I analyzed the experience of the Bravo children and where they see their
futures as third generation members of a multigenerational family unit that has spatially extended
between Mexico and Alaska. They can imagine potential futures in both Anchorage and
Acuitzio, and aren’t totally sure where they will end up. They, even more than their parents and
grandparents, are best positioned to remain oriented to the transnational social field as they move
between Alaska and Mexico. However, their parents also say they aren’t sure where they will
live. Luis Bravo would like to move back, he feels a gusto, or comfortable in Acuitzio. If he has
the chance to move back to Mexico, he says he will raise livestock for sale like he did the last
time he moved back, but without taking out any loans to do it. He told me he has already
installed all the pens for the animals. They could sell their house in Anchorage and go. However,
Juana wants to stay close to her children. As she said, “For me it will be difficult. Like right now
I can’t leave my children here and go back to Mexico. Maybe if they married and moved away,
to another state, well, then I could go. Luis says we’re going to go, but I don’t know. Because as
long as my children need me here, I’m going to be here. Like I told you, I was always really
close to my parents. And I think that even though you are grown up, you always need your
parents. Moreover, another thing that I’ve noticed is that in comparison to other cities in the
United States, Anchorage is *tranquilo*, and it’s better to stay here than move elsewhere in the
Lower 48.” Once again, where people imagine their futures depends on familial, economic, and
political considerations, but always along trajectories within the transnational social field.

Many families that I met talk about similar negotiations. For example Efrén said,  
“Soledad already wants to go back!” Soledad said, I’d like to go back but not to Acuitzio or to
Mexico City, I’d like to live somewhere else in Mexico. But I don’t think we will go back soon,
we’ll move back when we’re older. But then again, we’re already old” she laughs, “Who knows,
we were only supposed to live here for 5 years, and it’s been 13 years already!” She said that
over time, you start to make your life in Anchorage, and moreover the political and economic
situation in Mexico is bad. It’s safer in Anchorage, and there’s work.

Renata also talked about her plans in an interview: “Before I graduated from high school
my dream was to take a year off, to go to Mexico, and spend it with my family and everything.
But that didn’t come true.” When I spoke to her about her future plans, her hopes were to finish
her postsecondary training in Anchorage. She said, “I don’t see myself living in Mexico, I’d
rather just go visit.” After we spoke, Renata did live in Mexico for a time, studying there for a few months, before returning to Anchorage to live.

I asked Renata’s mother, Gloria, where she thinks she will live. She sighed, and said, “At first my husband and I were thinking that when we retire, we will go to live in el pueblo. That’s why we built the house there, right? With air conditioning and everything. But Mexico is in a sad state right now, and we’re afraid, honestly. It’s especially sad because when we grew up in Acuitzio, and in all of Michoacán, at midnight or whatever time, you could be tranquil without any fear. But now the situation makes you afraid. It makes you afraid, what if something happens to you, and no, well honestly we don’t know. My husband’s parents and my parents are in Mexico, but we appreciate the health care benefits we receive from working in the United States. So, the truth is, we don’t know. That is what keeps us here most of all.” For Gloria, you can see how fraught the decision is, especially within a context where people both describe their town as tranquilo while others fear for their safety on trips to Michoacán. In the end, Gloria reiterates Juana’s sentiment, “If Renata gets married someday, we are going to be where she is, to be close to her. So we don’t know. We don’t know what’s going to happen.”

Humberto was similarly conflicted about where he sees his future. He had been working in Anchorage in landscaping for the summer, then spending the winter in Mexico, but at 78 years old, he was not sure how much longer he would carry on. I asked him, Do you want to go back to Mexico permanently or carry on in Anchorage” He replied, “It depends.” He went on to explain that the ideal is to return to su tierra, your land. But “this is the land of second choice.” In Mexico he said there have been many political problems meaning that one doesn’t have the tranquilidad that one needs to live in peace, “as you should be able to.”
Desire for peace and security and the perceived lack of it in Michoacán is a major consideration for Acuitzences as they imagine their future. The need for work is another major consideration. For example, although Leonardo said he hasn’t thought about where he imagines his future, he said “why would we go somewhere else when we are doing well here? I want to be realistic. In other states further south there are lots of problems with work, the economy is bad, it’s worse.” Oscar said he is thinking of moving elsewhere in the United States because, “like I told you, if I see that the economy in Acuitzio is still really bad, I want to start my own company in the US.” Tomás says that he would like to live in Anchorage forever. It’s tranquil, he likes it, and more than anything, it’s safe. Safer than in the Lower 48 and the economy is a little better too.

However, this too could change. It depends on what happens within the US and Mexico and how these national economies and political spheres interact with each other, including how the so-called War on Drugs unfolds in Mexico. I argue that people will continue to move within the transnational social field to wherever they perceive conditions to be best for themselves and their families. Some will move back to Acuitzio, others will stay in Anchorage, and others will relocate to new points in Mexico or the United States. As Miguel Bravo says, “a ver qué pasa, see what happens.” To put his statement into context, Miguel’s initial plan upon coming to Alaska for work was to go back to Acuitzio when he couldn’t work any more and it was time to retire. For that reason he invested in an avocado orchard, so that they would have some income when they lived there. “But now with the violence in Mexico it’s become very difficult, and I wanted to live there someday, but it depends. Every day it seems worse and there’s no point thinking about being there when you would suffer from the violence and the cartels. No, I wouldn’t be a gusto, I wouldn’t be comfortable there right now.” Moreover, his children were
born in Anchorage and grew up there. “They’re going to want to work here in Anchorage, they’re not going to want to go to live in Mexico. So I don’t know. Maybe we could buy a house in another state, somewhere with a less extreme climate, where it is neither too hot nor too cold. Here the main thing is the snow, but overall we are good, you just have to be able to stand the cold, right?” I agreed, and Miguel said, “Well, we’ll have to see later on. See what happens, a ver qué pasa.”

As I show throughout this dissertation, people have already re-oriented their lives within the transnational social field. As circumstances change along the individual life course, within the family, in the economy, and politically within Acuitzio and Anchorage, in North America, or globally, people are able to be flexible, and expand or contract the network as necessary. For example, when things weren’t going well in Alaska and they wanted to spend more time with family in Mexico, Claudia and Ivan moved themselves and their children back to Mexico. When the autodefensas in Michoacán began using violence to reclaim territory under control of the cartels, the Juana and Luis Bravo and their family debated whether or not to go to Acuitzio for the summer. They ended up going, only later than usual and for a shorter length of time. When Gonzalo Calderón decided to retire, he first moved to his rancho near Michoacán but health problems led him to move back to the United States where he could access high quality medical care near his home. Lola moved to Anchorage in 2012 after she had returned to Acuitzio to live over 10 years before. When she returned to Anchorage, she opened a restaurant with her husband. In 2014 she is planning to sell the restaurant and move back to Acuitzio to run in the following year’s elections. People thus orient their lives around both locations, never moving to either location permanently, rather shifting primary residence to a different node in the network for the time being.
As I argue throughout this dissertation, drawing on the insights of Deborah Boehm (2012), many Mexicans in the United States want the ability to *come and go*, to develop their own patterns of temporary settlement between the United States and Mexico over the life course, and within family and kin networks without fear of arrest and deportation, or the danger of illicit border crossing. Immigration policy in the United States is fundamentally at odds with the freedom to move. Specifically, and as described in the Introduction, the rules and regulations laid out by the Immigration and Nationality Act\(^\text{136}\) in the United States and the kind of abstract space that it produces is in tension with the lived experience and spatial practice of many migrant-immigrants. Indeed, “visible boundaries, such as walls or enclosures in general, give rise for their part to an appearance of separation between spaces, where in fact what exists is an ambiguous continuity” (Lefebvre 1991:87). This is true of the US-Mexico border where although a visible boundary may exist, more people from Mexico than anywhere else continue to cross it to make a space for themselves. This “ambiguous continuity” extends throughout the continent all the way to Alaska. As well, US immigration policy and the US border are relatively recent historical products: there is a long history of mobility between what is now the United States and Mexico, and of course, a very large part of the United States was once part of Mexico.

Mexican policy towards its diaspora already better accommodates the desire to come and go, likely because they are motivated to maintain the flow of remittances and investments back to Mexico. Through federal, state, and local programs, Mexican governments has managed to

\(^{136}\) I refer here and elsewhere in the dissertation to the Immigration and Nationality Act in terms of the general spatial orientation of this set of laws. This body of law has changed many times since 1952, and in future research I hope to relate mobility between Acuitzio and Anchorage (Chapters 3, 4) and the process of transnational class formation (Chapter 5) to specific INA Acts which, at different moments, facilitated access or created barriers to the US permanent residency and citizenship required to live like the Acuitzences I describe in this dissertation do.
keep migrants engaged in their home country through participation in federal elections, the 3x1
program, migrant clubs, and consular activities (Chapter 6). In contrast, it is clear that the
balance between rights to movement and rights to containment (Massey 2005:86) is still being
negotiated in the United States. This is the double imagining of space – of the bounded space
created by the state and the more open space characterized by immigrant movement – that has
been discussed throughout this dissertation, an imagining “that in the very fact of its
doubleness…works in favor of the already-powerful” (Massey 2005:86, emphasis in original). If
we accept a world of originally separate and culturally distinct bounded places, then immigration
policy becomes a question of how hard we should try to maintain this order (Gupta and Ferguson
1992:17). “If, on the other hand, it is acknowledged that cultural difference is produced and
maintained in a field of power relations in a world always already spatially interconnected, then
the restriction of immigration becomes visible as one of the main means through which the
disempowered are kept that way” (Gupta and Ferguson 1992:17). As I have shown throughout
this dissertation, and emphasized in the conclusion, Acuitzences in Alaska structure their lives to
leave their options open. Freedom is the freedom to move and live between places. Earlier I
asked how immigration policy and public discourse about migrant-immigrants in North America
might shift to accommodate the freedom to move, and it remains an open question. Given the
present context of increased border security and restriction of migration policies that enforce
spatial segregation between nation states and peoples, freedom to move appears to be an

137 And as well, it is being negotiated along categories of ethnicity, age, socioeconomic status, and gender. For
example, the proposed DREAM Act would give a period of permanent residency to “illegal” immigrants in the
United States who were brought there as children, are of good moral character, and who have completed
postsecondary education or military service. President Obama continues to talk about ending deportations for those
already living, working, and contributing to the United States. Meanwhile, unaccompanied minors from Central
America are sent home.
impossibility, at least for most people. But shouldn’t all people be free to move, regardless of passport, citizenship, or the “shoes we have to run in” (Tsing 2005:5)?

**Taking a Transnational Frame**

Throughout this dissertation, by focusing on Acuitzences in Alaska and their trajectories that cross the North American continent, I encourage the production of analytical links that connect north and south. Indeed, I show that this is something that Acuitzences themselves do in their everyday lives.

For example, during the 2014 World Cup in Brazil, a research contact posted a photo on Facebook of himself and some other Acuitzences in Brazil before the Mexico-Portugal game. The men in the photo smiled in front of the crowds outside the stadium, and all of them were dressed in Mexican national colours, wearing national team Mexico jerseys, and hats that said “Viva Mexico,” carrying green and red horns to make noise with inside the stadium. One of the men was dressed in a novelty Aztec costume with a Mexican flag as a cape. Clearly, everyone was planning to cheer for Mexico. However, in front of them they held a navy blue Alaska flag, with a twist. In addition to the gold stars that trace out the big dipper and north star on the Alaskan flag were the words “Alaska, USA” across the top, and “Acuitzio del Canje, Mich., Mex.” across the bottom. Clearly, by making this flag and then taking this all the way to Brazil for display at the game indicates how strongly these men felt that they come from both places. But, it should be pointed out, when it came to the soccer, they were cheering for Mexico.

In another example, a wedding was recently celebrated in Anchorage. In Mexico, a couple might have a civil ceremony, for marriage in the eyes of the state, and a religious ceremony, where they are married in the eyes of God. The couple was a transnational one: she
lived in Anchorage most of the time, but traveled back to Acuitzio with her family every year. He lived in Acuitzio, and they met there, on one of her trips home. They had a long-distance courtship, followed by a long-distance engagement. They decided to have their civil marriage ceremony in Anchorage, followed by a church wedding and fiesta in Acuitzio. At the civil ceremony, their cake had a bride and groom balanced on a globe, with a Mexican flag on one side, and the Alaska flag on the other. An important moment in the lives of these people and their families is celebrated at both sites within the transnational social field, symbolically connecting Acuitzio and Anchorage as part of marriage. Mobilities are entangled with life stages within the transnational social field. However, again, normally the civil ceremony is the smaller of the celebrations. The couple will celebrate the larger, more festive church marriage in Acuitzio.

Stories like these lead me to adopt a transnational frame. In both of these examples, Acuitzences draw on multiple spatial reference points to build a sense of belonging, as is evident at the World Cup, at a recent wedding, and in multiple and more everyday spatial practices described throughout this dissertation. Acuitzences are already living, working, and imagining their futures across the continent and anthropologies of the United States, Canada, and Mexico should look across borders to see how larger structural conditions operate both within and across national boundaries, as well as how these are lived by all of us.138 Taking a transnational frame allows for the opportunity to re-imagine space outside of national borders, to decolonize the

138 Simpson (2014) writes about the articulations between the juridical and discursive history of the imposed, international US-Canadian border and a Mohawk community’s efforts to formalize membership in ways that might or might not enable it to exercise rights that guarantee passage across that border. The US-Canada border, “with the interpretive gymnastics that it entails for both its crossers and its administrators is a site that requires [further] investigation” (Simpson 2014:193). Simpson thus reminds us to focus on the production and experience of other borders besides the extensively researched US-Mexico border, as well as how these borders articulate with one another.
continent, or even the entire hemisphere, and draw attention to the crossings that work as a counter point to more rigid spatial imaginings and expectations. I aim to intervene by simultaneously critiquing the boundary effects of area studies topics that separate Circumpolar Studies from Latin American Studies from Migration Studies, for example, and interrupt and reconfigure expectations about people and places. This minimizes the ability to distance problems and locate them elsewhere, among other groups in far away locations such as “violence in Mexico” or “destructive resource exploitation in Alaska.” Indeed, other researchers have shown that moving towards a transnational analysis allows for better understanding of the dynamics of migration-immigration between Mexico and the United States (Boehm 2012; Cohen 2001, 2004; De Genova 2005; Hirsch 2003; Kearney 2004; Rouse 1992, 2002; Stephen 2007; Striffler 2007), as well as other processes, such as analyses of the US led War on Drugs (Muehlmann 2014), and the production of indigeneity across international borders (Simpson 2014; Muehlmann 2013).

Moreover, the editors of *Imagining Our Americas: Towards a Transnational Frame* write, “twinned imperatives, to contend with contemporary globalization’s intensity and to understand globality’s historical depth, shape any exploration of nation and empire. Locating such efforts in the geographical and imaginative possibilities of *region* is one way to introduce important questions of time and space into deeply politicized debates about how nation-states and their peoples relate to one another” (Shukla and Tinsman 2007:1). Like them, I wish to think across the nation, and encourage the construction of a politically and intellectually rigorous spatial formation, grounded in the experience of people across borders.

To do this, they advocate a focus on the experiences, imaginaries, and histories of transborder interaction. “These spaces of dialogue, linkage, conflict, domination, and resistance
take shape across, or sometimes outside, the confines of national and regional borders and sensibilities and therefore allow for new epistemologies.” (Shukla and Tinsman 2007:6). They identify “the need to think about how social formations such as colonization or migration are propelled by historical forces beyond the nation, as well as how they take their distinct shapes within transnational and transregional processes” (Shukla and Tinsman 2007:6)

Within a similar frame, M. Jacqui Alexander deliberately chooses to interrupt inherited expectations and boundaries of geography, nation, episteme and identity that distort vision, instead focusing on pedagogies derived from crossings which fit neither easily nor neatly into rigidly defined and bounded domains (Alexander 2006:6-7). Instead, the existential message of “the crossing”, which invokes the crossroads, space of convergence and endless possibility, instructs us in “the urgent task of configuring new ways of being and knowing, and to plot different metaphysics needed to move away from living alterity premised in difference to living intersubjectivity premised in relationality and solidarity” (Alexander 2006:7-8).

Researchers of transnational migration-immigration have been particularly well positioned to take up this kind of analysis, likely because the communities and processes they study are located in both the United States and Mexico. Lynn Stephen in particular goes beyond a national frame to analyze transborder processes rather than transnational ones, exploring how Oaxacan migrant immigrants cross ethnic, class, cultural, and state borders in Mexico, as well as US-Mexico border and in different regions of the US (Stephen 2007:6). She writes that although it is important to consider the nation, it is necessary to look beyond the nation to understand the complete nature of what people are moving between, the many borders that exist besides the US-Mexico border (Stephen 2007:23).
'“By moving beyond the concept of the transnational as the primary framing device for interpreting the meaning and experience of transborder lives, I hope to push the legal, racial, ethnic, class, gender, colonial, cultural, and regional borders of Zapotec and Mixtec migrants to center stage. By complicating the context within which transborder communities are understood, we can offer a framework for understanding such communities elsewhere” (Stephen 2007:34).

Stephen meshes the analysis of structural constraints imposed by global relations of economic and political power (for example, the integration of US and Mexican political economies) with the possibilities generated by the increased movements of peoples within and across borders, and the recomposition of local, regional, national, and transborder and binational spaces that result (Stephen 2007:311).

Viewing a location, region or area through its crossings doesn’t completely reject area studies as a useful paradigm for academic or applied research. Indeed, the Circumpolar North is a unique geography, positioned vis-à-vis the world economy in a particular way. Rather, it is most productive to understand all places as meeting-up-points for multiple trajectories and “stories so far” (Massey 2005). Attention to the multiplicity of places enriches our understanding of them. Indeed, in this dissertation common Alaska narratives of adventure, wilderness, strategic Cold War location, the Alaska earthquake, and Alaska Native culture are viewed from a different vantage point. I also introduce other perspectives to northern spaces, perspectives that have heretofore been ignored, erased, or dismissed as not authentically northern. The challenge for area studies, like Circumpolar Studies, Arctic Studies, or even Latin American studies, is balancing attention to the crossings with the boundary making inherent to the process of marking off a spatial frame for analysis.

However, more research needs to be done to examine the production of North America in historical perspective outside of US-Mexican migration, and with care to include circumpolar
spaces and perspectives within this frame, as uniquely geographically and historically positioned spaces within it. Global attention is already looking north, as climate change, resource exploration, and agreements between Indigenous people and the state such as ANCSA in Alaska or the Yukon First Nation Final Agreements have repercussions further south. However, northern spaces in general still suffer from the production of distance and an expectation of isolation and wilderness. The north in general needs to be reconnected, primarily because northern voices are urgently needed to help those in the south understand these processes and opportunities from a northern perspective. We also need to understand north and south as co-produced spaces, always already entangled with one another. Indeed, north is itself a relational category and not a location per se. Where there is north, there is a reciprocal south, and both are necessary to produce lives, imaginaries, economies, and political systems between them.

To Come and Go

Many people told me that they left Acuitzio with the hope to return someday. This is what Ernesto said, from the comfortable living room couch in his Anchorage townhouse, the day I interviewed him, “Look Sarita, what brought me to Alaska was economic necessity. I was in debt and I saw coming to Alaska as a good way to solve this problem. I came here with a lot of sorrow and pain, because I left my family, my land, my things, my solutions, and my plans. But I always had the hope and the dream to come back, con la ilusión de volver.”

People build a life between Acuitzio and Anchorage based on the uneven and fraught development of a transnational habitus and the common experience of mobility between these points. In this conclusion, I describe how some people do move back to Mexico, or imagine their futures there, but Anchorage still remains important. Acuitzenses who have lived and worked in
Alaska require both locations within the transnational social field, and the ability to come and go, to move between Acuitzio and Alaska to feel at home in the world. The lives of Acuitzences in Alaska confound expectations about Mexicans in the United States, and about places like Acuitzio, Alaska, and the relationship between them. Rather than understanding the lives and mobilities of Acuitzences in Alaska as anomalous, I show how people live their everyday lives across the continent. Places are continually produced through connection with other geographies and Alaska, Mexico, and North America are all products of interrelations. Throughout this dissertation I shift the discussion from anomaly to unexpectedness by focusing on the crossings between Mexico and Alaska, specifically those crossings between Acuitzio, Michoacán, Mexico, and Anchorage, Alaska, USA made by multigenerational families who re-categorize North America.

Immigration policy throughout North America, and especially in the United States, needs to be reconfigured to allow more people to come and go, to allow them to realize their dream to return to their hometowns, their ilusiones de volver. Without this, any change to immigration policy is likely to fail. Anthropologists and activists might take a transnational frame, to see how distance, difference, and inequality are produced within the continent, and how people live within it. It is time to deconstruct expectations about people and places, and work to build theory and policy that fits with the actual everyday lives and dreams of people at both ends of the continent, and at the multiplicity of points in-between.
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Appendices
Appendix A  Sophia’s Quinceañera

Table 1: Padrinos and Chambelanes at Sophia's Quinceañera

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Padrinos (Godparents)</th>
<th>Relationship to Sofia</th>
<th>Primary residence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Misa</td>
<td>Maternal aunt and uncle</td>
<td>Acuitzio del Canje, Michoacán</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ramo y tocado</td>
<td>Maternal cousins (2)</td>
<td>Acuitzio del Canje and Villa Madero, Michoacán</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Copas</td>
<td>Maternal cousin</td>
<td>Mexico City</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cojin</td>
<td>Maternal cousin</td>
<td>Mexico City</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biblia y rosario</td>
<td>Maternal cousin</td>
<td>Mexico City</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ramo para la virgen</td>
<td>Maternal cousin</td>
<td>Morelia, Michoacán</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medalla</td>
<td>Maternal aunt</td>
<td>Mexico City</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ultimo Juguete</td>
<td>Maternal cousin</td>
<td>Acuitzio del Canje, Michoacán</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corona (for the last in the family)</td>
<td>Maternal aunt</td>
<td>Morelia, Michoacán</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pastel (will buy the cake)</td>
<td>Paternal aunt and uncle</td>
<td>Anchorage, Alaska</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recuerdos en la Iglesia</td>
<td>Paternal cousins (2)</td>
<td>Yoricostio, Michoacán</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pala y cuchillo (not as common)</td>
<td>Paternal cousin</td>
<td>Anchorage, Alaska</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>De foto</td>
<td>Friend and ethnographer</td>
<td>Vancouver, Canada</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>De musica</td>
<td>Paternal aunt and uncle</td>
<td>Anchorage, Alaska</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chambelanes (Escorts)</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brother</td>
<td>Anchorage, Alaska</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maternal cousin</td>
<td>Villa Madero, Michoacán</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maternal cousin</td>
<td>Acuitzio del Canje, Michoacán</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friend</td>
<td>Acuitzio del Canje, Michoacán</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix B  Objects that Move

Each of these items was mentioned in an interview or listed in my fieldnotes as something that people brought with them on their trips between Acuitzio and Alaska.

From Alaska to Acuitzio: Photographs, coasters, books about the trans Alaska pipeline, baseball caps that say “Alaska”, ulu knife\textsuperscript{139}, salmon, (smoked and fresh), miscellaneous souvenirs, magnets, coffee mugs, cast iron pots, vitamins, clothes, party invitations, posters and paintings, dream catcher, cutlery set, toaster, winter jacket, toys, books, photographs, postcards, maps of Alaska and Anchorage, automobiles, Alaska license plates, camping trailer, stickers, bumper stickers, newspaper clippings, wall hanging/tapestry, decorations (husky dogs, bears), Alaska pipeline commemoration trophy, souvenir photo album, video game system and games, hair products, key chains, rooster cages, bathroom fixtures, decorations for the home, Mp3 player

Mexico to Alaska: Charro suit, tape recorder to record music, artesanias (handicrafts), calendars, huaraches (sandals), photos, pictures, guitar, candy, cheese, mole paste, candy, chiles, bread (multiple varieties), gorditas de nata (biscuits), clothing, team Mexico jerseys, bags, jewelry, souvenirs, bumper stickers, cheese, carnitas, chorizo, mascara, dried meat, recuerdos de fiestas (party favors, usually from a quinceañera, wedding, or baptism), calendars, tequila, mescal, rompope (an alcoholic drink similar to eggnog), barbacoa de borrego (lamb barbecue), chamoy chile sauce, chocolate gum, churros, pinole (toasted ground corn which can be made into a drink, similar to atole), cellphone, dance costumes, wheat seeds, molcajetes (a stone tool made of basalt used for grinding food, similar to a mortar and pestle), ollas/cazuelas (pots, some handmade of clay), rebozo (shawl), serape, videos from family events, a puppy, rooster, dress for first communion.

\textsuperscript{139} An ulu is a knife with a rounded blade that was traditionally used by Yup'ik, Inuit, and Aleut women. Many people continue to use ulus and they are also sold as tourist souvenirs throughout Alaska.
Appendix C Data Collection Tools

C.1 Life History Interview

Life history interviews generally allow the interviewee to elaborate their lives and present himself or herself in whatever way he or she chooses. I began each life history interview by asking the interviewee to “tell me about your life.” Following this, I asked interviewees to elaborate on various points of their life-history sketch with particular focus on where important events occurred.

At the beginning of each life history interview, I recorded the following information using the pre-interview form (Appendix C.2):

- Date, location of interview, age of interviewee, others present during interview, marital status, # of children and ages of children, current occupation(s), highest level of occupation achieved and where achieved, languages spoken, most comfortable language, primary residence.

This is a list of topics that I planned to explore in life history interviews:

1) Important life events (birth, marriage, parenthood, etc.)
2) Recollections of school or work experiences
3) Migration stories
4) Border crossing narratives
5) Narratives of US legal status (being undocumented, getting a green card, becoming a citizen)
6) Family relationships
7) Friendships
8) Perceptions and experiences of different places from different times (especially Acuitzio and Alaska)
9) Recollections of important historical events (e.g. the 1994 economic crisis in Mexico, the 1964 earthquake in Anchorage)
C.2 Interviewee Questionnaire

Interview #: ______
Date: ____________________________
Location of interview: _____________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
Age of interviewee: _____________________________
Others present during interview: _____________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
Marital status: _____________________________
# of children: ______
Ages of children: Where they live:
______
______
______
______
______
______
______
______
______
______
Current occupation(s) + where: _____________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
Highest level of education achieved and where achieved: _________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
Languages spoken: _________________________
________________________________________________________________________
Most comfortable language: _________________________
Residences (+ time spent in each during the year): _________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
Name 3 people closest to you, where do they live?
1. _________________________
2. _________________________
3. _________________________
Amount of time spent in Alaska (w/approximate dates): _________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
Citizenship (w/dates): _________________________
________________________________________________________________________
Do you vote in Alaska? _________________________
Do you vote in Mexico? _________________________
Community group involvement? _________________________
C.3 Network Questionnaire

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Family name</th>
<th># of individuals</th>
<th>Relationship to interviewee</th>
<th>Time spent together</th>
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Interviewee #: ___________________  Date: ___________________
# Appendix D  Interviewee Characteristics

## Table 2: Acuitzio-AK Interviewee Characteristics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PSEUDONYM</th>
<th>GENDER</th>
<th>AGE</th>
<th>YEARS IN AK</th>
<th>WHEN</th>
<th>MAIN RESIDENCE</th>
<th>US CITIZENSHIP</th>
<th>MARITAL STATUS</th>
<th># CHILDREN</th>
<th>OCCUPATION</th>
<th>EDUCATION</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Jaime</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1960-1968</td>
<td>Acuitzio</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>married</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Retired</td>
<td>Completed primaria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Pascual Allende</td>
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<td>37</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1991-1997</td>
<td>Morelia</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>married</td>
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<td>Ecotourism business owner/operator; photographer</td>
<td>Trade/technical/vocational training</td>
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<tr>
<td>3 Luis Bravo Sr.</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>1960-1985</td>
<td>Acuitzio</td>
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<td>married</td>
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<td>Some primaria</td>
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<td>77</td>
<td>0</td>
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<td>5 Ernesto Cárdenas Sr.</td>
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<td>11</td>
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<td>Livestock; store owner</td>
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<td>66</td>
<td>43</td>
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<td>2004</td>
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<td>16</td>
<td>1995-present</td>
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<td>1999</td>
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<td>15</td>
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<td>1996-present</td>
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<td>25</td>
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<td>20</td>
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<td>Anchorage</td>
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<td>2000</td>
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<td>15</td>
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<td>Anchorage</td>
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<td>43</td>
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<tr>
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<td>30</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2001-present</td>
<td>Anchorage</td>
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<tr>
<td>AK 25</td>
<td>Serefina</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2002-present</td>
<td>Anchorage</td>
<td>2007</td>
<td>married</td>
<td>2 Hairdresser</td>
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<td>AK 27</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>M</td>
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<td>30</td>
<td>1983-present</td>
<td>Acuitzio</td>
<td>2000?</td>
<td>married</td>
<td>3 Restaurant waiter; restaurant owner</td>
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<tr>
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<td>44</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>1996-present</td>
<td>Anchorage</td>
<td>2005</td>
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<td>3 Industrial food preparation</td>
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<td>PEUSDÓNIM</td>
<td>GENDER</td>
<td>AGE</td>
<td>YEARS IN AK</td>
<td>WHEN</td>
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<td># CHILDREN</td>
<td>OCCUPATION</td>
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<td>Salvador*</td>
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<td>AK 31b</td>
<td>Inés</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2008-present</td>
<td>Anchorage</td>
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<td>married</td>
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<td>Fast food employee</td>
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<td>Efrén</td>
<td>M</td>
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<td>22</td>
<td>1990-present</td>
<td>Anchorage</td>
<td>birth</td>
<td>married</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Janitorial services manager and business owner</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Soledad</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>1999-present</td>
<td>Anchorage</td>
<td>2009</td>
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<td>César*</td>
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<td>49</td>
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<td>Feb-April 1996; 1996-1997; 2002-2003; 2003-present</td>
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<td>5</td>
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<td>M</td>
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<td>1989-present</td>
<td>Anchorage</td>
<td>1997</td>
<td>married</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Truck driver</td>
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*Also interviewed in 2005