

SUITCASES FULL OF *MOLE*: TRAVELING FOOD AND THE CONNECTIONS BETWEEN MEXICO AND ALASKA

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ABSTRACT

This paper is about how transnational lives and identities are lived out as much through what people eat—or say they eat—as through other global cultural flows. This is what I call “eating transnationally”—meals that connect places and the people in them or foods that depend on interconnectedness and mobility across space. Based on multisited fieldwork with Mexican migrant workers and their families in Anchorage, Alaska, and Acuitzio del Canje, Michoacán, I investigate the food-related connections and interconnections between Alaska and Mexico. While food often travels long distances from field to table along grocery store and restaurant distribution chains, people also carry foods, recipes, cooking utensils, and ideas and memories about food with them when they travel. This exploration of food and eating in the lives of transnational Mexican workers in Alaska also provides considerable insight into conceptualizations of Mexican people and of places like Acuitzio del Canje and Anchorage in a globalized world.

KEYWORDS: transnationality, food, migration

She said they use the *chiminea*—the old style kitchen—for certain things, those dishes that are cooked in a big pot or that benefit from being cooked over an open flame. Inside are blackened walls, the smell of burning wood, and a rectangle of light that shines in from the doorway. I watch as Rosa¹ toasts each ingredient for the *mole*, a rich sauce made of chocolate, chiles, and many spices—there are a lot of ingredients so it takes a while. Everything gets mixed together into a thick brown sweetly spicy-bitter paste, and then it sits to cool. Later, she puts it into bags—two sizes: small and large. I buy a small one to take back home with me. “Does Ana take *mole* back with her to Alaska, or does Tomás when he goes back to Alaska?” I ask. Ana and Tomás are two of her nine brothers and sisters, the majority of whom live in the United States. “Yes, yes they do, but only a bit of what I make because it doesn’t last as long with no pre-

servatives, but they take some powdered *mole* too. Well, that’s why I’m so busy today, Mama’s going to California tomorrow to visit my other brother and sister and their families—of course I have to make *mole* for her to take to them.”

I think about what Ana, Rosa’s sister, said two months ago while we were in her kitchen in Anchorage eating and talking. I asked her if “authentic” Mexican recipes and ingredients were important to her. She said, “Yes, yes, because, well, it’s not what one eats every day. But, for example, I bring my *mole*; *mole* already prepared there, in Mexico, the way they prepare it in Mexico. And if I bought it here in Alaska? It’s very different. It’s very different, the taste.” “Why is it important? Is it the taste?” I ask. “Ah hah, yes, it’s the taste more than anything. But, anyway, we are so far away that . . . even though it’s not the same we like it.”²

1. All participant names are pseudonyms.

2. This block of text is a creative nonfiction account drawn from a combination of interviews, fieldnotes, and experience. Fieldnote and interview excerpts are indicated as such; they are also indented and not italicized.

This story speaks to eating transnationally. *Mole* is one instance of traveling food, one example of how food connects places (how *mole* literally moves, is packed in suitcases and taken from one place to another), and how food is connected to place (how Ana said that it just is not the same if you buy it in Anchorage). But this is only one example. While food often travels long distances from field to table along grocery store and restaurant distribution chains, people also carry foods with them when they travel.

In the pages that follow, I will introduce the concept of the “foodscape” and begin to describe the foodscape that arches over and connects Alaska and Mexico. By talking about the kinds of foods, ideas about food, and food practices that are traveling and the people who are sometimes traveling with them, I hope to begin to show how food and the movement of food and food-related things and ideas are wrapped up in configurations of power, the connections between places and the movement of people, commodities, technology, ideas, finance capital, the media, and the daily lives of individuals in extremely complex ways. Lisa Law aptly speaks of the “entangling of foodways in webs of culture, economics, and politics which enable the presence of some foods and not others in shops, restaurants or households” (Law 2001:276–277). It is important to remember that these traveling foods and ideas about foods are a real part—a material reality—of people’s daily lives, as well as a symbol, a marker of transnationality.

Food does more than connect places and people; it “provides a medium through which stories and histories are told and remembered, places described, identities formed and community imagined” (Choo 2004:206), so that the “embodied experience” of eating Mexican food can “[bring] back and [reconnect] memories from homes departed, as well as sounds, textures, and flavors from the past, which are then relived and experienced in the present” (2004:206). The kinds of foods and food-related things and ideas that connect Mexico and Alaska also reflect—in their smells, tastes, and sounds—memories and movement, or “historical moments and transnational movements of people, things, and stories” (Choo 2004:212). This kind of “home cooking” (Law 2001), or the dislocation of place and the creation of a sense of home through cooking and eating, connects Anchorage, Alaska, with Acuitzio del Canje, Michoacán.

I am also writing about transnational identity, by which I mean the creation and attribution of fluid and

complex identities grounded in both Mexico and Alaska. The negotiation of such an identity depends on the crossing of borders and boundaries and the exchange of information implied in these movements. Food, as something that is related to transnational identity, is part of the exchange of information and the crossing of borders and boundaries. It is partially through food that places and the people in them are—and become—connected. In this chapter I hope to illustrate these complex interconnections with stories, tastes, images, and analysis. This is what I call “eating transnationally”—meals that connect places and the people in them or foods that depend on interconnectedness and mobility across space.

FOODSCAPE: GLOBAL FLOWS OF FOOD CULTURE

When thinking about globalization, I primarily follow Arjun Appadurai, who sees the complexity of the world arising from “certain fundamental disjunctures between economy, culture, and politics” (Appadurai 1996:33). He proposes the study of global cultural flows as a way to explore such disjunctures, flows that he has termed ethnoscapescapes, mediascapescapes, technoscapescapes, financescapescapes, and ideoscapescapes (Appadurai 1996:33). These scapes are fluid and irregular, deeply influenced by the situatedness of different actors, and they “characterize international capital as deeply as they do international clothing styles” (Appadurai 1996:33) and, I would argue, the foods and cuisines available in a globalized world. Appadurai’s scapes make up *imagined worlds*, “the multiple worlds that are constituted by the historically situated imaginations of persons and groups spread around the globe” (Appadurai 1996:33).

Extending these ideas, I use the analytical concept *foodscape* to draw attention to the global flow of food culture and its relationship to other global cultural flows. Following Theodore Bestor (1999, 2005) and Sylvia Ferrero (2002), the foodscape is an analytical concept that draws attention to the global flow of food culture—such as Japanese sushi (Bestor) or Mexican food in Los Angeles (Ferrero) or Anchorage—and its relationship to global capitalism. For instance, due to current conditions of global capitalism, food-related interconnections and disconnections (or disjunctures) have intensified and in some cases have increased so much as to become nearly commonplace. Food is intimately connected to place in that it must be grown somewhere, and in that we associate cuisines with specific places and people. However, food and

ideas about food have become de-territorialized and then re-territorialized elsewhere so that food is connected to place as it connects places with one another. Consider, for instance, the fact that much of the food in North American and European grocery stores is grown thousands of miles away in the so-called Third World, that “Chinese food” (presumably a mish-mash of Chinese regional cuisines) is popular in India and has subsequently fused with regional cuisines there to create new dishes, that a tortilla factory has recently opened in Beijing (Arzate 2005), that sushi is particularly fashionable in North America these days (see Bestor 1999, 2005; Issenberg 2007), or that migrants in Alaska have opened Mexican restaurants and stores in Anchorage and that these same migrants often travel long distances with food from Mexico to be consumed upon their return to Anchorage. These instances—and the many others that are imaginable—have everything to do with the global flow of ideas, people, things, capital, and technology, and they make up a foodscape, a fluid, uneven flow of food culture. The movement of migrant workers and their foods and food practices are also part of a foodscape, as are the foods they encounter in their destination.

One can talk specifically about a transnational flow of food culture in order to draw attention to the fact that these processes are not necessarily worldwide and global, but are anchored in places and more specifically in nation-states (Levin 2002:3). The nation-state remains important (Basch et al 1994; Ong 1999), and a de-territorialized and flexible nation-state “may extend its hegemony over its citizens, who, as migrants or refugees, reside outside of its national boundaries” (Kearney 2004:223). To me, the term “transnationalism” draws attention to the nation-state and to the specific relationships between places in ways that “global” does not. I use transnationalism to refer not only to the “condition of cultural interconnectedness and mobility across space” as Ong (1999:4) does in her study of flexible, “multiply-displaced” Chinese subjects, but also to emphasize, as Michael Levin (2002:3) does, that “transnational processes are not worldwide, but are anchored in places, i.e. states, both homelands and nations of settlement. Both migrants and corporations whose journeys and activities cross borders of two or more states are best referred to as transnational.” As such, while both globalization and transnationalism draw attention to cultural flows, transnationalism draws specific attention to place (Levin 2002). For this reason, this paper is concerned

with the flow of food culture between particular places in specific nation-states, namely, Anchorage, Alaska, and Acuitzio del Canje, Michoacán.

In anthropology, early researchers “studied food because of its key central role in many cultures and several wrote pointed pieces on foodways” (Counihan and Van Esterik 1997:1). Later, Claude Lévi-Strauss (1966, 1969) and Mary Douglas (1966) wrote about food as something with great symbolic significance that can provide powerful insight into cultural systems. Later still, Sidney Mintz wrote about the history and meaning of food (Mintz 1985, 1996; Mintz and Du Bois 2002), a topic that continues to be studied by researchers like Richard Wilk (2006).

In North America and Europe, a burgeoning interest in food in academia and in popular culture—Food TV and the popularity of cooking shows, classes, and books, the arrival (or rather recognition) of food tourism both at home and away, and the increasing strength and popularity of food-related social movements such as SlowFood, anti-GMO protest, and the widespread interest in organic and fair trade foodstuffs—has resulted in a fascinating, growing, and very interdisciplinary body of literature about the place of food and eating in contemporary society. Recent edited volumes of essays and previously published articles focusing on food (Ashley et al. 2004; Atkins and Bowler 2001; Belasco and Scranton 2002; Counihan and Van Esterik 1997; Korsmeyer 2005; and Watson and Caldwell 2005, among others), specialty academic journals (such as *Gastronomica* and *Food, Culture, and Society*), academic blogs and websites (such as the Critical Studies in Food and Culture blog and message board),³ and panels at conferences attest to the fact that food is a valuable medium through which to understand culture and history, powerful in its “extraordinary ability to convey meaning as well as nourish bodies” (Counihan and Van Esterik 1997:2) because of its material place in everyday life and the universality of eating and cooking among human beings. And, as James L. Watson and Melissa L. Caldwell point out in the introduction to the edited volume *The Cultural Politics of Food and Eating* (2005:1): “food practices are implicated in a complex field of relationships, expectations, and choices that are contested, negotiated and often unequal. Food everywhere is not just about eating, and eating (at least among humans) is never simply a biological process.”

3. www.foodandculture.blogspot.com

And so, food is able to act as a symbol, a marker, as well as a reality. Food can symbolize one's identity yet is also physically connected to place, person, and body. Theoretically, this means that one way to look at globalization and its relationship with the individual is to study food. Methodologically, it means approaching food and eating ethnographically, focusing on recipes, ingredients, tastes, memories, performances, and other foods and food-related things and ideas.

The methodology for this project was ethnographic, with particular emphasis placed on participant observation and semistructured interviews. To complement my interest and theoretical orientation in transnationalism and the connections and spaces between places, my methodology was multisited, with ethnographic research conducted in both the origin and migration destination of the migrant workers and their families who are central to my study. I spent time in both Anchorage, Alaska, and in Acuitzio del Canje, Michoacán, putting myself wherever food and Mexicanness met, or might meet, and asking questions about food in the lives of migrant workers as well as of those who stay in place.

Since transnational lives and identities depend upon constant interconnections between homes, a multisited approach was especially appropriate due to its emphasis on following the connections made within and between sites. As such, I "followed the people" (Marcus 1995:106) and the food and food-related connections that Mexican migrant workers make between homes as I traveled from Anchorage to Acuitzio alongside migrants and their families who return to Mexico each year, beginning in mid-October through early December and returning to Anchorage after the New Year. For some, this coincides with the end of the summer landscaping season, and for others it coincides with the school schedule of their children, which for most is the holiday season in Mexico. Most have arrived in Acuitzio by December 5, the town's annual celebration of the *Día del Canje* or "Day of the Exchange" of Mexican prisoners for Belgian and French prisoners in 1865 during the French intervention in Mexico, which lasted from 1861 to 1867. An important day for the town and in Mexican history, it

also begins the festive season with December 12 (*Día del Guadalupe*), the *Posadas*, Christmas and New Year's, and *Día de los Reyes* (Epiphany) also as important celebrations during the season. During the time period when the migrants were returning to town, and the time that I visited Acuitzio, there were more and more people in town every day. More parties, weddings, baptisms, and other events are planned during this time, and business picks up for the shops in town.

I focused on the connections and interconnections between places, but I also became one of those connections between places, someone who, along with my research participants, lived in transnational space.⁴ Because I am interested in transnational migration and traveling foods, this is an especially suitable approach. I followed the lead of anthropologists such as Roger Rouse (1992, 2002) and Michael Kearney (2004) who used multisited methodologies in their studies of Mexican migration. In following the flows of people, food, and food culture from one specific place to another, and focusing on the connections and interconnections between places in order to study food as a marker and material reality of transnational identity, my methodology was designed to study the flow of food culture in a foodscape.

ACUITZENCES IN ALASKA

Estimates about the number of people from Acuitzio currently living and working in Alaska vary. Anchorage, the state's largest and most multicultural city,⁵ contains roughly eleven thousand residents of Mexican origin, according to the 2004 American Community Survey (U.S. Census Bureau 2004). My participants estimate that there are about one thousand men, women, and children in Anchorage who are from Acuitzio, a number that fluctuates depending on the season, with the most people there in the summer.⁶

I worked closely with twenty-six research participants in Anchorage who were either migrant workers, their adult family members, or individuals who owned, operated, or were employed at Mexican restaurants, bakeries, or stores in Anchorage. All of the participants were of Mexican de-

4. Of course, I also carried things and ideas with me when I traveled. One of the participants asked me to carry a backpack of gifts for his wife and son (name-brand clothing and other consumer goods) on my trip from Alaska to Mexico. His son visited me a couple of days after I arrived to collect it. I also traveled with food on my return to Canada from Mexico—bread, cheese, *mole*, candy, and powdered chile.

5. Anchorage has a population of about 278,700, of which 8.2% are foreign born and nearly 14% speak a language other than English at home (U.S. Census Bureau 2006).

6. For more background information on Anchorage, Acuitzio, and movement between the two sites, see Wiest, this volume.

scent and most grew up in Acuitzio del Canje, Michoacán. Of the semistructured interviews that I did with thirteen of these individuals, eight of the interviews were with women and five were with men. They can be divided into two groups: participants whose immediate families live in Anchorage (ten) and men working in Anchorage whose immediate family live in Mexico (three). All of the participants maintain close ties to Mexico, albeit of varying degrees, and all have family and friends who live there permanently. I tried to work with a range of individuals of different ages, genders, and length of time migrating. However, most of the participants that I got to know the best were women with families, something that could be due to my focus on food and cooking or my own position as a young woman alone in Alaska.

With the economy in Alaska driven by oil, tourism, and commercial fishing (and likely in that order), the jobs that are available for migrant workers are tied to the steady economic growth in those three industries that make up the “core triangle of Alaska’s economy” (Borneman 2003:528). Most of my participants work in the food service industry, whether as waiters or waitresses, cooks, dishwashers, bakers in chain stores like Costco, or in small businesses like the French Oven bakery. Some are even restaurant owners. Other participants work in landscaping, something that can be convenient due to the seasonal nature of the work where people can work for the summer, then go to Mexico for the winter with the promise of a full-time job again the following summer. Still others work in construction (for which English is a necessity), in painting, or cleaning houses, and some have been employed outside Anchorage in salmon canneries or other seafood processing, where 75% of all workers in that industry were nonresidents of Alaska in 2004 (Hadland et al. 2006). Other Mexican migrants, although not from Acuitzio as far as I know, work in Alaska’s vast and isolated backcountry picking morel mushrooms for sale on the global gourmet food market (LeVaux 2005).

Within the wider context of transnational subjects, my research population fits in somewhere between immigrants and guest workers, between relatively permanent and more-or-less temporary residence in Anchorage. By Alaska standards, the people who participated in this study are middle class. Of those who live most of the time with their families in Anchorage, nearly all have homes in both Acuitzio and Anchorage, more than one vehicle, televisions, computers, and cell phones. Some own and op-

erate their own businesses. Most take annual vacations to Mexico and some take additional trips elsewhere: Florida, Niagara Falls, Vancouver, California. Of those participants whose families live in Mexico while they live and work in Anchorage, they, too, have comfortable and modern homes in Acuitzio and well-maintained rental accommodations in Alaska, as well as a car or, more often, a truck.

While some of my research participants were “illegal” migrants to Alaska at first, nearly all did have some legal documentation and right to work in Alaska, with many holding both Mexican and American citizenship. For these legal migrant-immigrants especially mobility is a fact of life, and while they are not as wealthy as Ong’s (1999) very rich and extremely mobile Chinese elite, my participants can and do travel regularly and flexibly between Mexico and the United States.

In each interview with research participants in both Acuitzio and Anchorage, I asked how, when, and why each individual went to Alaska. As with migration to other sites by Acuitzences (Wiest 1973, 1979, 1980), the reason was generally to find work or to join a loved one (usually a spouse) who was already working in Alaska, something also asserted by the *Guide to Alaska’s Cultures* (Bibbs 2006). This is applicable to Mexican migrants more generally. The specifics of each story varied, however, with some people as second-generation or even third-generation migrants, following their fathers and grandfathers who had worked on the pipeline or in related industries. Others came looking for better work and a more tranquil environment than was available in the Lower Forty-eight, including some who had spent time in other parts of the United States, like California and Texas, and others who had not. Still others came with their families to reunite with loved ones after living as long-distance families for years under circumstances that differed for each family. Some migrants spend part of the year working in Anchorage, then the remainder of the year with their families in Mexico, a cycle that repeats each year. Other migrants live in Anchorage most of the time with their families, going back to Acuitzio once or twice a year to attend funerals, baptisms, weddings, the annual town celebration, and to be with family, especially around the holidays.

What is the same is that everyone was coming to find work in Alaska, whether to raise money for a wedding, to build a house in Acuitzio, to put children through school, or to raise their children in Alaska. Nevertheless, everyone that I spoke to and got to know maintained a

connection to their hometown, both through telephone conversations and regular travel back. The maintenance of this connection is the basis of the use of the term “transnational” to describe these people’s lives and identities. I was surprised by how mobile some of these people are, how often they travel back and forth between Mexico and Alaska, and how major life events such as weddings, funerals, baptisms and *quinceañeras*⁷ continue to take place in Acuitzio. Phone calls ranging in frequency from daily to weekly also connect very strongly the people in these two places. Video recorders and cameras taken back and forth between the two places allow family members and friends to “experience” aspects of the lives of those who are far away.⁸ As well, the internet is starting to become more useful for migrant workers in Alaska and elsewhere to keep connected. The town of Acuitzio had a website directed at those who are away, and as I wrote in my field notes, one woman says that her husband uses the internet to read *La Voz de Michoacán*, one of the major newspapers based in Morelia, the state capital of Michoacán (November 8, 2005).

SUITCASES FULL OF MOLE: TRAVELING FOODS

In my conversations with my research participants in Alaska, I found that people traveled from Acuitzio to Alaska carrying not only mole and bread but also things like cheese, candy, and dried and crushed chile. For the most part, these are foods that travel well and are permitted to travel across international borders. The first time I was invited over to Maria and Luis’s place, it was for a dinner party that was attended by others from Acuitzio, Ana, Ivonne, and Fernando. I wrote in my field notes that:

The food was ready so we all went into the kitchen. Maria told us to sit and we all did, except Maria and Ana who served us at the table. We had mole from Acuitzio—Maria and Ivonne each had a bit left and they mixed it together, chicken, rice, beans, salsa, cheese (cheese also from Acuitzio) and tortillas. For dessert we had flan from Costco that Fernando himself actually made. Ana told about how she and her family just got back from Acuitzio and they brought from there the cheese we had, and I guess they brought back bread and some other things—eight suitcases worth! She says she

loves the bread from a woman named Mercedes—it’s homemade and she said she especially loves the *conchas*. Her parents live on the last street in town and I understand the bakery is near there. (September 6, 2005)

Indeed, this kind of thing is not uncommon for people from Acuitzio who live and work in Alaska. In each interview, and in some of my informal conversations with research participants in both Anchorage and Acuitzio, I asked whether or not that person travels with food when they go to Alaska to work or return to Alaska after a visit to Mexico. Most of my participants do travel with food regularly or have at some point, while the few who do not carry food with them know someone who does. In fact, of the sixteen research participants that I interviewed formally, thirteen of them said that they had traveled with food from Mexico to Alaska at least once. Of those, eleven travel with food on a regular basis. As Victor, a young man who had just returned to Acuitzio from his first time working in Anchorage, said:

More than anything food is what I see...that relatives bring their family members when they go there [to the United States]. More than anything, food. Bread, whatever you want, *mole*, bread, meat, cheese, spices. (November 28, 2005)⁹

An interview with Maria made similar points:

Maria: Food, well [I bring] no more than that that they allow us to cross [the U.S.-Mexican border] with, which is like, cheese and *mole*. . . I also bring this chile with lime. Yes, because here [in Alaska] there isn’t any, or like there is chile but it’s crushed. Normally one uses chile for, for fruit. But it isn’t with lime and I bring that.

Sara: I think there’s some in Mexico Lindo [a small Mexican grocery store in Anchorage].

Maria: Yes, but it isn’t the same.

Sara: Ah, it’s not the same.

Maria: [laughs] No, no. And I bring that. Also, you know what? I bring sherry flavored gelatin mix because there aren’t any sherry flavored ones here and I really like gelatin. Ah, I’ve brought Japanese peanuts, but [the ones that are] *enchilados*. *Enchilados*, with chile. And also . . . in Mexico, in Mexico City they sell these gummies. They’re pineapple flavor

7. Celebration of a young woman’s fifteenth birthday marking her transition to womanhood.

8. www.acuitzio.com.mx, now inactive.

9. Interviews were done in English, Spanish, or some combination of the two. The author translated all of the Spanish interviews.

and they have chile [laughs]! Yeah, and I brought a kilo! [laughs] And anyway, I also bring candies. Candies that they don't have here because here there's more variety of Mexican candies. But there are some that aren't here and my kids like them so, well, I bring them and also that *pinole*.

Sara: What's *pinole*?

Maria: *Pinole* is corn, the red corn that's toasted, it's well toasted. Or like, they have, they have to know you, you don't toast it yourself but you take it to the mill and it's like a powder. And they combine this with sugar and it's kind of sweet. You can eat it just like that or you can make *atole* out of it. (September 26, 2005)

As Maria says, she brings food with her when she returns to Alaska from Mexico because those foods are not available in Alaska. Sometimes they are not available at all and other times the exact brand, taste, or level of quality is not available. Food is something important, something about Mexico worth bringing along to a new place.

Ivonne echoes Maria when she talks about the food that she brings and the reasons why she brings food to Alaska with her,

Ivonne: We always bring bread, cheese...

Fernando: *Mole*.

Ivonne: ... Cheese, powdered mole. Uh, we bring *chile perón*. It's a yellow chile, small; they also call it *chile manzano*. But here there aren't any. Sometimes you can find them so you don't have to order something special from one of the, the local produce carriers [grocers]. But you can't find them regularly. Anyway, we bring those, we bring foods that the family [in Acuzio] makes for us, and my mother-in-law always makes tamales before we go. We bring a lot of *tamales*. And, um...

Sara: Oh, great. How do you bring them? In suitcases?

Ivonne: We put them like in a, um, Rubbermaid container. Because if we don't, they [the airline baggage handlers] throw them and break some of the things. (September 28, 2005)

Among the people who regularly bring food with them from Mexico, mole, bread, and cheese were definitely the most common items. In Anchorage, the basic ingredients and foods necessary for Mexican cooking are available, both at specialty shops like Mexico Lindo, Taco Loco, Red Apple, and New Sagaya Market, as well as at large, main-

stream grocery stores like Carrs-Safeway, Fred Meyer, and Costco. There is a *tortillería* in town that makes both flour and corn tortillas that are later sold frozen. While *lo básico* (the basics) are available now in Anchorage, they were not always. Even five years ago, it was much more difficult to find the necessary ingredients; people used to bring even more than they do now. Anchorage is changing; more products are available, different stores are opening up. More of nearly everything, and not only Mexican ingredients, is available now, whereas it was not in the recent past. Miguel and Inez make this point in an interview:

Miguel: And look, around what you're talking about, yeah, we brought [food] before... we brought more things before because there weren't...

Inez: There weren't many things here [in Anchorage]. (October 25, 2005)

Specialized or unusual ingredients are still unavailable or are available only sporadically and often at a high price.

Bringing food is really important to people. As Lisa Law (2001:277) writes, "The absence of familiar material culture and its subtle evocations of home is surely one of the most profound dislocations of transnational migration." Perhaps, then, it becomes important to travel with a piece of home, a piece of Mexico to alleviate this dislocation, so much so that, as Alina's husband said, "when she came here her suitcase was all food, hardly any clothes!" (field notes, October 5, 2005). According to Miguel, who works at a Mexican restaurant in Anchorage, people bring things and food with them because:

Maybe we bring a part of ourselves. We want to bring a little piece of Mexico with us. Look, and even though, even though one has their U.S. citizenship, you know? But I always feel that your heart is always in Mexico... Sometimes I think more than anything food, and more than anything I feel that [some people think that we have] disgraced our country because we have been given the opportunity to live peacefully with our kids. (October 25, 2005)

People are also willing to take risks, as Alina notes:

Alina: I always bring food, even food that I shouldn't bring, Sarita! [laughs]

Sara: Like what?

Alina: Like I've brought some chiles, *chiles perones*. It's like a chile, like smaller than this orange. But, uh, yellow and it's red and really hot! And

you know that one can't bring fresh things here. But I've brought some, Sarita! I've brought chiles, all the food that, no, no [laughs]...I've brought *carnitas*, meat, you can't bring pork. But they [U.S. Customs] didn't look through my bag! They didn't look through it! I've also brought bread....

Sara: *Pan dulce*?

Alina: Yes, *pan dulce*. What else have I brought? The *cazo* [saucepan]. Well, but it isn't an ingredient. But the saucepan where we make the *atole*.

Sara: Oh, so things to cook with too?

Alina: The saucepan, this...I brought chiles, those that I have here for making *mole*. (October 5, 2005)

Government regulations on the movement of meats, seeds, roots, and fresh fruits and vegetables restrict the movement of some foods. My research participants know full well what kinds of things are not allowed and what kinds of things are, as well as how to get around the regulations by putting fresh chiles in a bit of vinegar, for instance. Airline regulations only allow a certain amount of luggage, which also restricts the amount of food and food-related things that travel.

It is mostly women who travel with food. Many of the men I talked to were uninterested in bringing anything with them besides perhaps a few candies or a certain type of chile that they like. In an interview with Miguel and Inez, it seems that they would agree:

Miguel: Yeah, but sometimes people say, "I bring things," well I don't. No, no, no, I don't like it.

Inez: That's a man, but a woman always brings a lot of things [laughs], lots of food, decorations.

Miguel: No, it's going through Los Angeles and having to carry those damn suitcases, no, no, no, no!

Inez: No, but it's that you're a man.

Miguel: I never liked it. And for that reason I, never bother my fellow Mexicans to bring me something. I, yes, enough...one, something, but I just bring my bag and...

Inez: It's much easier [not to carry things].

Miguel: It's much easier [not to carry things]. And of course, like I told you, before people came loaded with stuff because...

Inez: Because there weren't a lot of things here. But now there are lots of things here. (October 25, 2005)

The majority of my participants who regularly travel with food are women whose immediate families live in Anchorage. In fact, of the ten families who live in Anchorage and travel frequently to Mexico, in interviews with a family member, eight said that they always carry food with them. On the other hand, of the six single men who I met and interviewed, only two said they always travel with food, while two others said they sometimes carry food with them when they travel, or that they have in the past. In Mexico, where women are associated with food and cooking, men often do not have access to (or interest in) this information and may not know how to cook at all upon their arrival in the United States. While it has changed somewhat, in Acuitzio it is generally considered inappropriate for a man to do female domestic chores (such as cooking or cleaning) or to attempt to raise children himself (Wiest 1973:189). Furthermore, many households in Acuitzio employ domestic workers to do the bulk of the domestic chores. This is not the case in Alaska, however. In Alaska, men who have migrated alone do learn to cook at the very least out of necessity or because they enjoy it. It is also something considered appropriate. The change in attitude towards cooking by (some) migrant men is likely due to gender role shifts that have resulted out of necessity when men migrate alone as well as larger society-wide changes in the roles of men and women. As a result, some men do travel with food. Consider Antonio, for instance, who I interviewed in Acuitzio:

Antonio: That's where they make the bread, those guys. And it's delicious. It only needs some butter, that's what they [the men who bake the bread] tell me [laughs].

Sara: And you bring this bread to Alaska?

Antonio: To Alaska, yeah. They really like the bread, the bread from here [Acuitzio].

Sara: Who, the people from French Oven?

Antonio: No, friends that I have there, I brought them each a piece or two or three. I took something like, seventy pieces. I took *corundas*, *uchepos*, cheese, and mole as a paste. And, and I brought these sweets. And what else did I bring? Something else I brought. Or like, I brought two suitcases full of...of bread and that, yeah [laughs]...they [the airline] didn't charge me, I didn't pay anything, no. But yeah, they [the suitcases] were really heavy. I had the *corundas* in my backpack. But it was so heavy, right? [laughs]

Sara: That's funny. But [was the food] more for yourself or for friends that you have there?

Antonio: Yeah, for friends, yeah. Yeah, this time I took enough and... I arrived and well, later, later divided it up [for] Luisa, [for] everyone.

Sara: And before you didn't bring anything, or?

Antonio: Before, very little. Or for example, when I was in Texas there, for example twice I, well, even meat I brought sometimes. But we crossed by car and there wasn't a problem. Now, no, no you can't. I took *chorizo*, I took dried meat but right now, no. And anyway, well, chorizo, that they won't let you pass with. Nor chiles that have seeds. We, for instance, we've also brought chiles but in vinegar. We make it with those yellow ones, those...

Sara: The *manzanos*.

Antonio: Yeah, the *manzanos*. And we put them in vinegar in a jar with the lid put on tightly.

Sara: Oh, so you can take them in vinegar but not...

Antonio: A little bit of vinegar so that it won't spill because, ah... in the airport opening the bags, ooh! And all the way to Alaska [laughs]. (November 30, 2005)

In Acuitzio, too, I met people who prepared the foods that people travel to Alaska with. I wrote in my field notes that:

Rosa told me that she's been making *mole en pasta* (mole paste) since she was age twelve. She sells it. Her sister Ana takes some back to Alaska with her, but takes more *en polvo* (powdered) because Rosa doesn't use preservatives, so her mole paste doesn't last as long nor travel as well. (November 26, 2005)

I also met a woman selling bread in the plaza who said that she has sold bread to people on their way to Alaska. As I wrote in my fieldnotes that day,

She has a table in the plaza with bread stacked up on a flowered tablecloth. There are about four or five kinds of rather colorful bread. She said that the bread with the *atole* in the middle is the most popular. A customer can call her and she'll make the bread and pack it up so it'll be ready when people leave to go back to wherever they work in the US. She said that her bread has been all the way to Alaska (December 5, 2005).

However, it is not only food that is traveling; food-related things and ideas also travel between Mexico and Alaska and places in-between. Recipes and ideas, customs such as what time of day one should eat and what kinds of foods are appropriate, and memories about certain foods and times or places where they should be eaten, also travel between places.

Daily meal times are quite different in Acuitzio, with a mid-morning meal and the main meal of the day around 3:00 or 4:00 in the afternoon, supplemented by a snack or *cena* later on in the evening. In North America, however, social convention and work schedules are arranged around an earlier breakfast, midday lunch, and evening main meal. This is something that many of my research participants said was difficult to adjust to. The times when one ought to eat and what or how much should be eaten are ideas that people bring with them when they move between Mexico and Alaska and back again. It is not only about adjusting to new eating schedules. Those eating schedules are part of the way of life in the United States, part of entering a wage labor economy. Adjustment to a new eating schedule also represents an adjustment to a new way of life. Food and ideas about food thus become directly tied into economic processes and features of wage labor in the United States.

Recipes and other forms of knowledge about food and eating are also things that travel. Many of my participants learned to cook from their mothers and grandmothers in Mexico. One of my participants, Ivonne, who is originally from California, married a man from Acuitzio and they now live in a new home with their three sons in Anchorage. When she married her husband, Fernando, she decided that it was important for her to learn to cook in the regional style, in the style of Michoacán. She makes this point in an interview:

Ivonne: Where Fernando's from, like even the *mole* [is different]. The *mole* in the north of Mexico tends to be sweet. And the *mole* [the] kind from the region Fernando is from, is bitter, it's different. And, um, to the south it's sweet too. So in that central region, the *mole's* more bitter. Even the way that, like, *atole* is prepared or *menudo*, um, or even the way *enchiladas* are eaten is, it's different from region to region and it's just probably the availability of ingredients, I would say. Just what's more available.

Sara: And how was it for you to learn recipes from your mother-in-law?

Ivonne: It was interesting because she has so much patience. She has a lot of patience and, it was easy because they're not very difficult recipes.

Sara: And you wanted to learn?

Ivonne: Yeah, I wanted to learn.

Sara: For Fernando or for yourself?

Ivonne: For me, because I liked it. And for them [her husband and sons] too, because the food is really good and there are things that Fernando likes. The foods, they're different. For example, the first time that I made lentils, I learned from my grandmother. And when my grandmother makes lentils, she puts cilantro. And Fernando's mom doesn't put cilantro. Anyway, they're...

Sara: And the recipes are written down or memorized?

Ivonne: Some are written down, the more difficult ones that have more ingredients, or if there are measurements involved. But normally, I remember them. Because they're simple. They're simple. And if I don't remember, I could always call her [my mother-in-law]. I call her on the phone: "Suegra, how do I make this?" (September 28, 2005)

As Ivonne shows, when she asks her *suegra* (mother-in-law) for help with recipes, connections between people are also built and maintained through food. This also helps in building the transnational social field that connects Anchorage and Acuitzio. Memories and recollections are also an important part of the foodscape that connects Acuitzio and Anchorage. As Simon Choo (2004:209) writes, "the strong connections between the senses and memory facilitates the ability of foods to provide for an imagination of place, community, identity, and time—a connection to childhoods, homelands, reminiscences and nostalgic outpourings—but they also provide a means through which people...connect or reconnect with self and place."

This kind of "home cooking" (Law 2001)—the connection to home created through cooking—is something that was important to my research participants. Indeed, as Miguel said in an interview:

Unfortunately sometimes a person doesn't value our culture, our, each country...each place has their own. Talking about, about food, well they never go to buy it. Even though now we have access to many different kinds of food, we are preoccu-

pled with making our, our own too. The *antojitos*, *los tamales*, *el pozole*. It's that which identifies Mexico, in particular and in general. Because for sure, wherever you want, in all of Mexico I feel that...they're well known, tamales and *pozole*, *si*? Although the *pozole* [can be found] almost wherever [in Mexico]...and there are different kinds of *pozole*. Only that sometimes,...you focus yourself on what you're used to, or how your mother made it in your home. (October 25, 2005)

And as Victoria says, food brings people together, connecting family to each other:

But I dunno, I guess that the food does bring us comfort somehow...somehow to us. Well, like if we're gonna make a party we always cook Mexican food and it does bring family together. It does bring comfort, on us. I don't know why, but it does bring family together, the food. For me it's like, I'm just, I'm gonna make *menudo* and I'm just calling my dad and my mom, I make *menudo*, just come and eat it. And that is the way that we get together. Want it or not but we do get together, 'cause food bring us together. (October 13, 2005)

Food is something that represents home, that evokes memories of home or nostalgia for a different place and time. One evening I went to Maria's house to make *buñuelos*, a crispy, sweet snack traditionally served with *atole blanco* in the plaza (at least in Acuitzio). What is interesting is that getting together to make and eat *buñuelos* evoked memories and discussion about Acuitzio. This is something that contributes to the creation of a transnational social field that connects Anchorage and Acuitzio through imagination. Eating *buñuelos* and drinking *atole blanco* allows for the enjoyment of the taste, aroma, and texture of home (Law 2001), connecting Anchorage to Acuitzio through the senses. The opposite happened for me later on, however. For me, eating *buñuelos* made me reminisce about Anchorage. As I wrote in my field notes: "Sitting in the plaza eating *buñuelos* and drinking *atole blanco* made me think about when we made them in Alaska. The Acuitzio ones are really thin, melt in your mouth and tasty, especially together with *atole blanco*. It was so much fun when we got together to make them [in Alaska]" (December 7, 2005).

While I ate *buñuelos* in the plaza in Acuitzio I thought about Anchorage, something that (at first) seems contradictory. For me, *buñuelos* evoke an evening in Anchorage, while for my research participants, *buñuelos* evoke a variety of evenings in the plaza in Acuitzio. These contradictions

connect Anchorage and Acuitzio through memory and imagination and as social practice; these imaginings also *create* Anchorage and Acuitzio for us. What I mean by that is that by making and eating *buñuelos* in Anchorage while thinking about Acuitzio (or vice-versa in my case), my participants create an Acuitzio, an imagined Acuitzio, or an imagined community (Anderson 1983; Appadurai 1996) of Acuitzences in which they live their lives. In a way, you can be in more than one place and time while eating *buñuelos*: you are at once in Maria's kitchen in Anchorage while also in the plaza in Acuitzio (or vice versa), with memory and imagination negotiating between the two.

People also travel with food-related things. Copper *cazuelas*, *tamale* steaming pots, *comales*, and clay pots are some of the things that people bring. Clay pots, which are used for cooking beans in Mexico and said to give a special and delicious flavor to them, are an interesting case. Upon arrival in the United States, new migrants find out from others in the Mexican community that they are unhealthy to cook in due to the possibility of lead poisoning from the glaze (still known as *greta* in Michoacán).¹⁰ Victoria provides another interesting example of food-related things that travel. As I wrote in my field notes:

In Victoria's kitchen there is a clock and some pots and other things hanging on the wall from Santa Clara del Cobre. She says that her kitchen is too small [in Anchorage], that in Mexico her grandpa ground corn so there were always lots of people in the kitchen there. She also has shelves with little miniature pots on them. She said that in Mexico her grandma has shelves all around her kitchen with little pots on them. Victoria said she wants to do that too. (October 8, 2005)

For Victoria, the idea of what a kitchen should look like is one that comes from her grandmother's kitchen in Mexico, and so do the pots and other decorations that she adorns it with.

EATING TRANSNATIONALLY AND LIVING TRANSNATIONALLY

Food and ideas about food and eating travel regularly and in fairly high quantities between Mexico and Alaska, connecting those places and the people in them. This traveling food becomes both a marker and a material reality of the

transnational connection between places and the transnational lives that people live. Food is deeply symbolic of place in this case of Acuitzio, and it is a place that travels alongside people in their suitcases and Rubbermaid containers on their way back to Anchorage. In this way, people are sometimes "eating transnationally" in Anchorage in that they are eating food that is a "condition of cultural interconnectedness and mobility across space" (Ong 1999:4), anchored in particular places and homes, in this case Acuitzio and Anchorage. While away, food becomes even more important—"Mexican food" becomes an important marker of identity, of home, of Mexico.

While food doesn't really travel from Alaska to Acuitzio, ideas about food definitely do. That food prepared with lard is unhealthy, that sushi is tasty, or that pottery is dangerous due to the threat of lead poisoning are all examples of ideas that travel. My research participants generally carry many consumer goods back to Acuitzio, things like t-shirts and shoes and souvenirs of Alaska as gifts to family members—sometimes up to thirteen suitcases worth!—but they do not bring food from Alaska to Mexico. Typically "Alaska" foods such as smoked salmon, king crab, halibut, and blueberries often have a very short shelf-life, need to be frozen for travel, may not be permitted to cross the Mexico-U.S. border, and are quite expensive. It seems as though remittances, consumer goods, and American ideas about food flow in one direction while food moves in another. People, of course, move from Mexico to Alaska and back again, often making stops along the way.

Eating transnationally is part of how lives are lived across borders and boundaries, and in more than one place at one time. As Nina Glick Schiller et al. (1995:50) write, "transnational processes are located within the life experiences of individuals and families, making up the [fabric] of daily activities, concerns, fears and achievements," so it can be said that many "migrants live transnational lives," something emphasized by Roger Rouse's (1992) "transnational migrant circuit" and his notion of "cultural bifocality." Referring to his work with migrants from Aguililla, Mexico, and Redwood City, California, Rouse (2002:162) writes:

Aguilillans have forged socio-spatial arrangements that seriously challenge the dominant ways of reading migration. First, it has become inadequate to see Aguillan migration as a movement between

10. While the original Spanish glaze, also known as *greta*, did contain harmful lead oxide, most glazed pottery today either "contains no lead or is fired at sufficiently high temperatures to neutralize any noxious effects" (Balch 1999). The idea that the glazes are harmful persists among the Mexican community in Anchorage but not in Mexico.

distinct communities, understood as the loci of distinct sets of social relationships.

Kin and friends may live thousands of miles away or in the immediate vicinity. Migrants are able “to maintain spatially extended relationships as actively and effectively as the ties that link them to their neighbor” (Rouse 2002:162). With thanks especially to the growing use of the telephone (and other technologies, I would imagine), people can not only keep in touch periodically but also participate in household decision-making and familial events even from a considerable distance. Rouse (2002) uses the term “transnational migrant circuit” to refer to the fact that “through the continuous circulation of people, money, goods, and information, the various settlements have become so closely woven together that, in an important sense, they have come to constitute a single community spread across a variety of sites.” The other sociospatial arrangement forged by Aguilillan migrants is that these migrants orchestrate their lives within the circuit as a whole rather than any one locale—they are living and working within a transnational framework, a transnational space where they maintain two (or possibly more) distinct ways of life. As a result, Rouse refers to their “cultural bifocality, a capacity to see the world alternately through quite different kinds of lenses” (Rouse 1992:41).

The idea that transnational migrants are living their lives in transnational space is also emphasized by Michael Kearney’s (2004) “articulatory migrant network” and by Alison Mountz and Richard Wright’s (1996) description of a transnational community where “alterations in the conceptualization and utilization of space and time enabled the creation of a *single* transnational locale, so that “the space that once divided two physically distant and distinct places—San Agustín, a village in the state of Oaxaca, and Poughkeepsie—has been eliminated” (Mountz and Wright 1996:404). Also, Peggy Levitt writes of “social remittances” that flow between and connect Miraflores and Boston with “fashion, food, and forms of speech, as well as appliances and home decorating styles, attest[ing] to these strong connections” (Levitt 2001:2) between places. Each of these examples allude to the fact that transnational subjects are living their lives in two or more societies simultaneously, societies that may become so intercon-

nected through frequent long-distance communication, the media, the imagination, and the movement of people, money, and things that they may be conceived of as a single transnational space such as “Oaxacalifornia” (Kearney 2004) or Oaxaca-Poughkeepsie, or OP for short (Mountz and Wright 1996). Transmigrants “draw upon and create fluid and multiple identities grounded in both their society of origin and in the host societies” (Glick Schiller et al. 1992:11). As such, their identities also link them simultaneously to more than one nation.

For such transnational subjects, Purnima Mankekar (2005:203) argues, “food acquires a distinctive valence, and a distinctively gendered valence. . . . As markers of cultural continuity/difference, hybridity and/or assimilation, the gastronomic habits of [transnational] subjects become especially fraught areas for contestations and negotiations of gender, community, and kinship.” Quite appropriately, an article by sociologist Peggy Levitt (2004) about the lives of Dominican and Gujarati transnational migrants in Boston is entitled “Salsa and Ketchup: Transnational migrants straddle two worlds,” with condiments essentially standing in the title as markers and material realities of those two worlds.

Certainly, I found that my participants are not only eating transnationally, they are living transnationally. Consider this statement from an article in the *Chicago Tribune* about migrant hometown associations¹¹ in Chicago, one of which is from Acuitzio:

“The nation-state concept is changing” said Gutierrez, 46, who came to Chicago in 1986 and led one of the Midwest’s largest federations of hometown associations. “You don’t have to say, ‘I am Mexican,’ or, ‘I am American.’ You can be a good Mexican citizen and a good American citizen and not have that be a conflict of interest. Sovereignty is flexible.” (Olivo and Avila 2007)

In other words, you can live transnationally. Day-to-day life in Anchorage, right down to the food on one’s plate, can be intertwined with life in Acuitzio and vice versa. Migrants in Chicago, Anchorage, California, and elsewhere are able to be in two places at once, to be Mexican, yet Alaskan, to be both and neither. Memory, capital, information, language, technology, media, food,

11. Hometown associations are clubs that function as social networks whose members pool money earned in the United States to fund community projects in hometowns in Mexico (Olivo and Avila 2007). Organized around hometown, home region, or home state, there is no such group currently operating among Michoacanos in Anchorage. Interest in forming such a group is growing, encouraged by a hometown association in Chicago which recently helped (along with the federal and state governments) to fund two projects in Acuitzio: a retirement home and computers for the school and library.

clothing, and, increasingly, politics connect Anchorage and Acuitzio and the people in them. In the statement above, this applies even to citizenship. Indeed, many of the Mexican migrant workers and their family members I met held dual citizenship and sometimes dual passports. Nearly all had some sort of legal status in the United States; some were formal residents, others held work visas. With this legal status comes ease in crossing borders and flexibility in citizenship, cultural, formal, or otherwise. Indeed, sometimes “flexibility, migration, and relocations, instead of being coerced or resisted, have become practices to strive for rather than stability” (Ong 1999:19). However, even though traveling subjects such as Mexican migrant workers are “increasingly able to escape localization by state authorities, traveling subjects are never free of regulations set by state power, market operations, and kinship norms” (Ong 1999:19–20).

CONCLUSION: RE-PRESENTING ANCHORAGE

In this paper, I have written about how transnational lives and identities are lived out as much through what people eat—or say they eat—as through other global cultural flows. This is what I call “eating transnationally”—meals that connect places and the people in them or foods that depend on interconnectedness and mobility across space (Ong 1999). The foodscape, and the food and food-related things and ideas of which it is made, connects my participants to more than one nation-state simultaneously. Thus, they are eating transnationally by cooking, eating, traveling with, shopping for, talking about, or even reminiscing about foods that connect Mexico and Alaska. Food symbolizes this transnationality, while also literally providing an example of it by traveling between Mexico and Alaska alongside migrant workers and their families. Transnational identity, like the food people carry, depends on these kinds of connections between places and people, on connections to homelands, imagined communities created but also transformed by new places and spaces.

I have explored what kinds of food and food-related things and ideas travel, who travels with them, as well

as how and why they travel. I found that traveling with food is very common and that it is mainly specialty or regional foods that are brought to Alaska, where the basics of Mexican cooking are now available. Government restrictions limit the travel of some foods, while others travel commonly and relatively freely. There is also a gender dimension to the foodscape so that women generally carry more food more often. Finally, many foods and ideas about food travel for nostalgic reasons, for “home cooking” (Law 2001) and the creation of a sense of home in Anchorage.¹² “Home cooking” and the creation of a sense of home through cooking and eating is something that allows my research participants to maintain a “Mexican” way of life in Alaska, to maintain and exist in more than one way of life simultaneously (Rouse 2002).

I also found that the travel of food is tied into the conditions of global capitalism and that the flow of food and food-related things and ideas is related to other global cultural flows. For example, the fact that food moves from Mexico to Alaska at all is tied into international trade agreements, the setting of exchange rates, and the growth of a service-based economy in the U.S., among other conditions of global capitalism, so that there are far more stable and high-paying (relatively speaking) positions in Alaska and other parts of the United States than in Mexico. This makes transnational life advantageous and may encourage forms of flexible citizenship and flexible identities.

Eating transnationally for Mexican migrant workers and their families in Alaska is, then, about the connections and interconnections between places and the people in them, between Anchorage and Acuitzio, between Acuitzences in Alaska and those in Mexico and elsewhere. Traveling foods can be seen as material instances of transnational identity—things that actually travel and connect Acuitzio and Anchorage and the people in them. These traveling foods serve as important markers of Mexican identity, something that becomes especially important while in Alaska. Moreover, the unevenness of the cultural flows—that food travels in one direction (from Acuitzio to Anchorage) while capital and consumer goods move in another (from Alaska to Mexico)—hints at the complexity of the relationship between identity, consumption, and transnationality.

12. For a discussion of other aspects of creating a sense of home in Anchorage, see “Impressions of Transnational Mexican Life in Anchorage, Alaska: Acuitzences in the Far North” by Raymond E. Wiest (this volume). Dr. Wiest headed a larger Social Sciences and Humanities Council of Canada (SSHRC) funded multiyear and multisited project generally concerned with the “theoretical and practical understandings of the impacts of globalizing forces” (Wiest 2002:10), and the examination of how “mobile livelihoods affect social relations among workers and their sense of identity, their social and cultural positioning, their sense of community, and their sense of empowerment” (Wiest 2002:10). My research is part of this larger project, focusing specifically on food and transnationality among Mexican migrant workers and their families in Alaska.

That people are living and eating transnationally in Anchorage means that the conceptual distance between Anchorage and Acuitzio has shrunk. They are connected spaces. However, popular imagination and the anthropological literature make little mention of the connections between Alaska and Mexico, or of the very rich cultural diversity of Anchorage in particular. Reminders of Alaska are plentiful in Acuitzio. Souvenir clothing with images or locations from Alaska are seen on town residents with surprising (for me) regularity, as are license plates from Alaska and many other American states. During my time in Acuitzio, I was almost constantly reminded of locations *por el otro lado* (on the other side) of the border. My work on this project has also encouraged me to reconcile “Mexicanness” with “Alaskan,” to think about Alaska in new ways—still as the land of stunning natural beauty and seemingly untouched wilderness, of rich Native culture but *also* as a more vibrant cosmopolitan and multicultural place, home to many different people from many different parts of the world who bring their foods and ideas about foods with them (Anchorage Daily News 2006).

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This paper was first presented as part of *The Northern City and Ethnic Complexity: City as Portal, Place, and Process*, a panel at the 2006 Society for Applied Anthropology Annual Meeting in Vancouver, Canada. As well, this paper is derived from my master’s thesis entitled *Eating Transnationally: Mexican Migrant Workers in Alaska* (University of Manitoba, 2006). Travel and field support were provided by Ray Wiest (Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, Standard Research Grant 410-2003-0955, 2003–2007). Additional support was provided by a University of Manitoba Graduate Fellowship (UMGF) and a Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada—Canada Graduate Scholarship, Masters. The author would like to thank Ray Wiest and the anonymous reviewers for their very helpful comments on earlier drafts of this paper. Thanks especially to Kerry Feldman for his encouragement and work coordinating this special issue. *Muchísimas gracias también a todos los participantes y amigos de los dos lados. Mil gracias por compartiendo su tiempo y comida, sus recetas, y sus cuentos.*

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