VISIONS OF COMMUNITY: MEXICAN COMMUNITY IDENTITY IN A TRANSNATIONAL CONTEXT

by

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A Thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of
The University of Manitoba in partial fulfilment
of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

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Abstract

This thesis discusses the dynamic social processes involved in creating an evolving sense of community identity within the context of transnational labour migration from the town of Acuitzio del Canje, Michoacán, to sites throughout the US and Mexico. Based on "strategically situated single site" field research in Mexico, I have sought to understand the complexity of visions of community by examining the ways that migration fits into the community's self-conceptions and the practice of social life in the town, as well as among its migrating members. To focus this objective, I look to communication strategies, especially the social implications of media and communications technologies such as the Internet and cellular telecommunications in maintaining, (re)creating, and cultivating interconnections between migrants and residents of the community. By drawing attention to the adoption and use of new technologies, this research points to both differences and continuities between generations of Acuitzences, and highlights the practical and symbolic elements of the conceptualization of community identity for people living transnational lives.

Acknowledgments

For my dad,

whose interests and ideas introduced me to the world and its many wonders

and inspired my own journey.

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Chapter One

Introduction

What constitutes 'community' for individuals, households, and regions that depend economically on transnational labour migration? In an era of global capitalism – where ideas, people, goods, and money move across international borders – spatial images cannot adequately capture the complexity of social arrangements that are vital to a sense of community. Indeed, it is among social relations, familial networks, and channels of communication that a sense of community identity is created and maintained.

This research examines several aspects of the social creation of 'community' for the people of Acuitzio del Canje, Michoacán, Mexico. Historically, the residents of this predominantly agricultural village in south-central Mexico have participated in labour migration to other areas of Mexico, as well as international migration to sites in the United States, thus, at different points in time, making them residents of other towns, cities, and even different countries. The objective of this project is to understand the dynamic social processes involved in creating Acuitzio's evolving community identity. I have sought to understand the complexity of visions of community by examining the ways that migration fits into the community's self-conceptions, paying attention to inter-generational, class, and gender differences. To focus this objective, I look to communication strategies, the social implications of media and communications technologies such as the Internet and telecommunications, as well as other practical and symbolic interconnections between migrants and the other members of the community.

A set of interrelated issues were explored through interviews and participant observation: 1) the use of imageries, symbols, histories, and practices that relate to 'community' identity and how it is created and maintained across distance and time; and 2) the role of communications in perceptions of community, specifically the use of Internet and other Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), such as cellular telephones, in creating and maintaining community identity and cohesiveness. Additional

factors of importance include the intergenerational visions of Acuitzio and Acuitzences, as well as gender and class-based differences in attitudes toward migration, community imagery, and the reproduction of prevailing norms. Paying close attention to spatial and temporal elements as well as social, cultural, and economic networks, I explore informants' views of what constitutes their community. The purpose of this research is to document the ways in which a town's citizenry are affected by the challenges presented through the perpetuation of labour migration, seeking to understand the ways that images of 'community' are challenged through migration practices and the adoption and use of new technologies.

CONTEXT AND RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

In broad terms, the proposed project is situated in the current wave of literature and debate on globalization (Appadurai 2002; Friedman 2003; Sadowski-Smith 2002), transnationalism (Bhachu 1996; Bibler Coutin 2003; Friedman 2002; Glick Schiller et al. 1992; Mahler 1998), and labour migration (Appadurai 1991; Canales 2003; De Genova 2202; Dinerman 1982; Durand and Massey 1992; Durand et al. 2001; Kearney 1986, 1991; Rouse 1992; Singer and Massey 1998; Wiest 1970, 1973, 1979, 1980, 1983a, 1983b, 1984; and Wilson 1993), drawing on the work of Wiest in the community of Acuitzio to provide historical context (1970, 1973, 1979, 1980, 1983a, 1983b, 1984, personal communications).

For a community such as Acuitzio, fluctuation and weakness in state and local economies has influenced the acceptability of certain economic and social choices, with labour migration to the US a favoured option for many in the area. From a Dependency Theory perspective, local economic capacity is often diminished and 'sending communities' tend to continue to lose many of their working-aged residents to migration (Dinerman 1982; Durand and Massey 1992; Durand et al. 2001; Kearney 1986, 1991, 1996; Massey and Espinosa 1997; Rouse 1991). Although migrants may make more money in the US than at home, their social and economic status in the US often remains low, making the country unattractive for immigration or long-term migration (Bibler Coutin 2003; Dinerman 1982; Durand and Massey 1992; Durand et al. 2001; Kearney 1986, 1991, 1996; Ong 1996; Rouse 1991). Historically, migrant labourers from Acuitzio

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have tended to orient toward local agricultural production, discussing their future dreams of returning to the area once they have accumulated enough capital for investment in land and other resources (Wiest 1973, 1979). With the expansion of the Mexican economy beyond agricultural production, along with a weakening of this sector in the local economy, the impetus to migration is yet greater; even those with professional educations and degrees find themselves contemplating their prospects in the US. To a large extent contemporary migration from the area continues to be seen as a temporary measure; migrants still discuss their future plans in terms of returning to Mexico, but based on my interviews, returning to their country of birth has increasingly become a retirement option or it is placed in the context of potential business options outside of the agricultural sector. Nevertheless, the agricultural sector remains a large contributor to migration streams.

Throughout their sojourn abroad, migrants tend to sustain and generate social and economic networks through communications, monetary remittances, and returning 'home' periodically (Glick Schiller et al. 1992; Kearney 1986, 1991, 1996; Mahler 1998; Rouse 1991; Wiest 1973, 1979). With the development of improved communications technologies, the social space of Acuitzio is extended to the furthest climes in which an Acuitzence finds him or herself.

The reproduction of migration practices over many generations is reflected in peoples' visions of who, where, and what constitutes their 'community.' Rouse proposes the concept of a "transnational migrant circuit" to capture the sense of "a single community spread across a variety of sites" as settlements become closely associated through migration (1991:15). He, along with other authors (Appadurai 1991; Glick Schiller et al. 1992; Kearney 1991, 1996), contend that spatial boundaries dissolve as social and familial connections, as well as communications networks, create a broad sense of community identity. Similarly, Wiest (1973) found that most people in Acuitzio consider migrants members of local households despite their absence, even those away from the community for long periods of time.

The influence of migration has undoubtedly been important in Acuitzio over successive generations, but it has not always been a popular decision in the village (Wiest

1984). While embraced by some individuals, others make their way without migration for a variety of reasons. Opposition to the practice has contributed to community problems, even acts of violence, as in the early 1980s when public opinion shifted critically against the community's reliance on migration to *el Norte* (Wiest 1984). Yet, with changing economic circumstances under trade agreements such as NAFTA, the dismantling of *ejido* (communal) land provisions, and other poor conditions in the Mexican economy, migration has remained a dynamic force in Acuitzio over generations. The reproduction of this migration pattern is similar to Reichert's "migrant syndrome" (1981), a cycle in which labour migration is perpetuated over time and through successive generations.

Many scholars researching migration have discussed the perpetuation of migration practices across the generations, building on Reichert, to develop theoretical and practical understandings of what some call a "culture of migration" (see Cohen 2004b; Kandel and Massey 2002; Santamaría Gómez 2003; Stephen 2007). Writing about migrants from Oaxaca to the US in the Introduction to his book, *The Culture of Migration in Southern Mexico*, Jeffrey Cohen notes,

> By 'culture of migration,' I mean to argue, first, that migration is pervasive—it occurs throughout the region and has a historical presence that dates to the first half of the twentieth century. Second, the decision to migrate is one that people make as part of their everyday experiences. Third and finally, the decision to migrate is accepted by most Oaxacans as one path toward economic well-being (2004b:5).

Indeed, the people of Acuitzio, much like the Oaxacan migrants with whom Cohen works, have incorporated migration practices into their normal life experiences and expectations, as well as their prospects for livelihood and economic prosperity. In this way, the influence of migration is manifest in local activities, such as celebrations, and in the overall community identity.

Community-oriented activities have both practical and symbolic effects on creating a sense of community across spatial divides and are a major impetus for migrants to return periodically for visits during their time abroad. Community fiestas, both secular and religious, are used as a mechanism for establishing and maintaining broader 'community' networks; re-introducing migrants to the community that they left behind, and introducing the migrants' children, who may have lived their entire lives in the US,

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to their 'roots' in Mexico (Contreras 2004; Octavio Montes, personal communications, January 2004).

In Acuitzio, the month of December is the most important time of year for the return of migrants, coinciding with the town's festival and historical recreation of the exchange of Belgian and French prisoners of war for Mexican soldiers in 1865 on December 5th, the event for which Acuitzio del Canje was named, as well as *el Día de Guadalupe*, Christmas, New Years, *el Día de los Reyes* (Epiphany) and a myriad of other activities. Indeed, in response to the influx of migrants at this time of year, many familial events such as baptisms, *quinceañeras* ("Coming Out" parties for girls of 15 years of age), and weddings are specifically planned for December and January. Additionally, the community's large *jaripeo* (rodeo) for migrants has been successfully organised for the beginning of January to take advantage of the number of migrants returning to the community. Other important community events are held during *Semana Santa* (Easter week), drawing people from surrounding communities, other parts of Mexico, as well as from the US.

With a strong sense of Acuitzio's history, the issue of intergenerational differences is another element of this research. Most literature dealing with distinctions between generations has cast these differences within the context of *immigration*, with variation in attitudes and practices appearing by the second generation and the adoption of the predominant cultural norms of their 'adopted' home in the third generation (Friedman 2003, Mahler 1998; Ong 1996; Rouse 1991, 1992). While this earlier research is not specific to the context of repeat, 'circular' migration, I believe that it can be instructive for the proposed research; highlighting processes that are likely to be replicated in the context of labour migration (see Rouse 1991). This may represent an arena in which the proposed research could add to theoretical understandings of transnationalism. Other research dealing with intergenerational relations in contexts other than migration and immigration may also be instructive (Chant and McIlwaine 1998; Lamb 2000).

An important aspect of intergenerational attitudes is embodied in the consumption of cultural commodities and the use of communication technologies for establishing and

affirming social linkages. Wiest (1979, 1984) found that media-related items, such as radios, televisions, VCRs, stereos, and audio recording devices, were among the first consumer items purchased by migrants and their households in Acuitzio. In terms of the research associated with this thesis, one of the largest differences noted between generations is in the adoption of communication strategies such as the Internet.

The intensive use of the Internet to create and maintain social linkages between migrants and their home community has been noted by social scientists, although has only recently been studied to any great extent (Benítez 2006; Octavio Montes, personal communications, January 2004; Morley and Robbins 1995; Panagakos and Horst 2006; Stephen 2007). With even the smallest village connected to the World Wide Web, opportunities for personal communications via email, instant messaging, message boards, and community-oriented websites cultivate community and familial linkages across great distances (Benítez 2006; Gong et al. 2007; Octavio Montes, personal communications, January 2004; Stephen 2007). Not only does access to the Internet allow ease of personal communications, it also has further consequences for the creation and re-creation of community orientation. With this in mind, the creation of a website dedicated to community issues and events has exciting potential in celebrating, (re)creating, and (re)kindling a sense of community among Acuitzences both in Mexico and in the US.

Several anthropologists discuss the incorporation of the mass media and technology into the lived experiences of transnational migrants (Appadurai 1991; Benítez 2006; Friedman 2002, 2003; Kearney 1996; Rouse 1991; Stephen 2007). Kearney believes that communication networks between migrants serve as paths for people, information and value. "Indeed, the direct generation, transmission, and consumption of signs, symbols, and value through these media are variations of the communication dynamics of networks, of which the migration of persons is a primary form" (1996:126). In other words, he sees that the consumption of media and communications within the framework of the transnational community serves to expand the limits of transnational space. He also suggests that this situation becomes 'natural' over successive generations (Kearney 1996:126).

With the advent of greater and less expensive means of communication such as the Internet, email, and chat programs, I entered the community with a sense that these media would act as an expansion of social space for Acuitzences both abroad and within their community. This thesis reflects and follows the early developments associated with the World Wide Web and communications technology on the Internet as well as cellular telephone technology amongst Acuitzences, drawing on theory related to media and communications (Artz 2003; Benítez 2006; Dávila 2002; Ginsburg 2002; Gong et al. 2007; Himpele 2002; Horst and Miller 2005; Panagakos and Horst 2006; Sánchez et al. 2003; Spitulnik 1993; Wilding 2006; Wilk 2002a, 2002b). This literature is concerned with the transnational character of media forms, as well as issues of representation, both local and global, in the media.

The research for this thesis was undertaken in the community during the peak months of migrant return to Acuitzio from the end of October 2004 through March 2005, with subsequent visits in May-June 2005 and February 2006 that solidified previous research and relationships, as well as creating new areas for inquiry. The very subject matter of this thesis – development of community identity and its reflection in communications strategies – continues to be a reflected in sustained interactions with members of the community, both resident and ex-patriot, although for the purposes of the research presented here, the research reached its conclusion in February 2006.

The thesis begins with an overview of the theoretical perspectives employed in the creation and analysis of the research presented here, paying special attention to literature dealing with transnationalism and transnational migration practices, as well as the interaction of these practices with identity creation and conceptions of community. Social networking and communications strategies will be examined within the context of transnationalism.

Upon laying out the theoretical framework of the study, in Chapter Three I turn to the methodological elements related to carrying out this research, including the challenges and limitations that I faced in the field and the areas in which my final research has diverged from my original research proposal. This chapter also includes details of research design, data collection and data analysis.

Chapter Four examines the importance of migration to the people of Acuitzio del Canje, Michoacán, detailing the stories of my research participants, both migrant and non-migrant. I also draw upon the work of Raymond Wiest in examining the longer-term patterns of migration from the community. Chapter Five continues in this vein, discussing elements of community identity that are reflected in social relationships, interactions, and community events. In this chapter I discuss the importance of festivities and events in the town in shaping a sense of community identity, and draw upon ways that Acuitzences themselves are developing their transnational identity through communications and the creation of a webpage dedicated to the community.

Chapters Six and Seven discuss in greater detail the issue of communications and the use of communications technologies in broadening the social space of Acuitzio to sites outside of the immediate geographic area of the town site. In Chapter Six I begin with a discussion of computer and Internet usage within the town, based on my own observations and those of some of my research participants. In Chapter Seven, I continue to discuss communications, drawing on the experiences of research participants to examine personal communication strategies, as well as introducing new and emergent areas of research related to cell phone technology.

The thesis concludes by examining the broader implications of communications strategies for community identity in the context of continued labour migration. In this section I also reflect upon and examine future developments and areas of emerging research as they relate to the community of Acuitzio.

Chapter Two
Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

Several related theoretical perspectives are employed in this thesis; the most broadly useful concept that I will introduce here is the idea of 'transnationalism'. This theoretical framework helps to situate the subject matter within the context of labour migration, as well as incorporating elements of identity construction, concepts of community, and communication strategies.

Following an outline of the literature on transnationalism, I focus on identity construction in a transnational context, detailing theoretical understandings of how identity is formulated and negotiated. I place emphasis on belonging and community inclusion, as well as touch on issues of gender, class, generation and intergenerational perspectives. Identity construction encompasses both individual and collective identity, leading into a discussion of community identity and concepts of community.

Rounding out the perspectives that underpin the thesis, I turn attention to social networks and networking and the literature on communications and media. In the context of transnationalism, the literature considers the adoption of communication strategies, consumption of media and communications, the nature of international communications, and how identity is negotiated, created, and perpetuated in an increasingly technologically and media-linked world.

The chapter concludes with brief discussions of other perspectives that have informed this research, including the long-range historical contextualisation of this work within that of Raymond Wiest in the community of Acuitzio and the recent MA thesis research of Sara Komarnisky (2006) who worked with Acuitzences in Alaska, as well as areas in which the current research may add to theoretical understanding.

Historically, the town of Acuitzio del Canje has been a 'sending community' for Mexican labour migration to the United States. Through the generations, labour migration from the town and the surrounding area has been perpetuated through complex social networks linking the town to sites throughout the US and Mexico in an effort to maintain households and increase economic potential. The research presented in this thesis attempts to better understand how community identity is created and maintained in the contemporary context of globalization and transnationalism, characterised by an ease of movement and communications brought about by improved technological innovation.

Transnationalism is typically seen as implying "a blurring, or... a reordering of the binary cultural, social, and epistemological distinctions of the modern period", (Kearney 1991:55). As the use of the transnationalism concept in social science literature has grown in the last few decades, a variety of terminology, such as "transnational social field" (Glick Schiller and Levitt 2004), "transnational migrant circuit" (Rouse 1991), "borderlands" (Alvarez 1995), and "scapes" (Appadurai 1990) in addition to the use of metaphors such as "network", has entered the scholarship to describe social relations in transnational contexts (Mahler 1998:75-76).

Scholars use the concept of transnationalism to describe the movement of capital and goods between different countries within the modern global capitalist system, the movement of people through labour migration, the immigration process, and other human movements across national borders. The transnationalism concept is also used to understand and explore the nature of modern communications and media. Referring to migration and immigration, the transnationalism model is used to assess and clarify issues of identity construction, community, and local and global political movements, linking people and lived experiences across spatial barriers and divides.

The concept of 'transnationalism' is associated theoretically with 'globalization' in the social science literature, with globalization referring to the broad processes and structures that connect together different areas of the world (Glick Schiller et al. 1992:8; Inda and Rosaldo 2002; Kearney 1991:57; Leach 1997:3). Not a new process, globalization has been occurring to varying degrees for centuries, although in its current

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form – encompassing economic, social and cultural landscapes with an ease and speed unprecedented in history – it has become a much more pervasive phenomenon (Leach 1997:3). Globalization creates the structural context upon which the transnational movement of people, goods, services, and communications may be better understood in the contemporary world. Most writers on the subject, including Glick Schiller et al. (1992), Gupta (1992), Kearney (1991, 1996), Leach (1997), Levin (2002), Mahler (1998), and Rouse (1992) clearly associate the globalization of capitalism with the emergence of processes of transnationalism.

As with globalization, discussions of transnationalism have been critiqued for emphasizing a phenomenon with historical antecedents and treating it as new. Several writers have drawn attention to the characteristics of historic waves of immigrants to the US who remain connected to their homeland as evidence that contemporary transnational behaviours are extensions of earlier behaviours that have occurred for generations (see Glick Schiller et al. 1992; Leach 1997:3, Kearney 1991:59). Nevertheless, contemporary theorists recognise that the current conditions of globalization, such as communication technologies, international flights, and mass media, have created a stronger structural web and increased possibilities for transnational behaviours and identities to develop in the contemporary world (Artz 2003; Kearney 1996:124; Leach 1997:3).

While globalization and transnationalism are linked, Michael Kearney articulates the difference between these concepts by saying that transnationalism is typically more limited in its range and purview than globalization (1995). "Whereas global processes are largely decentered from specific national territories and take place in a global space, transnational processes are anchored in, and transcend, one or more nation-states. Thus transnationalism is the term of choice when referring, for example, to the migration of nationals across the borders of one or of more nations" (Kearney 1996:548).

In fact, the transnationalism concept has proven especially useful for writers studying international labour migration and immigration practices. Social scientists such as Bjéren (1997), Cohen (2001, 2004a, 2004b), Kearney (1991, 1996), Levin (2002), Pratt and Yeoh (2003), and Rouse (1992), have used the concept to better understand the contemporary challenges inherent in the lives of migrants who remain connected with

home while also creating lives and livelihoods in a new country. For example, in his book, *Reconceptualizing the Peasantry*, Kearney (1996) applies the concept of transnationalism to discussions of identity formation among labour migrants, focussing his attention on aspects of identity, ethnicity, human rights, and political mobilisation in an international context.

For the people of Acuitzio del Canje, everyday life may be seen as transnational. People tend to define their lives and social networks, and indeed even define their community, in ways that span geographic barriers. For those who remain in the community, as well as for those who leave for work, the creation of identity is intimately linked to their understanding of who is an "Acuitzence", what it is to "belong" to Acuitzio and the symbolic importance of their community within the broad and often international context of life.

CONSTRUCTING IDENTITY

Scholars working with transnational processes understand that the movement of individuals necessarily influences the construction of identity for those whose lives are touched by migration (Gupta 1992; Kearney 1991, 1996; Leach 1997; Rouse 1991, 1992). Indeed, identity, that ever-changing and negotiated sense of self and one's place in the world, has been the subject of many anthropological examinations within the transnationalism literature, with authors such as Anderson (1991), Friedman (2002), Gupta and Ferguson (1992), and Kearney (1991, 1996) using the model to draw attention to processes whereby individuals and groups undertake ethnic identities, integrate the 'traditional' with the 'modern', and participate in political and social changes in international contexts.

One of the seminal references to transnationalism comes from the work of Nina Glick Schiller, Linda Basch, and Cristina Blanc-Szanton (1992) who argue that immigrants and migrants "take actions, make decisions, and feel concerns, and *develop identities* within social networks that connect them to two or more societies simultaneously" (Glick Schiller et al. 1992:2, emphasis added). These individuals, labelled "transmigrants" by the authors, are seen to "build social fields that link together

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their country of origin and their country of settlement", creating social spaces and identities that span borders (Glick Schiller et al. 1992:1).

Even as the transnationalism concept is expanded in the scholarly literature, themes of gender, class, age and generational differences – important elements in identity construction – are seen to need further clarification in order to make the concept of transnationalism more meaningful in the context of labour migration practices (Appadurai 2002; Gupta and Ferguson 1992; 1997a; Mahler 1998:75-77, 82-87; Pratt and Yeoh 2003; Rouse 1991, 1992, 1995; Stephen 2001). For example, Roger Rouse is an advocate of understanding transnationalism from a perspective that accounts for class, examining how education and economic background contribute to transnational processes among migrants (1992:13). Similarly, several authors note that the literature is lacking a clear focus on class formation and divisions (Kearney 1996:130-135; Mahler 1998:82-84). Gender issues, especially the different ways that women and men understand and experience transnational lives and livelihoods, are another notable area that must be addressed in the transnational literature (Mahler 1998:82-83; Pratt and Yeoh 2003; Rouse 1992:28; Stephen 2001). Intergenerational issues, such as the adoption of certain practices within the context of migration, have also been highlighted as an important element for understanding transnational behaviours (Pratt and Yeoh 2003).

Attention has been paid to issues of class and gender in conducting this research, although these themes are explored only tangentially in the thesis. Partly a result of methodological constraints, which will be discussed in the next chapter, the research reflects a gender divide between migrants and non-migrants, as nearly all migrant respondents are men, and many of 'resident' respondents are female. While class does not always present itself as evident, especially in shorter-term research, elements of class division are reflected in the interviews and observations of Acuitzio and Acuitzences, specifically in terms of migration practices and the adoption of communication technologies. Intergenerational changes and continuities are also explored, underpinning both the continuity of migration practices from Acuitzio to sites in Mexico and the US, as well as the uses of the Internet and cellular telephones in communications among younger Acuitzences.

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Glick Schiller and Fouron (2002:356-357) approach the issue of identity formation by introducing the concept of "long-distance nationalism" to describe the way transnational migrants remain connected politically and economically to their 'home' society while living abroad, even after becoming citizens of their 'adopted' place of residence. This concept is useful when considering the cases of nation-states that have adopted policies explicitly connecting 'their' transmigrants back to the homeland (Glick Schiller et al. 1992:4, 10-12; Glick Schiller and Fouron 2002:357, 359). These efforts include extended citizenship and voting rights in the cases of Mexico and Haiti, gift and importation policies in the Philippines (see Bhachu 1996), as well as Mexico's famous *Tres por Uno para Migrantes* program linking migrant associations in the US with hometowns in Mexico to provide funding for public works and other social and economic programs.

For a community like Acuitzio del Canje, the idea of 'long distance nationalism' is an interesting one. Programs like '*Tres por Uno*' have recently begun to have an impact on community projects in the municipality, including the donation of computers to schools in the town in late 2005 by a hometown association in Illinois. The idea of long-distance nationalism is reflected in some of the ways that migrant monies have been used in the town in prior years, for instance, in the renovation of the community theatre, *Teatro Coatepec*. For those Acuitzences living in the US, hometown associations and programs such as *Tres por Uno* – and indeed, the recently extended right to vote in Mexican federal elections in 2006 and a push for the right to vote in municipal and state elections – further solidify their identity in Acuitzio and Mexico more generally, while also reinforcing and establishing new transnational relations between residents in the community and their *compadres* abroad. Similar developmental work by migrants and migrant associations has been discussed by a variety of anthropologists studying the economic impact of Mexican migration, such as Cohen (2001, 2004a, 2004b) and Stephen (2007), and many others have considered the implications of these political changes on conceptions of citizenship and social engagement (Fitzgerald 2000; Garcia-Acevedo 2003; Lowenhaupt Tsing 2002).

CONCEPTIONS OF COMMUNITY

Identity is often associated with geographic space and a sense of place and community. Gupta and Ferguson (1992) recognise that the social construction of identity is frequently affiliated with place, as "space itself becomes a kind of neutral grid on which cultural difference, historical memory, and societal organization is inscribed" (1992:7). However, in the contemporary world, the assumed connection between space and culture or identity is contradicted as people experience transnational lives and livelihoods and move across international borders; in the recognition of cultural differences within a locality, such as the idea of multicultural societies; and in post-colonial contexts where the connection between space and culture comes into question due to colonial hybridization with local cultures (Gupta and Ferguson 1992:7-8). Most importantly for Gupta and Ferguson (1992:8), by challenging the connection of identity and space in the contemporary world, social change and transformation may be situated within interconnected spaces, rather than the naturally disconnected spaces accepted in classical anthropology. Recognizing that "notions of locality or community refer both to a demarcated physical space and to clusters of interaction" the authors believe that "the identity of a place emerges by the intersection of its specific involvement in a system of hierarchically organised spaces with its cultural construction as a community or locality" (Gupta and Ferguson 1992:8). Similar sentiments have been echoed in discussions by Anderson (1991), Gupta (1992), Kearney (1991, 1996), and Leach (1997).

For Gupta and Ferguson (1992:9) the "familiar lines between 'here' and 'there', center and periphery, [and] colony and metropole become blurred" within the context of globalization and transnational migration practices. However, they point out that it is not only the mobile that experience this displacement and blurring of lines (Gupta and Ferguson 1992:10). Indeed, "people remaining in familiar and ancestral places find the nature of their relation to place ineluctably changed and the illusion of a natural and essential connection between the place and culture is broken" (Gupta and Ferguson 1992:10). Exemplifying the disconnection between space and culture, they present the idea of 'Englishness' in contemporary England, noting that through immigration and post-colonial movements of people, "'England' ('the real England') refers less to a

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bounded place than to an imagined state of being or a moral location" (Gupta and Ferguson 1992:10; see also Cohen 1996). Indeed, as recent news stories draw attention to escalating public outcry against undocumented workers in the US, debates over 'reasonable accommodations' to new immigrants in Quebec, as well as rising anti-immigrant sentiments across Europe, it is clear that identity and transnationalism are intrinsically linked in our globalized world for those who remain in their 'home' communities.

In his studies of labour migrants on both sides of the Mexican border, Roger Rouse (1991, 1992, 1995) also uses the concept of transnationalism to challenge the traditional anthropological construction of social space, suggesting that new images for describing and understanding processes of community identity construction be developed. Like Gupta and Ferguson, Rouse believes that concepts of community that are fixed, either conceptually or geographically, do not adequately reflect the realities experienced by people who live and work transnationally (Rouse 1991:9-10). The nature of certain anthropological terminology gives the impression of a boundedness that does not correspond to the transnational linkages inherent in migration practices (Rouse 1991:9-11). He suggests the terms "circuit" or "border zone" to more accurately portray the lived experiences of migrants and their communities outside the confines of spatial imagery (Rouse 1991:9, 11, 13, 14). By conceiving of transnationalism from a purely spatially-bounded perspective, he argues, we limit and confuse the true nature of the linkages and social networks that exist within the experience of transnationalism (Rouse 1991:14).

While concepts associated with transnationalism have generally been applied to those people, goods, and organizations seen to be in a state of movement, the processes and systems of globalization ensure that transnationalism is not limited exclusively to the mobile themselves (Gupta and Ferguson 1992:9). As a result, in the context of international labour migration and immigration, transnationalism and processes of transnational identity construction can and should be more broadly applied to include those members of what have been referred to as "sending communities" who have not physically crossed international boundaries, but who nonetheless make adaptations and

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live their lives within a transnational context. Images such as Rouse's 'circuit' and 'border zone' encourage us to see that, while their physical place may remain the same, the creation and maintenance of social relations with family, friends, and colleagues who have left the community, combined with the importation of myriad items, from goods and services to media and ideas, extends the social space of transnationalism to include the experiences of those who stay behind in places touched by the very mobility that is seen as fundamental to the transnationalism concept (1991:9, 10, 12, 14).

Indeed, for the individuals who participated in this research, the idea of Acuitzio as place has important connotations. For all, Acuitzio is home, regardless of their residency status, and connections to the space of the town are important markers of identity. Yet, just as the place of Acuitzio is important to residents and non-residents alike, the creation and re-creation of transnational practices through labour migration reveal that the space of Acuitzio is transcended as people engage in social relations that connect them to other places. As migration practices are ever-present and have been incorporated into localised discourses and histories, people visualise their social lives in a space that far exceeds that of the town site.

As individuals create lives that straddle two cultures, societies, communities, or countries, the fluid nature of identity construction, including a sense of community, means that, over time, identities are renegotiated through transnational experience; new meanings are appropriated, and the possibilities of identity are as endless as the experiences that shape them. While in the most personal sense no two individuals will ever truly have the same sense of self and personal identity, collective identities, carved out of the stories, people, experiences, and histories that people share together, have an equally profound impact on identity. And again, although studies have focused largely on the transnational livelihoods and experiences of individuals who are physically mobile, the impact that this mobility has on those who remain in their communities of origin also affects individual and collective identity. Gupta and Ferguson (1992:9) remind us of the shifting nature of community amongst those whose neighbourhoods and countries have experienced an influx of immigrants and migrants, but equally pervasive are the identity shifts and twists experienced by individuals remaining in home communities whose

neighbours and kin have migrated and continue to migrate away from 'home'. As individuals and the collectivity incorporate the idea of transnational movement into the repertoire of expected and normal social relations, they also shift their collective identity to include this movement and transnationality. In this way, we may look at a geographically-situated community such as Acuitzio and still witness the very transnationality of its collective and community identity.

SOCIAL NETWORKING, COMMUNICATIONS, AND MEDIA

Social networking and social networks have long been important concepts for anthropology, whether emphasis was placed on kin relations or other group dynamics as the force behind these connections. In the context of transnational practices, such as immigration and labour migration, social networks take on increased importance in terms of communications and the way that these networks help to establish and affirm connections between groups of people across borders, boundaries, and space, as well as over time. It is through nodes in social networks that migrating individuals may make new connections, find work, and find places to stay upon migration, for instance. Communications strategies as an element of social networking also highlight identity construction, including the construction of community identities, in that the individuals within one's network are seen, in one way or another, as belonging and sharing some element of identity with others within the network.

For Acuitzences, social networks have been created through the historic re-creation of migration practices, opening up spaces and places through social connections outside the physical geography of the town site. Migrants from the town are in nearly every state in the US, evidenced by the variety of license plates that adorn the vehicles on Acuitzio's streets, with the largest populations of Acuitzences in California, Illinois, and Alaska. Most migrants spoke of following their existing social networks, usually familial, when they migrated to the US, and in fact, many non-migrants discussed one day visiting or following family or friends to *el Norte*.

With the advent of new communications technologies, such as the Internet and cellular telephones, along with the more traditional strategies of posted correspondence and long-distance telephone calls, the possibilities of social networking are extended

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through space and time with an ease that was not possible only a few decades ago. Speaking of diasporic communities in the contemporary age, Reis states, "[t]he manner in which globalization has been most beneficial to diasporas lies in the fact that technological advances in communications... foster the maintenance of even closer ties between home and host countries... It is in this sense that globalization has shrunk distances, as the telephone, fax, [and] Internet... are important tools of the diasporic trade" (2004:47-48). Like other media in the contemporary world, these Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) move across national borders and boundaries, and indeed, may even create new communities and networks which defy spatial imagery entirely (Green, Harvey and Knox 2005:805). More importantly for this research, however, scholars have increasingly been interested in examining how social constructions of reality are negotiated and modified as ICTs are integrated into everyday life.

Arturo Escobar's "Welcome to Cyberia" (1994) marked a turning point for the anthropological discussion of new communication technologies, and in the decade since its publication, the breadth and scope of communication technologies have continued to grow, advancing in both predictable and unanticipated ways. Even at this early stage, Escobar (1994:211, 213) acknowledged that "cyberculture" – his name for social relations within the context of these new information and communication technologies – emerges out of the sociocultural environment of modernity. As such, he suggests that anthropology and ethnographic research offer unique insights for a broad range of research possibilities, including the exploration of the production and use of technologies, as well as the impact that the adoption of technology may have for language and cultural identity (1994:213). In the intervening years Escobar's rallying cry has been met by a wide variety of anthropological and multidisciplinary work, ranging from discussions of cyber communities to file-sharing to mobile phones and text messaging (Panagakos and Horst 2006:110).

Emerging from this research has been an interest in the adoption and creation of communication technologies across transnational networks, specifically among transnational migrants and across their social networks. Reviewing media adoption and

usage, researchers such as Karim have noted that, due to the unique challenges that migrants and immigrants face in reaching their intended audiences, it is often these individuals who are at the avant-garde of adopting new technological solutions (Karim 2003). However, access to communication technologies should not be assumed to be universal (see Gong et al. 2007). As Panagakos and Horst note, although transnational migrants "may benefit from their location in societies... obsessed with the newest electronic gadgets, the same cannot always be said of their compatriots back home" (2006:111). Furthermore, access to communications technologies does not guarantee adoption. Indeed, the adoption of technology is contingent on a variety of factors, with class, gender, ethnicity, and race, as well as educational level and legal status, impacting technological engagement (Benítez 2006; Gong et al. 2007; Panagakos and Horst 2006:111; Wilding 2006).

Among migrants and their relations remaining 'at home', the adoption of communication strategies is seen to be related to a number of factors. Age and generational differences are played out in the adoption of technologies, with children often the first to adopt these new strategies (Benítez 2006:194; Panagakos and Horst 2006:119). Similarly, gender and educational level also impact the adoption of new technologies; for instance, language comprehension and literacy may impede migrants away from home or members of their social networks in home communities from adopting Internet or other text-based communication strategies (Benítez 2006:187; Panagakos and Horst 2006:118). And while communication technologies, like other media, may allow unfettered movement of ideas and messages across borders, these technologies remain within the purview of the nation-state and its laws, permitting monitoring by authorities and creating potential difficulties for those whose legal status is at issue (Benítez 2006:188; Panagakos and Horst 2006:118; see also Artz 2003).

The research presented in this thesis was conducted during what could be described as the initial phases of technological engagement in communications in Acuitzio del Canje. Although the community is close to the state capital of Morelia, widespread access to the Internet was only achieved at the town site itself upon the opening of the first Internet café in 2001. Internet access in Acuitzio remains largely

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outside of the home, in the several Internet cafes that have opened since that time, although access remains uneven due to economic and educational factors, as well as reflecting generational differences in the community. This area of communications represents one of the most dynamic elements of the research, and I have witnessed a greater number of Internet providers, as well as a growing number of users with each subsequent visit to Acuitzio.

While the availability of technologies, such as the Internet and cellular telephones, has enabled increased communication over long distances, the impact of these technologies on social networks and day-to-day communications remains contested in the literature. Both migrants and non-migrants make use of the technologies at their disposal in ways that suit their communication styles and needs, negotiating the technological landscape in ways that meet their particular aims (Panagakos and Horst 2006:112-113). In this way, email may be used for certain communications, instant messaging for others, and cellular phone calls or calling cards for a third. This "bundling" of communication strategies is not always about finding the cheapest or most pragmatic technological solution (Panagakos and Horst 2006 114, 115). As Panagakos and Horst remind us, "we cannot underestimate how the particular qualities of technologies play a distinctive role in the choice and use of these media" (2006:114). Perceptions of technologies, including perceived accessibility, ease of use, and the particularities of individual needs, all impact usage in various ways. Moreover, the accessibility and use of technologies does not necessarily mean improved communication within social networks, nor does adoption of new communication strategies signify that other methods for communicating are completely replaced by technological innovations. Slater and Tacchi (2004:3) refer to "communicative ecology" as the range of information flows and communication media within a community, placing ICTs within the context of all communication strategies. Indeed, they suggest that new communication strategies tend not to displace old media and communications, instead being integrated into previously existing networks and strategies (2004). As Wilding notes in her discussion of family communications in a transnational context, "[e]ach new layer of technology was... used

to communicate more efficiently with existing modes, even as it offered an alternative" (2006:131).

Of further interest, new technologies like the Internet have the dual capacity to be both a mode of communication, such as email, instant messaging and message boards, and a more general media environment of web pages devoted to everything from business and consumer products to sites dedicated to communities, both virtual and 'real'. In this way, the use of the Internet must also be placed within the context of the larger scholarly literature on media consumption and creation. For many of the youngest regular users in Acuitzio, computers and the Internet are more often a source of information and recreational activities, rather than a communicative tool. Similarly, new forms of communications made possible by the Internet, including sharing photos and video, webcam conversations, as well as the creation of a website dedicated to the community of Acuitzio, offer new arenas for identity construction and social networking.

In the last forty years anthropologists and other scholars have sought to understand how people interact with, interpret, and internalise media in all its forms. This diverse literature has evolved from simple discussions of media to describe local processes, the multiple meanings inherent in the consumption of media products, and the nature of the media as a common experience and locus for social interaction. Deborah Spitulnik states that the mass media in today's world "are at once artifacts, experiences, practices, and processes. They are economically and politically driven, [and are] linked to developments in science and technology" (Spitulnik 1993:293). As such, she believes that the complex of interests bound up in the media allows anthropologists to approach from numerous angles: "as institutions, as workplaces, as communicative practices, as cultural products, as social activities, as aesthetic forms, and as historical developments" (Spitulnik 1993:293).

Anthropological discussions of the media have often focused on the creation of media, with much of this literature discussing transnational corporate media production. Scholars such as Artz (2003), Dávila (2002), Guarnizo and Smith (1998), Spitulnik (1993), Sreberny-Mohammadi (2002), and Wilk (2002a; 2002b) highlight how these corporate media, from film and television to music and advertising, may play upon and

reinforce stereotypes, including those associated with gender, ethnicity, and culture. For Sánchez, Cramer, and Prieto (2003) the messages transmitted through commercial media tend to create conditions that promote and cultivate social homogenization. Describing this homogenization as hegemonic, they find that "[p]opular music, advertising, and television programs serve to transmit the dominant myths, ideologies, and values of the leading capitalistic countries, thus influencing how people from other countries see, experience, understand, and act in their social lives" (Sánchez et al. 2003:131).

However, not all media are created with corporate agendas. Scholars have also been interested in the ways in which contemporary media technologies have been used by indigenous communities to transmit ideas of identity and community. Calling media production a process of identity construction, Faye Ginsburg believes that "indigenous media offers a possible means – social, cultural, and political – for reproducing and transforming cultural identity among people who have experienced massive political, geographic, and economic disruption" (2002:217). Indeed, examples of media usage for political and social projects of self-determination can be found throughout Mexico and Mexico-based transnational networks; such as the Internet communications of the Zapatistas from Chiapas, and in the work of the people of San Agustín Atenango and Teotilán del Valle in Oaxaca discussed by Stephen (2007).

One of the primary benefits of Internet media is that it is seen to be creatively available to a much larger and broader range of producers. Websites can be produced with little investment and overhead, giving voice to and empowering social groups, including transnational migrants, who may have been silenced in other media forms (Kearney 1996; Panagakos and Horst 2006:118). Noting that the Internet has become a powerful tool for cultivating ethnic, cultural and national expressions, Panagakos and Horst believe that this medium, especially independently-produced websites, provide transnational migrants and their communities with new outlets and spaces for social interaction and identity construction (2006:117-118). Indeed, they state, "[b]ecause of their small scale and decentralised character... such interactions may be kept below the radar of corporate sponsorship and big media interest" (Panagakos and Horst 2006:118). In this way, these sites may be, or at least appear to be, more authentic expressions and

representations of community identity and communicative practice. However, there are no guarantees of 'authenticity' in any representation, including those produced by governments, political parties, or other groups, and so, all representations must be viewed within the context of their creation.

As with interest in the creation and production of media messages, anthropologists have also been attentive to how people consume media in the contemporary world. Anthropologists have found that people consume media in different and sometimes unanticipated ways. Indeed, although media may be created with certain messages or agendas, there are no guarantees that the ways in which these messages are internalised will reflect their creators' intent (Morley and Robbins 1995). As the anthropological literature has shown, consumers of media products negotiate, interpret, and appropriate messages in ways that make sense within their worldview; ways that may defy corporate or other agendas (Gledhill 2000; Morley and Robbins 1995).

In Acuitzio and between Acuitzences wherever they may reside, Internet communications and connections are in their early stages of development. As noted more generally in the literature discussing migrant and immigrant populations in the US (for example, Benítez 2006), computer usage among Acuitzences in Mexico *and* the US tends to be from among the younger generation. With the dynamic nature of access and adoption of ICTs at the town site, as well as ever-expanding potential for access in the US, the Internet and new communications technologies point to exciting possibilities for the transnational community of Acuitzio. Indeed, the recent creation of a town website marks the entry of the community as a whole onto the world stage. While the introduction of the website offers new opportunities for Acuitzences, both at home and abroad, of connecting with social activities in the town, it may also highlight some of the socio-economic disparities within the town itself, as well as in the migrating population. It will be important to watch developments in the coming years as access and adoption of technologies become more prevalent, the website expands its content and reach, and Acuitzences find new and creative ways of connecting across space in ways that celebrate their community.

OTHER PERSPECTIVES

We cannot look to the future of transnational communications without also appreciating the full context of the social relations that are being created, maintained and communicated. Local community history is very important to the people of Acuitzio and any analysis of the community cannot ignore this element. As such, historical contextualisation is important to the research presented in this thesis. Basing my research agenda on earlier work by Raymond Wiest in the community of Acuitzio, a historical perspective has been employed here to reflect the larger context within which the story of the people of Acuitzio continues to unfold. Additionally, the recent work by Sara Komarnisky (2006) on food and identity construction among Acuitzences in Alaska has been invaluable at providing insights into the contemporary migrant experience outside the town.

Taking into account the historical continuity of labour migration from Acuitzio to sites in the US and throughout Mexico, the research builds upon the growing literature of transnationalism to examine community identity and communications practices. The social networks and communications that have persisted among Acuitzences and their compatriots living in other sites have always been important, as has a continued sense of belonging to the community. However, with the advent of advanced communications technologies, we see the possibility of expansion and growth in these networks, allowing for an enhancement to communications, increased frequency and ease, as well as new tools and media that provide opportunities for interactions between Acuitzences living and working everywhere. While the adoption of these technologies is uneven and may be in its infancy in the community, there is growth in this sector, as well as the potential for further growth in the coming years. By analyzing the adoption of these new communication technologies, this research represents an attempt to understand the changing dynamics of community belonging and identity, while also adding to the growing literature on transnational communications.

In the next chapter, I turn to the methodologies used in conducting this research, also discussing the challenges and limitations that I faced in the field and the areas in which my final research has diverged from the original research proposal. The chapter

ties the theoretical context of the research to the methodological framework and includes details of research design, data collection and data analysis.

Chapter Three

Methodology

In this chapter I discuss the methods used in conducting this research, beginning with the links between methodology and the literature on transnationalism, the theoretical framework that most informed my understanding of the issues of community identity and communications in the context of labour migration from Mexico to the US. After outlining the connections between the literature and method, I discuss my research strategy and design – including areas where my research differed in practice from my original thesis proposal – before moving to a discussion of the analysis of the data presented in the thesis. I end the chapter by addressing the limitations of the research itself, as well as by detailing the challenges that I faced in pursuing my research agenda.

THEORY AND METHOD

The literature on transnationalism and its associated methodologies generally imply that research takes place in several connected areas or regions. However, despite situating this research in the context of the bountiful literature of transnationalism, my research took place at only one 'node' in the transnational journeys of many of the subjects to whom this literature refers. This was primarily a practical choice. I could not, within the bounds of my research agenda, follow the connections between people across space to other locales, and as such, I developed my research problem with this in mind. Similarly, within the context of the research site of Acuitzio del Canje, I did not, nor could I, reserve my interviews and interest for only those members of the community who were directly involved in labour migration. Again, this was both an issue of research purpose and an issue of practicality. Furthermore, as I learned to know some of the residents of Acuitzio and the many individuals from the town who participated in migration to the US and other areas of Mexico, I soon became aware that this small community is connected through social networks to an extensive diversity of sites in the

US and Mexico, and that following even a sample of all of these connections would be virtually impossible.

I realised early that while migration was the key to bringing me to the community, and indeed, while it was one of its major economic features, the issue of migration and its connection to the community was not limited to only those members who participated actively in migration. In fact, the more that I observed, discussed, and participated in town events, the more I came to recognise that migration and a sense of "community" were highly developed as well as being interconnected even among those members of the community who remained in the town site and did not migrate to other locations.

In addition to establishing and maintaining relations with people in their immediate surroundings, Acuitzences, no matter their migration status, preserved, sustained, and cultivated associations and relationships that were not limited by geographical factors. Among my research participants who migrated to sites in the US, and indeed, even among those who lived in other areas of Mexico, all remained connected in several ways to the community through the breadth of their social networks. In a parallel fashion, those who remained physically in the community had social networks and frequent interactions and communications that extended through space, across borders and boundaries.

In order to balance my understanding of the nature of transnationalism in the context of labour migration with the practicality of doing anthropological research in one place, I based my research design in Marcus' "strategically situated single-site ethnography" (Marcus 1998:95). Marcus identifies this type of research as "ethnography [that] may not move around literally but may nonetheless embed itself in a multi-sited context" recognising that "what goes on within a particular locale in which research is conducted is often calibrated with its implication for what goes on in another related locale, or other locales, even though the other locales may not be within the frame of the research design or resulting ethnography" (Marcus 1998:95). In his view, strategically situated ethnography endeavours to "understand something broadly about the system in ethnographic terms as much as it does its local subjects: It is only local circumstantially, thus situating itself in a context of field quite differently than does other single-sited

ethnography" (Marcus 1998:95). Adopting this methodological stance[1], I remained constantly aware of the connections that exist between spatially separate sites and the impact that these connections have on images of community, including how these images of community are constructed and defined by members of the community (see also Gupta and Ferguson 1997b).

RESEARCH DESIGN

The method in this study is anthropological, with an emphasis on participant observation, qualitative data collection through detailed note-taking, and participant narrative secured in tape-recorded and noted interviews. My research was conducted in conjunction with SSHRC[2]-funded research under the direction of Dr. Raymond Wiest, and as a result, my research design had a basis in the 'household', a unit of analysis used in his research. While the household served as a starting point, my research followed kin and friendship networks, which are not always reflected in household-based living patterns. I had planned to establish relationships in the community through volunteering for local organisations (i.e., community organisations, women's groups, school-related groups) and other local activities upon my arrival in the research site, utilising a technique identified by Passaro (1997) to make contacts while also giving back to the community. But this proved to be difficult at the outset. I did, however, volunteer to give English lessons to a group of young women upon my return to the town in May 2005, as well as casually acting as translator of both English and French on numerous occasions, serving as a photographer at a variety of local events, and offering assistance in other ways, if and when I could. All of these activities served to broaden my own social networks in the community as well as provide some services to the people who kindly opened their homes and experiences to me and my questions.

In determining who would be my research participants, I tried to meet and work with individuals and families who participated in migration, while also interviewing community members who were not involved in migration at the time of the interview. I

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[1] The research conducted while physically present in the town has also benefited from continued interactions with some participants through email and other communications.

[2] Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada is abbreviated as "SSHRC" throughout the thesis.

did not attempt to achieve a set sample size, instead working through connections identified within the community (Passaro 1997). While I had expected to work with at least twenty individuals of different ages and backgrounds, as well as relying on participant observation techniques, my fieldwork experience was largely based on participant observation methods (Bernard 2002:322-364). As I gained more insight into the community and confidence in my ability with the Spanish language, I was able to broaden my fieldwork techniques, conducting informal interviews that usually took place in a casual setting, such as on the street, at a local grocery store, or in the plaza. These concise interviews with more than twenty individuals were most often intended as a prelude to longer, tape-recorded conversations, and wherever possible, more detailed interviews were conducted. In addition to the informal interviews, seven in-depth interviews were recorded on micro-cassette. Interviews and discussions were tape-recorded only upon explicit agreement with participants, but the nature of coordinating a space and a time for interviews often proved difficult, and after several failed attempts at organising these interviews, I began to place more emphasis on detailed note-taking after interviews. My notebooks, observations, and the transcripts from my tape-recorded interviews form the basis of my collected data.

The research was to take place over a six-month period, and in this time I expected to follow familial and social networks, such as those that exist through *compadrazgo* (co-parenthood) relationships, and build upon these connections through snowball sampling (Bernard 2002:185-186). As my initial research period drew to a close, I realised that more time was needed in order to complete some of the research that I had planned. I decided to extend my stay in Acuitzio for an extra month and returned again to the field in May 2005 after a short visit to Winnipeg and a conference in Merida, Mexico. Upon returning to the research site in May 2005, I was pleasantly surprised at the reaction of many people whom I had come to know casually around the town. It was as though I had proven my dedication to Acuitzio through my departure and return, and I found that many more avenues and social networks were opened via this short break from the field. I experienced this again when I returned to the field eight months later, in January 2006, for a five-week visit. By this time my Spanish skills had improved

substantially, and my distance from the field opened up new lines of inquiry, as well as again seeming to improve my credibility with Acuitzences. I also returned to the community in February 2007 for a short visit, and have maintained contact with several individuals in the community while in Winnipeg during the intervening periods between and after research, although this last visit does not form a specific part of the research presented here[3].

DATA COLLECTION

Participant observation was my most powerful tool in the field, especially as my language skills were developing. It was through this method that I came to learn what questions to ask and how to ask them, as well as navigating basic daily skills and nuances of the culture, such as how to eat like a Mexican, how people of different ages interacted, the slang terms used and even culturally appropriate hand gestures (see Komarnisky 2006:103-105; 106-107 for more on eating in Acuitzio and "acting like a Mexican"). These were skills that served me throughout my research period. While my main research strategy was based in observations and participating in community events, I paired this method with open-ended interview questions, often targeted to specific individuals with whom I became acquainted during the research period (Bernard 2002:254-255). All participants were clearly informed of the purpose of my research and, in fact, merely mentioning my interest in migration to the US often elicited spontaneous stories by casual acquaintances.

While much of my note-taking and participant observation was 'unplanned' in that I made the daily rounds interacting with individuals and would write short notes in situ or after arriving at home in the afternoon, other observations and note-taking exercises were more deliberate. Twice during my initial research period I made a point of observing and noting the clientele of a particular Internet café over several weeks – once in December 2004 and again in February 2005, in an effort to quantify and solidify some of my informal observations about the residents and individuals in Acuitzio who were

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[3] While my physical presence in Acuitzio constitutes most of my "fieldwork experience", by remaining in contact with several research participants and even meeting new ones via online interactions – especially emails – there really are no boundaries to my fieldwork; only the artificial constraints of the time period of "official" research.

using computer and Internet technologies on a regular basis. I have compiled this information in table format and it is presented in Chapter Six of the thesis.

My participant observation technique also included an attempt to take in a variety of cultural and social events in the town, writing notes both during and after attendance. These events included political rallies in the plaza, *jaripeos,* local dances, weddings, town festivities in celebration of their local history, *quinceañeras*, parades, Easter processions, Flag Day celebrations, concerts and dance recitals, and local sporting events, among many other activities. This collection of special events, as well as normal everyday interactions with people in the town, helped to form my understanding of the unique attributes of the community that bring together the people of Acuitzio.

There are quite a wide variety of individuals within the purview of the recorded interviews, as well as within the larger network of informal interviews and encounters. As I have mentioned, the interviews were generally of an informal nature, getting to know people and learning about life through participant observations and the expressions of attitudes about a variety of issues seen as important in the town. These anecdotal stories and events, and the importance placed on celebration of all kinds, were the underlying factor in terms of my understanding of the nature of community identity and identity construction. In addition to the special events and activities that gave people a sense of collective identity, community engagement and identity were manifest in the way that word travelled fast through town when someone had an accident, or word of an engagement between *novios* made the rounds at peoples' dinner tables. The sense of community is strong due to family, and in a town like Acuitzio, it often seems that everyone is related in some way! Despite a keen interest in genealogical ties, I could not do justice to family connections for the purposes of this thesis.

My interviews and daily actions largely consisted of interacting with people of a certain age group – 18 to 45 – with a few regular encounters with a group of more elderly community members. As my Spanish skills were limited for the first period in the town, my preferred encounters with the group of elders were of a pleasantries nature, however, I did have some opportunity on occasion to discuss some of the issues that they perceived to be of importance to the community.

In choosing my interviews and sources of information, I did my best to ask a variety of residents and migrating individuals as many questions as possible. Using the snowball sampling technique whereby I was introduced to individuals through other contacts, I did not expect to reach a set sample size. Nonetheless, I was able to target my interviews to those people who I believed at the time to have specific information pertaining to my interests, as well as being pleasantly surprised by some of the information shared with me by others. By meeting and speaking with a wide variety of individuals, I sought to obtain the broadest possible sample that my own limitations allowed.

In both my informal and formal interviews with Acuitzences, I asked questions to draw out views about living in Acuitzio and abroad, with an emphasis on their sense of 'community' and how this may have changed over time, especially given the long term migration patterns to the US. For instance, as I was interested in the intergenerational effects of migration, I asked questions about participants' personal views on the advantages and disadvantages of migration, noting similarities and differences across generations and gender. I also sought to understand villagers' conceptions of Acuitzio: who 'belongs' to the community and the criteria for making these judgements; what constitutes the most important elements of Acuitzio and town life for year-round residents and non-residents alike; what takes people away from Acuitzio and what brings them back; and how both residents and migrants are able to establish and maintain communications, including with whom, across space and time.

In addition to my general questions and interviews, I conducted interviews in a targeted fashion among certain residents. For example, as I was interested in communication strategies and the integration of new technology in these strategies, especially Internet communications, I conducted a lengthy formal interview with the owner of the first Internet café in town, asking him about his business and the changes he had seen over the course of his entrepreneurship in Acuitzio. In addition to this formal interview, the owner also spent countless hours explaining elements of the community to me, introducing me to his patrons and friends, taking me to visit his other business in the neighbouring town of Tiripetio, as well as talking both informally and formally about his

own foray into labour migration to the US. Similarly, in dealing with the issue of migration, I spoke at length with the Director of the *Atención de la Casa de Migrantes*, the local office of the state-run program created to help migrants and their families in a myriad of capacities, from working with community associations in the US (of which there is only one, in Illinois, specifically affiliated with Acuitzio), to locating loved ones abroad, to helping sort out legal issues, to even planning the return of those unlucky souls who did not make it across the Mexico-US border. I also spent a great deal of time with the young Director of the *Casa de Cultura*, the local cultural centre, discussing the events that she and her staff organised and offered for residents, as well as the issues that they faced in the community, among other general concerns.

DATA ANALYSIS

In this section I will detail the types of notes and other research data and how I have used them in the analysis and presentation of the thesis.

My primary data are in the form of field and interview notes, as well as the transcription of taped interviews. In order to analyse the data collected, I have divided my notes and written materials into several types. The first group of field notes fall into a category that I call 'targeted' notes. These are the notes that were taken during or immediately following attendance or participation in a specific, targeted event. I have further divided this category into three subtypes: 1) 'event notes' – notes relating to specific local events for which my attendance and participation were planned, including festivals, dances, religious and secular holidays, and other community activities; 2) 'respondent notes' – notes relating to specific respondents, including notations taken after informal interviews as well as notes and transcriptions referring to formal, cassette-taped interviews; and 3) 'Internet usage notes' – notes referring to my specific attempt to collect observed material related to internet usage over several weeks in December 2004 and February 2005.

In addition to my 'targeted notes,' I divided my raw research data into several other categories in order to ease the analysis of the data. 'Journal' notes refer to those notes that reveal my own experiences and reflections, as well as my preliminary, in-field analysis of situations and events. A third category consists of 'observation' notes, which

differ from the event notes in that they refer to spontaneous activities and observations rather than the targeted notes described above. Additionally, I collected many other 'miscellaneous documents,' such as pamphlets, newspaper articles, photographs and posters.

As the majority of these categories of notes and documents were developed after the research period, with the exception of the 'Internet usage notes,' these general categories in my typology often overlap or meld from one type into another, such as instances where I ran into a respondent unexpectedly in the street or plaza and held an impromptu 'interview.' However, by categorising my notes in this way I have been able to manage the notes that filled several small notebooks, two larger spiral notebooks, as well as countless computer word-processing documents into rough but organised groups. Generally speaking, the fieldwork presented in the thesis refers to the 'targeted notes'.

I chose not to codify my interview notes and transcripts as the number and nature of the interviews did not seem to create the necessity. As I conducted the interviews, wrote the related notes, and in the case of recorded interviews, spent countless hours transcribing and translating the interviews, my knowledge of the information contained therein is quite intimate and easy enough to draw upon without the aid of formal codification and computer-assisted text analysis.

In the case of the 'Internet usage notes', I recorded the time of day (engagement times were intentionally varied), the number of individuals in the café, the approximate age of individuals, gender, as well as – where possible – the activities undertaken and approximate length of time spent in the café. In addition to these criteria, I also noted whether people entered the café in a group or alone, their social interactions in the café, and other miscellaneous activities of interest, depending on the situation. I have organised these notations into table format presented in Chapter Six.

CHALLENGES AND LIMITATIONS

In this section I outline some of the challenges that I faced in conducting research in Acuitzio, and discuss some of the limitations of my research.

The issue of language was one of the largest hurdles I was forced to overcome during the course of the fieldwork. Clearly, not being able to fully articulate my thoughts,

especially on a more abstract level beyond daily pleasantries and small talk, made certain elements of research difficult during my early months in the town. However, this is not to say that I could not ask small questions and elicit certain viewpoints and ideas that often resulted in the complex responses that I have recorded here. It should be noted that although I was not always able to formulate the more complex questions, this language issue should not be mistaken as an inability to understand the responses that I received.

Before entering the field in Acuitzio, I spent my first two and a half months in Mexico living in the city of Morelia in an apartment that I first shared with Raymond and Shirley Wiest until they returned to Winnipeg at the beginning of September 2004. Taking private Spanish lessons, by the time of their departure I had learned a fair amount of Spanish, but I still did not feel prepared enough to venture into the rural territory that would be my research site. I spent the following month dutifully taking Spanish lessons, meeting new people through the help of my Spanish teacher and the young man who was our initial contact in Morelia, as well as venturing out into the hot streets of the city to practice my language skills in the local *tiendas* and *mercados*.

The issue of language had mixed consequences. On the positive side, the lack of initial language skills was lessened slightly by the fact that there were a handful of people in the town with whom I was able to converse in English to some extent, as well as many more who knew phrases or enough words to get my gist or help me translate my ideas into Spanish. And although my ability to communicate myself was not on par with what I would expect in an English context, my general comprehension of written and spoken Spanish were far more advanced, even early in my fieldwork experience. I believe that this was largely due to the fact that I am conversant in French, and between my classes in Spanish and the similarities between French, Spanish, and even English, I was able to understand a great deal. This understanding created some unique opportunities for me. as I was sometimes present for conversations that I am not sure would have taken place in my presence under other circumstances. On one of my early solo visits to the town I had the opportunity to accompany Ofelia as she did an interview for one of the local newspapers at a home in the rancho of La Palma. I wrote in my notes,

> I went with Ofelia to a rancho house today to visit a woman who had some
> information about the crumbling conditions of the schoolhouse. When we

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arrived there were five women at the farm house, approximately 15 to 55 in age, who invited us to lunch and were very welcoming... As we sat eating *pozole*, the women gossiped about local political leaders and I was shocked to hear the number of swear words that they used to describe events in the local community.

Although over time I found that people became more open and less formal with me, I am unsure if the women would have spoken quite as openly as they did had they considered me a threat or believed that I was fully able to understand everything that they said upon our first meeting. While I was able to see the positive aspects of this situation, I also wrote in my notes about that visit,

> The women spoke so quickly that I could barely keep up with all of what they said. I am nervous about my transition from city to town and wonder how far my Spanish lessons will actually take me in 'real life'

Indeed, not only did this feeling play a part in my reluctance to enter the research site as early as I had initially planned, the sentiment continued to plague me throughout much of my research period, and I believe, had consequences for my fieldwork. Each day was different and one day I would feel a boost in my Spanish abilities, followed by a less confident day the next. Psychologically, the doubt that I sometimes experienced led to a defeatist attitude on the less confident days; how could I perform the tasks that were in front of me? Could I ask the right questions? Would I be understood?

Beyond my need to psychologically prod myself some days; my language skills had a direct impact on my fieldwork in some unexpected ways. Upon my arrival in Acuitzio, I was introduced to a number of local residents from a variety of social circles in the community. These early encounters usually consisted of me using what little language skill I had accumulated up to that point in greetings, pleasantries, and explanations about myself (as these were the things that I was most frequently asked about, it follows that these would be the areas that I would be most able to discuss early in my fieldwork period). As time went on and my language skills developed, I revisited several of these individuals, and was often told how surprised they were with my progress. If I encountered them in situations where other people were involved, however, very little interaction would take place between us, perhaps a reaction to the impression that I remained unable to speak intelligibly. On one occasion, soon after my arrival in

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Acuitzio, I was sitting alone in the plaza when a young woman called out to me in English. I wrote in my field notes,

> As I sat in the plaza this evening awaiting Leo, a young woman approached me and began speaking to me in English... with a heavy California "street" accent. She said to me, 'hey, so you must be the girl who doesn't talk much?' which I found to be quite amusing. I agreed with her assessment and told her that I had lots to say but didn't always have the words to express myself, to which she replied that she understood perfectly. She said that she lives in LA but is here visiting for a few weeks and had seen me around town. She then said she would see me later as she was off to party with her '*gente*' ['people'].

In addition to this example, on several occasions I was told by acquaintances that they would have approached me sooner but that they just assumed that my language skills in Spanish were non-existent. Unfortunately, the combination of these two sets of assumptions coupled with my own insecurities sometimes resulted in missed opportunities for interviews.

Language was the largest but not the only challenge that I faced in conducting research in Acuitzio; I also feel that my gender, age, and appearance were factors in my fieldwork experience. For instance, although women do constitute a sizeable segment of the migrating population, many female migrants from the community move with their families to the United States and may remain away from the community for longer periods of time (Komarnisky 2006; Wiest 2008, personal communications, July 2007). Due in part to these demographic divisions in the labour migration stream from Mexico to the US, the majority of migrants from Acuitzio and the surrounding area with whom I interacted were men, which sometimes created difficulties meeting and making meaningful contacts with this group. On more than one occasion I found myself in an awkward situation; whether deciding on a neutral territory in which to carry out an interview, or even getting the interview to begin with. And the problems were not confined to relations with older migrants; one prospective interviewee, an 18 year old young man from the neighbouring rancho of *la Palma*, who had spent several years working in Texas, insisted that he could be persuaded to give me an interview if I would just give him a little kiss. Needless to say, that interview never took place.

Similarly, older men with wives and families were unlikely to be seen speaking with me, perhaps feeling that our interactions would be taken out of context. Among women I sometimes felt boring eyes, heard unpleasant remarks whispered just within earshot or, worse yet, received nothing more than a blank stare in return for my greeting as we passed in the street. These negative encounters had varying impacts on my fieldwork; those imposed upon me by the circumstances and those that I began to impose upon myself based on my experiences.

The individuals that I found most likely to embrace me, answer my questions, or just sit and chat with me, were often those who had come to the town from other places in Mexico. Whether they had arrived only recently or had lived in Acuitzio for many years, if they came from areas outside of the municipality, I often felt most comfortable speaking to them; they seemed to understand what it was to come to a strange town, not knowing anyone, and have to integrate oneself into the community. In a similar way, my lack of language skills in Spanish, as well as my entrance into a community and a culture unknown to me before my visit, mirrored the experience of many migrants from Acuitzio to the US, who often enter and may live years without learning English in their new setting. Although migration tends to grow organically out of social networks, I met several people who migrated to areas in the US in which they had no extended family, friends, or even acquaintances. The ability to sympathise with the plight that they endured and their ability to recognise my own hardships often led to interesting discussions about the nature of belonging.

While non-native Acuitzences were often the most welcoming to me upon my arrival in the community, this is not to say that I was not well received by many life-time residents of the community, nor can I say that my fieldwork experiences were overwhelmingly negative or difficult. The family with whom I stayed welcomed me into their home immediately and provided me with valuable connections to the daily activities, gossip, and people of the community. Owners of one of the most important *abarrotes* (grocery stores) in the community, the family spent over thirteen years together in California, where their two youngest children were born. Now all adults, their eldest son continues to live in California with his wife, while the two younger children divide

their time between Morelia and Acuitzio for university and work. As a result of their history and current situations, the family was in a unique position to provide insights into transnational life. In addition, as residents with considerable social status and wealth, living with the family provided a window into the lifestyle of a certain demographic of successful Acuitzences. For example, the family employed a variety of individuals in community through their store, domestic household work, temporary labour, construction, and the running of a popular salon. These connections with the community simultaneously provided me with opportunities for networking and meeting people even as it may have set me further apart in the eyes of Acuitzences. The tension of the situation did not go unnoticed by me, however, the immense benefits of my living arrangements, as well as the hospitality and generosity of all family members, greatly outweighed any less positive effects.

As the town population fluctuates from month to month during the year, as well as serving the larger municipal population for political events, church holidays, festivities, commercial activities, and a variety of other functions, at any given point in time there were people temporarily passing through the town who were willing to chat with me. And each time that I return to the community I have found people to be more welcoming than the previous visit. In fact, although my initial stay in Acuitzio was nearly six months, each subsequent visit that I have made – each only a few weeks in length – has been more productive than the last and have given me a chance to see a longer-term trajectory of the community's development, as well as given me the opportunity to meet people who can only visit the town infrequently.

In addition to personal challenges in conducting research in Acuitzio, I also recognise several limitations to the research at hand. As with any social situation, the people with whom one surrounds oneself have an impact on future possible social interactions. Upon my initial arrival in Acuitzio, and indeed through my first stay in the community, I was less aware of the overall view in the community of certain individuals, and in this way, I may have inadvertently closed certain social networks to myself by my early choices. In one exchange early in my fieldwork, I was asked about an acquaintance in the town. When I affirmed that we had become friends, I was warned that, at least in

some circles, the opinion of the individual was not positive. This type of remark was not infrequent in that, as with small towns everywhere, everyone has an opinion or a story about everyone else.

As my research took place at one 'node' in a circuit of migration, albeit arguably the most important node in the network, I was only able to come into contact with those individuals who happened to be in the community during my visits. This is especially important to note in that many migrants, especially those who cross illegally into the US, express that it is difficult to visit their family and friends in Acuitzio on a regular basis for fear of apprehension upon their return to work in the US. With border security issues increasingly scrutinised and politicised since 2001, the sense that the risks outweigh the benefits of returning to Mexico has extended the lengths of US stays for several of the participants in my research. For example, increased anxiety over the border situation kept one of my contacts from returning to the community for more than five years, and research conducted in other Mexican communities has drawn similar conclusions (see Stephen 2007). In turn, the transient nature of return visits and visitors to Acuitzio confined my research to available respondents who happened to be in the community during my research period. Although I am aware of other individuals who may have been important participants to my research agenda, my research design and my inability to access these contacts during visits, due primarily to scheduling conflicts, made interviewing impossible. This is definitely an area upon which my research could be expanded.

As a result of the challenges discussed here, I do not believe that my sample necessarily reflects a complete picture of everyone's experience in Acuitzio. Nevertheless, I am confident that within these bounds and limitations, the research that I conducted in Acuitzio encompasses an accurate and honest account, and a reasonable representation, of the experiences of my research participants; it also presents some of the challenges, ideals, and strategies of a group of people brought together, in one way or another, by a community that they hold dear.

Despite the limitations and challenges, I believe that this research also has several strengths worth mentioning. First, I was fortunate to have spent the majority of my first

trip – as well as part of my third visit in early 2006 – during the peak period of the return of migrants to the community. In addition to witnessing the influx of US-based migrants to the town during the peak winter season, I was also fortunate to be in the community during *Semana Santa* (Easter Week), a period in which many internal migrants living in other areas of Mexico, as well as extended family members of Acuitzences, visit the town. The length of my initial research period, coupled with my return visits, and the historical nature of Raymond Wiest's work in the community, provided me with the opportunity to develop a broad and longer-term view of the movement of individuals into and out of the community, as well as elaborate upon the variety of activities and community events that are involved in the creation of community cohesion and identity.

Before discussing the community of Acuitzio and its accommodation for and incorporation of transnational practices, it is crucial to examine migration from the community to sites in the US and Mexico. In the next chapter I discuss the historical continuities of labour migration from Acuitzio to the US (and other areas of Mexico), emphasising the ways that migration has been integrated into community identity. Basing my analysis on the experiences related by research participants as well as my own observations, I examine some of the reasons for migration from Acuitzio to the US and seek to underline the very ordinariness of transnational lives within the context of migration practices.

Chapter Four

Migration

Before discussing the town of Acuitzio del Canje, Michoacán, it is important to examine the labour migration patterns that are so much a part of the region's social and economic character. While the purpose of this research was not to determine contemporary migration practices from the community, in this chapter I relate the importance of migration to the people of Acuitzio, underlining the ordinariness of the practice of migration from the region to other areas of Mexico and the US. Like Stephen (2007:5), who notes "the utter normality of people living and working for significant periods of time in places other than their homes" for families participating in migration from Oaxaca to the US, labour migration from Acuitzio has become common and even expected by most Acuitzences. Indeed, it is from this migration and the overall effects of globalization that we may discuss Acuitzio as a transnational community.

MIGRATION FROM ACUITZIO

The residents of Acuitzio have a long history of engagement with labour migration, with extended families often counting multiple generations of repeated movement between the community and sites in Mexico and the United States. Among the older generation of Acuitzences, several have early experiences with migration to the US as participants in the *Bracero* program, an agreement that existed from 1942 to 1964 between the Mexican and American governments and permitted Mexican citizens to work legally in the US, often as agricultural labourers. The *Bracero* period, as well as subsequent periods of documented migration to the US, have had lasting effects on the community of Acuitzio, and indeed, several elder Acuitzences with whom I spoke continued to collect US pension and other benefits related to their time as *braceros* and temporary documented labourers in the United States.

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Labour migration from Acuitzio has historically flowed to sites in the US, as well as to sites in Mexico, predominantly Mexico City, and the nearby capital of the state of Michoacán, Morelia. While no statistical data exists for the current number of migrants from Acuitzio to the US or elsewhere in Mexico, most families in the community have extended family members, as well as abundant friends and neighbours, who spend at least part of their time living and working in other locations. Acuitzences in the US include a fairly large population in Chicago; in the Los Angeles region; in agricultural towns of the San Joaquín Valley, California; as well as a sizeable population in Anchorage, Alaska (see Komarnisky 2006; Wiest 2008, personal communications). The only recent statistical information available that refers specifically to migration practices from Acuitzio can be found in the 2005 Mexican federal census. The census distinguished between the population over the age of five years reported for the town in 2000 and that recorded in 2005, showing that 88 residents of the town in 2005 lived elsewhere in 2000, 37 of whom lived in the US (INEGI 2005). This information speaks more to the rate of return of migrants and population growth due to internal migration than the rate of out-migration from the town, leaving the question of the number and ratio of migrants from Acuitzio to the US and other areas of Mexico a topic where more emphasis should be placed in future work.

At the end of the *Bracero* program, Acuitzences continued to migrate for work to a variety of sites in the US, often following the social networks opened up during the *Bracero* period in order to find work in California, as well as in Illinois and Alaska. Wiest (1970) noted that Acuitzences had a relatively high number of individuals with green cards, Immigrant visas, and work permits during the period of his research in 1966-67, after the *Bracero* program had officially been cancelled. Additionally, he noted that there were a variety of other ways through which Acuitzences entered the US during this time, including employer sponsorships, temporary and other visas, as well as undocumented "illegal" entry (Wiest 1970:86-89). According to his research, as well as several people with whom I spoke in Acuitzio, individuals often return to the US repeatedly and use more than one means of entry – documented or undocumented – over the course of their personal migration history (Wiest 1970:89). In more recent years, the

trend toward documented migration between Acuitzio and areas throughout the US appears to have continued (Komarnisky 2006; Wiest 2008, personal communications, July 2007).

Contemporary migrants from Acuitzio enter the US through a variety of means. Among those individuals with whom I spoke in Acuitzio, several migrants had "papers", including work visas, resident visas, and in a few cases, US citizenship, allowing them to work and live legally in the US. Documented migration was often, although not exclusively, the case when families (husband, wife and children) lived in the US together. Others entered the US legally as tourists with the intention of working, and still others entered the US without documentation. Of those who entered without work visas, other documents, or on tourist visas, all the participants in this research, and most of those who I met in Acuitzio, were single young men at their time of entrance into the US. Several acquired documentation while in the US that permitted them to work, including legal documents based on counterfeits[4] and others were eventually able to acquire documented status, including legal residency.

Documentation and work visas are difficult to acquire and it may take years to complete the required paperwork. Speaking with Pilar, the Director of the town's *Centro de Atención al Migrante*, the state-run agency charged with migrant issues, she explained the average wait times for acquiring resident visas for families of legal residents.

> To arrange for residency [status], when they are doing it for one person, who is [already] a resident, like men, when they are arranging it for their wife and children, in some cases it takes five years...four, five years... [I]t can take as much as ten years until the date that they present themselves at the border, of the other side [American side]. At the moment it is in Ciudad Juarez, [with] the border agents...so that they can cross... When they are citizens and they want... to transmit residency [status] to relatives... it is quicker, in two years, more or less...
>
> *Para arreglar su residencia, cuando les están (unclear) para una persona que es residente, como los señores, cuando están arreglando para su esposa y sus hijos, en algunos casos tardaban cinco años... cuatro, cinco años... [H]asta 10 años pueden tardar en... en llegar... la cita para que se presenten en la frontera, del otro lado. En el momento está en la Ciudad*

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[4] In one case, the individual was able to acquire an American birth certificate with which he applied and received legal drivers' licenses in several US states.

Juarez, para adua[nas]... para que puedan pasar... Cuando son
ciudadanos y quieren... tramitar la residencia para los familiares... es más
rápido, en dos años, más o menos...

Ismael, a husband and father of three living in Anchorage with his family and visiting Acuitzio in December 2004, experienced an eight-year wait for his family to join him in the US.

> Ismael: They gave them [his wife and children] their papers in 1999, the first of December 1999. So then we moved to Tennessee. And later, to Alaska...
>
> Erin: How difficult was it to get them papers?
>
> Ismael: Eh, waiting. Waiting... I always spoke with people who know [about]... migration, let's say... about the rules for migration, even though the rules change every once in a while. So... when I [unclear - arranged for] my family, the wait was five years. But in that time of changes, the five years became eight... [M]ore than anything the changes were due to changes in the government system... I waited eight years for my family.
>
> *Ismael: Les dieron sus papeles en '99, diciembre primero de '99.*
> *Entonces ya, nos mudamos a Tennessee. Y despues, a Alaska...*
>
> *Erin: Qué tan dificil fue que les dieron los papeles?*
>
> *Ismael: Eh, esperar. Esperar... siempre hablaba yo con personas, que*
> *conocen... la migración, vamos a decir... como son las reglas que siguen*
> *la migración, aunque las reglas cambien cada rato. Entonces... cuando yo*
> *(unclear) a mi familia, era de cinco años de espera. Pero en ese tiempo de*
> *cambios, entonces los cinco años iniciaron ocho... [M]ás que nada por los*
> *cambios que había por el sistema de gobierno... Esperé ocho años por mi*
> *familia.*

For those individuals wishing to enter the US alone, such as single men or women, the wait for documentation can be equally lengthy. In addition, requests for entrance visas and other documents may require that applicants have proof of resources that would allow them to return to Mexico. For these reasons, individuals, especially youth, may decide to forego the paperwork and enter the US as undocumented migrants. I asked Pilar if the wait for papers resulted in individuals arranging to cross the border undocumented;

> Mm-hmm (yes) and [so] better they go that way... without waiting to arrange [the paperwork]. And others, like young people and youth, if their

parents don't have residency [status] and they haven't arranged it, or infrequently they have it but they don't want to make arrangements, well, the same. That is to say, they find a way and 'I'm going to find someone to help me and let's go'… In two weeks, in one week, and they want to be there already….

Mm-hmm (sí) y se van mejor así… sin esperarse a arreglar. Y otros más, como los muchachos y los jovenes, si los papás no tienen su residencia y no les han arreglado, o no muchas veces les tienen pero no les quieren arreglar, pues, igual. O sea, ellos buscan la manera y 'voy a buscar quien me ayude y vámonos'… En dos semanas, en una semana, y ya quieren estar allá…

Half of the migrants with whom I spoke formally, as well as several other migrants who shared their stories with me informally, told of crossing the border into the US without documentation, although I do not believe that this necessarily accurately reflects the divisions that exist in the migrant community from Acuitzio. While a few had initially passed into the US at border crossings prior to the attacks on US targets in September 2001, most undocumented migrants with whom I spoke in Acuitzio crossed the border in uninhabited areas, through the mountains or desert, with groups of migrants smuggled across the border with the help of *coyotes*[5]. Their stories are certainly compelling.

Domingo, one such undocumented migrant, began our interview by expressing his anxiety over his departure to the US the next day. This return trip would be his second undocumented crossing and he was feeling nervous due to the dangers that he faced during his first crossing. Despite the hardship of crossing, he felt that his construction job in California was worth the risk; as a twenty six year old man with an elementary education, he recognised that his economic prospects were poor in Acuitzio. By working in the US he was able to help maintain his grandparents in Acuitzio with regular monthly remittances, periodically send money to his mother in Morelia, as well as save money for the future. He, like many other Acuitzences before him, professed a desire to one day return to Acuitzio with enough money to build a house and start a small business. He recounted his border story to me during a visit to Acuitzio in February 2006:

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[5] 'Coyote' is the name used both colloquially as well as in much of the literature to refer to labour recruitment agents and others who aid migrants, for a fee, in crossing the border into the United States.

Domingo: From here we left on... Monday, March 15th [1999]... we went there by bus... We were on the bus for two days... we arrived in Sonora... we arrived at like, at like eight at night, there, on Tuesday night. And we were there for the whole night, the whole day Wednesday... until Thursday... when they came for us, him, the person...

Erin: The coyote?

Domingo: Yes... he took us in a truck...just up to the line, to the border...And there, there are many people who charge to cross the land... They *charge* you... I thought that all we had to do was cross the line and that's it. We began to walk. We walked all that day. All day, like until nine at night... and there we went into a, like a shed... and there we stayed the whole night. Quite cold... Like in the day it is so hot, it is just as cold at night... We got up at like six in the morning and... we started to walk... all day... like until four in the afternoon... and I tell you, one could really feel the long walk... What felt most, most dangerous was from there forward because we got into a truck, we are thirty, thirty people, we stayed there, shut up in the truck, all closed up... and it had little tiny holes like this (motions with his hands), like a pencil [tip], like that nothing more, and no, it was so tremendously hot inside, and in fact one of my friends, one of us, he, he got sick. And... from there it was about two and a half hours... in it, in that truck... and they get us out... There we waited like, mm, a half an hour and a couple, two trucks came back for us and we got in fifteen [in one] and fifteen [in the other]. We left first and we were going like, in the car, we traveled for about two hours or three, and the driver got a telephone call, and he was told that he must turn around... because the other [truck] has broken down... yes, and so, we got out... and there we stayed... until like six in the morning [when] they returned... from there he took us... to a house. And there... they gave us something to eat and everything... we left at about four in the afternoon and it took about four hours but in a car this time (laughs). Yes, it was pretty heavy...We arrived about eight at night, there where we were supposed to arrive... On Sunday... we got up and we went to a, it is a flea market, it's like a little market... there we ran into [another] friend from here, from Acuitzio...

Domingo: De aquí nos fuimos... el lunes, el 15 de marzo [1999]... nos fuimos allá en camion... Estuvimos como dos días en camion... llegamos a Sonora. Llegamos a como, como a las ocho de la noche, allí, de martes en la noche. Y allí estuvimos por toda la noche, el miercoles todo el día... y hasta el jueves... cuando fueron por nosotros, él, la persona pues.

Erin: El coyote?

Domingo: Sí... nos llevó en la camioneta... justo a la linea, a la frontera... Y allí, este, hay, hay mucha gente que cobra, este, por cruzar los, los terrenos... Te cobran... [yo] pensaba que nada más faltabamos cruzar la

*linea y ya. Empezamos a caminar. Caminamos todo ese día. Todo el día,
como hasta las nueve de la noche... Y este, ya nos metamos en como, una
barraca...Y ahí pasamos toda la noche. [Algo frio... Como en el día que
hace calor, hace tanto frio en la noche... Nos levantamos como a las 6 de
la mañana y... empezamos a caminar... todo el día... como hasta las 4 de
la tarde... Y yo te digo, se siente toda la caminata... Lo que se siente más,
más peligroso fue de allí y adelante porque nos metimos en la camioneta,
estamos treinta, treinta personas, nos quedó allí, metida en la camioneta,
toda cerrada...y este, tiene unos hoyitos así (motions with his hands),
como un lapiz, así nada más, y no, hace un calorón tremendo allí adentro,
y de hecho un amigo mio, uno de nosotros, se, se pusó mal. Y... de allí
fueron como dos horas y media... en esa camioneta... y nos bajan... Allí
esperamos como, mm, una media hora y ya regresaron unos, unas dos
camionetas por nosotros y nos subimos quince y quince. Nosotros nos
fuimos primero y caminamos como, en, en el carro, caminamos como unas
dos horas o tres, y le habló por telefono al, al chofer, y le dijó que hay que
regresar... por que la otra se ha descompuesto... sí, y pues, que nos baja...
y allí nos quedamos... hasta las 6 de la mañana que regresaron... de allí
nos llevó... a una casa. Y allí... nos dieron de comer y todo... salimos como
a las 4 de la tarde y tardó como cuatro horas pero ya en carro pues
(laughs). Sí, fue algo pesado... Llegamos como a las 8 de la noche, allí en
donde ibamos a llegar... El domingo... nos levantamos y nos fuimos a un,
es un* flea market, *es como un mercadito pues... allí nos encontramos a un
amigo de aquí, de Acuitzio...*

Stories such as Domingo's are not uncommon among undocumented migrants from Mexico, and indeed, the dangers associated with undocumented crossings are well known in Acuitzio, especially among those who are contemplating crossing into the US without documents. Current estimates of fatalities at the Southern US border with Mexico are as high thirty-five hundred deaths since 1995, and migrants and researchers report that it has become more dangerous and difficult to cross the border with the increased US security and scrutiny implemented in the wake of the attacks of September 11th, 2001 (Stephen 2007:xii, xiv, xvi, 29-31). Over the course of the research period, I heard several stories from Acuitzences about migrants who had died attempting to cross the border. In January 2005 the family with whom I was staying was shocked by the news of a cousin from Mexico City who drowned crossing into the US. Similarly, during my interview with Ismael, he recounted a return trip to Acuitzio five years previously when he was approached by a young man who was preparing to cross without documentation. When the young man asked Ismael for advice in crossing safely, Ismael explained that

the journey would be long and hard, with a lot of walking. Despite the fact that at the age of eighteen the young man was fit and agile, Ismael told him that he needed to be prepared for a difficult trek. He advised the young man not to drink alcohol for at least fifteen days prior to his departure although sadly, the young man was found dead from dehydration in the desert. Tragically, this was not the last time that an Acuitzence perished in pursuit of the American dream. In August 2007 I received devastating news that a dear friend, one of the respondents in this research[6], was found dead of dehydration in California after attempting to cross with the help of a *coyote*. It is believed that he became disoriented and was left to die by the *coyote* and the group of migrants with whom he was crossing. With his death have come renewed efforts by his friends and family to warn others of the dangers of undocumented migration, including a PowerPoint presentation sent out via email in an attempt to "virally" publicise his story beyond the community[7]. Indeed, although tragic and unnecessary, incidents wherein community members have died while crossing into the US provide a way for Acuitzences on both sides of the border to come together and share their grief while also increasing dialogue about migration practices within the broader community.

Despite the recognised risks associated with undocumented migration, the promise that migration will help Acuitzences to "*salir adelante*" or "*come out ahead*" is a strong incentive pulling individuals out of the community. The economic reality in Acuitzio is that there is a lack of meaningful employment opportunities, something that was repeated by most individuals with whom I spoke, whether they participated in migration to the US, other areas in Mexico, or not at all. Acuitzences, especially those with special talents or post-secondary education, feel that they are left with few opportunities and so come to consider work in other places, including the US, as options in pursuit of their career goals or economic well-being (see Wiest 1984). Even among individuals with professional training, such as Ismael who possesses a medical degree,

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[6] I have chosen not to identify the deceased respondent with his interview data in an effort to preserve the anonymity that I promised him at the time of the interview.

[7] The PowerPoint presentation has been sent out by email to all those who knew or knew of the young man, with the explicit request that it be passed along to everyone's email contacts. The hope of friends of the deceased is that his story will serve as an important lesson, and indeed, a warning, to all those who may consider undocumented migration.

employment opportunities in Mexico can be scarce. For others without an advanced education, the employment situation in Acuitzio may be more complex. As Domingo put it to me, "the economic situation is difficult. Here, although you aren't going to be without food... in order to do more than survive, that is to say, to come out ahead... to have something more... one cannot do it here". *"La situación economica está dificil. Aquí, aunque no vayas a quedar sin comer... para sobresalir, o sea, salir adelante... tener algo más... no se puede aquí."*

Labour migration not only encourages movement between the town and sites in the US, but also includes the movement of individuals on a more temporary or even daily basis to other areas of Mexico. Wiest noted that in the 1960s migration in the municipality of Acuitzio tended to follow a pattern of movement from farm or *rancho* (hamlet) to town to city, principally Mexico City (1973:182; 1980). With improvements to the highways and transportation systems between Acuitzio and Morelia, and due to the close spatial distance (approximately 35 kilometres) between town and city, Morelia has now become a hub of activities for Acuitzences. Many people from the community work or go to school in Morelia, coming home to Acuitzio in the evenings and spending their free days in town. In fact, this was the case in the family with whom I resided during the research period; the two younger children in the family, both in their early twenties, lived in Morelia during the week while attending university and working in the city; they returned to the town on weekends or periodically during the week, depending on their schedule. Many small stores and restaurants in Acuitzio rely on the goods that are available in the state capital, with individuals going to Morelia on a regular basis to purchase supplies which they use for retail sale or as the ingredients in creations of their own. With few employment opportunities in Acuitzio, several people remarked that the proximity of Morelia presents another location in which to work, while continuing to allow for residents to reside in town. In this sense, Acuitzio may be becoming a bedroom community of Morelia. I wrote in my notes about one such remark,

> I was introduced to Amelia... who said... that the biggest issue [in Acuitzio] was that there were few *"fuentes de empleo"* (employment options). For her, one of the best aspects of the town was that it was a relatively inexpensive place to live compared to Morelia, but it was close enough to the city that one could make the journey daily to work or study

Some respondents go further and connect migration to Morelia with the broader context of migration, expressing a belief that migration starts with frequent movement between the town and the city. Interviewing Jose, he said,

> [E]veryone knows someone who is in the United States or in Mexico [City], or it is more, here in Morelia... going on weekends and coming back. So... here in the town they know very well what is... migration. Short, medium, or long, but... in all regards... in fact our students from here... if they want a professional career, they must be in Morelia. Those that have possibilities... they come and go every day, others stay [live] there. But, from there the migration is already beginning. The changes... migration is coming here with those... youth... the families from here, this kind of person is very accustomed to that. To... see new people... to see those changes of, that they are making within the town.

> *[T]odos conocen a alguien que está en los Estados Unidos o en México, o es más, aquí mismo en Morelia... que va los fines de semana y que regresa. Entonces... aquí en el pueblo saben muy bien lo que es... la migracion. Corta, mediana, o larga, pero... de todos modos... de hecho nuestros estudiantes de aquí... sí quieren una carrera profesional, tienen que estar Morelia. Los que tienen posibilidades... van y vienen todos los días, otros se quedan allá. Pero, ya desde allí empieza la migracion. Los cambios... aquí mismo está yendo la migración con esos... jovenes... las familias de aquí, este tipo de gente está muy acostumbrada a eso. A... ver gente nueva... a ver eses cambios de, que están dando dentro del pueblo.*

INTERGENERATIONAL CHARACTER OF MIGRATION FROM ACUITZIO

Acuitzences relate the contemporary character of migration from the town to the perceived benefits of the practice, as well as to the experiences of previous generations of migrants. Migration from the town has been perpetuated through successive generations, following a pattern analogous to Reichert's (1981) "migrant syndrome", whereby labour migration is repeated over time and generations. Similarly, anthropologists such as Cohen (2004b), Kandel and Massey (2002) and Stephen (2007) note the ordinariness of migration practices and the growth of a "culture of migration". As Pilar explained, the wishes of contemporary migrants remain the same as those of previous generations and their hopes are rooted in what they see in the community among their peers;

In practice they (migrants' desires) are the same [as before], they are like before, they want to go, to build their homes, to [buy] their car, mmm, the young men who are not married [want] to come [back] and pass the time with their girlfriend, to have their little party, bring their truck like the one the other [guy] brings when he arrives... and they drive around and around the entire town... with the exterior [of the truck] all fixed up [laughs]. This is what they do here... this is what the young men do here. All that arrive with their good little truck, they ride up and down and through [the town], with the music at full volume so, of course, many [people] go around thinking 'well, if another [guy] has one (a truck), why shouldn't I have one too? I can go too, I can work too' but they believe, since they [only] see them with the truck they don't know how much had to happen, how much [the other guy] had to work, what, what things happened, to enable them to bring the truck that they bring [back]. And who helped them along the way, because they don't have papers, how they can cross [the border].

Practicamente están iguales, están como antes, quieren irse, que hacer sus casitas, que [comprar] su carro, mmm, los muchachos que están solteros que para venir para pasarse con la novia, que hacer su fiestacita, trae su camioneta como la trae el otro que vaya llegando...Y andan en vueltas y vueltas por todo el pueblo... con el exterior todo arreglado [laughs]. Es lo que hacen aquí... Es lo que hacen los muchachos aquí. Todos que llegan y que traen su buena camionetita, ahi andan para arriba, para abajo, para medio, con la musica a toda volumen entonces pues, muchos andan pensando 'bueno que si otro la trae ¿por que no la voy a traer yo también? También puedo irme, yo también puedo trabajar' pero creen que, porque lo ven con la camioneta no saben cuánto tuvo que pasar, cuanto tuvo que trabajar, que, que cosas pasó, por poder traer la camioneta que trae. Y quien se las puso la avenida, como no tienen papeles, como lo pueden ellos pasar.

Wiest noted that both males and females in Acuitzio began migrating as early as between fifteen and nineteen years of age in the 1960s (1973:186). Forty years later, contemporary migrants from Acuitzio still may begin migrating as teenagers. As Pilar observed, "There are young people who are sixteen years old and they begin to leave. Very young [people] who should still be in school and not... leaving to work." *"Hay muchachos que tienen 16 años y empiezan en irse. Muy jóvenes que todavía... deben estar en la escuela y no... para irse a trabajar."* Among the Acuitzences with whom I spoke who had migration experience, including the younger generation of migrants, many took their first trip to the US in their late teens or early twenties.

In fact, Acuitzences recognise that the cycle of migration begins in childhood, with children hearing about family members working in the US. Ismael recalled that his desire to work in the US was rooted in a childhood dream of adventure that developed in elementary school. By the time he was in university, his friends and classmates were planning their first trips to the US, and once he finished school he decided to join them. Pilar remarked that children are speaking about their own migration plans at an early age;

> From children. And already you hear talk about it. They say 'no, well, as soon as I am big mama, I am going to go to the United States. I am going to go to 'the other side' [of the border] too, to work'... the children also dream of going to the United States...

> *Desde niños. Y ya que lo escuchas hablar. Dicen 'no, pues, yo nada más que yo estoy grande mamá, me voy a ir para los Estados Unidos. Me voy a ir para el otro lado también a trabajar'... los niños también sueñenlo con irse a Estados Unidos...*

Similarly, José described this desire to migrate for work beginning in childhood, pointing to the experiences of children whose father or other family member spends years working in the US. Speaking of his own family, Jose related a common tale,

> I can tell you that 50 percent or more of the (my) family is in the United States. We are the only ones... that are not in the United States. I believe that everyone here, those that are from the countryside, we know what is... migration since [we were] children... You begin to hear that 'Fulano' is going to the United States, that 'Fulano' went to Mexico [City], that 'Fulano'... is not in the town because he had to leave for work purposes. From child[hood] you begin to hear that word. It becomes something common... a part of the vocabulary... in these towns. Now the children... now they are born with that idea, that one day they will have to migrate to another place... the child begins to understand that to be, that is to say, it is because your father is in the United States... one day when your father comes back... and the father comes, that he is here for two, three months and that he would go back [to the US] again, right? Here knowing about migration from that age... is very common.

> *[Y]o te puedo decir que el 50 o más por ciento de la familia está en los Estados Unidos. Somos los únicos... que no estamos en Estados Unidos. Creo que todos conocimos aquí, los que somos de provincia, conocimos lo que es... la migración desde niños... Empiezas a oír que Fulano se va a los Estados Unidos, que Fulano se fue a México, que Fulano... ya no está en el pueblo porque tuvo que salir por cuestión de trabajo. Desde niño empiezas a oír esa palabra. Ya se vuelve algo común... a dentro del*

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vocabulario... en estos pueblos. Ya los niños... ya nacen con esa idea, que algun día van a tener que migrar a alguna parte.... el niño empieza a tener razón de ser, o sea, es que tu papá está en los Estados Unidos... algun día cuando viniera tu papá... y viene el papá, que está aquí por dos, tres meses y que se volviera a ir nuevamente, no? Aquí saber de la migración desde ese edad... es muy común.

Migration from the town is perpetuated through the generations and young Acuitzences have the experience of their parents, often their fathers, upon which to draw. Indeed, the experiences of fathers, older brothers, and other family members inform the decisions of the next generation when it comes to migration. For example, Nicolás expressed that his own desire to migrate in 2001 stemmed from the experience of his older brother, who was living in California and who had offered him a job. Additionally, his father, who also has an extensive migration history, was able to help Nicolás acquire a job in Texas during his time in the US. His extended family includes aunts, uncles, and cousins who have been living in California for decades. As Pilar noted, social connections facilitate labour migration to the US; "It is made easier for them because already, [there is] family, [there is] a friend [there]... they find the way to be there". *"Se les facilitan más porque ya, que la familia, que el amigo... buscan los medios de como estar allá".*

While they may never have been outside of Mexico for work, young people in Acuitzio still relate to the migration experiences of their family members and to those experiences of individuals in the larger community. Gabriel, a young man in his mid-twenties who has never migrated to the US, was very familiar with his father's experience in Alaska. One day while I was visiting at his house, he came across photographs of his father from the 1960s and 1970s. After hearing about these experiences throughout his childhood, he was able to vividly describe the situations in the photographs and explained to me where, when, and in many cases, with whom, his father had been during that time period. In Gabriel's case, his knowledge of migration was second-hand, yet it was intimate enough for him to say decisively that migration was not in his future. Similarly, Ofelia juxtaposed her decision to stay and work in Acuitzio with the decisions of others who migrated. While she appreciated that for some people

migration was a viable economic alternative, she preferred to remain in the town and work to improve conditions within it, hopefully reducing the need for others to leave.

Indeed, migration is not always a popular option for Acuitzences. Wiest (1984) noted that in the early 1980s there was a backlash against migration in the community, and sometimes even migrants themselves are reluctant to allow their children to follow in their footsteps. Pascual told me about his decision at age eighteen to pick up and leave Acuitzio for Alaska. His father, who had an extensive history of migrating, having worked over the course of twenty years in many locations throughout the US, was incensed with Pascual's decision. I wrote in my notes,

> Today Pascual and I spoke about his improving relationship with his father. He said that they began to really connect after his return from the US after four years of working in Alaska. At age 18 he decided to 'seek his fortune' in the US but when he told his father he was leaving, the elder Mateo said, "If you leave this house, don't come back". With the stubbornness of youth (as he put it) Pascual left. He said that at the time he was very upset by his father's reaction and during his time away he essentially lost contact with his father...Upon his return to Mexico his father took him aside and explained that he had gone to the US in order to prevent his children from needing to do the same thing. His experience was not always good in the US and he did not want his children to have the same hardships.

The tensions inherent in labour migration also ensure that migration plays an important role in Acuitzences' community conceptions. Although not all agree on the practice of migration for themselves, everyone has an opinion to relate on the subject.

In addition to the family and other social networks that are undoubtedly major factors encouraging labour migration from Acuitzio, other signs of migration and American popular culture are everywhere in the community. During the research period I encountered several advertisements in the town requesting migrants for work in the US. One such ad, pasted to telephone booths and posts in the plaza, advertised work in a cannery in Alaska for Acuitzences with work visas or other documentation.

Often, however, the signs of migration are more subtle or require a closer examination in order to fully appreciate their true consequences for the community. In this chapter I have detailed some of the history of migration from Acuitzio, as well as some of the personal histories and stories of migrants themselves. By exploring some of

the ways and reasons that migration has been perpetuated from one generation to the next, I have sought to emphasise the normality of migration from Acuitzio to other regions of Mexico and the United States. In the next chapter I build upon this history, further examining the social impacts of migration from the town. I seek to illustrate how community activities incorporate migration, thereby affecting the sense of community identity that develops for Acuitzences. Ultimately, it is my contention that Acuitzio del Canje should be understood as a transnational community; a community whose boundaries, both social and physical, transcend the farms, ranchos, and town site to integrate the transnational experiences of its citizens 'at home' and abroad.

Chapter Five

Community Identity

In this chapter I explore the community of Acuitzio, focussing primarily on the idea of community identity. There are several difficulties inherent in research attempting to portray community identity. First, community identity is often associated with the physical site of a community, encompassing elements that connect individuals to *place*; for a community like Acuitzio, such elements include family, friends, and the physical landscape of the town. Similarly, less concrete elements of community, such as festivities and festive events, community history, and community dynamics also shape conceptions of community. Both the concrete and ethereal elements of community identity are dynamic. Shaped by practice and shifting with the passage of time, identity is situated in lived experience as well as in the memories of individuals and groups. For a community such as Acuitzio, with strong historical and contemporary ties to other places through migration practices, the idea of community is further compounded by processes of movement.

Before returning to examine labour migration and its integration into community identity begun in the preceding chapter, I wish to briefly explore elements of the place of Acuitzio that serve as physical and social anchors for both resident and migrating Acuitzences. Gupta and Ferguson (1992) recognise that the idea of community can refer both to physical space and to social interaction, with collective identity emerging from the intersection of these elements within systemic processes of cultural construction. Referring to physical space as a "neutral grid" upon which history and memory is etched, they understand that identity is a force that draws upon the meanings ascribed to place (2002:66).

While Acuitzences often claim that their identity is defined by their place of birth, Jeffrey Cohen suggests that "birth does not guarantee identity; it establishes only the most basic of boundaries around which an identity can be constructed" (2004:159).

Indeed, in his discussion of the community of Santa Ana del Valle, Oaxaca, Cohen cautions against approaches to identity that rely on essentialist ideas emphasising static cultural traits or social institutions. Instead, community identity must be viewed as a dynamic force that, while encompassing historical meaning, also shifts and responds to the contemporary pressures and challenges of everyday life. As a result, Acuitzence identity should also be sought out in the enduring presence of family, friendships, and other social relationships, such as *compadrazgo* or ritual co-parenthood, between individuals from the town. Indeed, through lines of communication with their social relations, Acuitzences who have left to pursue employment elsewhere in Mexico and the US are able to establish and maintain connections to the community and the root of their personal identity. Similarly, Acuitzences with connections outside of the town site are able to extend the space of their social relations, and as I argue below, the social space of "Acuitzio" itself becomes transnational.

Although not an exhaustive list, I emphasise several attributes here that are strongly linked to community identity for residents and migrating Acuitzences alike – the physical space of Acuitzio and the interplay of the site with the social relationships of Acuitzences, the history and place of Acuitzio in national and international events, and the national culture of Mexico as manifest in Acuitzio. Through examples, I explore how these fundamentals of identity serve as a backdrop to the labour migration practices that are pervasive in the daily lives of the people of the town. All of these elements are intertwined in Acuitzence identity through *practice*, and ultimately, I argue that the transnational experiences of resident and migrant Acuitzences, while drawing individuals from the community, also serve as a dynamic unifying force in creating a sense of collective and community identity.

ACUITZIO AS PLACE AND SOCIAL SPACE

The town of Acuitzio del Canje is located in the central Mexican state of Michoacán del Ocampo, approximately 35 kilometres southwest of the state capital of Morelia. The town is the *cabecera* or head of the *municipio* (municipality) of Acuitzio, which encompasses forty population centres, most small *ranchos* or hamlets with less than 100 residents each. In fact, the town of Acuitzio is the only centre in the

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municipality with more than 600 residents. The population of Acuitzio was 5,948 residents in 2005, according to Mexican federal statistics (INEGI 2005), accounting for nearly 60 percent of the 10,052 residents of the municipality. Although the name *Acuitzio* is indigenous Tarascan (P'urhépecha) for "hill of snakes," Spanish is the dominant language in the community. In fact, only twelve individuals in the town were identified in the 2005 census as speakers of indigenous languages, and in general, the residents of the town identify as *mestizo* rather than with local indigenous populations.

Located in the mountainous region of the state in an area known as *tierra fria* (cold land), the town is situated at 2020 metres above sea level and has a moderate climate, with temperatures fluctuating between 5 and 30 degrees Celsius. It is nestled between three *cerros*, or small mountains, and surrounded by pine forests and agricultural land. On its western edge, the town slopes up the *Cerro Viejo*, also known as the *Cerro de la Cruz* due to a large cross near its peak. The town is separated into three sections; *las Peñas*, the northern area at the town's entrance from Morelia, named for its location amongst the rocky cliffs and hills of the *Cerro Viejo*; the town centre or old town of Acuitzio; and *la Colonia Riva Palacio* (most often referred to as *la Colonia* by local residents), located south of the town centre, just off the highway linking Acuitzio to the neighbouring community of Villa Madero.

The town is connected to Morelia by following two roadways; the main highway between Morelia and the lakeside community of Pátzcuaro, and a shorter, winding road joining Acuitzio to the main highway five kilometres north, at the town of Tiripetio. At one time the journey between Acuitzio and Morelia was arduous; winding through mountains and hills on a dirt road, travel could take up to three hours, especially during the rainy season between June and September (Wiest 1973). However, in the 1970s the current highway configuration was completed and travel time was reduced to less than a half an hour by car (Wiest 1983b:71). The town and city are linked by regular bus service along the route between Villa Madero and Morelia, with buses through Acuitzio approximately every 15 minutes starting at 6 am, the last bus leaving Acuitzio toward Morelia around 8 pm, and the last one entering the town around 9 pm each day. The various *ranchos* surrounding the town, and the three sections of town, are serviced

regularly by a fleet of small minivans, or *combis*, which also travel between Acuitzio and Tiripetio. Travel by bus is relatively inexpensive at 13 pesos each way between Acuitzio and Morelia (approximately $1.25 USD during the research period), and four pesos per *combi* ride, although by local standards these fees add to a significant sum when travelling frequently.

Along the stretch of road leading into town at *las Peñas,* one finds Acuitzio's main *fútbol* (soccer) pitch, an important site for the many soccer teams based in Acuitzio and the surrounding area. Every weekend the area is full of activity as local teams battle each other in Mexico's national passion, cheered from the sidelines by family, friends, and other players who have stayed to drink beer and watch the game. It is an important social arena for people of all ages, especially men, and indeed, sport of all kinds is taken seriously in Acuitzio.

Across the highway and slightly south of the pitch is the newest and largest of Acuitzio's many social centres, *el Salon Rodeo*. Some of the most important social events in Acuitzio, for both year-round residents and returning migrants, take place in the many salons throughout the town. These halls are the sites of community events, such as public dances in honour of religious and festive holidays, as well as family gatherings, from *quinceañeras* to wedding receptions. Salons are in heavy demand in the community and there are often several occupied on weekends, especially during the late autumn and early winter months. In December demand for the salons reaches its peak, with the halls often booked solid through the week – the sites of a plethora of events stuffed into the few weeks per year during which many family members are in town from the United States.

The main section of town is set up along the grid pattern that was common during the Spanish colonial period. Short streets of adobe-walled homes painted white and burnt red surround the central plaza, Acuitzio's main public space, which is situated adjacent to the principal church and parochial school. The plaza itself is rectangular in shape, encircled by paved stone promenades, and lined by park benches and tall trees. At its centre is a round covered stage, or kiosk, flanked by two small cement fountains and surrounded by green space and walkways divided by short iron fences.

Across the road on the southern side of the plaza is *la Presidencia*, the municipal government buildings, which house the local police headquarters, the main post office, public washrooms, and the town's historic clock tower. On the raised western walkway of the plaza are a series of storefronts, including the local library building, which was recently reconstructed and reopened to the public in 2005. Although known as "*La Biblioteca,*" the library shares space with the *Instituto Michoacano de la Juventud* (state-run youth centre) – one of the locations of public Internet access in the town – and the local office of the *Centro de Atención al Migrante*, the state agency charged with coordinating migration issues.

The plaza space, like the soccer pitch and salons, is more than the bricks and mortar of its walkways and serves as an important social setting for the community, as well as retaining a commercial function (see Ames 1973). At nearly every hour of the day one encounters groups of Acuitzences sitting and conversing in the shade, and on Sunday nights locals of all ages stroll the promenade, meet neighbours, and enjoy the cool evening air. Taco stands and other food vendors draw customers into the plaza each evening, and the site bustles on weekends, with vendors displaying everything from peanuts to pottery to CDs and DVDs. Indeed, memories of the *"tranquilo y bonito"* (tranquil and pretty) nature of Acuitzio are often based in plaza scenes such as this, with both migrants and residents of Acuitzio discussing the plaza space as important for their conceptions of the community.

Residents like José, who moved to Acuitzio from the neighbouring state of Jalisco by way of Mexico City, refer to the customs and traditions of the region as important elements of small communities in general, and Acuitzio in particular;

> The reason that I left... the city is because I wanted to live close to these traditions. Not just be left with... what is on the television, the overview of... the party... but that... I wanted to be present and part of the tradition too... I see... the festivities of the towns, the customs of the people and all that, and I love and respect it a lot. That is to say, I would like [to ensure] that these customs don't come to an end... There are many right here that... including some that have lost their origins [over time], right? They have been adapted from their origins in certain customs, or certain ideas... and exist, who knows from where, who knows from when, but they continue to exist in our time; they are still right here. There is a custom that is very . typical of here, to see women going out early to sweep the street... In many

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large cities... one doesn't see this anymore because there is a... cleaning service. But here this custom still exists, to see many women, early, sweeping and watering the street. And... it gives an ambience to the town... Or... the traditions of seeing our little old men... talking, coming together and talking in the plaza... to see them conversing, at times, I don't know, it gives one the temptation to listen in.

El hecho de yo salirme... de una ciudad es porque quise vivir de cerca estas traducciones. No nada más quedarme con... lo que sacan en la televisión, el resumen de... la fiesta... sino que... yo quise estar presente y ser parte también de esa tradición... Yo veo... las fiestas de los pueblos, de las costumbres de la gente y todo eso, y me encantan y la respeto mucho. O sea, quisiera que estas costumbres no se terminaran... Hay muchas por ahí... que incluso hasta que se pierdan sus orígenes, no? Se adaptaron de su origen en ciertas costumbres, o ciertas ideas... que existen, quien sabe de donde, quien sabe de cuando, pero que aún en nuestros tiempos... aún estan ahí. Hay una costumbre muy típica de aquí, de ver a las mujeres salir temprano a barrer la calle... Que ya en muchas ciudades grandes... no se ve porque ya hay un servicio de... limpieza. Pero aquí todavía existe esa costumbre de ver a muchas de las mujeres, temprano, barrer y regar su calle. Y... da un ambiente al pueblo... o... las tradiciones de ver a nuestros señores viejitos... platicar, juntarse y platicar en la plaza... verle a ellos platicando, a veces, no se, da tentación de poner una oreja.

Migrants from the community also identify with quiet scenes of the town. While reflecting on his migration to the US, Domingo noted the pangs of homesickness for Acuitzio that he experienced one day as he left to work at his construction job in Modesto, California;

I went out on the street... and the street was <u>empty</u>, there were no people, nobody was out... and I said to myself, where am I? (pause) Oh! It gave me a lot of nostalgia for here, for Acuitzio.

Salí en la calle... y la calle <u>sola</u>, no había nada de gente, no había nadie... y me dije, donde estoy? (p) ¡Oh! Me dio mucha nostalgia por aquí, por Acuitzio.

Another area of social interaction in the community is *la Plazuela,* located adjacent to the churchyard and northwest of the plaza. The *plazuela* is a small paved courtyard surrounded by homes and storefronts, containing a basketball court that is often filled with school-aged children and teens playing ball and hanging out with friends. Roberto cited this area as an important place in his recollections of Acuitzio;

[As a kid] I played basketball everyday. I used - you know, I went to school, I had parties with my friends and all of that, and now that I'm back here, I, I'm always playing basketball, everyday, every single day, in the, in *la plazuela*... .

The *plazuela* is also the site of an annual basketball tournament, hosted by the community at the beginning of August, which draws local teams from all over Michoacán to compete for prizes and prestige on the court. In addition to its sport functions, the site serves as a meeting and presentation place for local and national events, such as the celebrations on Mexico's national Flag Day.

At the other end of the plaza, running southbound past *la Presidencia*, is the main street through town, *Avenida Vicente Riva Palacio*. From its origins at the plaza, *Riva Palacio* leads into the highway to Villa Madero at Acuitzio's southern boundary and is the principal route where social exchanges take place in the town. It is lined for blocks with small grocery and convenience stores, as well as restaurants, pharmacies and other services, and is where the majority of business is conducted in Acuitzio. *Riva Palacio* is the route taken by buses coming in from Morelia and also serves as the course taken by parades and religious processions through the town.

Down the road from the northernmost corner of the plaza is the *Teatro Coatepec*, a hub of cultural activities in the town. This theatre building, reconstructed in the early 1990s though the donations and dedication of a small group of local entrepreneurs and migrants, houses the offices of the local *Casa de la Cultura*, the state-run cultural centre, which is responsible for organising a variety of events in the community, including traditional Mexican dance, theatre, and art programs. The centre has two groups of traditional dancers who, in addition to participating in state competitions against *Casa* dancers from other communities, also make presentations on a monthly basis in the *plazuela* and in nearly all community festivities.

Another public site with important social significance to the community is situated at its southern end of the town, in *la Colonia*. The *jaripeo* or rodeo ring is a large outdoor stadium complex used for bull-riding and other local celebrations. During the course of the research period in Acuitzio I attended two major events at the ring; the first, a huge annual *jaripeo* celebrating the community's migrants in January 2005; and the

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second, a smaller *jaripeo* in honour of the municipal president's birthday in May 2005. The celebration of events for *el Día de los Norteños*, the "Day of the Northerners", referring to the Mexicans who work in the US, is another example of a community-wide activity that draws revellers from the surrounding municipality. Beginning after a luncheon in honour of migrants in the early afternoon of January 2, residents and migrants streamed into the *jaripeo* ring where they were entertained by bull riders from the municipality and elsewhere in Mexico, as well as music from a ten-piece band, complete with dancing girls, that continued well into the evening when the grounds were converted into a giant open-air dance.

Organised to coincide with the peak flow of US migrants to Acuitzio, taking advantage of the event is important to both migrants and residents. Indeed, several visiting Acuitzences with whom I spoke talked specifically about extending their stay into January in order to attend the event. Participants at the festivities were able to purchase T-shirts that were printed in commemoration of the event, as well as a variety of other merchandise locally available celebrating the community[8]. The importance of the celebrations is widely recognised and local and state media representatives were present to record the events and peoples' reactions and participation. In addition, members of the international media were also present; while at the *jaripeo* ring, I met and spoke with a Mexican-American film producer/journalist working on a film about the Mexican migrant experience who had heard about the event through Acuitzences in Anchorage.

LOCAL HISTORY AS IDENTITY

There are many events, both secular and religious, that are celebrated by public festivities in the community of Acuitzio. Arguably the most important event in the history of the town site, as well as the most important civic celebration in the community, is related to the 1865 Prisoner Exchange between Mexican, French and Belgian soldiers, one of a number of events that led to the end of the French occupation of the country. The

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[8] One participant in my research who owns a small store off the plaza has taken the initiative to produce small batches of shirts, key chains, stickers, belts, and other souvenirs of Acuitzio. Although there is virtually no conventional tourist industry in Acuitzio – for example, the community does not have a hotel or other similar options for local lodgings – Ana told me that migrants have come to her store specifically to purchase these items while they are visiting the town, and it is to these customers that she targets her designs.

anniversary of the Exchange is celebrated at the beginning of December each year, with the main festivities taking place on the 5th of December, the date of the official transaction. It is through this historic event that the community draws much of its sense of collective identity, as well as linking the town of Acuitzio to the larger history of the Mexican nation, and the nations of France and Belgium. In fact, the town received the extended name of Acuitzio *del Canje,* Acuitzio "of the Exchange", in honour of the unique place of the Exchange in Mexican history.

Local residents bear the lasting genetic evidence of the foreign troops, many of whom remained and married into the community after their release, and it is not uncommon to see light-haired or light-eyed residents in the town. In fact, Wiest reported hearing of men who refused to take responsibility for children born with blue eyes or other similar traits before the effects of recessive genes were widely understood in the community (Wiest 1983a:177). In a country famous for assigning nicknames, residents of Acuitzio with lighter complexions, eyes, or hair are often referred to as *"guëro"* or *"guëra"*, the Mexican equivalents to the term "blondie."

Beyond the distinctive nature of the local gene pool, the Exchange has become a historical event that is learned and practiced each December in Acuitzio. Children from kindergarten to high school participate in a parade lasting over an hour as it winds its way from one end of town to the other and back to the central plaza, where the day also begins with a recreation of the Exchange itself. Groups of children from all the schools in the municipality are represented, with the youngest dressed as indigenous women and soldiers from the three countries and the older students in marching band formation. The parade also features other community groups, such as horse riders, local military, and representatives of the municipal government. At the steps of *la Presidencia*, the central location for the festivities, dignitaries from the municipal, state and federal governments give speeches and recount the meaning of the historic Exchange to both town and country. The night of December 5th culminates in fireworks launched above the plaza to crowds of spectators from the town and beyond.

In addition to strengthening its place within the history of the Mexican Republic through recreations and the recounting of local history, the festivities associated with the Exchange also include community dances, dinners, and a wide variety of cultural displays, such as craft exhibits featuring local pottery and painting, and traditional dancing by the *Casa de la Cultura* dancers.

The *Casa* dancers, as well as dancers from community schools, portray folk dances from states all over Mexico while dressed in the regional costumes associated with the performances. Perhaps surprisingly, most of the dances in their repertoire do not come from Michoacán, and indeed, in the time that I spent in the community, I never saw nor heard of a dance that was indigenous to the town of Acuitzio. One of the only regional dances, performed by young local boys, is *la Danza de los Viejitos*, the Dance of the Little Old Men, a traditional Tarascan number typical of the neighbouring indigenous communities of Pátzcuaro and Tzintzuntzan, mimicking the movements and actions of elderly men with walking sticks.

The folk dancing of the *Casa* dancers, as well as those dances that are taught in local schools, clearly depict what Cohen (2004a:158) refers to as a "generic Mexican national expressive culture" rather than a local tradition. As such, these dances are a perfect example of one of the ways that local cultural identity is intertwined with national identity. While the dances may not be from the community itself, their performance by local troupes at festive events in the community, such as the Exchange festivities, as well as in competitions and displays throughout the state of Michoacán, serve as a rallying point for Acuitzences (see Cohen 2004a for a discussion of a similar situation in Santa Ana, Oaxaca).

My second visit to Acuitzio in May 2005 coincided with the state fair in Morelia. Soon after my arrival I encountered Ofelia, the Director of the *Casa de la Cultura*, and she mentioned that the *Casa* dancers, as well as a group from the local high school, would be performing for the public on the cultural stage at the fair. She invited me to attend the event with the dancers. I wrote in my field notes on May 13,

On the bus into the city, Ofelia explained that this was the first year that dancers from Acuitzio were participating in the cultural programming at the fair (at least in her memory)... The troupe from the Casa has presented their program outside of the community many times before... but the students from *El Colegio* (high school) were debuting at the fair. She believed that it was a great opportunity, not only to get Acuitzences on the stage at a state event, but also to give exposure and presentation skills to the dancers.

The Michoacán Cultural stage on which the dancers were to perform was located near the front gates of the fair grounds. A small audience area with seating for about 100 people was set up in front of the stage; a space that filled up quickly with the family and friends of the dancers, forcing many more spectators to stand around the area to watch the performance. As I sat in the audience with Leo and Sofia, friends from Acuitzio, both commented on the large number of Acuitzences in the crowd. I wrote in my notes,

Isabel officiated, presenting the dancers and their various dance steps, as well as indicating the region associated with the dances (including Veracruz, Jalisco, Sonora and others)... Throughout the presentation, she alluded to symbols of national unity as opposed to focussing solely on Michoacán... The program lasted over an hour... While watching, Leo and Sofia would periodically comment on the dances... As a dance from Veracruz began, Leo leaned over and indicated that he had performed it as a child... It was instructive to see how these dances serve as interconnections between the local and the national.

The emphasis on the historical and national elements of the dances performed by the *Casa* and high school dance troupes drew upon common features of Mexican identity for community members in the audience at these performances. Comments on the dances emphasised audience recognition; most spectators had personal experience with the dancing from their school days and all had exposure to the public performances of these dances associated with community events. While the dancers from Acuitzio do not perform local dance steps, their participation in events both within and outside of the community brings recognition to the town, something that is always well-received by the populace. Positive news travels fast and widely, transmitted beyond the borders of the town to those Acuitzences who are working in the US. This recognition increases the renown of the place and the people of Acuitzio, and serves as another reinforcement of community in their hearts and minds (Wiest 2008).

As I discussed in Chapter Four, residents of Acuitzio are acutely aware of migration. Not only is the practice of migration an integral feature of many families, it is also physically present in many ambient aspects of the town, from the license plates on the vehicles in the streets to the merchandise available in local stores. Video stores and plaza vendors advertise the latest Disney releases, imported or dubbed for sale, while clothing stores and *tianguis*, weekly markets, stock American brand names imported by migrants from the US. Walking down the main streets of the town one encounters many signs of the influence of migration; storefronts advertise US currency exchange rates, long distance telephone rates to the US, flights to Tijuana and several US destinations, and postal and courier shipping costs to the US.

Most households and families in Acuitzio have close ties to individuals currently living and working in the US. All of the respondents in this research, and every individual with whom I had contact during my fieldwork, either had personal experience with migration to the US or to other parts of Mexico, or had household or close family members who had a migration history. When I broached the subject of migration with residents, everyone had a story of their own or a second-hand account told to them by family members or friends, and everyone had an opinion to relate. While people may cast the effects of migration on the town in negative terms, the overall view of migration is one of resignation as to its existence, and even expressions of desire for the experience themselves, if only for a short period of time.

While residents express interest in going to the US, migrants often cultivate connections to the town site. It may be said that "there's always a party in Mexico," as Roberto exclaimed when we discussed what he loved about returning to Acuitzio, and festivities are important features of the community of Acuitzio throughout the year. However, the month of December, with events ranging from the commemoration of the Exchange, Christmas, New Years, as well as Mexican holidays such as *el Día de Guadalupe* celebrating the appearance of Mexico's patron saint, the Virgin of Guadalupe, is a particularly important month for the town. As a result, December is when many migrants choose to return to the town site to visit with family and friends.

With the return of migrants during this festive season, community events acquire additional meaning and, in fact, it is due to the heightened presence of migrants during the months of December and January that local officials began celebrating *el Día de los Norteños* during this time period, in honour of the place of migration and migrants within the community. When I first arrived in Acuitzio in [month] 2004, the town was entering the peak season of migrant returns. On November 30, I wrote in my notes,

> The town is abuzz with activity these days. Everywhere I look there are license plates from the United States and I am constantly being introduced to people who are visiting for the next few weeks... people here are really excited about seeing their friends and family again, some of whom they haven't seen in years.

With the many community events celebrated during this time period that draw migrants from the US, other particular familial events, such as weddings, *quinceañeras*, and baptisms, are often postponed to coincide with migrants' return to the town site. For both residents and migrants, the celebrations during the month of December are the highlight of the year, and people take advantage of the period when planning special occasions (Wiest 2008). Indeed, while the salons are generally busy throughout the year, especially on weekends, the month of December finds the number of events skyrocket to include parties nearly every day of the week. The family with whom I stayed during my fieldwork owned and operated one of the small but popular salons in the town. While they had a few employees helping with the salon year-round, increased demand in December resulted in the hiring of additional temporary workers dedicated exclusively to the washing of linens and maintenance of the salon space.

In contrast with the month of December, the week of Easter was identified by several respondents in the community as the time of year when Acuitzences and their families living in other parts of Mexico, principally Mexico City, are most likely to return to the town. While the Easter holidays are characterised by increased celebrations in the community, compared to the frenetic pace of December, participation in religious, community, and family activities is more subdued during this period, generally taking place on a smaller scale.

Although migration to the US and other areas of Mexico has a long history in Acuitzio, with generations of individuals and families participating, monetary and other remittances have largely been targeted for household use among migrating families. Individual contributions are added to the household purse, with monies often saved for appliances, vehicles, home construction, and the creation of small businesses. Of course, these investments in family and household have greater economic impact in Mexico and Acuitzio itself – indeed, migration remittances to Mexico as a whole represented some $2 billion USD annually in the 1990s and have likely exceeded that amount in the first years of the new century (Conway and Cohen 1998:29; Cohen 2004b) – however, unlike some Mexican migrant communities, collective investment of migrant money in Acuitzio has been relatively minor; with the exception of the reconstruction of the local theatre, there are few examples in the community (see Wiest 1983b). In fact, the last municipal government, which took power on January 1, 2005, was the first in recent memory to cultivate sustained close contact with several members of the ex-patriot Mexican community in the US. The municipality, acting in concert with a Chicago-based migrant association, *la Federación de Clubes Michoacanos de Illinois*, is actively involved in soliciting funds and other support for community improvements through the federal "Three for One for Migrants" program.

El Programa Tres por Uno Programa para Migrantes, a federal program implemented by the Mexican government in 2003 following successful state-level programs throughout the country, aims to coordinate funds from migrant associations in the US and channel these resources into public projects. The goals of the program, assisted by funding from the three levels of government – municipal, state, and federal – are to the support initiatives of Mexicans living outside the country in creating and executing community projects in their home localities. For each dollar donated by migrants through their associations in the US, each level of government in Mexico will match the funds, effectively quadrupling the monies available for particular projects. These projects are given financial support when they contribute to resolving the basic

lack of services in the communities, including creating employment and income opportunities for the population[9].

One of the ways that the Illinois migrant association – the only one affiliated with Acuitzio despite large and dispersed migrant populations throughout the US – has contributed recently to the community is through the donation of forty computers to schools in Acuitzio. In addition, the program aims to build and maintain a retirement home for elderly Acuitzences, and initial preparation of the site was ceremoniously begun in December 2005. In an interview with Pilar, the Director of the *Centro de Atención al Migrante*, she discussed the immediate plans of the Three for One program and the Chicago migrant association;

> Well, in terms of what I have already said, last year they brought forty computers for different schools. This year the intention is to solicit more computers again, but this time for the schools in the communities, in the ranchos. And to continue with the (work) on the Retirement Home. So that now more special attention is being given to the elderly here (and) of the population of the communities. It is from (through) the Three for One [program]…

> *Pues, a lo que antes comentaba, ya ya se entregó el año pasado cuarenta equipos de compu(tadoras)s para diferentes escuelas. Este año la intención es nuevamente solicitar más computadoras, pero ahora para las escuelas de las comunidades, de los ranchos. Y continuar con el de la Casa de Retiros. Para ahora que les da una atención más especial a los adultos majores de aquí de la población de las comunidades. Es del Tres por Uno…*

The influence of migration combined with other factors of globalization, such as the global integration of consumer markets all over the world, leave a mark on local identity. Foreign influences, especially American cultural influences, are incorporated into local activities and identities. As the festivities commemorating the Exchange began in Acuitzio on December 2, 2004, I wrote in my field notes,

> The party has begun in Acuitzio… Sitting in the plaza this evening, I watched a group of children performing traditional dances accompanied by recorded fiddle music. When this group finished, six teenaged girls took to the stage. Appearing around 16 years of age, they were all wearing

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[9] See government website for further details of the *Tres Por Uno* program, http://www.microregiones.gob.mx/estrategia.html)

coordinating outfits of black and white and sporting baseball caps... In all senses their dance appeared inspired by urban American culture, incorporating hip-hop dance moves and music with English lyrics... As the girls jumped around the stage, gyrating their hips and dancing provocatively, it struck me as quite a juxtaposition to see their performance immediately following the traditional clothing and shuffled tap steps of the previous group... The girls' musical choice was electronic, featured lyrics in Spanish and English, with a chorus of "the roof is on fire," interspersed throughout. Although very different from most of the performances I've seen this week, people seemed to really enjoy their originality and the crowd cheered loudly as they left the stage.

Similarly, I noted the strong presence of American cultural influences when I was asked to accompany Ofelia on November 15, 2004, to watch a parade through the streets of the town in celebration of the twentieth anniversary of the *Colegio de Bachilleres*, the local high school. Ofelia, as a young leader in the community, was chosen to be one of the judges of the parade, which featured floats created and decorated by the graduating class of 2005. Apparently this was just one of several activities related to the anniversary, with a whole week of celebrations, including a graffiti contest the next day. I wrote of my observations of the parade:

The parade circled through the town from the *Colegio* down *Avenida Madero* to the plaza, making its way back down *Riva Palacio*. There were six floats attached to tractors and trucks, each themed around storybook characters and their partners; Shrek and Fiona, the Little Mermaid, Anastasia, Cinderella, Pocahontas, and Tarzan and Jane. The costumes worn by the participants all seemed to duplicate the cartoon versions of the characters. Each float carried participants dressed in costume. with each float decorated to coordinate with the theme of the characters. The floats were followed by groups of high school kids who had decorated them, and they chanted and sang slogans in support of their team.

Indeed, among many of the younger generation of Acuitzences with whom I spoke, there was significant awareness of American popular culture, even when those young adults had never been to the United States. Most of these influences come in the form of television, film, and music; and some Acuitzences identified more strongly with foreign influences than with local or Mexican popular culture. For instance, when selecting music, several of my contacts in Acuitzio were more likely to choose rock or electronic music with lyrics in English than they were to purchase the latest *banda*,

ranchera, or *durangüense* music releases. This is not to say that Spanish-language music is not popular in the community[10] – on the contrary, the sounds of accordion and guitar can be heard wafting from the speakers of vehicles, homes, construction sites, and stores everyday in the community – but rather to highlight the fact that cultural influences and markers of identity are drawn from many sources. Indeed, with the incorporation of foreign influences in the community through cable television, satellite dishes, and other influences, I was hardly surprised when someone quoted lines from songs or films in English, or expressed the desire to go to the US in order to acquire the luxury and consumer goods that they saw on an episode of a VH1 reality television program.

While American influences associated with migration and globalization affect Acuitzences within the Mexican context, I found that migrants to the US, especially the longer-term migrants who I interviewed, were equally interested in incorporating Mexican cultural elements into their everyday life while they were away. Ismael spoke of Mexican cultural programs in Anchorage, praising the organisers of events and even stating that he had learned new things about Mexico during his years in Alaska (see Kormarnisky 2006:21, 29, 87, and Wiest 2008:10, 27-28, for more discussion of engagement in these programs in Anchorage). His son Roberto was another interesting case. Although he had several Mexican and other Hispanic friends in Anchorage, leaving Acuitzio with his family at the age of sixteen, he had few opportunities for remaining in contact with friends in Acuitzio beyond the news that he heard through his parents. During our interview, the conversation turned to the Joan Sebastian concert he had attended in Morelia a few days earlier, and to the ways that he remained connected to his Mexican roots after leaving the community. He told me about his music collection that includes many Hispanic artists, as well as several Mexican groups, and he expressed the longing he often felt for what he referred to as "my Mexico";

> When I, when I am there [in the US], sometimes when I miss, I miss my country everyday, you know? But when I am missing my country most I just go onto the computer and look at photos. Where is my Mexico? How is my Mexico? How are the people? I look for, sometimes I go on economic [websites], sometimes I look for culture, sometimes I just look for parties,

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[10] See Hernández 1999 and Herrera-Sobek 1979; 1993 for discussions of Mexican music and its connections to migration and identity construction.

you know? (Laughs) Sometimes I look for, just like, history. I love history. Mostly history of the *Aztecas*, how they fought for this country. I got a, I got a big tattoo on my back [of the Aztec calendar].

Roberto's search for Mexico and his Mexican national identity on the Internet points to an interesting opportunity for the community of Acuitzio, and indeed for Acuitzences on both sides of the border. While the individuals with whom I spoke had varying experiences with the Internet and communications strategies via the web, the use of the Internet to communicate across the borders and boundaries that divide community members reached a new level with the creation of a website dedicated to the community in late 2005. The website was initially created for the municipal election in November 2004[11], but with the successful election of the candidate, was redeveloped with the explicit purpose of giving the people of Acuitzio, both in Mexico and abroad, a place to come together[12]. The opening page of the site stated:

> With the objective of strengthening the lines of communication with migrants, academics, business owners, farmers, functionaries, and society in general, the H. Ayuntamiento (local government) 2005-2007 created this web page to inform of its activities.
>
> The Ayuntamiento extends its most cordial **WELCOME** to this Internet site in which you can explore information about our government, the municipality and its history, the newspaper **EL CANJE** and a gallery of photos that will bring you closer to our town.
>
> We ask, in the most respectful way, that you show this web page to your family members, friends and acquaintances.
>
> BEFORE BEGINNING, WE EXTEND MANY THANKS FOR ALLOWING US TO COME TO YOU VIA THIS MEDIUM.
>
> *Con el objetivo de fortalecer los lazos de comunicación con los migrantes, académicos, empresarios, agricultores, funcionarios y sociedad en general el H. Ayuntamiento 2005–2007 realizó esta página web para informar sus actividades.*

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[11] With only 120 computers reported in Mexican statistics for the town of Acuitzio one year later, in October 2005 (INEGI 2005), the creation of a campaign website was clearly a move taken to develop political ties with US-based Acuitzences. This aspect of the website is discussed in more detail in the Conclusion.

[12] The website developed for the election of the candidate for municipal president was available at www.acuitzio.com.mx. With the redevelopment of the site, users were redirected to www.acuitziodelcanje.com, which is now the official webpage of the town of Acuitzio del Canje.

El Ayuntamiento les da la más cordial **BIENVENIDA** *a este sitio de Internet donde podrás explorar acerca de la información de nuestro gobierno, el municipio y su historia, el periódico* **EL CANJE** *y una galería de fotos que te aproximarán a nuestro pueblo.*

Asimismo hacemos la solicitud de la manera más atenta a dar a conocer esta página web con sus familiares, amigos y conocidos.

DE ANTEMANO MUCHAS GRACIAS POR PERMITIRNOS LLEGAR A USTEDES POR ESTE MEDIO.

It is important to note that the website was first developed as a platform for the election campaign of the last municipal president. In Mexico, elected officials may serve only one term and so, with a new municipal president taking office on January 1, 2008, the continued existence of the website was not assured beyond his presidency. Speaking with Alejandro, an employee of the municipal government in February 2006, he seemed unsure whether the website's domain belonged to the municipality or remained in the hands of the winning political party and their affiliates. Upon the election of the same political party in November 2007, the website was transitioned to the new municipal government[13].

When actively maintained, the website has included a photo gallery of community events since January 2005 – photos of activities associated with the annual celebrations of the Exchange, *jaripeos*, local sports teams and dancers, cultural and social programs at the *Casa de la Cultura*, political events, and much more – as well as a brief history of the municipality, local statistical information, and a program of current events in the area. In addition, the site has a link to the bimonthly *El Canje* newsletter, which is produced and funded by the municipal government. The newsletter includes editorial pieces on local events and personalities and, on occasion, submissions by Acuitzences in Chicago and other US locations (see Komarnisky 2006:33, 35; Wiest 2008:30).

In her discussion of email use and web page construction among Oaxacan migrant communities, Lynn Stephen adapts from the concept of 'virtual diaspora' developed by Michel Laguerre to create her own concept of "virtual transborder communities" (2007:281). She defines these communities, linking the creation of online websites to the

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[13] In the short period since the new municipal government came to power, the website has been under reconstruction and unavailable. Personal communications with several Acuitzences have confirmed that the website is scheduled to be re-launched during the spring of 2008.

establishment and maintenance of social connections between migrating individuals. "Virtual transborder communities" are defined by

> [t]he use of cyberspace by immigrants or descendants of an immigrant group for the purpose of participating or engaging in online interactional transactions, wherever their actual physical location. Virtual transborder communities are extensions of real transborder communities. No virtual transborder community can be sustained without real life transborder crossing and in this sense, it is not a separate entity, but rather a pole of a continuum (2007:281).

Although the maintenance of the official Acuitzio del Canje website has been sporadic since its inception in 2005, it is clear that the creation of the site was undertaken with principles similar to Stephen's "virtual transborder community" in mind. The site addresses the desire of its creators to cultivate, maintain, and strengthen lines of communication between migrants and the local government, and indeed, it was the previous government that was strongly in favour of developing ties with the ex-patriot Acuitzence community in the US. In developing this website and addressing it to migrant Acuitzences and their families, the local government acknowledges the potential of the Internet for solidifying transnational linkages based in migration. In fact, this dedication to the migrant community underscores the very ordinariness of migration that I pointed to in Chapter Four.

Locally created websites such as Acuitzio's serve to reinforce and recreate, on another plane, the collective identity shared by members of its community. As Stephen writes, "[w]ebsite creation is a form of digital border crossing that involves a dialogue – usually at multiple levels – around cultural memory and... ideas about shared heritage and tradition" (2007:262). Emphasising local history, Acuitzio's website draws viewers into the community with images depicting the most important days in Acuitzio's pantheon of events; days that have already been linked by social conventions and practice to migration and migrants.

In the next chapters I move from the idea of community identity presented here to the creation and maintenance of social connections based in communication strategies. Chapter Six will detail my observations of local Internet usage in Acuitzio, specifically focussing on the acceptance and integration of this new technology into communication

strategies. In Chapter Seven I will turn from the practice of Internet usage *in* the community of Acuitzio to the communication strategies of migrants and non-migrants for establishing and strengthening social relations.

Chapter Six

Computer Usage and Communications

The issue of communications is of great importance for those families and friends who are divided due to labour migration. In preparing to enter the field in Acuitzio, I found myself asking about the impact of new technologies on the communication strategies of people in Acuitzio and their counterparts in the US. The area of largest impact, I postulated, would be in the realm of Internet communications, due to the relative ease and speed of email and instant messaging, as well as the generally inexpensive nature of these communications, especially in publicly accessible Internet cafés and libraries. In this chapter I discuss computer usage in Acuitzio, compiling federal statistics on computer and Internet usage in Mexico, my own observations throughout the research period, with special attention to two one-week periods in December 2004 and February 2005, as well as interviews with the proprietor of one of the town's Internet cafés.

COMPUTER USAGE AND INTERNET ACCESS IN ACUITZIO

According to statistics compiled by the Mexican government for the national population as a whole, the number of personal computers connected to the Internet increased substantially and steadily between 1994 and 2004, from a low of approximately one computer per 50 residents in 1994 to approximately one computer per 10 residents in 2004 (see Table 6.1 *Computers in Mexico connected directly to the World Wide Web 1994-2004*). Even more substantial was the increase in Internet servers during this same time period, from one server available to more than 10 000 residents in 1994 to approximately one server per 69 residents in 2004. While important in overall numbers, showing an increase of over a 100 times the number of Internet servers per 10,000 inhabitants and an increase of nearly five times the number of personal computers per 100 inhabitants, these statistics do not specify the distribution of computers across

Mexico by state, locality, urban or rural setting, nor do they indicate where the majority of personal computers are located – in private homes or public areas such as schools, offices, or businesses. Furthermore, the statistics only include those computers that are connected to the Internet.

Table 6.1 Computers in Mexico connected directly to the World Wide Web, 1994-2004

Year	Servers per 10 thousand inhabitants	Personal Computers per 100 inhabitants
1994	0.7	2.3
1995	1.5	2.6
1996	3.2	2.9
1997	4.4	3.3
1998	11.7	3.6
1999	41.6	4.4
2000	56.6	5.8
2001	92.6	7.0
2002	110.1	8.3
2003	130.6	8.3
2004	145.2	10.7

Source: SCT. Anuario Estadístico, 2004. México, D.F., 2005. INEGI www.inegi.gob.mx

Based on my observations in Acuitzio, the majority of homes do not have personal computers. Indeed, according to the 2005 Mexican Federal Census, of a total of 1306 inhabited homes during the census period, there were 120 private households in the town of Acuitzio that possessed personal computers. While these statistics do not indicate how many homes had private Internet access at this time, in the few households I visited that possessed a personal computer none had private Internet access during the period of my research.

There were several factors reported by Acuitzences for the lack of personal Internet connections in the town. In addition to the price of computers themselves, which are outside of the financial reach of many households, the expense of carrying an Internet connection into homes in the town was approximately 400 pesos per month during the research period. As many houses do not possess an existing telephone line through which to connect to the Internet, the cost and inconvenience of carrying telephone lines into the older adobe homes in the town compounded the other carrying costs and made Internet usage in the home unattractive to many households. In fact, the lack of wiring and connections to the central telephone grid was a contributing factor to cellular telephone usage in the town, something that I will discuss in the next chapter. In addition to the

costs associated with Internet connections, it was generally acknowledged that neither the telephone lines nor the Internet connections to the town were particularly dependable. Outages of the lines are relatively frequent events that sometimes last several days. When these outages occur it was believed that the businesses relying on telephone lines, such as Internet cafés, public telephone stalls, and long distance providers, were the first to regain access. As such, it was seen as easier and less expensive to spend time and money gaining access through these businesses as opposed to incurring the costs of bringing access into homes.

Following my observations in Acuitzio, Mexican federal statistics indicate that while the absolute numbers of Internet users more than doubled between 2001 and 2006, the proportion of people accessing the Internet from their homes has decreased by nearly 12 percent (see Table 6.2 *Internet users in Mexico, six years of age and older, 2001-2006*). In other words, while more of the Mexican population has a personal computer in their home, it appears as though Internet use is becoming an increasingly public activity; moving out of peoples' homes and into public spaces, such as commercial Internet cafes, libraries, and places of business. Indeed, while access in the home doubled between 2001 and 2006, access outside of the home nearly quadrupled during the same period based on the federal statistics. As a result, access to the Internet, and with it the potential for international communications via email and instant messaging, has become increasingly accessible to a larger population who may not have a personal computer in the home.

OBSERVATIONS IN ACUITZIO

Soon after my arrival in Acuitzio I was introduced to José, the owner and operator of what seemed to be the town's primary Internet café. Located just off the town's central plaza, José's Cyber Café was a popular spot for the town's younger residents, especially in the late afternoons and early evenings when the café would fill up with small groups of friends. As I wanted to remain in contact with my own friends and family while in Mexico, I spent time at the café nearly everyday, giving me the opportunity to get to know José and his business, as well as providing me with a glimpse of his clientele and the overall computer and Internet use among his patrons.

Table 6.2 Internet users in Mexico, six years of age and older, 2001-2006

Places of Access	2001[a]		2002[a]		2004[b]		2005[b]		2006[c]	
	Absolute	*%*	*Absolute*	*%*	*Absolute*	*%*	*Absolute*	*%*	*Absolute*	*%*
Total number of Internet users	7047172	100.0	10764715	100.0	12945888	100.0	16492454	100.0	18746353	100.0
Inside of the home	3194638	45.3	3934434	36.5	4985418	38.5	5235018	31.7	6295052	33.6
Outside of the home	3852534	54.7	6830281	63.5	7960470	61.5	11257436	68.3	12451301	66.4

Note: Referring to the population of six years or older
[a] Statistics corresponding to the month of December
[b] Statistics corresponding to the month of June
[c] Preliminary statistics corresponding to the month of April

Source: INEGI. Encuesta Nacional sobre Disponibilidad y Uso de Tecnologías de la Información en los Hogares. INEGI, www.inegi.gob.mx

I quickly learned that José's café had been the first of its kind in Acuitzio. He was also the owner of another smaller Internet café in the neighbouring town of Tiripetio, the location of a state-run normal school that trains teachers for the rural rancho schools throughout the country. After serving a population that includes many students in Tiripetio, he opened his second location in Acuitzio in 2001. Originally from the neighbouring state of Jalisco, he and his family moved to the area when his brother married a woman from Tiripetio. Prior to moving to Michoacán he owned an Internet café in Mexico City, a business into which he invested funds he had earned while working in the United States.

José initially began his café business when he became captivated and impassioned by the potential of the Internet and computers for learning and communications. When he moved to Michoacán, it was only natural that he would continue working in this arena. He spoke of Internet and computer access as necessities for a population such as Acuitzio;

> To begin with, I saw that the town had a necessity... a necessity to have computer services. There wasn't any Internet service; there was no one who rented computers... When I arrived there weren't... in the schools there weren't... computers. I mean, it was two or three years after I arrived that they began to put computers in, in the schools...

> *Yo en principio de cuenta ví que el pueblo tenía una necesidad... una necesidad de tener un servicio de computadoras. No había servicio de Internet, no había quien rentara computadoras... Cuando yo llegué no había... en las escuelas no había... computadoras. O sea, eso tiene dos o tres años para acá despues de que yo llegué que empezaron a meter computadoras a, a las escuelas...*

After spending some time in the café during my first weeks in Acuitzio, I began to see patterns of usage among the customers. Attempting to quantify the patronage of the café was one of my primary fieldwork exercises relating to computer usage. While my Spanish language skills were still elementary, I was able to gather information based on observations during my time in José's café. For several weeks, one in December 2004 and another in February 2005, I observed the clientele of the café at rotating hours of the day, focussing my attention on the age and gender composition of the clientele, as well as

attempting to record the computer activities and other social behaviours of the café's customers[14].

Table 6.3 Cyber café usage, Acuitzio del Canje, Michoacán, December 2004

December 6-12, 2004	Time Period	Number of hours (TOTAL)	Number of patrons (TOTAL)	Male patrons	Female patrons
Monday, 6th	11:30 am-1:30 pm	2 hours	6	3	3
Tuesday, 7th	4-6 pm	2 hours	13	7	6
Wednesday, 8th	12:30-1:30 pm	1 hour	7	4	3
Thursday, 9th	7-8:15 pm	1.25 hours	14	6	8
Friday, 10th	4:45-5:45 pm	1 hour	10	5	5
Saturday, 11th	12-2:15 pm	2.25 hours	10	6	4
Sunday, 12th	10:45-11:45 am	1 hour	7	3	4
TOTALS		10.5 hours	67	34	33

Table 6.4 Cyber café usage, Acuitzio del Canje, Michoacán, February 2005

February 13-19, 2005	Time Period	Number of hours (TOTAL)	Number of patrons (TOTAL)	Male patrons	Female patrons
Sunday, 13th	11 am- 12:15 pm	1.25 hours	5	3	2
Monday, 14th	4:30-5:30 pm	1 hour	8	4	4
Tuesday, 15th	12:30-2:30 pm	2 hours	6	3	3
Wednesday, 16th	2-3 pm	1 hour	5	3	2
Thursday, 17th	6-8:30 pm	2.5 hours	13	6 (+1)	7
Friday, 18th	5:45-7 pm	1.25 hours	9	5	4
Saturday, 19th	12:45-3:15 pm	2.5 hours	10	5	5
TOTALS		11.5 hours	56	29 (+1)	27

In absolute numbers, José's café had a slightly larger active clientele during the month of December 2004 than during the month of February 2005 (see Table 6.3 *Cyber Café Usage December* and Table 6.4 *Cyber Café Usage February*). With the influx of visitors from the US and other Mexican cities during the festive month of December, most of José's ten computers were regularly in use at this time. By February, the clientele had slowed slightly, although it still did a steady business in the afternoons and evenings as youngsters and teenagers would come by to work on homework assignments and pass the time with their friends.

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[14] Over the course of the research period several other Internet cafés opened in the community. While I visited and used these other cafés on occasion, the majority of my observations were based out of the original café, José's Cyber Café, including the information cited in the tables presented here.

Unfortunately, the federal statistics cited in Tables 6.1 and 6.2 do not indicate the distribution of Internet usage between urban and rural Mexico, nor by Mexican state, nor do the statistics indicate the age, gender, or educational background of Internet users. Based on my observations and interviews, while the gender composition of computer usage is fairly evenly split between females and males, the ages of these users is heavily weighted toward the younger generation of Acuitzences. Additionally, computer usage does not only include Internet access, as I observed during my research period in Acuitzio, but also includes all manner of computer applications, from word processing and gaming to Internet browsing, email, and chat applications.

AGE AND GENERATIONAL FACTORS IN COMPUTER USAGE IN ACUITZIO

As indicated in Tables 6.5 through 6.8, the ages of café patrons have been split into approximate categories – Under 12, 13 to 18, 19 to 34 and 35 and Older. These age categories are not exact, although in many cases I was familiar, or became familiar, with the people in the café and was able verify their ages. The tables show that the largest contingent of computer users, in both December and February, were between 13 and 18 years of age, closely followed by the group between 19 and 34. Lastly, but still a relatively large group, were the children under the age of 12. Users over 35 years of age were largely absent during the exemplar weeks, with only a few examples, including a father who entered the café in order to pick up his child during the exemplar week in February.

Table 6.5 Male computer users, Acuitzio del Canje, Michoacán, December 2004

December 6-12, 2004	Males Under 12 (A)	Males 13 to 18 (B)	Males 19 to 34 (C)	Males Over 35 (D)
Monday, 6th			2	1
Tuesday, 7th	2	3	2	
Wednesday, 8th		2	2	
Thursday, 9th		4	2	
Friday, 10th	1	2	1	
Saturday, 11th	2	3	1	
Sunday, 12th	2	1	1	
TOTALS	7	15	11	1

Table 6.6 Female computer users, Acuitzio del Canje, Michoacán, December 2004

December 6-12, 2004	Females Under 12 (A)	Females 13 to 18 (B)	Females 19 to 34 (C)	Females Over 35 (D)
Monday, 6th		2	1	
Tuesday, 7th		4	2	
Wednesday, 8th		2	1	
Thursday, 9th	1	4	3	
Friday, 10th		3	2	
Saturday, 11th		3	1	
Sunday, 12th		2	2	
TOTALS	1	20	12	0

Table 6.7 Male computer users, Acuitzio del Canje, Michoacán, February 2005

February 13-19, 2005	Males Under 12 (A)	Males 13 to 18 (B)	Males 19 to 34 (C)	Males Over 35 (D)
Sunday, 13th	2	1		
Monday, 14th	1	2	1	
Tuesday, 15th		1	2	
Wednesday, 16th		1	2	
Thursday, 17th	2	3	1	(1)*
Friday, 18th	1	3	1	
Saturday, 19th	2	2	1	
TOTALS	8	13	8	(1)

* Indicates non-user who spent considerable time in café waiting for child

Table 6.8 Female computer users, Acuitzio del Canje, Michoacán, February 2005

February 13-19, 2005	Females Under 12 (A)	Females 13 to 18 (B)	Females 19 to 34 (C)	Females Over 35 (D)
Sunday, 13th		2		
Monday, 14th	1	2	1	
Tuesday, 15th		1	2	
Wednesday, 16th			2	
Thursday, 17th	1	4	2	
Friday, 18th		2	2	
Saturday, 19th		3	2	
TOTALS	2	14	11	0

As the absolute numbers in these tables indicate, the ages of José's clientele, as well as much of the clientele that I observed in the other Internet cafes in Acuitzio, appeared to be in their teens and 20s. These customers had the most diverse computer usage habits of those that I observed in the café. Many were students at the local high school or in university in Morelia, and they often used the computers for word processing

functions, Internet searches, and other applications in completing their homework assignments.

These two age groups also tended to be the heaviest users of email and chat programs, and according to José, they were the primary consumers of these applications. Interestingly, José believed that most chatting and email usage by the younger population was in order to interact with people from outside the community of Acuitzio. Contrary to my original thesis, however, while these communications were important for the youth age group, the teens and young adults were not necessarily chatting with known peers or family members. Instead, their experience with chatting was often the result of entrance into online communities, and may reflect the growth of Internet subcultures.

> Erin: So, there is a lot of chatting, for example… do you know with whom they are speaking? Is it, for instance, with people who they know or with strangers?

> José: Mmm, for the most part it is with strangers… That is to say that, um, they enter chat programs for the precise idea of meeting someone. That is the basic idea, I mean, to meet someone totally different from outside of those that they would commonly know in the street, in school, the idea is to meet someone with completely different ideas from those that they already know…

> Erin: But really this is mostly the teenagers…?

> José: Yes, yes, yes…

> Erin: *Mm-hmm. Entonces, pues, hace mucho chat, por ejemplo… sabes con quienes estan hablando? Es, este, con conocidos o con desconocidos…?*

> José: *Mmm, la mayor, la mayor parte de ese es siempre con desconocidos… o sea, este, emm, se meten por precisamente la idea de conocer a alguien. Es la idea básica, o sea, de, de ya conocer a una persona totalmente diferente fuera de la que conocen comunmente en la calle, en la escuela, este, la idea es conocer a alguien que tenga una idea totalmente diferente de lo que conocen…*

> Erin: *Pero realmente son los jovenes…*

> José: *Sí, sí, sí…*

Although José saw a large proportion of the teen and young adult population using email and chat programs, it was his belief that they tended to be in contact with friends made in online chat rooms. However, he acknowledged that this group of youth

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was also in contact with friends and family in the US, especially those young people whose partners were working or living abroad.

> Oh no, of course... [they are talking to people]... in the US, yes, they are doing that. I mean, before, for example, the only way to communicate was through letters or that they spoke every week or two weeks as partners. Today they can come and exchange comfortably and they come and are talking much more often, for more time, and they can see each other in front of the camera and it is much easier to communicate now that they are experiencing new ways of communication...

> *Oh no, sí...[están hablando con gente]...en los Estados Unidos, sí, ya se han dado. O sea, antes, por ejemplo, la unica manera de comunicación era la carta o que se hablaba cada 8 días o cada 15 días como parejas. Hoy ya pueden venir y intercambian cómodos y ya vienen y ya estan hablando más seguido, más tiempo, ya se pueden ver através de la cámara, este, ya es mucho más facil la comunicación, o sea, ya están experimentando nuevas maneras de comunicación, este...*

During the two exemplar periods in December and February there was a relatively large contingent of younger, preteen users, who often used the computers to play one of the video games that José had in stock. These gamers were almost exclusively young boys between approximately 9 and 12 years of age, who entered the café in small groups of friends or by themselves. Although a few girls of this age group used computers with the same frequency as their male counterparts, generally speaking, usage among girls under 12 years of age was significantly lower than that of males. Although I cannot give definitive reasons for this difference, the greater personal freedom afforded to young boys in the community, as well as the appeal of the type of activities – principally video gaming – in which they participated appear to be two of the factors driving the gender division of young computer users in Acuitzio.

According to José, games served as an opening into the world of computers for younger clients, and children often came to José's café asking for the latest games. He discussed the evolution of computer usage at his café,

> Erin: (Do) people know more than when you first arrived...?

> José: Yes...I was the first business to install a server. And logically, yes... it hasn't been sufficient to just put computers in the schools because there weren't teachers. That is to say, they brought computers but no... no one knew, the teachers equally; there was no one to teach and the only thing that they learned, precisely, was to play. Because it is the easiest (thing to learn),

right? Everyone looks for a little game and it was what got people started learning, to play, but is was, now, little by little there are teachers, now more schools have computers so now, every time, it used to be the teenagers, now they are doing their undergraduate work and those that are in Morelia now (unclear) a server, now they know how to use a computer. And now you will find children from elementary, secondary and high schools that now also are visiting... doing homework on the computers.

Erin: ... que la gente sabe más que cuando llegaste...

José: Sí... yo fui el primer negocio que se puso de server. Y lógicamente, sí ... no fue suficiente que meter computadoras porque no había maestros. O sea, trajeron computadoras pero no... .nadie sabía, los maestros estaban igual, no había quien les enseñara y lo unico que aprendieron, precisamente, fue a jugar. Porque es lo más fácil, no? Todo el mundo busca un juegito y fue lo más que empezar uno a aprender, a jugar, pero fue, ya, poco a poco ya hay maestros, ya más escuelas tienen computadoras, entonces ya, eh, cada vez, antes eran los jóvenes, ya que estaban en una licenciatura y los que andan en Morelia que ya (unclear) un server, que ya sabían manejar una computadora. Y ya ahora encuentras niños de primaria, secundaria, eh, prepa, que ya también están, este, visitando... haciendo tareas, este, en la computadora.

As José noted, schools in the town of Acuitzio have only recently begun to add computer laboratories. In fact, in November and December 2005, during the peak season for the return of US migrants, the community welcomed the donation of forty computers to the local high school, *el Colegio de Bachilleres,* donated by a migrant association of Acuitzenses in Chicago. The municipality was also working to increase the number of computers and equipment in 2006, hoping to provide these technologies to the some of the smaller schools throughout the municipality through the *Tres por Uno* program.

While schools in the community have gained some of the necessary computer equipment in recent years, the promise of computers to schools also highlights some of the tensions of migration practices – tensions between the lives of those who remain in Acuitzio and those who migrate to the US – in this case, in the acquisition of access to, and adoption of, new technologies. The need for teachers trained in computation alluded to by José, as well as issues as basic as the electrification of schools in the small rancho communities surrounding the town (see discussion in Chapter Seven), underscore what Santamaría Gomez (2003:80) sees as dual interests on the part of the migrant community, especially those with legal residency or citizenship status in the US; interests related to their circumstances in the US and those related to their home community from which

they may be absent for extended periods of time. Just as Benítez (2006) and Panagakos and Horst (2006) note that there is often a division between access to technology among the migrant population and the community of origin (what they and others have referred to as the "digital divide"), a broader range of influences must be considered in order to fully appreciate the adoption of technology in a community such as Acuitzio. Merely having computers in schools, or in the larger community, is not enough to guarantee adoption of these technologies.

As the relatively recent introduction of computers and teachers in local schools has placed emphasis on providing access to the younger generation of Acuitzences, within the larger community there are several programs dedicated to improving computer literacy for adults and children alike; most prominently those offered by the local offices of the *Instituto de Capacitación para el Trabajo de Michoacán* (ICATMI), a state agency dedicated to educational and technical programs for all ages. One of the specialties of the Acuitzio chapter is *Operación de Microcomputadoras* (PC operation), and monthly rotating programs have also included workshops on navigating the Internet, setting up websites, email and other computer programs[15].

The introduction of community-based education programs and computers into schools of all levels is a positive development for the community; however José still sees challenges ahead in terms of the growth in usage of computer and Internet technologies. Peoples' idea of the Internet and their experience of the Internet sometimes differ in quality,

> Erin: And what, what are the things that people do here the most? For example... (tape *paused for clients*)
>
> José: The thing that people want most is to manage, to navigate a computer. We are barely beginning to teach the computer system, that is to say, we are very behind because in each family, I think, for each five families no more that one member of the family knows how to use a computer. And in the beginning it is mostly games and chatting, and searching for information, more than anything, in encyclopedias. Not even much... the Internet is not as strong as people hope...
>
> Erin: Well, really, one must know what they are doing in order to... (in order to) search...

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[15] www.icatmi.com/plantel_acuitzio.html

José: Mm-hmm (yes), the Internet. That is to say, how to search on the Internet.

Erin: ... right, because it is not as simple as merely putting in a word and that's it... all the information comes...

José: ... uh-ha (yes), in fact that is what I try to explain to them. I mean, to search for something imaginatively, like, if they have a job or homework, (unclear) from the most general to the most simple, or from the simple to the general, right? To be able to encounter the answers... so, if you encounter this little problem, one believes that the Internet or computers are like in the movies more than anything else (unclear) and with typing – tap-tap-tap – a lot of information is just going to appear. So, people become very disillusioned by the computers when they come and have to work more than what they had thought they would need to. I mean that, they think, like they see in a movie, that they type and all the information appears and everything is there and done, so suddenly they arrive here and no, its like, look, you have to search and this many results will appear based on the way that you asked for the information, but 850 responses appear for you and – WHAT? No, I want my homework done NOW! – that is to say, in order to look for it you need to know some of the concepts, like how to navigate, what is a network, how the Internet exists, things like this... They are simply; we are beginning and in the future we will hopefully have a better idea but right now they, the only thing that they are looking for in computers is, eh, their homework. And yes, people suddenly begin coming to play and they look for the games, principally the children. It is a medium for games, and the teenagers, eh, to chat, to search for a partner. It is surprising, in fact, and I don't understand it myself, sometimes they are talking from one computer to the other amongst themselves... I mean, its incredible, how there isn't communication between two people (in person) and they're using the computer in order to communicate.

Erin: Y qué, qué son las cosas que más hace la gente aquí? Por ejemplo... (*tape* paused for clients)

José: Lo *que más aquí se maneja, apenas estamos comenzando mucho lo que es, este, el sistema de computadoras, o sea, aun estamos muy atresados, porque, pues de cada familia, yo pienso, aquí, de cada cinco familias, nada más un miembro de la familia (sabe) manejar una computadora. Y principalmente son juegos y chat, este, y busca de infomación, más que todo, en enciclopedias. No tanto aún, el Internet no es tan, tan fuerte como se espera... este...*

Erin: Pues, realmente, tienes que saber de que estas haciendo para... .buscar para...

José: ...mm-hmm, el Internet. O sea, como buscar en el Internet.

Erin: ...sí, porque no es tan simple que pones una palabra y ya... viene toda la informacion...

José: ... uh-ha, de hecho es lo que trato explicarles, o sea, con imaginación buscar algo, o sea, como, si te deja una tarea, (unclear) de lo general a, este, a lo más simple, o lo simple a lo general, no? Para poder encontrar una tarea. Entonces, si te encuentras con ese pequeño problema, o sea, siente que el Internet o las computadoras son como las peliculas que nada más (unclear) el tecla <ta-ta-ta> aparece muchísima información. Entonces, eh, se desilusionan mucho de la computadoras cuando vengan que tienen que trabajar más de lo que ellos mismos piensen que lo pueden hacer. O sea, piensan que, como lo ven en una película, de que teclean y aparece una información y todo está allí y hecho, entonces de repente llegan aquí y no, es que, mira, tienes que buscar y te aparecen tantos resultados con lo mismo que tú pediste la información, pero te aparecen 850 resultados – QUÉ? No, yo quiero ya mi tarea, o sea, no, o sea, que buscalas y necesitas algunos de los conceptos que no entienden como que es navigar, que es la red, por que esta la red, cosas así por el estilo, o sea. Ellos simplemente, estamos comenzando, o sea, este, y al futuro a lo mejor tendremos mejor estas ideas pero ahorita ellos, lo unico que buscan en las computadoras es, eh, su tarea. Y sí , o sea, gente que de repente viene a jugar que buscan mucho los juegos, este, principalmente los niños. Es un campo para, para el juego, este, y los jovenes, eh, chat, buscar pareja. Es algo soprendente, o sea, lo que más, eh, de hecho yo no entiendo, a veces estan de computadora a computadora, este, chateando con ellos mismos... o sea, es increíble, o sea, yo, este, como no pueden una comunicación entre dos personas, utilizan una computadora para que haya una comunicación.

As indicated in Tables 6.6 through 6.9, rarely in the time that I spent in the Internet cafés in town did I see anyone who appeared to be over 35 years of age. An exception to this was the appearance of older adults entering the café to pick up children, sometimes chatting with José or one of his employees while waiting or sitting down with the child to see what they had been doing. Indeed, this was the case during the exemplar week in February. Nevertheless, there was a general absence of older adults in the café and even when they did appear they almost never requested to use a computer themselves.

José also observed that his clientele tended to include a very small proportion of older users, and he noted that older people tended to avoid computers altogether, whereas the younger children and youth were more embracing of the technologies. As we discussed the activities of his customers, he turned to the question of migration and

communications and his desire upon opening shop in Acuitzio to increase lines of communication between family members in the town and abroad. He was especially interested in the benefits that he saw for older Acuitzences with family and other social connections in the US, although he had not had much luck convincing this generation of the potential of the Internet.

> For me, one of the ideas that I've always had but which is very difficult (to implement) is to help the older people understand that computers are also for them... That if their children are there (in the US), that they can see them, that they can speak with them, that they can see each other directly, via the camera, but for some (unclear), they don't understand, or they are not convinced at how the Internet functions and what are the benefits... The thing is that there is a theory about computers. They see it as an apparatus that can easily break down, and so you don't touch what can, what can break. That is to say, therefore, they say that if I don't know about it, better that I don't touch it so it won't break... So that is what I have always heard – it could break. You can do whatever you want and little by little but yes. I mean, it has taken work to get older people to come to the computer so that they see its benefits, you know? The thing is that here many peoples' family members are outside of, of the town, they are working in México City, or in the US, and they can have contact with them, um, at a more economical price, more quickly, instantly, that is to say that they can be speaking with them in real time and, or including sending a correspondence that can arrive in a matter of minutes and not a matter of days. But principally it is the youth that are here taking advantage of the services right now, the new thing that is the computer, the Internet principally.

> *A mí, uno, una de mis ideas que yo siempre tuve, pero que, pues, es muy difícil, o sea, hacer entender a la gente grande que esto de las computadoras también es para ellos... Que si sus hijos están allá, que nos podrían ver, que podrían platicar con ellos, que podrían, este, verlos directamente, este, a través de una cámara, pero a unos (unclear) no entienden, o sea, no, no están convencidos de como funciona el Internet y cuales son sus beneficios... Lo que, hay una teoría de la computadora. Lo ven como un aparato que se puede descomponer, entonces no toques lo que no descomp..., lo que se puede descomponer. O sea, entonces, ellos dicen si, yo no sé, mejor no toco para no descomponerlo... Entonces, es lo que yo siempre he oído. Es que esto no se descompone. Ustedes pueden hacer lo que ustedes quieran y poco a poco, pero bueno, o sea, sí ha costado algo de trabajo, este, hacer que esa gente grande se acerque a la computadora y vean más beneficios, no? Este, que, aquí muchos de sus familiares están fuera de, del pueblo, están trabajando en la ciudad de México, o en Estados Unidos, y que pueden tener contacto con ellos, mm, a un costo más económico, más rápido, instantáneo, o sea que pueden, este, estar platicando con ellos en tiempo real y, este, o incluso mandar*

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una correspondencia que puede llegar en cuestión de minutos y no en cuestión de días. Este, pero principalmente son los jóvenes los que están aprovechando ahorita, eh, lo nuevo que es, este, la computadora, el Internet principalmente.

In an episode that perhaps epitomises the attitude of the older generation of Acuitzences toward the Internet, I was on my way to the Internet café when I encountered Luis, the father of a friend. I wrote in my notes later that day:

> As I made my way toward the Internet this afternoon, I ran into *don* Luis coming out of the *papelería*. He asked me where I was going in such a rush and I motioned down the corridor to the staircase leading to the café. "I'm going to use the Internet," I said, to which he replied that he had never been inside. When I asked why, he responded, "An old guy like me; I don't use the Internet"

As the younger generation has been introduced to computers in schools, the older generation has been largely left behind, despite programs targeting this audience through ICATMI. Indeed, the generational divide within the immigrant community also points to an overwhelmingly younger demographic of Internet usage, with 61 percent of Hispanic Internet users in the US under the age of 34 (Pew Internet and American Life Project 2001, cited in Benítez 2006:187). José explained,

> Here there are professionals; there are many professional people that don't know how to use a computer so it has been my responsibility to teach these people to use one, those who already have a career, because in their time there weren't any computers.

> *Aquí hay gente profesionista, hay mucha gente profesionista que no sabe manejar una computadora entonces me tocó a mí a gente, este, ya con una carrera enseñarles, este, (manejar) una computadora porque en su tiempo no había.*

I witnessed a similar situation one day while in José's Internet café. As I sat working at a computer, an older gentleman in his late 40s entered the shop with a disc in hand. He went immediately to José and explained that he had been sent to print copies of the documents contained on the disc, but that he did not know what to do. With José's guidance and assistance the man successfully printed his copies, which I later learned were documents he was presenting to the municipal government.

The gender of José's clientele appeared to be roughly equal during the research period, although the activities and ages of males and females in the Internet café differed to some extent. There were slightly more males than females in both the exemplar weeks, with a total of 34 male to 33 female patrons in December and 29 male to 27 female patrons in February. While male users are the larger component of the clientele, the ages of male users point to an interesting dynamic. The larger proportion of young boys under age 12 obscures the fact that there are actually more female users in their teens and twenties than there are male users of the same age groups. In fact, while there were seven boys under 12 during the exemplar week in December, only one girl of this age group was accounted for during the same period. Similarly, during the exemplar week in February, there were eight boys and two girls under 12 years of age. However, during both December and February there were more female users than male users in the age categories of 13 to 18 years of age and 19 to 34 years of age. Female users in the teen category outnumbered their male counterparts 20 to 15 in December and 14 to 13 in February, and females 19 to 34 years of age outnumbered males 12 to 11 in December and 11 to 8 in February.

As both my own observations and José's observations confirm, younger users of computers in Acuitzio tend to play games and are simply learning to navigate the computer system, while older users in their teens, twenties, and early thirties, are more likely to use the Internet and other computer applications for both homework and communications. Examining the gender division of computer usage in the town, taking into account age and associated activities, it appears as though there are more female users of Internet and computer communications technologies than there are male users of the same applications. While males may begin entering the world of computers at an earlier age, gravitating towards computer games, their female counterparts are attracted to computers in their teens and twenties and maintain their usage at a slightly higher level than the male users. This gender differential may have several contributing factors, including high school and university attendance by females, as well as the larger number of females in the community – Mexican statistics indicate that there is a ratio of 88 males to 100 females in the town (INEGI 2005). Migration practices continue to exhibit gender

divisions and many females remain in the community while their male partners work in the US. These gender and age divisions are areas in which more research is needed in order to make more concrete assessments regarding the propensity toward using the computer for communications.

GROWTH OF COMPUTER USAGE IN ACUITZIO

The beginning of December witnessed the opening of a rival Internet café with six new computers across from the plaza, a location more accessible to walking traffic than the one belonging to José. According to clients of the two cafés, the new café had "faster Internet service" than José's[16]. The novelty of the new opening, along with lower prices for Internet access (10 pesos per hour versus the 12 pesos per hour charged at José's café – although the lower access fees at the new café were matched by José within weeks) gave the site an initial boost that, over the long term, did not seem to affect José's business negatively. Soon both cafés, as well as the other locations with Internet access in the town, were bustling with activity, especially in the afternoons and evenings.

In addition to the perceived faster speed and the lower access fees at the new café, patrons cited newer computers, easier access from the street and increased visibility of the new café as the primary reasons for choosing it over José's. The social appeal of 'being seen' at the new café strongly influenced patrons. In fact, as the café was located at street level near the central plaza, sitting in the new café became an open invitation to friends and acquaintances passing by to come and chat, engaging customers in the café in both online and face to face social interactions. With few businesses in the town open after 8 pm, except for *cantinas* and a few local restaurants serving *comida corrida* (fast food), the Internet cafés were popular meeting places in the evenings, especially among teenagers and young adults. This fact is reflected in the generally higher numbers of patrons recorded during the evening hours in my observations. With few options for social interaction outside the home, the Internet cafés provide a relatively safe environment in which to meet other members of the community.

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[16] All Internet connections in the town were telephone-line based, functioning on 56k modems during the period of my research.

José's café and the newly opened café were not the only public places where residents and visitors could connect to the Internet in the town. In addition to the commercial offerings, the state-sponsored youth centre (*Centro de la Juventud*) provides computer and Internet-access right off the central plaza[17]. Although the centre had fewer computers and shorter business hours than its competitors, its prices undercut the private businesses by nearly half (at 6 pesos per hour) and the centre was often busy, especially among the youth population that was their target audience. As my time in the field ended in June 2005, another Internet café had opened further up *Avenida Vicente Riva Palacio*, and by the time of my return in January 2006, the town had at least five public Internet access points.

Understandably, José's opinion on the opening of more Internet providers in the town was mixed. While he believed that the growth in the number of Internet and computer businesses does reflect a growth in the overall number of users, he also recognised that growth is relatively slow and there is a ceiling to the current number of users. He believes that he and his competitors are, to a certain extent, simply dividing a finite group between themselves.

> Erin: So, there are five places here now and, just now you mentioned that you are experiencing a bit of a low season, but that all of the businesses have, more or less, the same thing is happening to them...
>
> José: Uh-huh... What is happening is that many people think that, because of the fact that many people have come (to my business), that it is a good business (to get into). But they haven't thought that we have now begun to divide the same people between all of us because not everyone knows (about computers). That is to say that, if everyone had the same necessity for computers like, pardon my example but, buying tortillas here in Mexico, I mean, for the most part everyone eats tortillas here so having a *tortilleria* couldn't be a bad business, could it? Because everyone consumes them. But the reality is that the group that consumes this type of service, the Internet, is minimal. As a result, the only thing that we (the owners of Internet cafes) have done is to adapt ourselves to each other. By thinking that if he has people in his business, I should be able to have people here too... the only thing that we've done, in that regard, is to divide this group of people between ourselves... because it is all the same. That is, I see that people who used to come here and be my clients are now in another server and when a new business opens, those clients of that server and two of mine

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[17] When I arrived in Acuitzio the Centro was located on the far corner of the plaza but moved into the newly reconstructed library building in 2005.

are going to go there and here we will be, you see? Because in reality, I'm telling you, here business has reduced quite a bit. I mean, we're growing; in four or five years I can tell you that we have grown our clientele, the people who are using the Internet, by 60 percent. If, for instance, one person used to arrive to use a computer, today five or six more people arrive to use the same computer. But, we are talking about four years, five years at this point, which is very little, that is to say, in comparison to the necessity of the town itself. I mean, the need has grown very little, so those that enter are very few and with the opening of more businesses we have reduced our market (share) a bit.

Erin: Entonces, hay cinco lugares aquí y pues, ahora me dijiste que es una temporada así bajita, un poquito, pero que todos los negocios tienen, más o menos, la misma cosa está pasandose...

José: Uh-huh... Lo que pasa es que muchos piensan que, el hecho de que vino mucha gente que era buen negocio. Pero no se pusieron a pensar que, que esos mismos nos hiciéremos a repartir entre todos porque no todos saben, o sea, si todos tuvieran la misma necesidad a las computadoras, como, perdón por el ejemplo, pero comprar tortillas como aquí en México, o sea, a lo mejor, todos comen tortillas entonces poner una tortillería no puede ser tan mal negocio, no? Porque toda la gente lo consume. Pero en realidad el grupo que consume este tipo de negocio, el Internet, entonces es, es mínimo. Entonces, este, lo único que hemos hecho, también nosotros mismos, como comerciantes, es adaptarnos a nosotros mismos. Pensar que, que si él tiene gente, pues yo también puedo tener gente... lo único que hicimos fue, o sea, dividirnos este grupo de gente para todos... porque son los mismos. O sea, yo veo gente que habían antes clientes míos que ahorita están en el otro server y que cuando se abre otro negocio, o sea, el de él y dos míos se van por allá y aquí estamos, no? Porque en realidad, te digo, aquí, mmm, es muy reducido, o sea, estamos creciendo, en cuatro (cinco) años te puedo decir que creció un 60 por ciento la gente que, que utiliza una computadora. Si, mmm, llegaba una persona a usar una computadora, hoy llegan cinco o seis personas más a utilizar ese, esa computadora. Este... pero a una sí, estamos hablando de cuatro años, cinco años de ese momento, que es muy poco, o sea, a comparación de, de, de la necesidad que tiene el mismo pueblo. O sea, se ha creciendo muy poco, entonces, eh, mmm, los que (entran) son pocos y con la apertura de más negocios hicimos que, que nuestro mercado se redujera un poquito.

The recent expansion in computer and Internet providers in the town generally reflects a growth in the number of users of these services. Indeed, this is also reflected in the national statistics cited in Tables 6.1 and 6.2 above. Considering the growth in service providers and the other extenuating factors, such as the larger population of the town during the month of December, the fact that the February clientele at José's café are over

80 percent of those of December would suggest that there continues to be steady growth in computer usage in Acuitzio[18].

SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF PUBLIC COMPUTER USAGE IN ACUITZIO

As noted in the federal statistics, access to the Internet and computers in public spaces has increased over home-based Internet usage in the last ten years. The availability and accessibility of computers to a larger proportion of the Mexican population will likely have the effect of continued increases in computer and Internet usage.

Computer usage moving into the public sphere may also have a variety of larger social implications. Like the plaza and other social and commercial spaces in Mexican society (see Ames 1973 for discussion of the plaza in Acuitzio social life), the Internet café has become a meeting place, especially for younger users, where they can interact with friends and acquaintances outside of school and other social settings. Based on my observations at the Internet cafés in Acuitzio, teenage students often arrived with a friend or two, or perhaps a sibling, and spent as much of their time in the café interacting with small groups of friends as they did using the computers. Indeed, the assertion that the newer Internet café's location on the main street made users more visible to passersby implies that public computer usage in the town is a social activity that extends beyond the usage of the computers themselves, and is creating another avenue for face to face social interactions, especially for younger users.

The public nature of Internet access also creates a situation where social monitoring is possible, and as such, certain activities may be more or less likely to occur in these public settings. For instance, intimate conversations via email or instant messaging may not be possible during the busiest times at the café due to the number or identity of other users in the café, or conversely, conversations may engage several users at once, where this would have been impossible in a home-based setting. The public

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[18] In March 2006, José moved his Internet café from the centre of town to his home in *Las Peñas*. During my last visit before the move in February 2006, he noted that with the increase in competition it made little sense for him to remain in town. Rather than continuing to pay rent on the space (which was relatively expensive and not greatly accessible from the street), he preferred to open in the front room of the house he was building. He expected that the move would also expand and increase his clientele among residents of *Las Peñas* who, until that time, had to go into town to access Internet and computer facilities.

nature of access signals another interesting avenue for further research on computer and Internet adoption in the community.

In this chapter I have endeavoured to show that overall computer usage in the town of Acuitzio del Canje has been growing in recent years. Access during my research period appeared to be exclusively within the public sphere, through commercial Internet cafés and other public access points. The number of access points to computers and the Internet grew by 500 percent in the five years following the opening of the town's first Internet café in 2001. In addition, the implementation of computation courses in schools and the larger community has ensured that computer usage continues to grow at a slow, yet steady pace.

Computer users in Acuitzio were overwhelmingly from the younger generation during the research period, with teens and young adults comprising the largest groups of users. While some older patrons used the Internet cafés on occasion, many older Acuitzences were reluctant to enter the Internet cafés and generally avoided computers. Younger Acuitzences were more embracing of computer technologies and young people under 12, especially young boys, were also a large contingent of computer users.

I had postulated prior to visiting Acuitzio that computers and the medium of the Internet would be an excellent communication strategy between loved-ones separated through migration practices. In spite of the potential of the Internet for communication purposes, interviews with the proprietor of the town's first Internet café and my own observations revealed a broader range of computation activities among café patrons. Some email and instant messaging occurred between residents and their counterparts in the US; however, during this early phase of Internet access in the community, the acceptance and usage of these methods had a significantly younger face than I had been expecting to see. With limits placed on the type of interviews and data I could collect among younger Acuitzences[19], the picture of the youthful nature of Internet adoption in

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[19] Ethical guidelines and considerations prohibited me from conducting interviews with Acuitzences under the age of 18 without the expressed consent of their parents. In a situation in the Internet cafés where younger users were often without parental supervision, acquiring this consent was nearly impossible. Due to some of the other research limitations that I outline at the beginning of the chapter, as well as in Chapter Three, I deemed it more important to record some of the broader trends in the community rather than follow up on specifics with young Internet users.

the community could not be fully developed in this research. However, questions related to computer use and practices represent areas for continued research in the town.

In the next chapter I will turn to interviews that I conducted with several members of the community, both migrants and non-migrants, to determine their personal communication strategies.

Chapter Seven

Personal Communication Strategies

In this chapter I explore the personal communication strategies of several migrants and non-migrants, building upon my observations of computer usage presented in the preceding chapter, as well as discussing cellular telephone usage in the community of Acuitzio. As noted by Slater and Tacchi (2004), computer-based communications should be viewed within the full range of potential communications strategies, and indeed, individuals in Acuitzio utilise a variety of strategies to remain in contact with their friends and family, both in Mexico and abroad. Additionally, as Panagakos and Horst (2006) point out, the adoption of particular strategies of communication is related to several factors, including the qualities and perceived qualities of particular approaches, personal preferences and needs, cost, and ease of access and use. For Acuitzences, Internet communications should be viewed within a broader set or "bundle" of strategies that include posted letters and packages, monetary remittances, and long-distance telephone and cellular communications. This variety of approaches to communications or "communicative ecology" differs by individual, taking into account the recipients of the communications, the access of all parties, as well as the particular situational needs (Slater and Tacchi 2004).

PERSONAL COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES

As I discussed in Chapter Six, Internet communications in Acuitzio are largely a public activity, taking place in Internet cafés and offices, rather than in homes in the community. In fact, it was in the local cafés that I met and came to know several individuals in the community, both migrants and non-migrants, and through these encounters I was able to learn more about the personal communication strategies of these individuals.

The Internet communication habits of Acuitzences varied widely among migrants and non-migrants with whom I spoke, with age and educational achievements of respondents most strongly correlated to Internet usage. Both migrants and non-migrants had individuals who used email and instant messaging to correspond with friends and some relatives in other communities, and both categories also had individuals who did not use computers at all. I have chosen to present this chapter on personal communication strategies by separating non-migrating individuals from migrants in order to discuss the unique circumstances that each present for computer and Internet access and adoption.

Among non-migrating Acuitzences, some individuals were indifferent to the technology of computers and the Internet. As I discuss in Chapter Six, few Acuitzences over the age of thirty-five appeared to have much interest in the Internet, and people of this age rarely entered public Internet cafés according to my observations. Even some younger Acuitzences in their twenties and early thirties did not express much interest in computers or the Internet. These individuals tended to have little experience using computers and did not have active email addresses. As Internet access was firmly within the public domain in the community, they had the potential to acquire email, however, most expressed that they did not perceive a need for email, or that they would not use it even if they had it, so they were not inclined to go through the hassle. This was the case with Carmela, who at 19 years of age lived with extended family in Acuitzio, and who did not use the Internet at all, preferring communications by telephone. For her, Internet communications were too impersonal; since her parents resided relatively near Acuitzio in another Michoacán community, it was more personally satisfying and nearly as cost effective to make long-distance phone calls. Maria, another non-migrating individual, lived in one of the outlying communities and spent six days a week in Acuitzio working in a home as domestic help. In her early thirties with two young children, she saw no need for using the Internet or computers herself, despite having extended family throughout Michoacán, as well as family and an ex-husband in the United States. She stated that she was unfamiliar with computers and so preferred other means of communication. Her primary means of communication with individuals outside of Acuitzio, and indeed also with friends in the community, was with her cellular telephone, both telephone calls and text-messaging.

Other individuals, such as 28-year-old Elena, considered acquiring an email address in order to communicate with her fiancé who was working in Alaska, but instead, after conferring with him, they chose to hook up a telephone landline in her home. There were several reasons for this choice, including the fact that her fiancé sent remittances in order to pay for the phone line to the house. He also paid a monthly premium rate in Alaska for calls to Mexico, making the cost of communications quite affordable. By communicating primarily by telephone the couple could speak whenever it was convenient, from the comfort of home. Communications by telephone also meant that the couple could speak for as long and as often as they wanted. In addition to frequent telephone calls, both Elena and her fiancé sent cards, photos, and letters through the mail, although usually only for special occasions[20].

While neither Maria nor Elena had email addresses during the research period, both recognised the increasing importance of computers in Mexican society. Each woman is a mother to elementary school-aged children and both expressed a desire that their children learn computation skills at a young age. This was easier for Elena, who lives in the town, as her school-aged child was able to learn basic computation in one of the community's elementary schools. Elena was cognisant that the school courses may not be an adequate education in computer usage and she spoke of enrolling her child in one of the computation courses at ICATMI in the next few years. Maria's concerns, on the other hand, were more immediate and modest. Living in a small *rancheria* community, her two young children were educated in a one-room schoolhouse without access to computers or computer courses. Moreover, during my return visit to the community in June 2005, I accompanied Maria to a parent-teacher meeting at the school, where I learned from the congregated group of mothers and school administration that the schoolhouse did not have electricity. Without computers or even electricity in the school, Maria considered moving her children into a school in Acuitzio in order to rectify the disadvantage that this placed on their education.

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[20] In May 2005, I was honoured to be a witness at the civil wedding ceremony of Elena and her fiancé. In the time since my research period in Acuitzio ended, Elena and her husband have had a baby, and when her husband returned to the Alaska to work, Elena decided to acquire an email address so that she could send him, and other relatives in the US, pictures of the child.

Education, especially post-secondary or advanced education, appears to be a factor in Internet and computer usage among non-migrating Acuitzences. Most of the younger individuals in Acuitzio who have post-secondary education also have some experience with Internet technology, although they vary in their use of the Internet for communicative purposes. For many of these individuals, email and instant messaging are mainly used to communicate with friends and colleagues in Morelia, where most had gone to university, as well as contacts in Mexico City or elsewhere in Mexico. For example, in December 2004, I met Alberto, a man in his mid-thirties, who came to the Internet café quite regularly. As a friend of José, the café's owner, Alberto spent a few hours a week there, usually dividing his time between socialising with José and other patrons and using email to communicate with friends in Morelia and Mexico City. Speaking with him at the café in early January 2005, Alberto enlisted my help to set up a new email account so that he could send and receive large files, such as photographs. He expressed frustration that his previous account had inadequate limits on file sizes and that he had not received some of the larger email messages sent out by his university friends because they had overloaded his email inbox. He told me that email is his primary means of communication with some of his more distant acquaintances elsewhere in Mexico, but that he does not tend to use the Internet to converse with Acuitzences outside of the country. Instead, his communications with locals are largely in person or through telephone calls and text messaging on his cellular phone.

Although some non-migrating individuals with whom I spoke reported periodic contact with Acuitzences in the US, none of them had acquired email or used Internet communications for the primary purpose of communicating with friends or family abroad. Out of fifteen non-migrating, regular Internet users who I surveyed between the ages of 18 and 36, only seven of them are in regular contact with Acuitzences outside of Mexico via the Internet. In six of these cases, the regular contact is with an older brother who lives and works in the US; in another case the individual communicated both with his older brother and with his girlfriend in California; and in the remaining case, regular email communications were sustained between the individual and a close friend in Chicago. In all but one of these cases – the friendship – Internet communications are considered to be supplemental communications, with telephone calls the primary means

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of communicating, followed by posted letters and cards. Even in the case of the friendship, periodic telephone calls and letters – especially in times of personal crises – are also used to maintain lines of communication.

For the remaining eight individuals, Internet communications are generally a means of communicating with friends and acquaintances within Mexico, although on occasion they too may use the technology to communicate across borders. Several of these individuals use email for more than just personal communications. Ofelia and Isabel, for example, use email to communicate with one another, as well as with individuals in other communities in Michoacán as part of their work coordinating cultural events and activities in Acuitzio. Alejandro and Pilar, both employed by the local government, use the Internet when communicating with their older brothers in the US, as well as using email and instant messaging for work purposes, including professional contact with Acuitzences living in the US. Indeed, as I discuss in Chapter Five, the municipal administration that came to power in the community on January 1, 2005 has been quite active in coordinating, generating, and exploiting transnational migrant linkages, especially with the Acuitzio migrant association in Illinois, and much of these individuals' professional contact outside of the community was with this group of migrants.

Migrating Acuitzences who I met during the research period use Internet communications to varying degrees and in a variety of ways, similar to non-migrating individuals in the community. Jorge, age 33, who was visiting extended family in Acuitzio as part of a "Mexican vacation" that included stops in Mexico City and the resort area of Ixtapa, used the Internet to communicate with friends in California, as well as accessing American news websites, during his short sojourn in Acuitzio. As a US citizen who had moved to California with his family at age 15, Jorge considered his sporadic visits to Mexico to be vacation time, and as such, did not have frequent contact with people in Acuitzio. His usage of US-based, English websites for news, for example, also underscores his personal orientation to the US rather than Mexico, as well as highlighting the fact that English continues to dominate the online world (see Benítez 2006:193).

Flora, in her early thirties, is another individual who used Internet communications to remain in contact with loved ones in the US while visiting Mexico. Flora migrated with her family to the US as a young girl and now works as a schoolteacher there. Although she spent much of her formative years in California, she has returned to Acuitzio throughout her life and eventually married another Acuitzence. When we met at the Internet café in November 2004, she was visiting her parents and brother, who had returned to live in Acuitzio, and her mother-in-law, who continued to live in the town, for a few months before returning to work. She and her husband had plans to move back to Acuitzio in the next few years, and they were constructing a home in the community in anticipation of their return. While she visited family in the town, the couple used daily emails to communicate.

Among migrating individuals with whom I spoke formally, communication strategies vary substantially between individuals. Domingo had no Internet communications with anyone in Acuitzio during his five years in the US. He expressed a variety of reasons for this, primarily because his only regular communications are with his elderly grandparents, as well as with his mother in Morelia, by telephone. He spoke of these regular communications, saying,

> I call them by telephone… every eight days, every two weeks. Or, if they need something, they can just call me there and… I call [back] here because phone calls from here, well, it's expensive. So I always call them here.
>
> *[Yo] les hablo por telephono… cada ocho días, cada quince días. O si ellos ocupan algo, así me llaman para ahí y… yo llamo para acá porque las llamadas desde aqui, pues, sale caro. Entonces siempre yo les llamo para acá.*

His departure from Acuitzio in 1999 predated Internet access in the town and, until his return visit, he had not had the opportunity to exchange email addresses with individuals in the community. However, he was more interested in exchanging telephone numbers than email addresses with friends in the community during his visit as he recognised that he was unlikely to adopt the Internet as a means of communication. Without access to the Internet in his home, and with little free time to spend online due to long hours at his construction job, the Internet as a means of communicating with his peers in Acuitzio seemed impractical.

The Internet had been a communicative tool for staying in contact with friends in Acuitzio for Nicolás, who returned in October 2004 after eighteen months in the US. Similar to Domingo, Nicolás's primary communications with Acuitzences were with his family by telephone; communications that were much more frequent than with his friends. During our interview in February 2006, he explained,

> ...[W]ith my family it (communication) was mostly by telephone; one time, at least once per week. And with my friends, by Internet, by email. It was, perhaps, only once a month or, or...(p) once every two months, but at least I was in contact with them.

> ... *[C]on mi familia fue más por telefono; una vez, al menos una vez por semana. Y con mis amigos, al Internet, por correo electronico. Era, tal vez, una vez al mes o, o... (p) una vez cada dos meses, pero al menos estaba en contacto con ellos.*

The ability to communicate was clearly important to Nicolás, and the facility of communication via the Internet enabled him to maintain contact with his friends during a time that, otherwise, he may have been cut off from these relationships.

While in the US, Nicolás lived in Palmdale, California, as well as in Chicago and Houston. In each of these cities he had varying degrees of familial and other social support, and as a result, his communication practices differed slightly in each community. It was mainly during the six months that he spent in Chicago that he had regular access to the Internet, going with a friend to use computers at a local school. Having been back in Acuitzio for fourteen months by the time of our interview, he continued regular email communications with several of the friends he had made in the US, as well as regular contact with his girlfriend in California. Although he was in contact with her by email and instant messaging, their primary communications were nonetheless by telephone and text messaging, and he considered the Internet communications to be supplementary to these methods.

The situation for Ismael and Roberto, father and son visiting from Alaska after a five-year absence from the town, was slightly different from those of Domingo and Nicolás. As individuals who had migrated as a family, along with Ismael's wife and two other children, Ismael and Roberto's communication practices highlight several issues. As individuals, their communication needs differed greatly; Ismael and his wife, the elder generation, were charged with maintaining contact with individuals in Acuitzio during

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their time in the United States. While their parents spoke regularly with relatives, specifically their own parents in Acuitzio and Morelia, Roberto and his siblings had little direct contact with Acuitzences. Indeed, Roberto's circle of friends in Acuitzio had not heard anything from him during his years in the US, and the first time that I met him and his younger brother was the day that they arrived in Acuitzio from Alaska, surprising friends immensely by appearing, out of nowhere, at a party in one of the salons in town.

Like Domingo, Ismael and Roberto had left the community in 1999, and as a result, neither had the opportunity to exchange email addresses with friends until their first visit back to the community in December 2004. Signalling a generational divide, Ismael recounted that while his sons used email, he did not, despite access to the technology. Unlike Domingo, as a part of a stable family unit Roberto had access to a personal computer in his home as well as home-based Internet access, and he admitted that he used the Internet regularly. During our interview in January 2005, Roberto expressed his intention to remain in contact with his friends in Acuitzio when he returned to Anchorage, saying, "now I've got their phone, like, their cell phone numbers, and the [email] addresses of my friends... I think I will [stay in touch]". In the weeks following his return to Alaska, Roberto contacted several individuals in Acuitzio, even sending me an email to let me know that he had safely arrived and had returned to work.

The contrast between the communication strategies of these men can be understood by examining the differences between their experiences of migration, as well as their access to the Internet and their own personal communication needs and preferences. Nicolás went to the US to visit his brother in California and he had the advantage of connecting into social networks in the US despite taking the journey on his own. Although an undocumented migrant, his social connections and the economic stability of his parents, as well as the fact that he left the town after the introduction of Internet access to the community, allowed him greater opportunity and time to communicate with his peers. Domingo also entered the US as an undocumented migrant; however, his departure in 1999, as well as his lack of social support system in California, prevented him from developing similar connections with Acuitzences. Ismael and Roberto, with access to the Internet in their home, were in a unique position to adopt Internet communication strategies with contacts in Acuitzio. Nevertheless, Ismael did not

use email and his communications with resident Acuitzences were primarily with his elderly parents and parents-in-law by telephone. Roberto, on the other hand, used his return to Acuitzio to re-establish lost contacts in the community and create new ones, and as a result, is now in contact with several Acuitzences on a regular basis.

It should be noted that in the time since I left the field in June 2005, I have been in contact with several people in Acuitzio, primarily by email and instant messaging, but also through periodic telephone calls. A few of these contacts, particularly close friends in the town and members of the family with whom I stayed, have remained in regular personal communications with me, fluctuating in frequency but averaging at least a few personal emails each month. My contact is less frequent with other Acuitzences, although several contacts forward email messages, such as jokes, pictures, videos, and PowerPoint presentations, at a rate of two or three per month. I did not consider these forwarded messages to be "personal communications" until I was cornered upon my return to Acuitzio in January 2006 and was accused by one of my contacts of not staying in touch once I left the community. As this individual had not written me a personal message since soon after my departure in 2005, I was initially puzzled by the allegation. I soon came to realise that these forwarded messages, although not personally addressed to me, were considered by the individual to be a means of establishing and maintaining contact. Horst and Miller discuss a similar situation in Jamaica which they refer to as "link up" – short text messages or calls sent by cellular phone between friends, family, or acquaintances that may say little in substance, but that serve to remind people that others are thinking of them (2005:760). Indeed, they point to a study of university students in Jamaica who send religious text or jokes to their entire email address book as a means of staying connected (2005:761). These forwarded communications point to an element that I did not consider when conducting this research – the qualities of personal communications – and may represent an area in which further research can be developed.

While the research period officially ended upon my return to Winnipeg in February 2006, communications with Acuitzences in the town and in the US have extended my research through space and time and further underscore some of the ways that Acuitzences are creating and recreating community through the adoption and use of ICTs. In addition to email and instant messaging communications with Acuitzences, the

Internet has become a tool for sharing and even meeting new people. Benítez discusses how immigrants from El Salvador to Washington, DC, orient online in ways that reflect both their community of origin and their community of residence (2006:186). Indeed, among migrant and resident Acuitzences with whom I have remained in contact, the adoption of the Internet for a variety of tasks outside of strictly 'communication functions' (text-based email and chat programs, for example) highlight the evolving ways that Acuitzences are engaging in transnational community and identity construction. In the period since 2006, my Acuitzence contacts have continued to incorporate other online activities such as social networking sites, photo and video sharing via email and posts to personal web pages, as well as uploads of video by young Acuitzences to the video sharing website, *Youtube*. Similarly, the introduction of the town website provides another avenue for sharing and creating community identity within the context of transnationalism.

CELLULAR TELEPHONE USE IN ACUITZIO

While Internet communications have not been evenly adopted by migrants and non-migrants in Acuitzio, this should not be understood as reluctance to adopt new technology. As Wiest noted in the 1970s, migrants and their families often used initial earnings in the US to acquire consumer and technological goods, such as radios, televisions, and appliances (1984). Upon my first visit to the community in September 2004, I was struck by the number of satellite dishes visibly protruding from the roofs of homes in the town and basic cable television is also available in the community. As I discuss in Chapter Six, the adoption of these technologies in the home has increased the availability and influence of American television programming and film.

Another striking technological adoption by individuals in Acuitzio is the large number of cellular telephone users. By the time that I entered the field, even I had been persuaded to acquire a cell phone by my Spanish teacher in Morelia. Although I had not anticipated it in my research proposal, cellular telephone communications became a feature of my time in the community.

As Horst and Miller (2005) discuss in their exploration of cellular telephone usage in Jamaica, cell phone usage in Mexico has penetrated the country quite heavily, largely

due to the role of government and industry in promoting the wireless communication sector. According to Mexican federal statistics, there were over 47 million cellular telephone users in the country in 2005, over 45 percent of the total population of 103.3 million inhabitants (INEGI 2005). With four main companies vying for the Mexican mobile telephone market, users have a variety of choice in terms of cell phone providers. But, as Horst and Miller (2005:756) indicate, to suggest that the success of cellular technologies is entirely based on the role of government and industry would be to miss the story that emerges on the ground.

Although I did not enter the field with a view to exploring cellular telephone usage, the rate of cell phone use among both migrants and non-migrants who I interviewed in Acuitzio was quite extraordinary. Even among Acuitzences who do not use or rarely use the Internet, the majority of individuals have a cellular telephone that they use for personal telephone calls and text-messaging.

As I point to in Chapter Six, many homes in Acuitzio and the surrounding small communities do not have telephone landlines, and with the advent of cellular technology at accessible prices, many individuals with whom I spoke found landlines to be an unnecessary expense. Indeed, this was also the case in the Jamaican community surveyed by Horst and Miller (2005). Additionally, much of the cellular telephone industry in Mexico is a pay-per-use system, allowing users to purchase credits based on their communication needs rather than as a fixed monthly bill. As a result, even low income cell phone users are able to acquire the technology.

Most cellular users with whom I spoke in Acuitzio paid 100 Mexican pesos (approximately $10 USD at the time of the research) every few weeks or once a month to top up their cellular telephone credit. As credits are used, people switch from telephone calls to text-messaging – at an average cost of five US cents per outgoing message – in order to extend their available credit for as long as possible. Even when they no longer have enough credit to make phone calls or send text messages, most users' telephones allow them to continue to receive incoming text messages. In fact, when someone receives a text while in a social group of other cell phone users, it is not uncommon for them to ask if anyone has credit in order to text or call the sender back. In a similar fashion, respondents in Horst and Miller's research in Jamaica speak of ways to

'economise' their telephone credits, including shortened phone calls – the average cellular telephone call in Jamaica is a mere 19 seconds long – and text messaging (2005:761).

Unlike Internet usage in Acuitzio, cellular telephone use is much more broadly appealing across the generations in the community. In many families each member carries a phone for personal communications. For example, in the household in which I stayed during the research period, each family member has their own phone. As the two young adults in the family spent most of the week in Morelia while working and attending university, the family was able to communicate frequently by cell phone. Indeed, cellular communications are important for families, but these telephones are also a primary means of communicating between friends in Acuitzio, especially when individuals spend time outside of the community, such as in Morelia.

Another element of cellular telephone usage in the community is the social prestige associated with the 'look' of the phone. Wherever cellular telephone cards are sold, and they are advertised in practically every little shop and market; trinkets and cell phone accessories are also sold. Individuals festoon their phones with bobbles that glow with incoming calls, leather or plastic phone protectors or carriers with the logo of their favourite soccer team. When someone purchases a new phone, everyone wants to see and comment on it. Equally, when something happens to their phone, individuals go to great lengths to hide the fact. On one occasion while in Morelia with a group of Acuitzences, Alejandro, who had cracked the face of his cell the day before, asked to borrow my phone saying, "Mine is embarrassing, I don't want anyone to see it" *"El mío me da pena, no quiero que nadie lo vea".*

As noted in my conversations with both migrants and non-migrating Acuitzences, most individuals used the telephone as their primary means of communicating with family members in Acuitzio and the US. Among both groups of individuals, cellular telephone usage is also important for contacting friends and family members. Roberto, Ismael, Domingo and Nicolás all used cellular telephones at the time of our interviews, to varying ends. For example, throughout his visit in Acuitzio, Roberto was in daily communication with his girlfriend in Anchorage via cell phone calls and text-messaging, as was Nicolás with his girlfriend in California. Domingo, although he does not use the

Internet at all, had two cellular telephones during his visit to Acuitzio – one based in California, which he used to communicate with his grandparents and mother while in the US, and a second that he purchased upon arriving in Michoacán in order to avoid long-distance and roaming charges on his US-based phone.

As the personal communication strategies explored in this chapter make clear, contact between Acuitzences and their social networks in the US and Mexico are tied to a variety of factors, including personal needs, access, affordability, and preference. While the current research points to some interesting trends and developments, the results of the small sample size leave several areas open to further exploration, specifically in terms of the quality of communications, new uses for Internet technologies and their impact of creation of community, and a more exhaustive investigation of cellular telephone usage. Additionally, with Internet communications still arguably in an early stage of development in the community, it is likely that over time Internet usage may become incorporated more strongly into communication strategies, especially as the younger generation of Acuitzences grow older and begin to migrate themselves.

In the last chapter I draw conclusions based on my research aims and observations, while also exploring in greater depth some of the areas of the research that could be further developed in future research.

Chapter Eight

Conclusion

The research presented in this thesis focuses on the creation and maintenance of community identity in the contemporary lives of the people of Acuitzio del Canje, Michoacán, Mexico. Acuitzences, like the people of many other communities in central Mexico, have historical ties to sites in the US through the labour migration practices of multiple generations. In order to understand the complexities of labour migration from a community such as Acuitzio, I have used the concept of transnationalism to guide my analysis of community identity. By focusing on community identity in the context of migration, this research presents the community of Acuitzio in social terms, thereby highlighting the *practice* of transnationalism.

The social networks of Acuitzences span large geographic distances and international borders, and over time have come to encompass individuals living and working in California, Illinois, and Alaska, among other US states, as well as Acuitzences living in other areas of Mexico. Social networks are both created and maintained through communication strategies and shared interests that connect Acuitzences, wherever they may reside. By investigating Internet and cellular telephone usage, I examine how these new technologies are being incorporated into the communication strategies of Acuitzences. I argue that while the physical place of Acuitzio is integral to migrant and resident community concepts, including the ways that local and national identity are integrated into the lives of Acuitzences, it is through communications that the social space of Acuitzio is extended beyond the boundaries of the town.

In this concluding chapter, I present an overview of the thesis, drawing together the major themes of the research, and look ahead to future developments in the community. I also explore some of the areas upon which the current research could be expanded.

The fieldwork that informs this research took place solely within the town of Acuitzio del Canje, however, by following Marcus' strategically situated single-site ethnography (1998) I entered the field aware of the context of labour migration and the larger picture of transnational networks that have been created through migration practices. Basing my research in the abundant transnationalism literature of anthropology and the other social sciences, I contend that the practice of labour migration from Acuitzio del Canje to sites throughout Mexico and the US extends the social space of the town to encompass relationships between citizens inside and outside the physical community. Indeed, as labour migration from the area has historical antecedence, with generations of residents having experience in the US, migration has become an ordinary feature of social life for the community. By examining elements identified by residents and migrants as integral to their visions of community identity, as well as paying attention to the ways that the community exerts its historical and local identity and its place in Mexican national identity, I draw attention to the incorporation and manifestation of migration practices in the daily lives of community members.

The manner in which the community of Acuitzio celebrates its community identity, specifically through recreations and commemorations of the 1865 Prisoner Exchange – an event that has served to carve the town a place in Mexican national and international history – are intertwined with the issue of migration. The festive atmosphere that exists in the community in the month of December is both reflected in and reflects the fact that December is the peak time for the return of migrants to the Mexican town. In addition to events celebrating the Exchange, December is full of other religious and social festivities in the community, making it the perfect time for Acuitzences living outside of the town to return to celebrate with their family and friends. As a result of the influx of migrants during this period, residents have responded with celebrations in honour of their migrating *compadres*, such as *El Día de los Norteños*, as well as planning important family and social events, including weddings, baptisms, *quinceañeras*, and other festivities to coincide with migrants' return visits. In the same way, other local events, sports teams, community groups, celebrations and news provide rallying points

for resident and migrant Acuitzences to come together in their shared community identity.

Acuitzences who reside in the town, as well as those who live and work in the US, establish and maintain social bonds through communications, linking their own experiences with those members of the community who may reside in other localities for extended periods of time. Indeed, no matter their place of residence, Acuitzences are able to hear news of local and familial events, sorrows and celebrations, through a variety of communication strategies. The importance of communications for connections between family and friends despite physical separation is a major factor in the creation of, and continued sense of, a transnational community of Acuitzences. While Acuitzences have historically communicated through various strategies, the contemporary period marked by globalization has increased the speed and frequency by which communications can be transmitted from one place to another. As such, Acuitzences migrating to areas throughout Mexico and the US are able to have sustained contact with loved ones who remain in Acuitzio, as well as those who reside elsewhere, extending the social space of the community.

Upon entering the town of Acuitzio I sought to explore computer usage and the ways that Internet-based communications are impacting social relations for the community at large. Although the size of the sample prevents definitive conclusions as to the specific nature of all migrant and non-migrant communication strategies, certain themes emerge from the research, specifically in terms of the incorporation of new technologies like the Internet and cellular telephones.

During the period of my research, Internet usage was almost exclusively in the public sphere, in commercial Internet cafés and other public access points. Based on my formal observations in one of the local cafés, as well as informal observations in some of the other centres of public access, the majority of computer and Internet users in the town are from the younger generation of Acuitzences, concentrated between the ages of 13 to 34. The youngest computer users I observed were preteen boys, although their usage could most often be characterised as 'exploratory' and they spent much of their time playing video games. Similarly, teen and young adult computer users often confined much of their usage to school homework assignments, and where several used the

computer for interpersonal and work communications, much of these communications were with peers within Mexico. Older teens and young adults were most likely to use the Internet for communicating with their peers, although the extent to which these communications took place with migrating Acuitzences appears to be relatively limited. While males were most likely to begin using computers as children, female computer usage was slightly more pronounced among teens and young adults. With a ratio of 86.11 males to 100 females in the town in 2005 according to Mexican statistics, this difference is probably attributable to the higher female population in the community (INEGI 2005). To a large degree, the difference in the male and female population of Acuitzio, which has a lower ratio than the national average of 91.26 males to 100 females, is attributable to the continued gender division in migration practices from the community (INEGI 2005).

Among both migrating and resident Acuitzences there were Internet users as well as those who did not use computers and the Internet with frequency or at all. For several research participants, Internet communications were deemed impractical, unnecessary, or too inconvenient to be worth the effort. In fact, issues of access and convenience were most often cited as reasons for lack of computer use, as well as for irregular and infrequent usage. These factors included lack of immediate access in the home, lack of time to connect to the Internet, and the relatively recent introduction of Internet technology in Acuitzio, which precluded the necessary contact information between peers.

Furthermore, among those research participants who used the Internet on a regular basis, very few recognised the Internet as their primary communication strategy. Just as I observed in Internet cafés in Acuitzio, younger migrating Acuitzences were more likely to use the Internet for communications, however, for those whose primary contacts in Acuitzio were older individuals, such as parents or grandparents, other strategies of communication were more regularly employed. A few migrating participants acknowledged that Internet communications provided opportunities for maintaining connections with peers, such as friends, with whom they may not have otherwise had contact during their sojourn in the US, however, their Internet communications with

friends were irregular when compared to communications by telephone and posted letters with family members.

Economic status also appears to have an impact on computer and Internet usage. While economic factors weigh on communication strategies for both migrant and resident Acuitzences, the relative ease of access and comparative affordability of Internet use in Acuitzio – where public access points reduce the need for household investment in computers, electricity, and Internet connections – at least partly negate the economic factor as a barrier to Internet communications among resident Acuitzences. On the other hand, the economic status of migrants in the US, where Internet access tends to be based in the home rather than public access points, has an effect on the adoption of Internet communications. Although the US has one of the highest rates of Internet penetration in the world, studies indicate that annual income in the US is strongly correlated to household Internet access. According to the US National Telecommunications and Information Administration, among American households with an annual income of $15,000 USD or less in 2000, only 12 percent had access to the Internet versus over 77 percent of households with an annual income of more than $70,000 USD (cited in Khiabany 2003:143)

Migrants with strong social networks in the US, such as families who have migrated together or those individuals with extensive familial connections in the US may be at an economic advantage while abroad. For example, the creation and maintenance of transnational social networks may assuage the economic difficulties of living alone or improve employment prospects for Acuitzences in the US. Individuals without extended family or other strong networks in the US, as well as those who are responsible for maintaining family members in Acuitzio through regular remittances, may be at a disadvantage in accessing computers and the Internet on a regular basis due to lack of disposable resources during their time in the US.

Indeed, among the research participants I interviewed, migrants with stable social networks and family in the US, as well as those with legal residency status and extended experience in the US, were more likely to use the Internet on a regular basis than those with less stable migration status. Where families migrated together, or at least where migrants had established familial connections in the areas to which they migrated, they

were more likely to have regular access to computers and the Internet in their homes or places of business, and they were more likely to use these tools as a communication strategy. Although they may have more regular access to computers, individual migrants cited the time frame within which migration was initiated as reducing their tendency to use the Internet when communicating with peers who remain in Acuitzio. With the passage of time and the return of migrants to Acuitzio, even if only short visits to their home community, Internet communications will likely be facilitated for those individuals who have regular access to the Internet as they reconnect and exchange contact information with peers in the community.

Regular access to the Internet, whether used as a primarily communicative tool or not, provides migrants with other opportunities to connect to their Mexican heritage and their communities of origin. Among several migrating research participants, satisfying a sense of where they are from was integral to their personal identity, and they actively sought out "Mexico" in their regular activities, both on- and off-line. Like many other communities in Mexico, including indigenous collectives, political and social movements, towns and cities, and indeed, the state and federal governments of the republic, Acuitzio now has a dedicated website. With the recent introduction of the website, the people of Acuitzio can celebrate their community and Acuitzences everywhere are afforded an opportunity to connect with activities and people in their home community.

Originally created for the 2004 presidential campaign of the previous municipal government, the official website of Acuitzio del Canje was converted after the campaign to a community-based site in which to showcase important events, activities, and personalities in the community, as well as celebrating the history of the town and its citizens' contemporary achievements. While its creators surely expected some Internet traffic from resident Acuitzences, with only 120 personal computers in homes in the town in 2005 (INEGI 2005), a year after the municipal elections, and only two public access points within the community at the time of the elections, it is unlikely that the target audience of the original campaign webpage were resident Acuitzences. Instead, I postulate that the web pages were created by municipal authorities to further expand the social space of the town and create opportunities for increased participation by ex-patriot

Acuitzences in local activities and events. Although non-resident Acuitzences do not have voting rights in municipal elections, legislative changes to electoral laws in 2000 and 2005 extended these rights to non-resident Mexicans in the 2006 federal elections, and there is a campaign underway to extend voting rights to non-residents in both state and municipal elections (Fitzgerald 2000; Garcia-Acevedo 2003; Navarro 2006; Santamaría Gómez 2003). In fact, recent communications with sources in the community point to political resolutions that may make it possible for migrant Acuitzences to vote in municipal elections in the future, however, only community residents were able vote in the most recent local elections in 2007.

Nevertheless, since 2002, migrants from communities throughout Mexico have been participating in the economic development of their communities of origin through the national *Programa Tres por Uno para Migrantes* (Pradillo 2005). Indeed, one of the campaign promises of the last municipal president was to increase connections with Acuitzences in the US, especially through the Illinois-based hometown association, and it was during the last presidency that the *Tres por Uno* program began to have an impact in Acuitzio, specifically through the importation of computers for schools and the construction of a retirement home for elderly Acuitzences. By developing a website that focuses on some of the very elements of the town that community members, both resident and migrant, cited as important to community identity, the site can be viewed as a prudent manoeuvre by town officials to tap into the search for identity and meaning in the lives of Acuitzences who may have spent more time outside of the community than within it. As longer-term migrants have more economic stability in the US, as well as having more regular Internet access, the website may serve to reincorporate community members who have, over time, become separated from the day-to-day social, political, and economic life of Acuitzio.

Recent municipal elections in November 2007 represent a continuity of political power in the community, with the same political party and many of the same faces remaining in *la Presidencia*. As the town website is redesigned to reflect the new municipal government, I speculate that the new design will continue to encourage participation and connections between the community and migrating Acuitzences. As a strategic mechanism linking migrants with their home community, the webpage

underscores some of the elements of community identity recognised by participants in this research. I believe that, with time, the importance of the website could figure prominently in community works projects and other participatory activities, thereby strengthening transnational networks and linkages from the town site to places throughout the US.

Much of the communications literature notes that there are many factors that influence strategies of communication, highlighting the variety of communication tools employed by individuals living transnational lives. While the Internet appears to be positioned to find increased popularity for Acuitzences, other more convenient communications, primarily telephones and cellular telephones, were used much more prominently during the research period for maintaining contact between migrants and residents, as well as between residents and their peers in Acuitzio, Morelia, and other areas of Mexico. Family connections, specifically communications with older relatives in Acuitzio, were most often through regular telephone conversations as well as posted letters and remittances.

Cellular technologies, with their portability and relatively inexpensive nature, are further extending the use of the telephone for long-distance and local communications. Although I did not enter the field with an eye to develop research on cellular communications, the adoption of this technology among many research participants led me to begin to investigate cellular usage, and further underscores the adaptability of "communicative ecology" (Slater and Tacchi 2004) among Acuitzences. My observations and interviews with cellular telephone users, while not exhaustive, point to one of the areas upon which the current research could – and should – be expanded. I turn now to suggestions for further expanding the research presented in this thesis, pointing to future developments in the community.

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

The research conducted for this thesis underlines the evolving nature and manner through which community identity is constructed and communicated and highlights the speed with which new technology is integrated into everyday life in the contemporary world. Indeed, in the time since the research period ended, homes in Acuitzio have begun

to hook up Internet connections, and some have even adopted Internet-based long distance communications such as Skype, thereby expanding the possibilities of communications among the citizens of the community. Similarly, the expansion of regular use of Internet technologies by Acuitzences on both sides of the US-Mexican border point to new and evolving dimensions of community identity creation, such as those created through the usage of social networking sites, and picture- and video-sharing, among many other examples.

Internet access in Acuitzio was only relatively recently introduced, and as a result, both migrant and non-migrant Internet communication strategies warrant continued and closer research in the next few years. The growth of Internet access points and the increasing educational opportunities afforded to Acuitzences in terms of computer usage will likely have an effect on Internet communications between migrants and non-migrants over time. Similarly, for at least some migrating Acuitzences, returning to the town site and reconnecting with friends and family in the community may affect their Internet communications with peers in the town. Given the historical continuity and ordinariness of migration practices from the community, it is possible that younger Internet-savvy Acuitzences will adopt Internet communications as part of their overall communication strategy as they and their peers participate in migration from the community.

Several other elements of computer and Internet usage were also explored to varying degrees in the thesis research. The adoption of computer usage for gaming among children, as well as other entertainment and communication purposes, in addition to the growth of online communities of peers and social networking, has broad-ranging consequences for conceptions of community among Acuitzences and points to the tensions and dynamism of (community) identity construction. Discussed only briefly in the thesis, the social implications of these online activities and of public Internet access in the town suggest other avenues for examining how community is constructed in place and, indeed, through space, in a transnational context.

The advent of the community website also provides opportunities for creating and cultivating transnational linkages between Acuitzences, wherever they may reside, as well as enhancing engagement with, and encouraging investment and participation in, the

community by ex-patriots Acuitzences. Indeed, the recent election of a new municipal government in the community brings with it the promise of continued interaction between resident and ex-patriot Acuitzences, specifically through connections established with migrant associations, but also with the expansion of the website dedicated to the town site and history.

While Internet communications were not as prominent as I had postulated prior to entering the town, the communication strategies of migrants and resident Acuitzences include a variety of other communication technologies such as long-distance phone calls, posted letters and packages, as well as – increasingly – cellular telephones. Cellular communications are a popular choice for Acuitzences in that they are relatively inexpensive – within the economic grasp of most residents – and they allow for convenient and extended communications with friends and family throughout Michoacán, Mexico, and even the US. Just as resident Acuitzences are adopting cellular telephones, so too are migrating Acuitzences, even purchasing multiple telephones for specific usages.

Cellular communications encompass regular telephone interactions, as well as text- and image-based interactions. The quality and type of communication possible with cellular telephones, and indeed with email and other Internet communications, is an area that provides ample opportunity for more research. While the social scientific response to cellular telephony is only in its infancy, already a body of literature is developing, reflecting an increasing importance and an increased recognition of cellular telephones as communicative tools. With this growing interest and the dynamic nature of cellular telephone communications in Acuitzio, the adoption and use of cell phones represents a subject that warrants closer study than was possible during the research period.

Several areas of both Internet and cellular telephone communications provide opportunities to expand upon the research presented here. First, the limitations of the current research programme, specifically the limited sample size and focus on individuals living or visiting the town of Acuitzio during my time there, present as obvious stimulus for further research on communications strategies. Research that follows social networks to places in the US and elsewhere in Mexico would expand upon the current research

agenda and provide a more thorough understanding of the role of communications in creating and maintaining connections between Acuitzences.

Second, more attention should be paid to issues of gender and class with regard to technology adoption. Although I was able to draw some conclusions on the ways that gender influences communications, especially Internet communications, this element was not thoroughly developed in the research. For example, although females appeared to be more frequent users of Internet communications within the context of Acuitzio, this difference may only reflect the ratio of females to males in the community rather than a real gender division in technological adoption or communication practices. In addition, all of the migrating participants in this research were male, excluding a small but significant sector of migrants from Acuitzio to the US. By expanding upon the current research agenda and following networks to sites in the US, the role that gender plays in communications could be more thoroughly investigated. Although females represent a smaller segment of Acuitzio's migrant population, and indeed, may even represent a segment that is less likely to return to Acuitzio on a regular basis (see Wiest 2008), the experience of female migrants represents another area in which the current research should be expanded. Similarly, while some elements of class divisions were explored with regard to technology adoption, specifically Internet communications, an increased sample size and an expansion of the research site to areas in the US would provide more opportunities for understanding how class and economic factors influence communications.

Third, the fact that Internet and cellular communications have only relatively recently become accessible to the majority of Acuitzences has implications for the adoption of these technologies for migrating and resident Acuitzences. As access expands in the town and migrants return to the community and re-establish contacts with their peers, I expect that the possibilities of these technologies will be increasingly embraced by both migrants and non-migrants. In addition to developing a better understanding of technology adoption for Acuitzences, elements such the quality of communications and use of technology for ends other than communications represent areas that are emerging in the social science literature. By understanding quality and type of communications as

well as more general technology adoption, a broader picture of community identity-building will emerge for transnational communities.

FINAL REMARKS

The very fact that Acuitzences remain just that, "Acuitzences," in places other than Acuitzio may be, to some, an essentialising remark – they come from Acuitzio and are therefore Acuitzences. However, if we go beyond identity as birthright to identity as practice as Cohen (2004a) suggests, we find a sense of community and shared identity based on experience and social interaction that encompass migrating and resident Acuitzences alike. Above all else, Acuitzences remain connected to the community through social networks, communications, remittances, and returning to the town. Indeed, residents of Acuitzio often speak of their migrating relatives and friends as members of the community based on their regular social interactions (see also Wiest 1973; 1979; 1984; 2008) – sending remittances, letters and packages, and through direct communications. Of course, it cannot be said that some people born in Acuitzio do not leave the town and never look back, just as it cannot be said that all "Acuitzences" were born in the town. However, as the local community of Acuitzio has integrated migration into the ordinary practice of its citizenry, it is through a variety of communication strategies that social relations have been cultivated and maintained across borders and space. With new communication possibilities created through technological innovation, the potential for increased ease and speed of communications can only strengthen the ties that exist between Acuitzences and help to forge new connections between the 'community' (in both the physical and social senses) and other communities. The adoption of new technologies, including the creation of a community website, has only become possible in the contemporary phase of migration practices within a framework of globalization, and these technologies may even have the effect of connecting and re-integrating ex-patriot Acuitzences into the political, economic, and social development of the community of Acuitzio. In this sense, "Acuitzio" will continue to encompass and expand upon the transnational social space that is more than just the place itself, while also emphasising the very connections to place that make Acuitzio a source of pride and identity for Acuitzences wherever they find themselves.

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