Representing transborder communities: Yolanda Cruz and Reencuentros

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Abstract Our examination of the documentary film Reencuentros: 2501 migrantes (translated as 2501 Migrants: A Journey) contributes to scholarship connecting film geographies to critical geopolitics, accounting for affect, and attending to documentary films. We augment this literature with the concepts of Indigenous geopolitics and decolonial affect. After an abridged introduction to Yolanda Cruz, the Chatina filmmaker from Oaxaca, Mexico who made Reencuentros, we interpret her film’s representation of transborder communities in Indigenous regions of Oaxaca at the turn of the twenty-first century. We then illustrate the film’s affective logic by detailing what the film moved us—and others—to do in Oklahoma. We conclude by recognizing how friction has stalled the impetus sparked by Yolanda’s film and hoping that this article might incite impulsion anew.

Keywords Film geographies · Critical geopolitics · Indigenous geopolitics · Mexico · Transborder migration

Yolanda Cruz is a Chatina filmmaker from the southern Mexican state of Oaxaca, who earned her MFA from the world-renowned film school at UCLA. Her feature-length film Reencuentros: 2501 migrantes was released in 2009 and translated into English as 2501 Migrants: A Journey (hereafter, Reencuentros). It documents the making and moving of artist Alejandro Santiago’s 2501 human-sized ceramic sculptures, each representing an individual who emigrated from the Zapotec community that Santiago considers his hometown. Between Santiago’s haunting yet heroic sculptures and Cruz’s visual storytelling skills, Reencuentros vividly illustrates the distinct geographies of twenty-first century transborder communities in Indigenous regions of Oaxaca. We (Filo and Laurel) first heard about Yolanda’s filmmaking while in Oaxaca, where we met when I (Laurel) was researching the transnational geographies characterizing the collaborative production of Indigenous videos. We realize

1 Chatino is a language spoken by Chatino people; most Chatino communities are located near the coast of Oaxaca.
2 You don’t have to take our word for it. To view the film yourself, go to the very bottom of Yolanda’s Vimeo page and click on the “Load More” button (Cruz, n.d.a); note that Sueños Binacionales is also available there.
3 We realize that “Indigenous” is a mighty imperfect category steeped in colonialist categorizations, but it remains useful to an array of individuals, communities, organizations, and nations that rally together around it. Whenever possible, we refer to an individual’s identified affiliation(s), but sometimes the frame is wider than one individual, community, organization, or nation. For us, the phrase “Indigenous video” describes collaborative video productions involving Indigenous media makers and their partners who live and work in places like Oaxaca, where 16 different Indigenous languages and many dialects are spoken.

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As this introduction suggests, we write about Reencuentros from the perspective of embodied experience and uneven authorship. Since I (Laurel) have spent the most time typing, this paper utilizes the tripartite analytic of author-text-reader that geographers borrowed from literary scholarship to study films (Dixon et al., 2008; Sharp & Lukinbeal, 2015). It also reflects a desire to go beyond an interpretation of film geographies from the nowhere land of only images and ideas by asking questions about affect and representations-in-relation (Anderson, 2019). Finally, as evidenced by its opening paragraphs, our story about Yolanda’s film Reencuentros centers a concern for the Indigenous geopolitics characterizing transborder migration.

Linking affect, documentary films, and Indigenous geopolitics

Film geographers’ focus on how films produce meaning (Aitken & Dixon, 2006) has fruitfully intersected with critical geopolitics (Lukinbeal, 2004; Lukinbeal & Zimmermann, 2006). Scholarship drawing on this intersection has examined the political power of films to represent (i.e., to stereotype, champion, invent, celebrate, erase, and/or denigrate) particular Peoples and places (e.g., Sharp, 1998; Dodds, 2008; articles introduced by Power & Crampton, 2005). Attending to popular visual culture as seriously as the textual expressions of the elite and powerful allows analysts to discern both the operation and overturning of hegemonic geopolitical discourses (Funnell & Dodds, 2017; Glynn & Cupples, 2015; Hughes, 2007; Lukinbeal, 2019; Saunders, 2019). Instead of “see[ing] whole texts in quite totalizing, binarizing, and static ways as either reproducing or subverting dominant geopolitical discourses,” these film geographers draw on cultural studies to compose “particular but variable sets of readings” of audiovisual materials to emphasize the “complexities and contradictions of popular texts” (Glyn & Cupples, 2015, p. 273; see also Smith, 2002, 2012). This approach demonstrates how, despite filmmakers’ best efforts, films do not have fixed meanings or pre-determined geopolitical influence.

In addition to studying films as complex representations, geographers who study visual media through the lens of critical geopolitics have started “attending [to] things such as affects, bodies, and emotions” (Glyn & Cupples, 2015, p. 273 discussing Dittmer & Gray, 2010; see also Sharp & Lukinbeal 2015). Geographers tend to understand affect as a discarnate force flowing among bodies that prefaces interpretive thought and therefore precedes emotion (cf. Dewsbury, 2009). For instance, Carter and McCormack examine Ridley Scott’s film Black Hawk Down as “an affective assemblage through which geopolitical sensibilities emerge and are amplified” (2006, p. 228). Released in December 2001, only a few months after the events of 9/11, Black Hawk Down is based on the 1999 book with the same name in which journalist
Mark Bowden depicts the 1993 U.S. intervention in Somalia. Given these circumstances, Ridley’s film adaptation provides Carter and McCormack fertile grounds for investigating “the relation between cinematic and geopolitical intervention” (their emphasis; 2006, p. 241). The task of studying these relations “must be understood not only in terms of the way one [form of intervention] reproduces or subverts the discursively framed codes and scripts of the other, but also through the ways in which each serves to amplify and modulate the affects of the other” (230).

Carter and McCormick argue that understanding these amplifications and modulations takes more than thinking about and ‘breaking’ codes. It requires thinking “about the viscerally intense processes that provide the conditions of emergence of ideological and/or discursive formations, rather than sugar-coating such formations after the fact of their emergence.” The “viscerally intense processes” of Black Hawk Down consist of combat scenes and their valorization of “an emotional form of comradeship and brotherhood emerging from the more than human affects of battle” (240). To make their case that “Black Hawk Down not only amplified the affective intensity of geopolitical intervention in Somalia[, but it also resonated with the geopolitical cultures of post-9/11 America,” Carter and McCormick rely on their interpretation of how Bowden’s book and Ridley’s film represent soldiers’ bodies and experiences, the film director’s commentary regarding geopolitical intervention in the DVD version of Black Hawk Down, and the observations of film critics.

We certainly agree when Carter and McCormick maintain that we “need to pay more attention to how affect can also positively intervene in the shape and sensibility from which action takes place” (242). But our examination of Reencuentros does not exclusively focus on the bodies visible on screen and (re)articulating artistic intentions. Our more-than-representational strategy also contemplates how audiences respond to a film; however, without recourse to the resources other geographers have utilized to study critical geopolitics through the lens (and bodies) of film audiences’ reception (e.g., Dittmer & Dodds, 2013; Dodds, 2006), we concentrate on how the bodies we know best: our own, have responded to the visual/textual encounters Yolanda’s film mediates. For us, affect refers to the delighted goosebumps of recognition, choked up sensations, and tears that we experience whenever we watch Reencuentros. We also extend the term ‘affect’ to ‘affective logic’ to point out the action (and related thinking) this somatic experience of Yolanda’s representation of transborder communities disposed us—and others—to undertake.

Such an approach to affect helps us consider how documentary films can precipitate alter-geopolitics (Dodds & Jensen, 2019; Holland, 2020; Laketa, 2019). To varying degrees (see Dixon, 2008; Natter & Jones, 1993), documentary films can persuasively question the status quo and “open up the possibility for alternative interpretations of geopolitics to emerge (Fregonese, 2020; Koopman, 2011; Ó Tuathail, 1996 cited in Holland, 2020, p. 2). We focus on the affective logic of films that document Indigenous geopolitics from the perspective of the involved Indigenous Peoples. As Chris Gibson (2013, p. 421) observes, “[e]xaminations of indigenous peoples and geopolitics bring into sharp relief questions of land and control, resources and livelihoods, agency and cultural identity.” Formulated in this way, Indigenous geopolitics reveal how the machinations of colonialist genocide continue to structure settler society, states, and capitalism. An attunement to Indigenous geopolitics can provide insight into place-based, and sometimes also widely networked, struggles for self-determination, along with an awareness of how these efforts deconstruct nation-state narratives and Eurocentric notions of universal knowledge while generating Indigenous futurities (Estes, 2019; Howitt & Suchet Pearson, 2006; Whyte, 2018).

As a practitioner (Filo) and an academic accomplice (Laurel) of Indigenous video coproduction, we maintain that media made by Indigenous visual activists and their collaborators can prompt alter-geopolitics. Our lived experiences and empirical examinations have convinced us of the affective power of videos creatively and collaboratively produced by Indigenous actors (both individual and collective)—to educate audiences about Indigenous geopolitics (Smith, 2015). We believe in the haptic geographies (McHugh, 2015) of Indigenous videos because we have seen, felt, and made them articulate an embodied awareness of place that permits viewers to see and feel connections capable of making them more amenable to pursuing affinity politics (Larsen & Johnson, 2012). Our faith in Indigenous videos’ potential to spark progressive social action developed when we
were living in Oaxaca and learning from members of Ojo de Agua Comunicación.  

Freya Schiwy (2014, 2019) closely examines a selection of videos co-produced by members of Ojo de Agua and other media makers constituting an international community that came together in 2006 to document a massive popular uprising in Oaxaca. She explores how their innovative collective practices intersect with a leftist revolutionary tradition of documentary filmmaking in Latin America. Both currents of politicized media activism can be categorized as conventional, realist, and evidentiary documentary. They also move “far from a detached, ‘objective’ representation,” sharing the conviction “that the structures of neocolonialism need to be explained, the desire to act against them fomented, and that cinema offered a unique tool adequate for the task” (Schiwy, 2014, p. 146). While the co-productions Schiwy examines prompt angered dismay, she underscores how—unlike the leftist revolutionary documentaries—their videos consistently “redirect rage into joy, happy endings, happy beginnings, or at least happy interludes that allow us to connect with victories, even if these are momentary.” She argues that the critical difference between these two schools of visualization is the way Ojo de Agua members and their collaborators “thrive on [a broader spectrum of] feelings: outrage, sorrow, anger, hope, joy” (157), and humor (Schiwy, 2019, pp. 162–190).

While not losing sight of how an infusion of experimental techniques from street art also contributed to videos that invite viewers to encounter joyfulness, Schiwy emphasizes how the creative sensibility of the collaborative Indigenous videos made in Oaxaca “reconfigures a melodramatic, object-centered politics of rage into an open-ended optimism that balances precariously on the threshold of temporary victories, but looks back on a much longer political memory” (Schiwy, 2019, p. 19). She argues that instead of an emergent political subjectivity (à la Jacques Rancière’s notion of a politicized aesthetics), the corpus of activist videos she studied “resonates with the discourse of indigenous movements that insist that they are not vanquished, but survivors whose struggle has lasted over 500 years” (Schiwy, 2014, p. 159). Even more specifically, Schiwy identifies the vital contagion for this mutation in visual activism as *comunalidad*, a political praxis embedded in Mesoamerican traditions of Indigenous governance centering consensus and communal wellbeing (cf. Magallanes-Blanco & Rodriguez-Medina, 2016). Schiwy describes the powerful force of this hopeful harkening to an adaptive and hardy heritage as decolonial affect. Videos characterized by decolonial affect tend to be “optimistic against all odds… [even though] we have no guarantees that life will become more just and more livable, yet we must keep doing, enacting the change we want to see and finding enjoyment in the process” (Schiwy, 2019, p. 161). Below we examine the decolonial affect fueled by *Reencuentros*, but first, we need to introduce the person responsible for creating the film.

**Introducing Yolanda Cruz**

As noted earlier, Yolanda Cruz was born and raised in a Chatino community located in the Sierra Sur region of Oaxaca. At 16 years of age, she followed family members to the USA. Tracing the footsteps of her five siblings (all of whom studied at universities, two with PhDs), Yolanda received an undergraduate degree in Liberal Arts from The Evergreen State College in Olympia, Washington. While earning an MFA from the UCLA Film School, she established her own film company, naming it Petate Productions in reference to a bedroll woven from palm fibers (a petate), and by extension, the weaving of stories to create community (Y. Cruz, personal communication, July 19, 2014; see also Petate n.d.). In many ways, Yolanda’s mobility and accomplishments set her apart from most Indigenous media makers working in Mexico, but that is another story for another paper. Here we briefly introduce her as a transnational filmmaker whose work has richly rendered the experiences of transborder migrant communities.

Yolanda made her first film *Sueños Binacionales* (*Binational Dreams*) with funding from the Rockefeller Foundation. This 52-min documentary focuses on migrants from Indigenous regions of Oaxaca now located in Los Angeles, California, and Durham, North Carolina. In a 2016 interview, Yolanda recalls how she thought “it would be interesting to have this video,

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7 Laurel and others (e.g., Magallanes-Blanco & Rodríguez-Medina 2016) have written about this small media organization comprised of individuals who identify as Indigenous and those who do not. See Ojo de Agua Comunicación (n.d.).
Sueños Binacionales, facilitate our efforts to organize ourselves binationally” (Kummels, 2016, p. 364; our translation). As Argelia González Hurtado (2020) argues, by illustrating how Indigenous migrants carry their cultural and organizational practices with them as they travel, Yolanda narrates into existence a more organized transborder community in Durham. She does so by representing it alongside the LA-based binational organization Frente Indígena de Organizaciones Binacionales (FIOB, n.d.), which has successfully demanded rights for Indigenous migrants in Mexico and the U.S.A. (González Hurtado, 2020, pp. 93–98). In other words, Yolanda made Sueños Binacionales to represent—and encourage—Indigenous geopolitics.

Further funding from the Rockefeller Foundation as well as support from Latino Public Broadcasting (LPB: a non-profit organization that brings programming to public television and online platforms) enabled Yolanda to devote the next couple years to making the film Reencuentros (LPB, n.d.a & n.d.b). Starting in 2008 Yolanda screened Reencuentros at film festivals and art museums in the USA, Germany, Spain, and Mexico. Between 2010 and 2013, the documentary was broadcast on PBS channels in the USA. It also streamed on Netflix for a while. Since making Reencuentros, Yolanda made several short films also funded by LPB and the (now defunct) National Geographic All Roads Film Project (you can view many of them at Cruz n.d.a). More recently, she garnered high-profile opportunities to finance a feature-length film Hope, Soledad, which screened at the Festival Internacional de Cine de Morelia in October 2021 (SIFF, 2019; imagineNATIVE, n.d.; Nia Tero, n.d.; Cruz, n.d.b). Our truncated introduction to Yolanda’s accomplishments underscores three things: first, her—and her films’—transnational travels; second, her cinematic expertise, without which this mobility would not have been possible; and third, Yolanda’s commitment to community building by skillfully representing Indigenous communities, most especially the Indigenous diaspora linked to Oaxaca. Now let us take a closer look at her film Reencuentros.

Interpreting Reencuentros

One of the first things Reencuentros does is introduce an artist and his art project. Viewers learn that Alejandro Santiago (1964–2013) was born in Teocucuilco de Marcos Pérez, a Zapotec community located in Oaxaca’s mountainous Sierra Juárez region, but he left at nine years old. While making his living as an artist since his teens, he regularly traveled to Teococuilco for pueblo celebrations. In the early 1990s, Santiago visited without a fiesta unfolding and was shocked when no one came to see him. Ten years later, after three years living in France, the painter returned to Oaxaca determined to do “something for the people,” especially the emigrants he felt no one remembers. Inspired by the large-scale artwork of artists such as Christo that he had experienced in Europe, he began working on a monumental piece comprised of 1–5 ft. tall ceramic statues that became “2501 Migrantes.” Early in the film, pensive guitar music plays when Santiago travels to Teococuilco with his wife and their daughter. He knocks on a gate no one opens, visits his family’s empty adobe home, and sadly notes that all his friends and relatives now live in New Jersey or California. Later in the film, Santiago, grieves for the missing migrants. He says they haunt his dreams, giving him nightmares...

Elements of Reencuentros amplify the sorrow shaping Santiago’s art project. Three short segments, for example, feature mothers who lament the loss of their children who emigrated from Oaxaca. One talks about getting bilked $1600 by the trafficker who left her young daughter to die in the desert. This bereft woman takes her granddaughter to visit the cemetery, and when it is time to leave, she must peel the little girl off her mother’s tomb to which she clings. Another woman recounts how, despite her efforts to convince her otherwise, her daughter attempted to cross the border with her own 2-year-old. She gives thanks for the person who recognized her daughter’s dead body and then turned himself in to immigration authorities to facilitate her young granddaughter’s safe return from the borderlands. A third woman did not lose children to the desert but nonetheless weeps. She says her 15-year-old daughter, and later a son,

8 As a young man, Santiago studied in the art studios of prominent Oaxacan painters. For details see Santiago’s official state biography (SIC México, n.d.), artist bios on sites such as askART (n.d.), and his obituary in The Los Angeles Times (Nelson, 2013).
went to Los Angeles and not returned. Although she thinks of them constantly, she feels they no longer remember or care for her.

Skillfully augmented with sound and song, these profiles of anguished mothers deftly distress; their pain is palpable. With decidedly decolonial affect, however, *Reencuentros* refuses an overarching narrative of despondency. Without sidestepping the horrific circumstances of transborder migration, Yolanda’s film does not allow despair to overshadow fortitude, commitment, and ebullience. The concluding scene in the segment focused on the woman whose granddaughter was rescued from her dead mother’s arms provides a case in point; in a lingering shot of this woman with her arms wrapped around her granddaughter, their smiles beam mutual adoration. Such interventions repeatedly buoy the melancholic mood of Santiago’s spectral art project. By broadening Santiago’s focus on individual bodies, they highlight how migrants may be gone, but few—if any—are forgotten.

In addition to showing how families forge ahead, *Reencuentros* elucidates how migrants need not be present to shape their communities. Portions of an interview with an agrarian lawyer in Oaxaca offer counterarguments to Santiago’s notion of abandonment. This lawyer notes how migrants who send remittances can significantly influence local governance and community development efforts. Sometimes these dynamics can fuel conflict over political power when community authorities are not inclined to attend to migrants’ wishes. Two scenes in the film featuring elders from Teococuilco scolding Santiago underscore these tensions. An older man seated in front of a small store chops forward his hands held in prayer position as he tells Santiago the community was offended because he described the pueblo as a ghost town when he was on TV. This man also rejects the artist’s complaint about cement structures replacing old houses, insisting that such changes evidence the community’s progress.

Similarly, when Santiago greets an elderly woman in Teococuilco, her response seems to say more (in Zapotec) than what gets translated into subtitles. Something about the exchange prompts Santiago to raise his eyebrows and say, “¡regaño!” (a reprimand!). Perhaps this woman was also discomfited by the suggestion that Teococuilco is a ghost town, or maybe she was disappointed that Santiago only sporadically returned? Regardless, these elders appear to take the artist to task for not seeing transborder migrants’ agency as well as their absence. Combined with detailed footage of Oaxacan landscapes and achingly appropriate music (e.g., the song “Ofrenda” by Lila Downs, a singer from Oaxaca), these discussions illuminate the complexities of becoming—and belonging to—contemporary Indigenous communities in Oaxaca.

Our favorite aspect about Yolanda’s film is how it showcases Indigenous practices of collective labor and the community they create with its intimate look at Santiago’s studio. The artist says he initially found it difficult to retain workers he painstakingly trained—most of whom are Indigenous youth, but he solved this problem by purchasing livestock so that his skilled workers would feel at home. Teenagers, some of whom spend part of their workday tending to the animals, clearly enjoy each other’s company as they prepare and shape the clay as well as move, paint, and maintain records of the ceramic statues. During breaks and shared meals, they chat and laugh together. They also talk with Yolanda, introducing themselves, describing their work, and telling her about family members who emigrated.

Along with comradery, humor and strategic music steadily offset the poignancy of the circumstances of mass migration. An older man grins as he relates how he thought, “I am going to ‘cook some migrants’,” when he was put in charge of the studio’s large kiln. At one point, Santiago and others glumly describe how a rainstorm destroyed his first 300 clay statues and forced him to let all his employees go because he could not pay them. One of the most stirring segments of the film follows this low point. Guitar music builds in tempo as multiple studio artisans recount how they decided to return to work without pay after reflecting on all they invested in the project together. Next, the young guys reenact their return by bicycling up to the studio accompanied by excited dogs and terrifically invigorating trumpets. This rousing music continues to play alongside the now driving guitar during a montage of the team loading the kiln with clay statues and then unloading the ceramic figures.

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9 El Zopilote, Santiago’s workshop, is located in the central valley of Oaxaca, almost 60 km down a winding mountain road from Teococuilco and about 30 km north up the Pan American highway from the capital city.
These scenes in tandem with that marvelous music never fail to inspire us in a hair-raising way.

Although we could endlessly go on about why love Yolanda’s film Reencuentros, we conclude our interpretation with a brief consideration of the decolonial affect characterizing its final minutes. A work crew carefully packages individual sculptures in padded wooden crates for transport to the northern Mexican city Monterrey, where they will be exhibited at the 2007 Forum Universal de las Culturas. Their labors are interwoven with an interview in a coffin store in the capital city of Oaxaca. The undertaker explains how many migrants return home in wooden boxes because, after struggling to pay the $4000 to $8000 USD it costs to negotiate their lost loved ones’ final border crossing, their families cannot afford coffins. As Reencuentros is wont to do, an uplifting overview of Santiago and some members of his team traveling to Monterrey to set up and share the 2501 ceramic statues by way of an awe-inspiring exhibit, succeeds the sobering juxtaposition of boxed migrant bodies.

Responding to Reencuentros

I (Laurel) first saw Reencuentros in 2011 when Yolanda screened it during a “Gender, Ethnicity and Migration in Latin America” symposium at the Freie Universität Berlin, and Filo watched a DVD copy of the film soon after. We were smitten from the start. So, when the organizers of the 2015 Native Crossroads Film Festival (NXR, 2015) at the University of Oklahoma asked me for suggestions for films from Latin America, I encouraged them to consider Yolanda’s. In addition to wanting to introduce Oklahoma audiences to an amazing filmmaker, we had a pedagogical purpose for hoping Yolanda’s work would screen at NXR. Ever since arriving in Oklahoma in 2007, Filo had encountered racist bigotry—not only on the part of White Oklahomans, but also Mexican immigrants who denigrated the shorter and browner populations of southern Mexico. Furthermore, we had been surprised to discover how many people (including citizens of Tribal nations and university professors) were unaware—and even dismissed the idea—of Indigenous peoples living in Mexico, despite Oklahoma’s growing population of immigrants from southern Mexico and Central America (some of whom do not speak Spanish or English). We felt Yolanda’s film might educate Oklahomans, as well as help these migrants feel seen and heard.

In December 2014, NXR invited Yolanda to screen two short films during the festival in early March 2015. We immediately started scheming ways to screen Reencuentros in nearby Oklahoma City (OKC), some 20 miles north of the college town where we live. Unsure where else to begin, we reached out to the owner of La Oaxaqueña, a restaurant and bakery located on the south side of the city. This resulted in a ‘preview’ screening of the film at his restaurant to which we invited people connected to non-profit organizations associated with Latinx neighborhoods and communities. Subsequently, donations from some of these Latinx community leaders, in tandem with further funding from NXR and my academic department, permitted us to not only arrange a satellite screening of Reencuentros at a high school in south Oklahoma City, where many transborder migrants live, but also to include a performance by a Mexican dance troupe. To top it off, the restaurant owner generously catered the event; he also shared sound equipment to play music in the cafeteria where the food was served. Clearly, Yolanda’s film sparked a sense of community.

After Yolanda returned to Oaxaca, we did our best to carry on the goodwill toward community service her film had prompted. During the fall 2015 semester, I continued working with a Latina community leader and a Spanish professor from a nearby university, both of whom had helped to coordinate the screening of Reencuentros. We arranged to show and discuss an episode of a Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) television series, Latino Americans, with classes at community colleges in Oklahoma City. Over the course of the following year, Filo worked with the same Spanish professor to produce a 30-min documentary titled Here for Good: The Latino Experience in Oklahoma (Gómez Martínez & Griffin, 2016). In 2017, Filo also became involved with the Mexican Cultural and Humanitarian Association of Oklahoma and, in the spring of 2017, he was elected to a leadership position within the organization.
Conclusion

This reader-centered story has examined how the film Reencuentros represents the everyday matters of joy, life, pain, and death that distinguish transborder migrant communities associated with places such as Oaxaca. We have endeavored to articulate how Yolanda’s potent film does this beautifully, with a decolonial affect capable of generating strong emotions, which in turn prompt collective actions fueled by an alter-geopolitics focused on Indigenous geopolitics. In hindsight, perhaps our strategy too strongly suggests that our actions have been impactful and enduring. Allow us to conclude by noting that this is hardly the case. Our efforts soon faltered from the friction of our own everyday matters.

After tenure and promotion in 2014 and a semester-long sabbatical during the spring 2015 semester, the start of my (Laurel’s) 2015 fall semester came with an enormous increase in service responsibilities that curtailed overtures initiated by the screenings of Latino Americans. Preparing for a month-long education abroad venture in Peru that I co-led that summer consumed the 2016 spring semester. The next year we both focused on relocating to Puebla, Mexico for another stint of education abroad, not just that summer but the entire academic year 2017–2018, followed by a second excursion to Peru. This time away, in conjunction with Filo starting his graduate studies and my beginning a film coproduction project of my own upon our return to Oklahoma, effectively ended our direct contributions to Latinx communities in the area. But as this article suggests, embers of our passion for the film’s power continue to burn. We hope this article might catalyze further use of Reencuentros in all sorts of classrooms and civic venues. And who knows, maybe Yolanda’s new film Hope, Soleydad might come to town and spark renewed connections among Oaxaqueñ@s and/or Oklahomans.

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