
Routledge Studies in Affective Societies

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Methods and Methodologies

Edited by Antje Kahl

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Part III

Performativities

Investigating affective media practices in a transnational setting

Ingrid Kummels and Thomas John

Introduction to the setting: a transnational indigenous community between Mexico and the US

This case study explores the affective media practices of people who live in the Zapotec village of Yalálag in Mexico, and of those who migrated from Yalálag to Los Angeles, California. Taking a media anthropology perspective, we propose that the mediatization of social relations and its affective dimensions are key for processes of transnational community building.¹ We contend that actors living in Mexico and the US rely on affective media practices to create a ‘home’ that connects them physically or virtually to multiple places, among them the Mexican community of origin.² That certain groups of migrants engage in community building on both sides of the international border is by no means a given process. Our project therefore strives for insight into the ways media practices enable Zapotec people to fashion a relationship to several places of belonging simultaneously, when experiencing or provoking affects related to joy, pride, envy, or hate that they associate with the places in question. It also examines their ability to generate what media scholars call a “co-presence” by connecting people living at various localities, and the extent to which such practices foster their integration into their new country of residence in terms of political participation, social protection, and citizenship.

Yalaltecs who immigrated since 9/11 do not have permanent resident status in the United States, and their risk of being deported has increased under the Trump administration. For these illegalized immigrants, the use of digital media is critical to staying in touch with their relatives and friends in the Mexican village of origin, and they resort to patron saint fiestas as a primary means of fostering transnational social relations. Such fiestas in honor of a Catholic saint have been celebrated in Yalálag since the Colonial era. Starting in the mid-1980s, migrants also began to host these fiestas (called *kermesses*) in Los Angeles, which include performance of Zapotec dances to raise funds for the village of origin. Professional mediamakers who operate commercial video enterprises regularly document the fiestas either in Yalálag or Los Angeles. They often focus on recording Zapotec dances like *La*

danza de los Negritos in their fiesta videos, especially when there are innovative aspects to the performances. In addition, Facebook has become the most popular forum for the transnational villagers to socialize with relatives and friends living far away. Ordinary persons therefore engage in taking photographs – whether with a mobile phone or professional single-lens camera – recording digital video, posting images, and commenting on social media like Facebook and YouTube (see Kummels, 2017a). When such users document highlights of their life and work on personal Facebook pages, they often use pictures depicting themselves and relatives engaging in fiestas as community affairs. An important dimension of exchanging and reproducing Zapotec culture in a transcultural setting therefore unfolds through these diverse media practices that become sites of relational affective dynamics.

Affective media practices as a methodological approach

To explore the emotive aspects of socializing and exchanging Zapotec culture while carrying out ethnographic research in this transnational setting, we conceptualized our object of investigation as affective media practices. We began as a two-person team in 2016 in Yalálag, and later one of us followed up in Los Angeles.³ We were able to build on current theories of media practices as well as of affective practices. When asking ourselves how sites of affective dynamics should be discerned and which criteria should be used to make those decisions, we paid attention to media practices, that is, to “what people do and say in relation to media” (Couldry, 2004). We conceive such practices as encompassing a broad range of communicative devices, beginning with engagement in the corporeal medium of dance and leading up to interactive social media practices. For the sphere of indigenous people’s media, these practices are particularly relevant. Despite their marginalized position, these indigenous actors have opened up new media spaces in a geographical, practice-oriented, and imagined sense, for the most part on their own initiative and with great vitality (Kummels, 2017a, 7). The concept of affects, on the other hand, refers to experiences of intensity when perceiving new differences in contrast to what existed before. Affects are distinguished from emotions as culturally shaped conceptualizations systemized in emotion repertoires (SFB Affective Societies, 2016, 3–5). Yet affective dynamics are often hard to recognize during their evolution, and actors’ subsequent interpretations proved crucial in deciphering them. In conversations, our interlocutors emphasized how they experienced Zapotec dance practices and their dissemination via video and social media as a communicative space in which they often ‘get into a bigger conversation’. They then experience acutely how they and other persons are ‘affected’ in the course of interaction.

Combining the concepts of practice and affect has the advantage of allowing for the identification of a broad range of affective phenomena, beginning with those involved in actors’ routines, affects which cannot be controlled, and extending to

affects that are strategically provoked by actors with the aim of “doing affects” when engaging in media communication (Kummels, 2017b, 135).⁴ In other words, affects then emerge from intentional acts of management. Many of our interlocutors reflected on such affective media practices intensively and shaped them consciously because their routines in the United States had been disrupted as a result of their former mobility and present immobility with regard to Mexico. They described affects in terms of place, of a newly perceived intensity of ‘being here’ and ‘not being able to be there’ and therefore engaging in efforts of bridging geographical distance by using digital media for generating a form of ‘co-presence’ (see Madianou, 2016). Many of their media practices were geared toward generating affects to create a sense of being at home in various places, such as their community of origin, their current place of residence, and some other place they had left behind (see Moores, 2012, 54). Moods in general are selectively managed by choosing emblematic spaces and consuming music and photographs to this end (Scheer, 2012, 209). Rooms, buildings, and objects can be explicitly conceptualized to provoke feelings such as reverence or admiration, and therefore become “affect generators” (Reckwitz, 2015, 41–45). We transferred these ideas to the performative practices of Zapotec dance on-site, and its current mediatization and transnational circulation through video and social media.

The actors in the present case study availed themselves of existing and novel media to create a form of ‘co-presence’ with the dancers’ undocumented parents in Los Angeles who were unable to travel to the Zapotec dance performance in the Mexican village of Yalálag. Media actors – ranging from ordinary persons who engage in media to professional mediamakers – often establish social relationships by sharing an important event taking place at the location they are currently visiting with people physically far away. Zapotec interlocutors called these practices of generating ‘co-presence’ through digital means of communication in both countries “*armar la historia*”, that is, to “piece together a story” or produce a narrative through media.⁵ Such practitioners concentrate at “media stations” (Postill, 2010, 12) at which many media practices intersect, and where affective dynamics might therefore intensify. In our case study (see the next section), the venues of the Los Angeles female dance group Nueva Generación Krus Yonn turned out to be media stations. At these stations, we were able to identify key actors “doing affects” as they recorded the dancers audiovisually and/or commented on them to position themselves with the ensuing transnational debates.

At a theoretical level, we needed to consider that the increasing management of social relations via new communication technology also transforms the quality of affects themselves. In our case study, the immobilization caused by restrictive US immigration policy meant that migrants relied on mediatization to create a ‘co-presence’ with family and friends. Actors in general adapt their “feeling rules” and emotions to mediatize these forms of social interaction (Berg, 2015, 123; Madianou, 2016, 196–198). Media scholars suggest that the ubiquity and speed of current networked technology may be modifying the temporality ascribed to emotions. For example, emojis have emerged as a means of communicating and

performing emotions digitally, since their catchy presentations and facile circulation allow global networked communities to rapidly share and react to them (see contributions in Prieto-Blanco & Schreiber, 2016). In the transnational migration setting, nostalgia has acquired a new “digital” or “productive” quality geared toward shaping the future (Mejía Estevez, 2009; Kummels, 2017b). With regard to the present case study, we ask why actors seek to anchor interrelational affects to multiple places. We propose that they may be resignifying existing emotions and transculturalizing emotion repertoires when mediatizing Zapotec dances and culture via video and social media.

An event-centered case study: mediatizing Zapotec dance culture and “Doing Affects” between Oaxaca and California

In July 2016, we concentrated on pursuing our research questions with regard to the annual patron saint fiesta in honor of Santiago El Mayor Apóstol in Yalálag. Here, as usual, traditional dances were performed all day long on two consecutive Sundays. However, at this fiesta a controversial premiere took place that was anything but typical. The female dance group Nueva Generación Krus Yonn had arrived from Los Angeles only a few days before. For the first time, young women between 13 and 19 years old publicly performed the sacred *La danza de los Negritos* – traditionally reserved for men – in front of the Santiago chapel. The young dancers were born in Los Angeles. Their parents are Yalaltecs who, for years, have been living in the California mega-city, most of them without documents. Their performance triggered discussions at multiple fora on-site in Yalálag and Los Angeles, and within a transnational media space between Mexico and the US. As part of these debates, images and videos of the young women and their pioneer dance performance were recorded and posted online. In face-to-face conversations in Yalálag and Los Angeles, as well as in phone calls or chats on social media like Facebook, the following issues were debated: Should young women be doing this dance, especially young women who were not born in their parents’ village of origin? What was the quality of their performance? Was this version ‘authentically Zapotec’? Should it be assessed positively or negatively by the transnational community of Yalálag, and what indeed should Zapotec culture consist of in the future?

During the first week of the patron saint fiesta, we sought to identify which actors were participating in the dance performance, what media practices they were applying, and what the results might be for transnational community building. Relying on George Marcus’ (1995) mobile ethnographic approach, we first ‘followed’ the appearance and the respective debate it triggered. Our first insights were based on participant observation and conversation on-site. Nevertheless, we had to apply several methodological layers, sometimes simultaneously, to be able to trace the affective dynamics from the perspective of different actors in two countries implementing diverse media practices. This is illustrated in the following chart (see Table 10.1).

Table 10.1 Methodological layers of investigating affective media practices.

	Ethnographic research method	Techniques of recording and empirical material	Analysis method	Problems, restrictions
First layer	Conducting participant observation of affective media practices; informal “go along” conversations about these practices at media stations	Memory minutes	Reconstructing and detailing to obtain a “thick description” (Geertz, 1973) on the one hand and formulation of argumentative nuclei on the other hand (Elwert, 2002)	Recognizing practices actors consider relevant requires acquiring enough everyday contextual knowledge (Orientierungswissen; Elwert, 2002)
Second layer	Studying audiences’ reception and viewing actors’ videos, i.e., patron saint fiesta videos and individual Facebook pages	Memory minutes, recording interviews and acquisition of audiovisual material from the actors; collection of downloads and screenshots from Facebook and YouTube	Media anthropological audience studies; analysis of contents and aesthetics based on audiovisual material	Attaining access to “natural situations” of audiences viewing actors’ videos and to the producers’ and viewers’ exegesis of them
Third layer	Producing and viewing researchers’ videos	Making one’s own recordings with a camcorder or single-lens camera	Analysis of contents and aesthetics of researchers’ videos based on images and texts	The researchers’ presence and act of recording influence the discussion and the affective dynamics produced
Fourth layer	Conducting eliciting interviews about affective media practices in Yalálag and Los Angeles via the interviewee’s exegesis of his or her Facebook page	Recording interviews with audio equipment (camcorder or single-lens camera), for example, recording an interviewee using his or her Facebook page	Coding and textual analysis of the transcribed interviews based on grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967)	Adopting multilingual access (Zapotec, Spanish, English) toward affective phenomena; using a Zapotec language consultant

First layer

Let us start off with the first layer. A vital dimension of ethnographic research consisted in acquiring everyday contextual knowledge (called *Orientierungswissen* in German) of the Yalalteco transnational community. This knowledge guides action and encompasses affective dimensions such as “hopes and fears” as Georg Elwert emphasized (2002, 5, footnote 3). First insights came from ‘go along’ conversations, that is, accompanying particular persons who, for different reasons, are interested in the dances during the fiesta. As a result of these insights, during this research period we realized that dance events and the medium of Zapotec dances are important dimensions of (re)creating community and Zapotec culture. In this field, affects are negotiated as they unfold, and existing emotion repertoires are reproduced, challenged, or altered. To summarize our findings, Yalaltecos charge sacred dances (*danzas sagradas*) affectively when describing them as part of the patrimony of their village of origin since time immemorial, and in expressing fears that their dances could be copied and distorted.⁶ Emotions (*sentimientos*) are intentionally embodied in Zapotec dances. Parodic dances, called *danzas chuscas*, make fun of (*burlarse*, *parodiar*, *ridiculizar*) neighboring ethnic groups (see also Cruz-Manjarrez, 2013, 153–189).⁷ In addition, dancers parody the deviations of certain members of the Yalalteco community from existing norms – for example, in attire, morality, marital status, or business practices. Research in Los Angeles showed that transcultural migrants have recently enacted their realities and aspirational dreams by embodying US superhero figures like Spider-Man (see also Peña, 2017). Zapotec dances therefore can be conceptualized as “affect generators” that oscillate between vilification and utopian fantasy. This further underscores the traditional and ongoing role of dance groups as traditional instruments of politics. In the village of origin, four neighborhoods compete by upholding their own patron saints, brass bands, and dance groups with the goal of attracting the largest audience and of collecting funds for specific community projects. The Los Angeles satellite community has also adopted this pattern of neighborhood organization, including its form of competition and brisk culture of factional debate. Yalaltecos consider the basic affective approach of their transnationalized community as “being forthcoming” (*somos comunicativos*). This has both positive and negative connotations, since at times the debate around community issues has turned aggressive. Yalalteco actors differ according to age, education, media use, media literacy, social class, migration generation, place of residence, and immigration status even within the family. Dissent is negotiated face-to-face and screen-to-screen, particularly between Yalálag and Los Angeles.

Conducting participant observation initially allowed us to develop a sense of awareness that the dance group’s performance evolved in the midst of great tension. To calm the spirits, no mention of Krus Yonn’s appearance was made in the circuit of self-fashioned media at first. In subsequent conversations, the degree of acceptance we heard about the premiere depended on varying intersections of age, gender, education, migration experience, place of residence, occupation,

and political orientation. While some male *maestros de danza* in Yalálag assessed the women’s performance as a deliberate provocation and even as an offensive parody, female supporters of the dance group celebrated it as a renewal of Zapotec culture within a transnationalized Oaxacalifornia.⁸

We then purposely focused participant observation on the appearance of the dance group in Yalálag. This allowed us to identify how key media actors clustered at two media stations. The first consisted of the village’s main street and its town hall. This media station was noteworthy for its orderly, almost routine course of events. The female dance group was welcomed by an official representative of the village. After parading down the street, the dancers entered the town hall, where the mayor received them and delivered a speech in their honor. This type of reception, which was formerly reserved for delegations from neighboring villages, has become routine nowadays whenever brass bands and dance groups come to visit from Yalálag’s own satellite communities. The arrival message of one of the dancers and the reception speeches of Yalálag’s officials were all delivered in a serious, respectful, and ceremonial manner. The reception ceremony was also systematically recorded on video – a routine procedure at comparable events. The local videographer Pancho Limeta has specialized in such recordings with his business Pancho Video. As a pioneer videographer in Yalálag, he is a key media actor. While engaged in the left-wing Grupo Comunitario movement in the 1980s, he appropriated film for political purposes. But in the course of migrating to the US, Yalalteco viewers began shifting their interests and resources to religious fiestas, also financed by migrants.⁹ Their urge to disseminate their own cultural manifestations within the transnational audience motivated villagers to appropriate video as a media technology in the first place. At media station 1, we realized that Pancho’s mere presence recording the reception lent the female dance group the recognition it had sought.

Media station 2 was the dance venue in front of the chapel of Santiago. On Sunday of the so-called Octava¹⁰ of the patron saint fiesta, more than a dozen of those present diligently recorded the many dances, either with mobile phones or with professional single-lens cameras. In this case, film practices added to the tension. During informal conversations on-site, we learned that these recordings were controversial within the community, since many fear that particular dances might be copied and ‘stolen’. Lisvelia, the dance group leader, engaged in an innovative media practice. She may have been the first to transmit a performance in Yalálag via iPhone using FaceTime, an application that transmits live video conference-style. By using the wireless LAN of the nearby hospital, she created a transnational screen-to-screen forum. During the 20-minute transmission, the newness of the method as well as the novelty of the performance itself were commented on, particularly by the mothers, aunts, and godmothers of the dancers – that is, mainly by women. We captured these text comments in one of our researchers’ videos. In addition, they are documented on Lisvelia’s Facebook page. The users thanked Lisvelia and the dance instructor. They congratulated the dancers, expressing pride in their female protagonism (“A proud moment for us

women!!”). They expressed “joy” (*alegría*) at being able to view their daughters dancing. The affective mini-icons of emojis were also applied, especially clapping hands. Through these media practices and “doing affects” at this precise moment, Yalalteco women of two generations created a co-presence with regard to the dance performance, which intentionally had been anchored in the village of origin to enhance its authenticity within Zapotec culture.

Second layer

Later we analyzed how videographer Pancho’s images of the reception ceremony and the performance constructed these events as integral to the patron saint fiesta of the village of origin. They appeared in the main video, documenting the patron saint fiesta, which consequently circulated through on-site sales of the DVD, parcel service to the United States, and on his business Facebook page. Both media forms have become an essential part of the transnational village’s ‘official’ representation. In addition, the dance group leader had specifically asked Pancho to record a DVD, which she promised would be financially rewarding since each dancer would buy one. The almost two-hour-long video he produced, “Los Negritos dance performed by young ladies living in Los Angeles California”, captures the normative emotion repertoire of “the ceremonious” (*lo ceremonioso*). A film aesthetic and content analysis, as well as an interview with Pancho and his clients, provided initial information as to how the Yalaltecs conceptualize these videos as a village film genre. As Pancho explained, he caters to clients who “do not want a documentary”.¹¹ They expect videos to virtually represent ‘reality’ – that is, the viewer’s perception of reality – and to do so in real time to the extent possible, therefore with little editing. Since a sacred character is attributed to *La danza de los Negritos*, clients expect both a performance and an audiovisual representation that conveys these qualities. In turn, these characteristics are associated with emotions such as the joy of life experienced when dancing. Pancho focused on capturing all eight dancers with a rigid camera perspective – never foregrounding a particular dancer – since the consumer’s main desire is to be able to assess the quality of the dance as if on-site. Specifically, viewers want to evaluate the execution of the quadrille-like dance choreography and the precision of hopping steps called *puntillas*. On the emotive level, their appraisal requires the representation of the dancer’s entire body within the larger choreography to be able to assess the joy and energy that a dance is thought to produce. The dances are fashioned via the rigid camera perspective, the camera angle, the length of the recordings, as well as the interplay of dance and music to an overall narrative of “the ceremonial”. In this regard, dance and sentiment are conceptualized as closely connected to place. According to Zapotec religious beliefs, the earth is the prime natural force, and the dancer’s relation to the earth is crucial to receiving this energy.¹² Female incursion into the former male-dominated realm therefore means that women acquire a right “to feel and live by dancing”.¹³ Pancho designed the visual language of the video around this emotion repertoire and its expressions, which the Yalaltecs look for and judge in dance performances on-site and in their digital media forms.

Photographs and film clips were circulated during and after the event on the Facebook pages of the dance group leader and the mothers of the dancers. These Facebook photos and video clips differed from Pancho’s inclusive and harmonious portrayal of the Los Angeles female dance group participation. Instead, they conveyed a picture of a group of young women who need to surmount obstacles – even within their own transnational community – to achieve gender empowerment. The mothers of the dancers – including the leader, whose own daughter is a member of the group – created family-style albums on their Facebook pages, which they filled with photographs of their daughters performing. In their comments, most wrote that their daughter’s participation was a way to empower women. One mother stressed that her daughter should not let anything hold her back. At the same time, these media actors also anchored the dancers to place, both to the village of origin and to Los Angeles. For example, the dance group leader combined two photos of her daughter as a dancer and a musician with a genealogy that ties her to her grandparents in Yalálag. In the accompanying text she underscores that her daughter is a second-generation Yalalteca in Los Angeles who is also proud of her roots in the village of Yalálag.¹⁴ Through the generational gap addressed indirectly in this comment and the obstacles mentioned by other mothers, the dance is not only reinterpreted with regard to gender hierarchies in the home village, but is also resignified in the context of the specific affective meanings attributed to race and ethnicity in Los Angeles. The descendants of the migrants from Oaxaca began to consider performing “indigenous dances”, as one youth called them, as a source of pride only 10 or 15 years ago.¹⁵ Zapotec dance representations on Facebook pages are used to express intimate dimensions of human experience such as affects related to pride versus shame. Meanwhile, these affects are enmeshed within larger economic and political processes. Along with other scholars, we therefore conceptualize them as part of an “affective economy” (see Ahmed, 2004; Berg, 2015, 137). The circulation of Zapotec dances through video and social media both produces and reflects this entanglement of affect, economy, and politics. The affective media practices concerning the dances at fiestas and *kermesses*, for example, intersect with the school education of children and youth and the occupations of adults, as we will see in the following section. The ability to navigate these interconnected areas with the help of digital communication has become crucial for actors’ cultural, social, and economic life in a transnational setting.

Third layer

Let us briefly proceed to the third methodological layer, which concerns researchers recording events and interviews with a camera. Engaging in this kind of media practice always entails influencing decisively the actors and environment being investigated. It is therefore not a simple means of documentation, but instead triggers a new ‘filmic reality’. This may sometimes be desirable, for example, when researchers want to collaborate with subjects more closely. In this case, the leader of the dance group and several other parents enthusiastically accepted our request

for an interview and permission to film, as they were keen on promoting the event. The leader then chose the setting where she and the eight dancers would be interviewed as a group. Nevertheless, to everybody's surprise, our researchers' video generated an unexpected insight into the affects aroused by the performance. In this group interview, the young dancers only briefly commented on their female pioneer role and the need to overcome the reservations of the 'patriarchal' society of origin.¹⁶ They suddenly seemed overwhelmed by feelings of frustration as a result of their parents' inability to attend the performance because of their immigration status. Some of the young women began to cry. At the same time, they alluded to the intergenerational frictions they experience at home in Los Angeles. Telling their stories before our camera and to us – an audience outside their community – therefore triggered these kinds of uncontrolled affects.

Fourth layer

The last methodological layer of eliciting interviews on affective media practices face-to-face in Yalálag and Los Angeles offered further insights into the complexity of the affective media dynamics involved with the dance performance. These offline narratives transcend and complement the discourse that dominated social media. They thus constructed the dance performance as an act of gender empowerment vis-à-vis the community of origin's 'outdated' gender structure and as a moment of triumph and joy. In these interviews, we systematically traced the motivations, intentions, and development of media practices from actors' divergent perspectives. After transcription, they were analyzed on the basis of Grounded Theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). We applied theoretically informed qualitative coding to identify and interpret actors' implicit and explicit emic concepts regarding affectivity.¹⁷ Their multilingual skills posed a particular challenge for our interpretations. Yalalteco people who do not speak but understand the Zapotec language may nevertheless refer to emotions coded in that language. Emic concepts expressed in Spanish and English therefore require profound knowledge of Zapotec culture and language. We regularly consulted a local expert with regard to these language skills that we lacked.¹⁸

An example relevant to the following interview analysis is our consultant's explanation of the word "heart". The term "heart", or *lhall* in Zapotec, refers to what Zapotec people consider the source and generator of all kinds of affects. Zapotec actors usually describe the heart as an agent and a trigger for an array of feelings, referring, for example, to a heart that 'shrinks' and provokes sadness, or one that 'opens itself' and generates joy.¹⁹ In Zapotec thought, volition requires close coordination of heart and mind to be able to make a good decision. We therefore converted emic concepts such as those coded as "the heart" into researchers' concepts, such as those concerning practices of "doing affects" in the transnational community. As a result of this analysis, we determined that social status and political power do not only depend on age, education, migration experience, social class, or indigenous ethnicity, but also – and quite importantly – on

savviness with respect to affective media practices. Integrative community initiatives in a transnational setting and their effectiveness require this kind of expertise.

The perspectives of parents of the female dancers were juxtaposed and compared with those of the dance group leader. The former share an illegalized status and a working-class background as employees in restaurants and housekeepers. Interviews revealed how they urged their children to practice Zapotec dances as an educational strategy that ties them both to the Mexican village of origin and to Los Angeles, in order to get ahead in the United States ("*salir adelante*").²⁰ The parents of a 19-year-old dancer promote their children's participation in Zapotec dance groups to socialize them according to values they attribute to the village of origin, but which they have in fact reformulated in the US setting. These values are negotiated against the backdrop of a generational gap within their family, which has a mixed immigration status. The relationship between immigrant parents and children who have been socialized in the US is affected by the racial hierarchy of their new country. The parents commented on how during adolescence their US-born daughter distanced herself from them by discriminating against their village of origin, referring to it as "your (backward) *rancho*", and questioning their authority. Yet the parents unexpectedly triggered a turn from shame to pride when they sent their then 14-year-old daughter to Yalálag during her vacation as punishment.²¹ To their great surprise she returned with new admiration for Yalalteco culture. The parents then supported her participation in Zapotec dance, since it is promoted by the US school system as an extracurricular sport and therefore conducive to a career and social ascent.

As for the dance group leader, she was born in Los Angeles and is a first-generation²² Yalalteco-American with a high school education who works in an office. In an interview, Lisvelia talked about the dance initiative as a project with a political dimension that was also intended as a form of modernizing Yalalteco culture in a transnational setting. Accordingly, she planned Nueva Generación Krus Yonn's first appearance very strategically, focusing on making an impression on the village of origin and its 'outdated' gender structure. She followed up on other initiatives involving female appropriation of formerly all-male dances. Such initiatives are booming in the context of transnational community building. Since 2014, girls whose parents migrated from villages neighboring Yalálag and formed satellite communities in Los Angeles, have been performing all-female versions of *La danza de los Negritos*. The dancers from Yalalteco families were also keen on proving that this is not solely a "man's *danza*". Therefore, the name of the dance was feminized and renamed *La danza de las Negritas* in the program of events.²³ According to Lisvelia, this triggered a machista revolt prior to the performance. Some Zapotec men in Los Angeles scoffed that women performing ritual dances would move the wrong part of their bodies: their "boobs". The women were just as harsh, chiding that dancing would impair the girls' reproductive capacity.²⁴ Meanwhile, there were obstacles to be tackled in Los Angeles, beginning with finding a Zapotec dance instructor willing to teach the men's dance to girls. Nevertheless, she persevered. The dance group was created and began training for this

one appearance in Yalálag. Performing in Los Angeles was considered a secondary goal.

Interviewing Lisvelia while she was engrossed in her affective media practices proved to be particularly illuminating about her strategies. Our conversation took place at her PC while she was logged onto her Facebook page.²⁵ We did not merely speak about the events represented in images, film clips, and commentaries archived there. Instead, these materials elicited Lisvelia's explanations of how and why she had deliberately used media practices to advance political initiatives through Zapotec culture, negotiating the future of this culture for a transnationalized community. Since 2009, the dance group leader has maintained a personal Facebook page, where she has uploaded more than 1,000 video clips that have been seen by as many as 2,000 users at a time. Since she first began posting, Lisvelia has perfected her skills to fashion an attractive Facebook page, including novelties such as FaceTime and Facebook Live transmissions. Based on her practices, the time invested in them, and the expertise acquired by executing and improving their effectiveness, she can be characterized as an "ethnic influencer" (Kummels, n.d.).²⁶

During Ingrid's interview with her, some of Lisvelia's Facebook practices pointed to a number of ambivalent affects that were triggered by the co-presence between people participating in the dance performance and their relatives living in Los Angeles. Lisvelia would open the photo albums and videos and click on those she particularly cherished, such as the live transmission from the female dance performance in Yalálag. She lamented, "it broke my heart" that none of the other dancers' mothers were able to be present. Yet this feeling inspired her to record a fun greeting from the girls, dressed in their dance costumes. She transmitted the greeting live to the girls' parents in an effort to ease the tension caused by geographical distance. Her representation of the dance performance therefore deviates from the perspective of the videographer Pancho, who concentrates exclusively on its ceremonial aspects. Yet what was intended as a fun greeting also caused a moment of intense strain. In an interview, the mother of one of the female dancers declared how the live transmission from Yalálag had been both exciting and painful for her.²⁷ It had given her an unexpected sense of the place she had left 12 years ago. At the same time the transmitted images conveyed quite plainly to her the fact of 'not being there' physically and not being able to assist her daughter in her village of origin. The pain she experienced on the inside because of her lack of mobility contrasted with the joy, encouragement, and pride she and the other mothers expressed on the FaceTime forum while watching the performance on their mobile phones.

Through her choice of Facebook entries and comments during the interview, Lisvelia demonstrated how she, as a first-generation Los Angeles Yalalteca, actively constructs a transcultural identity by discussing the nature of Zapotec culture and its authenticity. Since they are presumed to be "less Zapotec", people like her who were born in the US are sometimes belittled as *yalaltecos gringos* in the village of origin. At the same time, they now thoroughly shuffle up the

Zapotec culture scene with a view to reinforcing transnational community ties. In the interview, she related how she counteracted allegations in Yalálag that the female dance performance had been a deliberate attempt at mocking the dance. On the one hand, she responded with a counterargument widely disseminated in Los Angeles: "Nothing in this world is the original, nothing".²⁸ On the other hand, Lisvelia took care to legitimize the new, creative dance performance initiatives with narratives and images connecting them to the 'original' village and place-based sentiments indexing authenticity. On several of her Facebook pages, she employed genealogical motifs in images and text to connect the young dancers to grandparents living in Yalálag. During the interview she revealed that her own grandfather told her daughter, during a visit to Yalálag in 2006, to "take over" the dance. The girl had asked him why only men performed *La danza de los Negritos*, and he had answered: "My granddaughter, whatever you want to dance, whatever is born of your heart, go for it".²⁹ In this anecdote, Lisvelia interestingly refers to the traditional Zapotec unity of heart and head, according to which sentiments and intellect must coincide for volition, to conceptualize a central moment of female empowerment in the transnational setting. She also uses this concept on her Facebook page. After the female dance group appeared at four other Zapotec *kermesses* in Los Angeles, Lisvelia posted the following message along with a smiley emoji next to a portrait of the eight dancers: "Whatever you set your heart and mind to, it can and will be done. Feeling proud". Gender empowerment is promoted through images and text conveying affects as an indispensable component of the unity of heart and mind. "Doing affects" allows young women to surmount obstacles such as men who "hate" this female appropriation of dance. As one female visitor to the page comments: "I gone through all that hate for dancing what they say is a 'mans' Danzas but that never stop me from doing so".

Conclusion

The present case study examined how actors separated physically by a strictly enforced international border between Mexico and the United States use affective media practices. Such practices turned out to be the site where affects connected to the sense of control or impotence, and where the sense of movement or immobilization was experienced, communicated, withheld or internalized by the actors. Identifying affective media dynamics in itself was at first no easy task. But our multi-layered methodological approach, which combines findings of practice and affect theory, paved the way. This approach is complex and somewhat time consuming, but nevertheless feasible, efficient, and promising. In particular, actors' reflexivity with respect to their routine and their strategic engagement in affects ("doing affects") proved to be a key for our analysis. On the whole designing this decidedly actor-centered approach allowed us to discern multiple perspectives and ways of "doing affects" and how they may enhance transnational community building, even when people sharply dissent. The actors we worked with all experience varying degrees of socioeconomic and gender inequality, as well as racial

discrimination implied in and augmented by increasingly restrictive migration policies. Nevertheless, our research results indicate that, despite these obstacles, the diverse actors in question adeptly use affective media practices strategically for establishing a home in multiple places when erecting a transnational community. The approach presented here thus merits further development. In particular, it suggests the need to adapt the established anthropological toolkit to the changing social relations, affectivities, and “feeling rules” at stake during this era of ever-tightened national borders and digital interconnectedness.

Notes

- 1 Transnational communities are constituted by inhabitants of two or more localities who connect them to a joint field of social relations and communicative space (Kummels, 2013). A notable aspect of indigenous Mexican migration, in particular from Oaxaca, has been its transference of local governance system from the Mexican village to diaspora settlements in the United States for the ends of transnational community building.
- 2 ‘Home’ is conceptualized from a researcher’s perspective as enacted in culturally varying practices of either displacement or rootedness to which affectivity and emotionality are key. Emic terms for ‘home’ in Spanish include the expressions *mi pueblo* (my village or my people) and *mi comunidad* (my community).
- 3 Ingrid Kummels and Thomas John jointly initiated field research in Yalálag at the end of May 2016. The senior researcher (IK) regularly instructed the junior researcher (TJ) in the methodology of field work during the two-month period ending in July. She conducted the research in Los Angeles in 2017.
- 4 Research in another transnational Ayuujk community had shown that in the course of producing and consuming video images of the hometown and its fiesta, migrant actors often intentionally charge them with affects that target fondness and love for the locale and the people living there (Kummels, 2017b).
- 5 Interview with Cecilia Mestas, Yalálag, 26 July 2016 (IK).
- 6 According to the Zapotec community’s self-image, it is “the ‘Cradle’ of Dance”, and its inhabitants are well-known for their mastery of elaborate dance patterns. They claim the ‘copyright’ to dances like *Los Huenches* and *Los Negritos*, among others.
- 7 This is the case of *la Danza de los Mixes*. *La danza de los Negritos* portrays ‘Others’ too, in this case Yalalteco merchants on a pilgrimage to Guatemala observed *negros* dancing and copied them.
- 8 Oaxacalifornia is a term coined by the anthropologist Michael Kearney that since the 1990s has been widely used by Mexican indigenous organizations based in the US. The dance normally requires putting on a mask, which the female group did not wear, creating an interesting controversy, which cannot be dealt with here due to space constraints.
- 9 Interview with Francisco “Pancho” Limeta, Yalálag, 25 May 2016 (IK).
- 10 The Octava is a prolonging of the same fiesta into the following weekend.
- 11 Interview with Francisco “Pancho” Limeta, Yalálag, 5 May 2016 (IK).
- 12 Interview with Cecilia Mestas, Yalálag, 26 July 2016 (IK).
- 13 Informal conversation with Jaime Morales, Yalálag, 15 April 2017 (IK).
- 14 The terminology adapts to the Zapotec interlocutors who refer to migrants’ children born in the US as the ‘first generation’. In contrast, ‘second generation’ is the term that is mainly used in scholarship for this social group.
- 15 This positive reappraisal can be ascribed among others to the celebration of *kermesses* and initiatives of Oaxacan indigenous organizations, among them the Organización

- Regional de Oaxaca (ORO), which hosts the dance festival of the Los Angeles Guelaguetza since 1987.
- 16 Group interview with eight dancers, Yalálag, 24 July 2016 (TJ; IK).
 - 17 For a similar approach on the basis of grounded theory with regard to linguistic terms and practices of emotion, see Eksner (2015).
 - 18 Juana Vásquez Vázquez was one of the native speakers and Zapotec linguistic experts consulted.
 - 19 Juana Vásquez Vázquez, memory minutes, Yalálag, 15 April 2017 (IK).
 - 20 Interview with the parents of a 19-year-old dancer, Los Angeles, 27 February 2017 (IK).
 - 21 The parents conceived of this as punishment due to the poverty of Yalálag compared to the conditions of relative affluence to which their daughter was accustomed in the US.
 - 22 See footnote 14.
 - 23 The other satellite communities in Los Angeles originate from Zoochina, Yatzaichi el Alto, Zoogocho and Xochixtepec in the Oaxacan Sierra Norte. The female dance group from the Zoogocho community in Los Angeles was the first to rename the dance *La danza de las Negritas*.
 - 24 Interview with Lisvelia, Los Angeles, 23 February 2017 (IK).
 - 25 Interview with Lisvelia, Los Angeles, 1 August 2017 (IK).
 - 26 “Influencer” is used to designate individuals with a strong presence and reputation in social media who exert power on consumer behavior. The term “ethnic influencer”, Ingrid Kummels (n.d.) likewise refers to individuals with a strong presence and reputation in social media, but who use these narrative skills to influence people in terms of cultural expressions and ideals considered to be characteristic of an ethnic group.
 - 27 Interview with a mother of one of the dancers, Los Angeles, 28 February 2017 (IK).
 - 28 Interview with Lisvelia, Los Angeles, 23 February 2017 (IK).
 - 29 Interview with Lisvelia, Los Angeles, 23 February 2017 (IK).

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