GLOBAL NETWORKS, LOCAL REELS:
YOUTH MEDIA AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT IN TRANSNATIONAL SETTINGS

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A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in
THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE AND POSTDOCTORAL STUDIES
(Language and Literacy Education)

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA
(Vancouver)
July, 2014

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Abstract

Scholarship concerning youth, participation and media tends to celebrate the liberatory potential of both local and global youth engagement with networked technologies produced by the exponential rise in access to participatory media (Lesko & Talburt, 2012; MacIntosh, Poyntz, & Bryson, 2012). However, celebratory accounts of youth and media foreclose on the possibilities that research practices might document the multiple actualities and outcomes pertinent to an assessment of both: a) how young people navigate social justice and social media and b) what is produced in these landscapes of mediatic labour and relationality.

This multi-sited qualitative research addresses this analytical gap by documenting the transnational relationships that shape youth engagements with media technology and by carrying out an analysis of the conditions of possibility for international youth who produce media in the context of an international youth media program in Nicaragua. The youth media program, jointly facilitated by Amigos de las Américas and a major international development agency, works at the intersection of youth leadership, civic engagement, and media production.

Analysis of ethnographic data suggests that liberation discourses surrounding media technology, civic engagement, and youth are linked to the modernist belief that the amplification of public voice will facilitate political justice. The assumed foundation where capacity is defined as agency, empowerment, or voice actually functions to further marginalize populations who have been historically silenced, and facilitates the expansion of neoliberal relationality. Modernist development norms and post-feminist sensibilities contribute to the assemblage of complex pedagogical spaces that animate and inform my
cautionary analysis regarding marginalization, power, and the limits of pedagogical interventions and liberation discourses. This research advances knowledge concerning youth media production as it has typically been imagined within modernist discourses about education, development, and “change,” by means of its re-conceptualization of agency through a “critical mobilities” framework that more fully attends to the complex and affective relationalities produced, sustained, and interrupted in youth media production.
Preface

This dissertation is original and independent work by the author, C. Hauge.

The fieldwork reported in the dissertation was approved by the UBC Behavioural Research Ethics Board, Certificate Number H10-00702.

A version of Chapter 5 was published in *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*. An earlier version of Chapter 4 was co-authored with Dr. M.K. Bryson and published in *Feminist Media Studies*. I was the lead investigator, responsible for all major areas of concept formation, data collection, and analysis, as well as manuscript composition. M.K. Bryson was involved in early stages of concept formation and contributed to manuscript edits.

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List of Abbreviations

The abbreviations used in this dissertation are:

- IDA: International Development Agency
- AMIGOS: Amigos de las Américas
Acknowledgements

The research and writing of this dissertation has been nothing short of magical: heartfelt recognition is owed to the many people and communities that have inspired the process. I offer enduring gratitude to my dissertation committee at the University of British Columbia, who consistently offered phenomenal guidance throughout the research and writing of this dissertation. I am particularly grateful to Dr. Mary Bryson, who nurtured my intellectual curiosity, motivated my writing, and encouraged my development as a scholar. They believed in my ability to finish this dissertation when I did not, and they kept a sense of humor when I lost mine. Dr. Bryson showed me how to navigate the most challenging of situations and they showed me how to right the proverbial (academic, health, or life) canoe when it flips, sinks, or becomes otherwise imperiled. Dr. Theresa Rogers patiently guided my ventures through methodology with constructive comments and warm feedback, and she included me in countless research, teaching and publication opportunities which have enriched my scholarly experience. The energy Dr. Stuart Poyntz put into supporting my development as a writer has been instrumental, and our discussions about youth and media were consistently illuminating and inspiring.

The young people I worked with in Boaco, Nicaragua were fundamental in shaping my ideas about youth, civic engagement, and media. They showed me how to live life playfully when they sang A-Boom-Chicka-Boom with me; they taught me about curiosity as they struggled to identify with each others’ lives; they challenged me to reconsider why we produce media together; they inspired me to write this dissertation. These youth- Nicaraguan, American, and Dominican- will always have a special place in my heart. There are far too many names to
mention all who shaped this work, though I’d like to especially recognize the “boys from El Crucero,” Rita, Iliana, Betty, Darling, Isaac, Alan, Olga and Pablo for their contributions to the AMIGOS program and their friendship with me. Mateo Miller’s memory figures large in this research.

My time in Boaco would have been impossible without the many lifelong friends I made through my many years with AMIGOS. All of my amig@s encouraged me to keep writing and inspired me to believe in youth leadership. Maribel played an extraordinarily important role in running the AMIGOS media program with me with a giant dose of laughter, and being the greatest friend and inspiration I could ask for. Special thanks are owed to Kate, Ryan, Donahi, Sara, Tanika, Jameelah, John, Erin, Alberto, Marta, Sierra, Amelia, Sita, Angel, Mary, Katherine, Becca, and Kristen. Thank you for always welcoming my academic work about AMIGOS with open arms, even when you disagreed. You may never know how dearly I hold your friendship. And of course, my time with AMIGOS eventually led to the pursuit of this graduate degree; thank you to all those who made my participation with AMIGOS possible and fruitful. I would be a totally different person without my incredibly special AMIGOS experiences and the far-flung AMIGOS communities that span North, Central, and South America.

My journey through graduate school has been made rich by the many friends that have written alongside me in cafes, discussed theory late into the night, and diffused the occasional madness. My peers at UBC have become family, their ideas have impacted my own view of the world immensely and I hold their companionship close to my heart: Ariana, CJ, Dai, Emilia, Sara, Lori, Amanda, Evan. I would also like to thank Dr. Janice Stewart for
warmly welcoming my ideas and firmly guiding me to the light at the end of the dissertation. Comments by Dr. Mary Gray and Dr. Angela McRobbie about various sections of this dissertation have been extremely helpful.

I received a generous fellowship to complete this research from the Vanier Canada Graduate Scholar program, which allowed me to write without financial concern. Thank you also to Drs. Gelmon, Dingee, and Bowville, who kept me alive and well enough to continue working on this dissertation during my final year of study.

The support of my family has been tremendous: they have rallied around my finally ending education, and though they may never understand what I study, they never wavered in their belief that I would eventually hold a Ph.D.. Finally, Sammy—there are not words to describe the thanks you are owed—your questions, ideas, and comments about this work are braided throughout the dissertation. Your friendship, love, and musical spirit guide me every day.

TQM.
Because she believes in the power of youth to change the world without question, because her laugh echoes throughout Boaco, because she is a total bad-ass, this dissertation is dedicated to Maribel Flores. Maribel’s work with young people and communities in Nicaragua inspires me always.

May we all be more like Maribel.
Chapter 1: Introduction and Literature Review: The Landscape of Youth

Media Production

Studies of youth, participation and media tend to celebrate the liberatory potential of youth engagement with technologies produced by the exponential rise in access to participatory media (Lesko & Talburt, 2012; MacIntosh, Poyntz, & Bryson, 2012). Whereas foregrounding emancipatory stories about youth and media obscures complex workings of power, in this dissertation I situate youth media engagement in feminist traditions that emphasize democratic practice (e.g., Dean, 2009 & Zerilli, 2005) to engage key questions concerning how youth media constitutes an animated field of friction (Tsing, 2005) in and across local and transnational networks. Traditions in youth studies have drawn our attention to networked publics, understood as audiences bound together through digital media, and to how networked publics create spaces for civic engagement for young people to participate in

Figure 1 Youth participants at a leadership workshop, 2011.
practices of local and global citizenship (boyd, 2014; Ito et al., 2009). Extending this research, the work of this dissertation is to problematize the emancipatory discourses surrounding youth media production, and to suggest a framework for theorizing youth and media that centralizes the transnational relationships that shape youth engagements with media technology. This dissertation examines

• How youth media makers negotiate agency and civic engagement in media production;
• How videos produced by young people are shaped by complex agencies and mobilities;
• How youth participation in media and networked publics is situated in the transnational political climate regarding youth, media, and social change.

The impressive multi-literacy benefits offered through engagement with networked information communication technologies (ICTs) have fed the hope that both everyday engagement and pedagogical interaction with digital media evidence a space of youth civic engagement (Hull, 2003; New London Group, 1996; Rheingold, 2008). Examining how civic engagement and media literacy came to generate hopefulness about youth and technology, this dissertation intervenes in the particularly robust assumption that media engagement fosters voice and empowerment for participants by examining one international youth media organization. This study brings a critical lens to entanglements between media education and democratic participation (Poyntz, 2006), so as to investigate how democratic ideals materialize in media-education approaches to critical civic engagement in global networked culture (Bennett, 2007; Ito et al., 2009; Reingold, 2008; Tufte & Wildermuth, 2013).
response to a “growing global preoccupation with the need to educate a different kind of citizen with the help of new media” (Blasco & Hansen, 2006, p. 473) the youth media program considered in this dissertation is one organization that, like many of its kind, offers opportunities ranging from media production to deconstructing mainstream media (Broughton, 2012; Tyner, 2009). This dissertation intervenes in the conversation about critical media production by documenting the local and transnational networks that shape production of video artifacts in the context of civic engagement. To this end, I consider the shape of global engagement in video production with attention to the international development agencies involved in incorporating media into their work with young people (Tufte, 2013; Burde, 2012).

The hope surrounding youth and media technologies has resulted in significant scholarship about how young people use media; in response, my research explores how discourses about agency, technology, and youth function to obscure the ways in which media participation and civic engagement emerge from a particular set of Western discourses and practices (Lesko & Talburt, 2012; MacIntosh, Poyntz, & Bryson, 2012). The historical and utopic conflation of hope and technology privileges Western notions of participation in the public sphere that depend on public voice to facilitate public intervention (Bryson & MacIntosh, 2010; Gajjala, 2004; Hindman, 2008). This project emerges from theoretical engagements with communicative capitalism, which Jodi Dean (2009) defines to be the material manifestation participation in networked media culture that has proliferated so much that voice and participation are valued but not always linked to political action. Examining communication for development programming that fosters the production of voice in networked media
culture, this research challenges the emergence of the subject as an agentive being whose successful participation with media technologies facilitates social justice. Building on Dean’s work about networked culture, this project disrupts the relationship between agency, youth, and media technologies and foregrounds youth participation in communicative capitalism and significantly, the local and global relationships that structure youth participation with media technologies. The major contribution of my dissertation is to disrupt liberal notions of democratic practice in youth media production. In this chapter, I outline the theoretical constructs- including democratic practice, critical media studies, and development and globalization- that inform my work and the ways in which I conceptualize youth and media production.

**Democratic Practice**

Liberal democracy is built on a Habermassian system which values the freedom of the individual to affect politics by intervening in the public sphere. People’s freedom and their ability to influence politics underlies a system in which “the fundamental premise of liberal democracy is the sovereignty of the people” (Dean, 2009, p. 21). I address the ways that this belief in sovereignty and freedom shapes the youth media pedagogy. In youth media, the production of civically engaged media becomes the strategy through which active, engaged publics are sustained (Rheingold, 2008). For example, New York City’s Educational Video Center runs a youth video program with the goal of helping young people to participate in the production of civic media and in doing so, advance social justice (Goodman, 2003). I argue that what is problematic with this understanding of democratic practice is the way it presupposes an individual, emancipatory relationship to political action. Feminist scholars
such as Linda Zerilli and Jodi Dean who work in an Arendtian tradition offer a version of politics and democracy that depends neither on the sovereignty of the individual subject nor on emancipation. In this dissertation, I advance an argument about youth media production conceptualized through the lens of mobilities, and explore how feminist scholarship on democratic practice assists in theorizing youth media not as emancipation, but as cultural practice.

Working in the tradition of Hannah Arendt and other Italian feminists, Zerilli (2005) defines democracy as that which constitutes the concrete spaces in which people, actions, ideas, and other bodies become public. Following Zerilli’s lead, I document the ways that becoming public and intervening in public spheres through media production happens in relationship to other people, actions, ideas, and bodies. Plurality is a necessary condition of democracy, where when participating in public spaces “the actor no more controls the effects of her action than she does its meaning” (Zerilli, 2005, p. 13). In the research described in this dissertation, democratic practice is understood to be the site at which young people come together to produce media, a site defined by unpredictable relationships and action, in contrast to the depiction of ICT programming that is yoked to particular versions of utopic change.

Democracy and Social Change

At issue in this research project is the Western understanding of democratic politics that centralizes the subject as the primary body that is politically transformed and that makes political transformation possible (Zerilli, 2005). For those concerned with how social justice happens, agency is a central concern because agency mediates social change, indeed the
concern that inspired this research project was about how social justice and political change happens. The subject and her ability to act and control those actions is at the center of the most common frame around how political change happens in contemporary liberal democracy, and as a result public participation is valued because it provides an opportunity to ameliorate injustice (Dean, 2009; Zerilli, 2005, McRobbie, 2009). By providing an account of democratic practice as always relational, Zerilli (2005) and Dean (2009) illustrate that the subject’s agentive action is the driver of emancipatory social change. Situating my research on youth media production in this tradition of democratic practice makes possible an analysis of the political relationality of youth media. Instead of focusing on the emancipatory possibilities of youth media production, this research will illustrate how action is animated through the relationships between organizations, youth, communities, and transnational networks involved in youth media.

In this work, I advance an argument about how the subject of youth media production is produced and mediated by transnational relationships. I draw on Zerilli’s work because her construction of democracy is relational and there is no sovereign subject. Relationality is democracy in her construction of democratic politics, and the ability to commit agentive acts would situate the subject outside of relationality (Zerilli, 2005). This subject would participate from outside the networks of power relations that construct possibility and subjectivity (Davies, 2000). The underlying argument is that subjects are not unitary but occupy multiple positions and that subjectivity is continuously and discursively re/constructed as the subject engages multiple and diverse publics (Davies, 2000; Davies & Harre, 1990). This dissertation advances an argument about youth media that critically
engages with the problematic production of liberation discourses around programming directed toward young people, and a construction of the non-sovereign subject is a key component of my argument about youth media that disregards agentive action as central to social justice.

My dissertation provides a perspective in contrast to work about youth media production that infers agency based on the ability to produce media, engage communities, and critically examine one’s own experiences in order to create change (e.g., boyd, 2008; Jenkins, 2006a). While this orientation highlights the hopeful possibilities of youth media production, I understand the positive documentation of youth who produce documentary media and actively contribute to public spaces to be problematic because it posits a “fully egalitarian environment where none exists, thereby obscuring rather than unsettling the uneven distribution of power” (Soep, 2006, p. 201). One of the goals of this dissertation is to carefully document and analyze how capacity operates as a reflexive attempt to attend to more than just optimistic outcomes and individual actions but to the complex and affective moments of mobility within youth media. In order to do so, this study challenges notions of agency by foregrounding the complex constellation of transnational movements that shapes subjectivity in relation to change and media production as significantly shaping how individuals and groups of people are able to conceive of and enact change.

**Democracy, Space, and Power**

In order to re-theorize agency, I approach this research by considering capacity as interlaced with movement. The ability and desire to move through and within networks with other people, objects, spaces, ideas, and images is made possible in relation to how different bodies
interact in democratic ways (Barad, 2003). The focus of this project is to illustrate how capacity is tied up in relational mobility in how concrete objects and bodies and abstract notions relate to each other and structure space. Movement in relational worlds is more accessible for some than for others, creating disparities in social experience, distribution of power, and visibility (Sheller & Urry, 2006). In order to understand how stories, movements and youth media are shaped by practices of (im)mobilities, this research project is oriented with postcolonial work about the constellations of global and local power (Appadurai, 1996; Mohanty, 1991, 2002; Spivak, 1999). In her ethnographic research, Tsing (1993, 2005) illustrated how global forms manifest in and shape local cultural practices in rural Indonesia, identifying the emergent cultural forms that result from encounters, and notably, movement, across difference. Tsing (2005) names the emergent cultural forms resulting from mis/encounters across difference friction. Drawing on Tsing’s ethnographic approach to friction as a way to conceptualize relational mobilities in contrast to methods of understanding agency as emancipatory, this research investigates how global constellations of power are relevant for understanding the practices of transnational youth media in which young people encounter difference and interact with emergent cultural forms in multiple aspects of their work.

In this dissertation research, I investigate how the organization of space, time, and activity makes certain narratives, voices, and experiences possible and others impossible. Scholars working on the geographical distribution of power have noted the multiple ways in which access to capital, citizenship, visibility, and resources are limited through technologies of class, race, gender, sexuality, and location (Kojima, 2014, Mignolo, 2002; Spivak, 1999;
Tsing, 2005). For example, in Tsing’s (2005) work on how international practices of logging come to bear in local communities, the movement of capital results in particular encounters across difference that would have otherwise been inconceivable. Likewise, in an analysis of Kiva.org, the online lending site that allows donors in the global North to provide loans to individuals in the global South, it is clear how capital moves geographically through relationships facilitated by the consumption of particular narratives about development in the global South (Gajjala, Gajjala, Birzescu, & Anarbaeva, 2011). In the research on youth media production described in this dissertation, I argue that space and relationality in space play a major role in designating from what vantage point particular bodies can be mobile and, relatedly, the sorts of unstable discourses and practices that emerge in encounters across difference in the context of youth media programming.

Because youth always act within networks of communities, organizations, and peers, research on transnational youth media needs a way to account for relationality and a way to conceptualize capacity for which traditional concepts of social change, bound with the subject’s ability to effect change, are inadequate. I propose relational mobility as a method to think through these complex ideas in youth media because relational mobility foregrounds the cultural forms that emerge as young people encounter transnational cultural forms in local spaces. A complex understanding of transnational youth media practices must account for how global and local practices and flows come to bear in local communities (Burawoy, 2001; Canclini, 1995; Tsing, 2005) in order to make sense of how global networks influence and structure youth capacity and mobility in media-making.

Literacy and the ability to speak have long been linked with power (Street, 2003) precisely because knowledge is negotiated and produced through language (Davies, 2000; Spivak, 1988). Working within traditions of critical interventionist work with marginalized communities this research addresses the consistency with which literacy is organized as a tool of power in youth and social justice programming. Paulo Freire organized his activist work with marginalized farmworkers in Brazil around the ability to engage in literate practice and in doing so, to initiate a process of conscientización (Freire & Horton, 1990; Freire & Macedo, 1987). Critical pedagogy, the approach that grew out of Freire’s work, encourages the

analysis and rejection of oppression, injustice, inequality, silencing of marginalized voices, and authoritarian social structures. . . . The goal of critical pedagogy was a critical democracy, individual freedom, social justice and social change—a revitalized public sphere characterized by citizens capable of confronting public issues critically through ongoing forms of public debate and social action. (Ellsworth, 1989, p. 300)

Critical pedagogy typically animates a belief that power relations can be overcome in educational spaces. One of the goals in this dissertation is to address how power relations are reinforced by the very pedagogy that attempts to dismantle them so that underlying conceptions of democratic practice can be reimagined. Interventionist work with youth and media can be particularly vulnerable to the modernist assumptions of critical pedagogy, and
to the desire to control the critical outcomes of pedagogy. Given the multiple, historical discursive positioning of networked communications, media and technology act as a crucial key to freedom and liberation (Bryson & de Castell, 1994). Nearly twenty-five years after Ellsworth’s (1989) influential critique of critical pedagogy, her cautionary analysis regarding marginalization, power and the limits of pedagogical interventions and liberation discourses continue to inform current research as they do this dissertation project.

Freire’s (Freire & Horton, 1990; Freire & Macedo, 1987) work and the multiple related streams of critical interventions into education and social justice are typically built around literacy and the ability to engage the world through literate practice, and the youth media program examined in this dissertation grows out of this tradition. James Gee (2012) defines literacy as “being able to use academic language connected to institutional and public sphere knowledge-building and argumentation,” and digital literacy as “the ability to use specialist/technical language connected to digital tools” (p. 419). In work with marginalized young people both Soep (2006, 2012) and Goodman (2003) use media literacy to educate about social justice, and both identify the amplification of historically marginalized youth voice as central to justice work. This dissertation is an attempt to both do the work of youth media production and maintain a critical relationship to the challenges of thinking about participation in media networks in relation to democratization.

One objective of the media literacy program explored in this dissertation that is common to media education is the creation of learning spaces in which youth become engaged democratic citizens who can negotiate mediated publics. In media literacy education, digital tools are frequently recognized for the possibilities they hold for civic participation (Bennett,
2007b; Poyntz, 2006). Media literacy is understood as part of a broader set of literacies that are politically, culturally, and socially situated (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001; Lankshear & Knobel, 2006). Digital media has been taken up as one solution to the panic surrounding youths’ political disengagement and the dangers of new media (Bennett, 2007; Montgomery, 2007). In youth media programming, voice is the effect of the literate civic engagement in the mediated public sphere. In this research, I examine the how voice became central in understanding how young people operate at the intersection of media and civic engagement, and generate a model for theorizing youth media that accounts for the multiple power dynamics that shape the tenor and genre of youth voice.

**Voice**

In a small study of youth media organizations in the U.S., Tyner (2009) found that 96% of youth media organizations listed giving youth a voice as part of their mission (p.107). This dissertation examines the desire to “give voice” to marginalized youth in response to the historical challenges faced by precarious populations to access networked media. The amplification of voice for populations who have historically been marginalized has been one major understanding of media’s liberatory potential (Bennett, 2007; boyd, 2007; Goodman, 2003; Ito et al., 2010; Jenkins, 2006; Soep & Chavez, 2010). For example, Goodman’s (2003) flagship youth media program provides marginalized young people of color in New York City with cameras and training to document contemporary issues in their own communities with the goal of them become engaged, active citizens through their media making experience. Public voice helps young people “turn their self expression into a form of public participation. Public voice is learnable, a means of consciously engaging with an
“active public” (Rheingold, 2008, p. 101). In this important work on media literacy, voice is frequently conflated with liberation. This scholarly project is devoted to offering an updated understanding of the significance of media literacy and public participation, in order to theorize youth media in such a way that political relationality, as opposed to voice, is centralized.

This dissertation critically investigates the conditions of possibility for voice in youth media making. Historically, North American organizations, people, and communities structured and had power over the development processes of Latin American communities. These colonial practices endure in contemporary relationships between organizations, communities, and individuals (Escobar, 1994). One instance of how this happens was detailed in a research project addressing relationships between development workers collaborating with rural communities on participatory development practices documented silencing on the part of the development workers as a strategy to give voice to rural communities and counter Northern imposition on local communities (Mckinnon, 2006). In the context of development and elsewhere, digital tools have been positioned as liberatory in marginalized communities, tools that can foster empowerment, development, and something like agency or voice (Hindman, 2008; Jenson, de Castell, & Bryson, 2003) especially in the case of trying to give voice by re-adjusting power imbalances. In a study on women and online engagement, researchers found that the euphoric rhetoric about information communication technologies (ICTs) in marginalized communities in the global South designed to empower participants served to constrain possibility in the long run, reproducing marginalized subjects as ignorant in relation to rapid digital development (Gajjala, Zhang, & Dako-Gyekye, 2010). This
situation in which technology and agency together are understood to be catalysts for
liberation, positions value on the ability of the individual to remedy their own challenges
without linking them to networks of power or articulating any sort of shared marginalization
with others (McRobbie, 2009). Building on this earlier research about relations of power and
liberatory pedagogy, this dissertation articulates how the transnational networks that shape
how media production sediment in local youth programming, in effort to identify a non-
emancipatory strategy for theorizing youth and media production.

Despite efforts to foster voice, in reality, voice in media production is a crowded space. The
“voice” that appears as unitary in artifacts produced through youth media is in fact crafted by
many youth participants who draw from pop culture, previous histories, and other stories
they know (Soep, 2006). Voice is situated and built through available discourses, as opposed
to flowing from something approximating authentic subjectivity (Davies & Harre, 1990;
Fleetwood, 2005). I suggest that discourses about voice as an authentic production of
experience serves to veil the power dynamics that transpire in the context of voice, as well as
the histories of development and colonialism that are rooted in the desire to empower
communities designated as marginalized, impoverished, or at risk. In the context of this
dissertation, I will argue that voice is not a productive ontological category for thinking about
youth media events and that foregrounding movement will be instrumental in understanding
how stories are produced through the pedagogical underpinnings of media and development
programming. This argument is different that previous accounts of youth and media that
understand and celebrate youth video stories as representations of reality that signify voice or
empowerment. The focus on voice and its representation as agency obscures the broader
socialities and materialities in which production is situated.

**Voice and Communicative Capitalism**

The connection between voice in relation to empowerment and civic engagement can be reconsidered in light of Dean’s (2009) argument about how the nature of the communicative event is changing as digital networks come to facilitate more local and transnational relationships. Dean discusses this shift in relation to how communicative events circulate and are taken up in the public sphere. The idea that the communicative event and politics are linked through democracy was built on the belief that public communication would shape political action. This relationship between the communicative event and politics has broken down as networked media allows for much more communication. The value of the communicative event is transformed such that it is no longer valuable because of how it is responded to politically, but rather, value is determined by the volume of communicative events (Dean, 2009). Of course, there is no way the high volume of political, communicative events can all be responded to such that they directly affect political action. Media programming that aims to support young people to become more involved in their communities necessarily operates with the hope that the production of communicative artifacts will interpolate young people within the political public sphere, and in this dissertation I document how young people who participate in one such program navigate mobilities in media production.

Thought through communicative capitalism, the production of communicative artifacts becomes unmoored from political movement. Rather, those participating in communicative events produce affective feeling about a political issue, and the affect takes the place of
political action (Dean, 2009). In the context of youth media, communicative capitalism provides a structure for understanding the sort of participation media production offers, and for contextualizing the affective relationships to voice as a construct of social justice. The capacity for endless numbers of people to participate in the constant communicative chatter creates a feeling that everyone is included and, as such, negates the need for a marginal politics. As a result, there is so much feeling around political issues that it appears as though society has moved beyond needing radical politics, even though the tie between communicative events and political action has broken down (Dean, 2009; McRobbie, 2009; Zerilli, 2005). Youth media organizations like AMIGOS address the digital divide and young people who are traditionally marginalized in the communicative environment. They operate with the hope that media production and the making of space for youth voice will constitute a civic intervention. Dean’s work on communicative capitalism informs my concern about youth media as not only an intervention into civic life but also as an instance of affective and cultural production that is politically situated.

Agency

Agency has long been a central problem for those working at the intersection of social justice and social change, and at issue in this dissertation is how youth media can be theorized in a non-emancipatory framework. Modern, humanist agency depends on the sovereignty of the subject and leaves no room for an understanding of political marginalization as relational, systemic, and experienced by others- in short, no geographic constellation of power is possible (McRobbie, 2009). This concept of agency designates a subject whose experiences of power and marginality are not systemically related to the experiences of those around her,
or the structures, institutions, and narratives that populate the public sphere. In humanist terms, agency is often used interchangeably with freedom and rationality (Davies, 2000).

In youth media literacy, agency is tightly linked with the capacity to speak and write, and to create texts that can be heard and are impactful in public spaces (Soep & Chavez, 2010). At the heart of most conceptions of agentive action is the capacity for the individual to be an autonomous actor (Dean, 2009; Zerilli, 2005). For example, Bryson and Stacey (2013) identified how health logics conflate participation in knowledge systems as agency, making particular kinds of citizens visible. Notably, agency is attributed to these stories of people who successfully care for themselves and/or narrate heroic stories around illness. In work with media literacy, youth agency often masquerades as a way to resolve the moral panic that persists about young people (Bennett, 2007). Media literacy work is often justified by twin arguments about how the young require protection from popular media and also that their increased media literacy will integrate them into society as productive citizens (Poyntz, 2006). Agency is synonymous with a full functioning adult, constructing those for whom agency is necessary (young people, racialized people, marginalized communities, etc.) as less than fully adult, less than fully human (Davies, 2000). At issue here is that agency as constructed through humanism fails to account for the plurality of experience and the discursive construction of relationality through which voice becomes possible at all. In attempting to understand how youth come to have capacity in their media productions, this research shifts the focus from the agentive individual in media production by charting the multiple ways in which young people’s capacity is tied up in transnational networks. In my own work with youth and media, agency is most often ascribed to young people who
complete projects that evidence positive change in communities facilitated through already existing structures. In the following chapters I explore the multiple actors and relationships that shape the production of media artifacts instead of working with an agency lens.

**Relational Mobility**

The relationships between and among the various bodies involved in youth media production—including media technology, youth, organizations, etc.—are formative in shaping how youth move within the media program and the sorts of artifacts they create. Because youth are operating in arenas where media artifacts move transnationally, framing their cultural production through the mobilities lens has been generative for my work on the complex negotiation of media production. Movement is differently structured for the distinct bodies that are involved in media production, and movement is more accessible for some than for others creating uneven social experience, distribution of power, and visibility (Sheller & Urry, 2006). The structure of movement in determining conditions of possibility is one of the ways that constellations of local and global power are manifested in youth media production.

Appadurai (1996) writes about global mediascapes and financescapes in order to think about the rapid movement of image, ideology, and resources about the globe, facilitated increasingly by transnational networks. The forces are indeed global, however they manifest locally in particular ways. For example, women are differently interpolated by the non-profit development agencies that come with resources from the global North to *do* development, and particular images of women in the global South gain traction transnationally in order to make this work possible at all (Mohanty, 1991). Women who participate with development
non-profits also materialize particular Western ideologies about gender and development, like the upwardly mobile, happy woman who participates in microfinance or community leadership (Cornwall, 2003; Mohanty, 2002). In a study about the microfinance lending site Kiva.org, researchers found that images of women and communities doing development in the global South were crafted to satisfy particular ideologies on the part of lenders in the global North. This example clearly illuminates how ideology and image travel transnationally and impact funding, how folks participate in community development initiatives, and lived subjectivities (Gajjala, Gajjala, Birzescu, & Anarbaeva, 2011). The organization of space, time, and activity through local and global relationships like this make certain narratives, voices, and experiences possible and others impossible.

Scholars working on the geographical distribution of power have noted the multiple ways in which access to capital, citizenship, visibility, and resources are limited through technologies of class, race, gender, sexuality, and location (Kojima, 2013, Mignolo, 2002; Spivak, 1999; Tsing, 2005). In subsequent chapters these are some of the complexities that I explore with regard to youth media cultural production and for which agency is not a sufficient organizing mechanism. For this reason, I turn to relational mobility in order to better understand how young people relate to each other, the relevant non-profits, and transnational networks in the production of civic engagement media artifacts.

A complex understanding of transnational youth media practice accounts for the way that mobility is situated in global and local flows and practices (Burawoy, 2001; Tsing, 2005). Because I draw on an analytic frame that centralizes power as a geographic constellation, agency is not a useful category for thinking about how youth become enmeshed in and
negotiate media and civic engagement discourses and practices (McRobbie, 2009). Bryson and MacIntosh (2010) used a mobilities framework in their work about queer youth and media to complicate the significant body of literature about youth and media that emphasizes the potentiality and ameliorative benefits of networked media (e.g., boyd, 2008; boyd, 2014; Goodman, 2003; Jenkins, 2006). Rejecting the formative assumption that participation in networked publics is democratic and thus that access to technology can remedy profound inequity, Bryson and MacIntosh use a mobilities lens to focus on precarious millennial queer youth narratives and the cultural politics and crystallizing of norms that manifest in mediated spaces. Building on this work, I will argue that relational mobility is a generative ontological category for thinking about how the media event unfolds in the context of transnational youth media production practices. Relational mobility foregrounds the local and global relationships, histories, and networks that affect how young people come together to produce media, the various relationships they have with each other, media, development, and the other involved actors, and ultimately, the kinds of media narratives and artifacts that they produce.

**Participation and Civic Engagement in Networked Media Culture and Participatory Culture**

The development of participatory culture shifts the space of civic engagement, such that civic engagement becomes mediated by technology. This dissertation explores the space of civic engagement and media technologies with particular attention to young people in the global South who are historically underrepresented in media and technology. Informally, youth participate in saturated media ecologies and engage social media frequently in order to build
networks, often referred to as participatory culture (boyd, 2007; boyd & Ellison, 2008; Jenkins, 2006a). Participatory culture is facilitated by networked publics, which boyd (2014) defines as both the publics facilitated through the use of networked technologies and the communities that emerge from engagements with networked technologies. The various communities that animate youth media production in the context of international development in this dissertation are linked through complex material and ideological relationships that emerge from engagement with networked media and the transnational communities spawned by networked publics.

My dissertation engages with the assumption that networked publics naturally facilitate participation for diverse communities, documenting the ways in which technology and discourses of participation enable narrow patterns of engagement in networked publics. Media spaces like Facebook are frequently understood as participatory spaces where youth can attain agency by uploading and posting (Ito et al., 2009; Jenkins, 2006b; Lankshear & Knobel, 2006). Jenkins (2006b), for example, in his work on convergence and youth participation in commercial storylines, writes that as youth participate in online communities they “are using the internet to connect with children worldwide and through that process, finding common interests and forging alliances” (p. 216). Jenkins understands participatory culture as an opportunity for participation in the public sphere and for people to connect as they encounter difference. Though it has consistently been shown that young people reinforce connections with social networks they already have through networked media, as opposed to forming new connections (boyd, 2008), the hope that media can facilitate participation persists. It is braided together with the belief that networked media is “more
democratic than previous media. . . [and] houses the potential for community formation beyond national boundaries and identity construction freed from the material constrains of gender, race, and class” (Enteen, 2010, p.9). The desire that technology facilitate a participatory democracy, as Jenkins expressed, is a historical pattern associated with new technologies at multiple points in time, including the radio, the television, and, of course, social media (Hindman, 2008). The desire to recognize youth participation in a way that produces good feeling about youth obscures the conversation around power and marginalization, chalk ing it up as “enough” that young people are connecting and collaborating in networked media. Building on this important research about how young people do civic engagement in networked publics, my research attends to how discursive formulations about youth, networked media, and participation shape pedagogical interventions in rural communities.

**Media and Civic Engagement Programming**

The link I described earlier in this chapter between literacy and agency manifests pedagogically in the proliferation of youth media organizations; this dissertation describes the pedagogical intervention of youth media production. Some of the major youth media organizations include The Downtown Community Television Center’s PRO-TV program and Educational Video Center, both media arts training programs that offer New York City youth opportunities to address issues in their communities through media production.¹ On the West

1 Learn more about DCTV here: [http://www.dctvny.org/youth](http://www.dctvny.org/youth), and more about Educational Video Center here: [http://www.evc.org/](http://www.evc.org/)
coast, Native Lens offers Native American young people the opportunity to work in media on issues relevant to their lives, and ReelGrrls runs a program in which adolescent girls are mentored in media production by women with successful media careers.\(^2\) RadioArte in Chicago provides a forum for young media producers to interact with Chicago’s large Mexican-American community, and Youth Radio in Berkeley, California encourages young people to develop their creative and critical skills as they produce radio and other kinds of social justice media.\(^3\) Like these smaller, local organizations, major international development agencies have integrated media programming into their agendas as well. Plan International has a Youth Media and Development program that runs in many of their work areas in Africa and Latin America, and One Laptop Per Child, an initiative of MIT’s Media Lab has famously distributed computers to children throughout the developing world.\(^4\) These kinds of programs are timely insofar as they draw on networked publics and media production to create spaces of youth participation, and in this dissertation, I explore the networks that shape the kind of programming offered by these sorts of international youth media organizations.

Organizations that offer media programming to young people have in common a concern about the digital divide and a desire to remedy injustice with access to democratizing media


\(^3\) Radio Arte’s website is: [http://cyvn.org/](http://cyvn.org/) and Youth Radio can be found online here: [https://youthradio.org/](https://youthradio.org/)

\(^4\) Plan International’s program can be found here, [http://plan-childrenmedia.org/spip.php?id_rubrique=2](http://plan-childrenmedia.org/spip.php?id_rubrique=2), and you can learn more about OLPC here: [http://one.laptop.org/](http://one.laptop.org/)
technologies. Concerns about the digital divide have led a number of non-profit organizations to create opportunities for marginalized youth to engage with media. For example, the One Laptop Per Child Project provides laptops to thousands of children in the global South in the hope of improving educational access (Warschauer & Ames, 2010). In the research described here, I attend to the struggle of conceptualizing youth media work without over-determining or relying on opportunistic constructions of media, progress, and youth. Access to networked communications media has historically been a challenge for precarious populations including girls, people of colour, rural communities, and other marginalized groups, and these interventions often appear to address these concerns of access. However, these interventionist projects that provide experience in and access to networked media do not address the root causes of marginalization in any consistent way (Bryson & MacIntosh, 2010; Jenson et al., 2003). My research explores the ways in which mobilities are structured with and by interventionist projects, aiming to strengthen understanding of how power happens locally and transnationally in youth media and civic engagement programming.

The desire to create and reinforce participation in networked publics has frequently been theorized as a moral panic that persists about the young (Bennett, 2007). This generation of youth is positioned as “at the forefront of falling rates of civic engagement and political participation” (Xenos & Foot, 2008), which contributes to panic about the young. Media participation offers a potential solution to panic about disengagement. This is a twin argument, in which youth media programming is justified because youth require protection from popular media and also because media is positioned as being potentially empowering (Poyntz, 2006). It is important to note that media programming is deployed in order to
reengage young people in political life, as Rheingold describes:

although a willingness to learn new media by point and click exploration might come naturally to today’s student cohort, there’s nothing innate about knowing how to apply their skills to the process of democracy. Internet media are not offered here as the solution to young people’s disengagement from political life, but as a possibly powerful tool to be deployed toward helping them engage. (Rheingold, 2008, p. 99)

Young people who participate in these programs are understood to be engaging in political life through participation in the normative democratic structures of the public sphere. Youth civic engagement programs are founded on a notion of participation in the public sphere as inherently good, and the production of voice in the form of documentaries and socially oriented pieces is common; it is from within this mediated space that non-profits create opportunities for participation in civic life (Broughton, 2012). For example, The Educational Video Center in New York City aims to provide young people from poor communities of color with the tools that affect issues in their own communities because taking a video camera “into the community as a regular method for teaching and learning gives kids a critical lens through which they can explore the world around them” (Goodman, 2003, p. 3). Increasingly, researchers are addressing how transnational civic life happens online, and technology is often posited as a site of international engagement that can facilitate tolerance (Burgess & Green, 2009). Hull, Stornaiuolo and Sahni (2010) offer a framework for understanding how youth navigate transnational spaces through digital media, suggesting that carefully constructed networked media provides young people the opportunity to engage each other in ways that support cosmopolitan learning between youth. This framework is a
valuable contribution to thinking about youth and cultural production, and my research extends this work by focusing on how spaces of transnational engagement are constructed at all.

**Globalization and International Development**

**Globalization**

The availability of networked media has created media flows of images and ideas that carry knowledge about difference that circulate globally (Appadurai, 1996). Relationships and media flows work to distribute power and intelligibility in particular ways, and in this research I consider how these networks serve as a backdrop to how young people interact with each other and construct their own media pieces. The geopolitics of knowledge are distributed through these networks of information, and international development agencies like those considered in this dissertation participate in the distribution of knowledge that makes their existence necessary (Mignolo, 2002). In an ethnographic research agenda, Tsing (2005) researched the way that transnational flows come to manifest in local spaces, documenting the way no lives are untouched by these global networks. Tsing calls the interaction between transnational and local bodies, friction, on account of how bodies come into contact and are mobile with and around each other and to acknowledge the shifts that bodies cause on each other when they encounter; however, it does not attempt to qualify the significance of encounter. In this project on youth media, the ways in which bodies encounter each other and the kinds of narratives, challenges, and tensions they produce as a result, is understood to be a map of transnational engagement in Latin America.
In Latin America, globalization has intensified processes of development in many ways. Particular images, information, and ideologies move more quickly through the networks enabled by globalization, resulting in the availability of narratives that teach about power differentials, race, gender, and capitalism, over others (Appadurai, 1996). Because patterns of social modernization have not mirrored the cultural movement of modernity and postmodernity in Latin America, a distinctly hybrid cultural space in which the pre-modern, modern, and postmodern exist alongside each other might be considered definitive of Latin American culture (Canclini, 1995). Hybrid modernities is a distinct formulation of space in the global South⁵ that foregrounds the production of postmodern sensibilities alongside the reality of pre-modern material realities, and one way to consider Canclini’s formulation is as an instance of friction (Tsing, 2005) in which global capitalism comes to bear on the material lives of people living in the global South. Global capitalism distributes social mobility through the discourses and practices that facilitate encounters across difference. Situated in these ideas about encounters across difference as an instance of friction, in this research development and youth media production are considered examples of encounters across difference that can be understood as instances of friction. Unbalanced processes of

⁵ While language such as “the developing world” and the “Third World” have their roots in economic development, Esteva and Prakash (1998) suggest that language such as “one third world/two thirds world” would more accurately reflect the ways in which resources are divided and (in)accessible across the world. Mohanty (2002) draws attention to the importance of making the colonial histories between North and South visible, and to how language such as “Western/Third” and “North/South,” while coming from economic relations, makes colonial histories explicit (Mohanty, 2002). In order to draw attention to the political implications of globalization that differently affect diverse communities, I use global North/South language, in particular because North America and Latin America have a historical relationship of colonialism.
development and cultural modernization in Latin America has produced multiple logics of
development and conflicting temporalities, such that when democratic participation is
possible it occurs from multiple, and even conflicting, temporal spaces of engagement
(Canclini, 1995).

In many parts of the world, globalization has meant that time and space become compressed:
it is easier and faster to access resources facilitated by the internet, and the rapid transit of
goods, people, images, and ideas around the globe has become near ubiquitous (Sheller &
Urry, 2006). Globalization is often associated with an increased ability to move fluidly about
the world, accessing the resources one needs and desires. However, as Kojima (2013) has
noted, this view of mobility does not take into account the colonial, historical situated-ness of
movement, or the ways in which certain bodies become mobile while others become
immobile. Intervening in this dialogue about mobility, this research project addresses the
multiple ways in which the mobilities of various institutional and technological bodies shape
the sorts of stories youth make as media producers.

Highlighting instances of media production with transnational participants, this dissertation
pays careful attention to how different participants in the research navigate mobilities in
relation to development, media, and civic engagement. The intensification of movement and
rapid access to resources in the global North has had opposite effects in many parts of the
global South. For many rural communities globalization has meant that goods and resources
become further away and more challenging to access, requiring people to travel farther and
longer in pursuit of resources (Katz, 2004). Because of the changes in economic structuring
in rural communities, and the loss of land and subsistence farming, people now often need to
travel to other communities—and countries—to get work in order to support their families. As a formal education has become increasingly vital to economic survival, children need to travel farther and farther distances for schooling, often as far as a couple of hours each direction. Globalization has made resources more widely available for some; however, for others living in the global South globalization has meant a greater need to traverse more and more space in order to access resources (Katz, 2004). In considering the diverse mobilities of youth who participate in development programming from both the global North and the global South, considerations about space, historicity, and movement are foregrounded to make sense of the conditions of possibility available for youth media production in this complex political situation.

**Development**

Concerned with mobilities, this dissertation investigates how the organization of space makes particular bodies, ideas, and experiences visible in youth media production in the context of international development programing. International development practices, mostly based in the modernist tradition, draw on the notion that “underdeveloped” communities need to pass through a series of stages of development before they become “developed,” where development goals include the increase of economic, technological, demographic resources and the presence of social institutions and value systems (Worsley, 2013). Because in global capitalism mobility is unevenly distributed throughout the global North and South, development relationships tend to reinforce the kind of knowledge, capital, and value systems that already carry the most mobility—those from the global North (Mignolo, 2002; Escobar, 2007). The presence of development organizations and projects in the global South
is a direct outcome of the colonial organization of space, a “product of histories of struggle between competing authorities over the power to organize, occupy, and administer space” (Tuathal, 1996, p. 1). Relatedly, development agencies have played a major role in assimilating those outside of the Eurocentric global design into modern logic in the name of development (Escobar, 2007). This dissertation critically examines the role of media production in international development practice, especially with relation to how media production is situated in the transnational networks of development.

Of interest in relation to youth media is how the historicity of development relationships shapes the conditions of possibility for transnational groups of media producers working in the context of development. Postcolonial theorists have argued that the premise of development itself is problematic because it is rooted in the oppressive relationships of colonialism and cultural imperialism (Mignolo, 2002; Mignolo, 2000; Said, 1979; Spivak, 1999). In effort to reconceptualize development in light of colonialism, development is sometimes grounded in “enhancing freedoms and capabilities of countries and their citizens so as to create the space for people to chart their own path, using their own agency” (Perold & Graham, 2012, p. 181). One research project found that focus on the local context and participatory practices is one strategy that development workers use when trying to discursively position themselves outside of colonialism (Mckinnon, 2006). However, the emphasis on participatory practice is not without concern, and in development work, participatory practices in development also tend to produce relationships of power rooted in colonialism. Participatory discourses and practice are relationships of power that privilege particular kinds of subjectivities, bodies, and communities, constructed through normative
notions of gender, sexuality, age, and race (Cornwall, 2003; Cornwall, Correa, & Jolly, 2008). The intensive attachment to the local in order to foster participation and participatory practice tends “to underplay both local inequalities and power relations as well as national and transnational economic and political forces” (Mohan & Stokke, 2000, p. 247). One purpose of this research is to address the multiple ways in which discourses of development, participation, and colonialism circulate in youth media production.

The research described in this dissertation is situated in Nicaragua, which has a lengthy history of colonial relationships with the United States. In Nicaragua, the United States played a formative role over the last several decades providing support to certain political parties, notably removing power from socialist hands and turning it over to conservative reign in the late eighties and early nineties (Roberts, 1990). The United States participates heavily in Nicaragua’s development, and Nicaragua is home to one of the largest Peace Corps programs Latin in America. The relationship between these two countries is indebted to colonialism, and multiple political, developmental, and economic relationships continue to define how the countries relate to each other. These relationships are explored in this dissertation insofar as they shape how young people come to encounter each other, and in relation to the kinds of narratives that young people can interweave with the organizations and histories that define Nicaragua.

More information on PeaceCorps: http://www.peacecorps.gov/learn/wherepc/centralamerica/nicaragua. In Boaco, Nicaragua, where this study took place, there were four Peace Corps volunteers during the period from 2009 – 2011. They collaborated with AMIGOS occasionally. Peace Corps is very well known in the region.
Development ties communities from the global North and communities from the global South together through complex funding and reporting structures, and through the relationships created between funders in the global North and communities in the global South. This is a long-standing tradition in which the aid organizations move capital from the global North into the global South (Rodriguez, 2007). Often subtly interwoven with this support is the tacit belief that integration into Western designs and processes such as capitalism will benefit communities in the global South (Escobar, 2007). Though many organizations and programs serving communities in the global South acknowledge that they are working against colonial systems of power, these organizations often grow out of historical relationships of colonialism in which particular resources and knowledge are concentrated in the global North. These colonial histories are defined by pillaging of resources, abuse of relationships, and ongoing, systemic disregard and disrespect, resulting in political and social dominance over Latin America (Galeano, 1971). Despite recent movement to discourses and practices of participation, development discourse functions so that, “there exists a verifiable underdeveloped subjectivity endowed with features such as powerlessness, passivity, poverty, and ignorance, usually dark and lacking in historical agency, as if waiting for the (white) Western hand to help subjects along” (Escobar, 1994, p. 8). The global North/South relationship carves a role for subjects in the global North to befriend, support, and help those in the global South. This engagement functions as a feel-good experience of helping. Relationships of helping align communities from the global North and South through neo-colonial histories and relationships. How these relationships play out in the media artifacts young people produce as part of their participation with community development organizations will be explored in this dissertation.
Development and Volunteerism

Many non-profit organizations and development agencies sponsor programs that combine volunteer work with tourism and/or international travel. Nonprofits send young people abroad to participate in service and volunteer experiences (Tossell, 2012) and development organizations have recently expanded youth programming (Burde, 2012; LaTouche, 1996) focusing on citizenship and civic engagement. Often these programs value intercultural sharing, and make intercultural and skill sharing central in their exchange programs (Devereux, 2008). This research project on youth and media production examines how the language of intercultural exchange comes to soften the focus on the colonial histories that are cause for development programs to exist in the first place. Critics have referred to these initiatives as voluntourism in attempt to highlight the colonial tendency in the presumption that some good will come of North American youth intervening in development processes, (Brodie, 2006; Hayling, 2011; Kristoff, 2010; Schimmelpfennig, 2011). Programmatic relationships that focus on volunteering replicate colonialism insofar as volunteerism is built upon the idea that even youth and/or ignorant people from the global North can better the lives of communities in the global South, and that the

Western intention of helping underlying the development aid goal is humanitarian as much as it is colonialist . . . . it tends to reproduce the same global patterns of inequality and poverty, leaving intact—if not reinforcing—the dominant position of the North. (Palacios, 2010, p. 864)

The presence of volunteers from the global North in communities in the global South is an explicit drawing of the multiple ways that development organizations rely on and channel
ideological values, bodies, and funds from the global North to the global South as they carry out their work. However, it is painfully clear that often volunteers are not sufficiently aware that they are carrying out service work in the context of colonial histories, and “international volunteers do not always link prevailing conditions of material deprivation in host communities within historical and current industries of the global trade and aid regime” (Perold et al., 2012, p. 187). While significant critique engages with the skills and appropriateness of volunteers to help developing communities, the very premise of development aid and volunteers in the communities that receive them (Palacios, 2010) needs to be challenged because programs are structured, pedagogically to insist on a relationship of volunteering in order for the aid to reach communities. This relationship between development and volunteering is explored in this dissertation because it manifests in the kinds of stories that will sustain the development relationship such that communities in the global South have continuous access to resources from the global North.

At a conference held by young people doing exactly this kind of work in the sixties, Illich (1968) addressed these concerns, criticizing the good intentions with which do-gooders and development agencies from the Global North impress their values, ideals, and ways of life on communities in the Global South in the name of development. He is chiefly critical of the American export of helpers to Latin America because helpers are so divorced from the cultural context of Latin America that their help is hopeless, and inflicts more damage than anything else. In this vein, development agencies have been challenged by those noting the multiple ways in which development work reinforces imperialist tendencies. While Illich (1968) urged those present to go home and/or to engage in tourism as opposed to
volunteerism in Latin America, these programs have done exactly the opposite and expanded at a rapid rate. Youth programming has become increasingly popular and this dissertation examines one such volunteer program in order to better understand how it is related to transnational networks and flows of information, ideology, and power. Many scholars are hopeful that international volunteering can foster intercultural understanding, and a more peaceful, just world:

At best, I argue, international volunteering brings benefits (and costs) to individual volunteers and the organizations with which they work, at the same time as providing the space for an exchange of technical skills, knowledge, and cross cultural experience in developing communities. Most significantly, volunteering can raise awareness of, and a commitment to, combating existing unequal power relations and deep-seated causes of poverty, injustice, and unsustainable development. In this way, international volunteering has the potential to challenge the economic and technical focus of globalization in favor of young people connecting and relating with each other on a global scale. Long-term international volunteering can thus deepen the relational nature of development and the power of solidarity” (Devereux, 2008, p. 358)

Despite the potential positives Devereux identifies, and following feminist development and postcolonial scholars who are critical of discourses and practices of participation, I will argue that the use of language such as cross cultural experience, awareness, connecting, and relating in the context of youth media production serves to obscure the relationships of power between participants, organizations, and other stakeholders. Even the word volunteer
creates inherent expectations and power imbalances that, while perhaps intercultural exchange and the building of solidarity is possible, designs how people relate such that volunteers and community members are not on the same footing. Given that international volunteers understand their experience through the volunteer identity, particular naming conventions set up relationships that might not be as conducive to relationship building or solidarity exactly because of the power dynamic (Palacios, 2008). My research offers an opportunity to explore how relationships between diverse youth in media production shape the kinds of artifacts young people create as well as how young people relate to each other across the particular kinds of difference that define international development practices.

In order to combat some of these concerns and move away from development as a Western practice of assimilation, an increasing focus on global citizenship and on civic engagement is frequently taken up in development practices (Latouche, 1996). As in youth media, this shift in development practice is grounded in language about civic engagement, and in the belief that participation will produce a better future. Interventions are rationalized by imagining them “as acts of citizenship . . . [because] youth must be reinvested as our future, and we must ensure a good future” (Baez, 2012, p. 156). In this dissertation, I argue that participatory and progressive development evokes a set of practices that are discursively divergent from colonial development practice, but that replicate many colonial tendencies. This research examines the ways in which programming is caught in liberation discourses, and in order to provide an alternative endeavors to provide a rationale for thinking youth media production and civic engagement through a mobilities framework.
Chapter 2: On What It Means To Know: Multi-Sited, Qualitative Research and Ethnographic Methods

Figure 2 Participants from Nicaragua during a youth leadership training session, 2011.

Conceptual Methodological Framework

Introduction

The methodological objective in this dissertation is to illustrate the complex mobilities enacted as international groups of youth collaborate on the production of videos and in doing so, interface with multiple global publics. Drawing on traditions of feminist and global ethnography, this research employs a multi-sited qualitative approach along with
ethnographic methods to organize the data collection and analysis. The research attends specifically to a program in rural Nicaragua run by two international development organizations that involves youth from all over the Américas in media production. The sponsoring organizations are Amigos de las Américas (AMIGOS)\(^7\) and a major international development agency I will refer to as IDA (International Development Agency) in order to protect their privacy. The programming has a specific focus on civic engagement and media and operates at the intersections of youth leadership, globalization, and rural development. There is an explicit hope that participation in development work and the creation of media stories will foster a commitment to civic engagement in North American and Latin American youth. This particular group of youth come together in small groups in rural communities and, over a period of eight weeks, produce a series of mostly video (but also radio and photography) narratives about a wide range of topics. My focus on how young people engage with the world through media lends itself to a multi-sited methodology with a focus on global relationships, and to an understanding of agency and democratic practice grounded in mobilities.

**Youth Media, Method, and the Global**

When, and where, is the global? At what point does somewhere local become “global,” and how can we study the global given that the global cannot be circumscribed through physical space in a similar to how the local is spatially contained? While communities around the globe have been exchanging goods, ideas, and languages for as far back as we have been

\(^7\) More information about AMIGOS can be found on their website [www.amigoslink.org](http://www.amigoslink.org).
studying transnational connections, what is distinct about the contemporary moment is the 
persistent awareness of fragmentation. For people navigating this complexity, a common 
experience is that of a “local that is constitutively global but whose engagements with 
various global imperatives are the material forms and practices of situated knowledge” (Katz, 
2001, p. 1214). Complex mediascapes facilitate the movement of information and ideology 
about difference, and the mobility of this kind of information constantly reorganizes 
knowledge about difference and relationality (Appadurai, 1996; Burawoy, 2001). The layers 
of media networks that drive globalization affect localities in distinct ways, and the global 
manifests distinctly as it meshes with local practices (Burawoy, 2001) producing what Katz 
(2001) refers to as the material forms and practices of situated knowledge. The locally 
produced reality is hybrid, where media technologies such as social networks create new 
flows in which relationality and resources move (Castells, 2009). Many have referred to 
globalization as a “time-space compression” (Harvey, 1989), yet in contrast to the time-space 
compression occurring in the global North, the global South experiences time-space 
expansion. For communities of the global South, the grid in which the search for work and 
income occurs is ever expanding as manifested in the migration of people to far-away cities, 
and other countries in order to access resources (Katz, 2004).

Tsing (2005) discusses the friction that is produced when global notions, ideas, and 
movement comes into contact with local communities, languages and practices. Friction, she 
writes, “makes global connection powerful and effective” (p. 6) and at the same time causes 
bumps, challenges, and twists to global power. For Tsing, this messiness of global 
connection illustrates how local bodies, companies, transnational ideas, commodity chains,
and global capital come into being together. As opposed to a spatial circumscription of what is global, these relationships constitute the global, and in this dissertation, a focus on global relationships in the production of youth programming and media production is foregrounded.

In youth media production, much as in writing about broader but related social concerns in this era of globalization, there are two prominent ways of thinking about the global and youth media production. Those writing from (and for) a cultural theory perspective stress ideas about power, capitalism, and liberal sovereignty, and of the impossibility of voice and agency; their counterparts writing from (and for) an activist perspective place significance on potential, on urgency and access, around particular groups of young people, and on particular issues or mediated spaces (Tsing, 2005). The AMIGOS/IDA media program operates with a sense of urgency around local issues and youth in rural Nicaragua, and certainly, there are multiple issues that affect the quality of life for the youth and communities involved in radical ways. At the same time, the collaboration between the communities, youth, and organizations is not neutral nor are the root causes of those issues that drastically affect quality of life. When people come together to work like this, though they may be collaborating on a particular issue, “there is no reason to assume that collaborators share common goals. In transnational collaborations, overlapping but discrepant forms of cosmopolitanism may inform the contributors, allowing them to converse—but across difference” (Tsing, 2005, p. 13).

As youth participate in the AMIGOS media program, they participate in the global networks of organizations, media flows, transnational belief systems, and capitalism that created the situation for the media program to exist in Boaco, Nicaragua, in the first place. I stress the
relationships that shape learning and mobility in media production, and I acknowledge the urgency around issues of access and the particular situation of the rural communities in Boaco, Nicaragua, who’s engagements with international development agencies made this program possible. I stress this urgency around access because it is what drives the program and my leadership of the media program. Global relationships and their local, material impact on youth and media production facilitate what sorts of videos youth produce. I understand the global relationships that youth negotiate to be maps of mobility. I address these relationships methodologically in this multi-sited work, where the connections between communities, youth, video artifacts, and pop culture are clearly visualized. The multiple groups of youth involved in this project are all differently connected to each other and to flows and resources generated through globalization.

I understand pedagogy to be constitutive of the connective tissue in this program that functions to hold relationships between youth, non-profits, and media technologies together. Pedagogy is a conceptualization of problems in the world insofar as the work of education is to produce thoughtful and critical encounters around particular issues that warrant pedagogical address (Ellsworth, 2005). Pedagogy is particularly political because it conceptualizes of what issues warrant address at all. In the context of media interventions, pedagogy explores possibility by presupposing that the arts “have the distinct power to open our imagination toward the unimagined” (Springgay, Irwin, & Wilson Kind, 2005, p. 897), and that the media arts might facilitate understanding across difference (Burgess & Green, 2009; Hull, 2003). Methodologically, I draw on traditions of research in youth media to attend to how youth media becomes an activity of civic engagement. I build on the complex
narratives of media literacy that have been written by scholars of youth media, to explore young peoples’ negotiation of pedagogy and mobility in the AMIGOS/IDA media program.

**Media Literacy, Representationalist Logic, and Arts-Based Methods**

The importance of an embodied and affective understanding of the spaces of media literacy grows out of a concern for representation (Leander & Rowe, 2006), and the ways in which we go about representing how bodies, forces, and discourses interact in producing the place of youth media production and media literacy. Arts-based approaches are concerned with understanding the aesthetic and artistic experience as broader and more complicated than the creation of artistic work as representative of reality. Without viewing the production and reception of artistic work as complex, we are forever caught “in a loop of construction and interpretation that only serves to reinforce routines of sense-making of the same sense. . . . it also misses the material corporeal effects of participation” (Triggs, V., Irwin, R., Beer, R., Grauer, K., Xiong, G., Springgway, S., Bickel, B., 2008, p. 1). Representationalist logic leads us to believe that youth create videos and talk about them in ways that directly represent their realities, beliefs, and opinions about the world. In my search for a methodological perspective that addresses the embodied aspects of participation in youth media, I turned to arts-based methods.

Representationalist logic in literacy performances obscures the *production* of difference in literacy events. It tunnels our vision so that literacy performances are communicational, informational events, where texts produced by performances “function to signify (or represent) a world that lies behind them” (Leander & Rowe, 2006, p. 432). As Canclini (1995) points out, in the Latin American context, many rural communities may have access
to the Internet but not to running water, creating spaces of uneven access that could be defined by hybrid modernities. Hybrid modernities produce a distinctly different kind of public, and the link between material representation and ideological position is often ruptured, nonexistent, blurred, or multiple in this kind of context. Exploring representational logic, ethnography, and the need to translate field work into academic text, Stewart (1996) turns to cultural poesis to mediate her research data, where “like a montage or collage, it operates through a poetics of and by citation that can only ‘grasp’ its ‘object’ by following its interpretive moves into their tense and varied effects” (p. 24). Representation of the AMIGOS/IDA media program through the narratives of youth participants thus is not enough to understand the media literacy event or its relationship to civic engagement or democratic practice. In this dissertation project, critical understanding is situated within the pedagogical production of difference and my data maps the global and local relationships that structure the production of video story. This is an embodied, movement-focused way of thinking about how events, realities, truths, and experiences come to fruition.

A major assumption that is situated in particular beliefs about power, progress, and youth development and that drives this research forward is that there is some good to be had by bringing youth together in creative, artistic spaces. As a researcher, I continue to believe in the transformative power of the arts, but I wish also to complicate this belief by examining, from another angle, how transnational connections and beliefs about civic engagement, agency, and empowerment form the basis of programming. My commitment to the transformative power of the arts falls in line with work done by critical art educators, whose commitment to democratization through artistic endeavors drives their research and
pedagogical commitments (Darts, 2004). The practice of media production is understood as a condition that cultivates agency and change (Springgay, Irwin, & Wilson Kind, 2005). In attending to artistic practices and the negotiation of relationships and production process, I focus on how narratives about youth, media, and development construct the pedagogical space, and how youth engage with these narratives in the stories they tell in their own media (Rogers, Marshall, & Tyson, 2006).

**Space, Pedagogy, and Narrative**

This dissertation focuses on a series of youth media-making events, in order to understand how spaces and bodies are created and interconnected in shaping mobilities is of primary interest (Springgay, 2005). I understand the media event to be a site of pedagogical address where youth come into contact with learning that is shaped by multiple factors including the spaces and movement that youth encounter and inhabit (Ellsworth, 2005). Pedagogically, the AMIGOS/IDA youth media program creates situations of encounter for youth who otherwise might never meet to engage on particular ideas about civic engagement, change, and community participation. What this dissertation offers is a relational understanding of critical youth media production focused on a community-engaged project that approximates something like participatory pedagogy. My familiarity with the complex negotiation of power between the multiple entities involved in the project led me to question the possibilities of participatory and community engaged work and in response I use a map-based approach that emphasizes movement through local, global, and transnational relationships and that focuses on analysis of the local and global systems of knowledge in which young peoples’ experiences are situated (Bryson & Stacey, 2013).
As part of their participation, youth engage in narrative construction. The media projects youth produce (mostly narratives about social issues) could be read as maps of how international groups of young people engage with the practice of place and space, and through that engagement, democratic practice. Youth in the program are creating narratives, and narratives themselves “traverse and organize places; they select and link them together . . . they are spatial trajectories” (de Certeau, 1988, p. 115). De Certeau, (1988) writes about how stories are spatial practices that furnish paths through the world and organize movements—they produce geographies of action. These narrative-hosted models of spatial practice are not the only ones at work in the production of youth media. In order for the pedagogical space to be constructed, spatial practices of development, community narratives of globalization, embodied youth leadership and social change, and other practices intersect in organizing the pedagogical space.

In order for youth to engage with each other in the construction of media narratives, they necessarily situate themselves and others through discourse. In other settings in which researchers are interested in the social justice learning and engagement of individuals, stories and discursive positioning have been used to understand how participants think about themselves and others in relation to justice and learning (Rogers, Marshall, & Tyson, 2006). This work understands relationships to be significantly discursive in nature, and for positioning of the self and others to occur as individuals engage with each other discursively and pedagogically (Davies & Harre, 1990). Youth locate themselves in modern, rationalist worlds by telling multi-vocal stories about the self and other that weave coherent narratives about the self, other, and world. These narratives are produced by weaving together stories,
identities, and discourses drawn from popular culture, personal experience, and other sources of words and stories (Davies & Hare, 1990). In these relationships, people are situated discursively, for example calling youth together for a youth media workshop situates participants as youth and media producers before they begin; referring to young people as volunteers, international participants, local youth, and community leaders situates those individuals in certain ways prior to the beginning even of their participation. Given that in order to produce pedagogical space, scaffolding and structuring are necessary, these kinds of relationships and understanding of how they are built are very important to the kinds of media that youth go on to produce.

As youth collaborate and tell stories about themselves, their communities, and the world, they draw on and reflect broader discourses and ideologies from a wide range of perspectives; narratives about social justice and lived experience are consistently tied to broader experiences and discourses in and about the world (Holland, Skinner, Lachicotte, & Cain, 1998). Likewise, how youth situate each other and themselves in the production process and how they craft stories is important. I pay attention both to how this is done discursively and to how youth organize movement. Through the production of video narratives, youth weave together beliefs and stories they gather from global mediascapes to form a coherent narrative about a social issue. These narratives are situated within AMIGOS/IDA pedagogy, which perpetuates particular notions of media, youth, and social issues through programmatic structures. These narratives organize mobility, giving us a map of the kinds of stories and movement youth draw upon in order to make sense of the world and locate themselves.
I look to the space of video production and its pedagogy, in order to understand how youth are constituted by and in democratic practice and global connectivity, and the mobilities that structure participation in these spaces. The videos evidence spatial accounts of mobilities—how youth organize movement in stories they have created around issues relevant to democratic practice and community development. Youth create characters that have certain mobilities in the stories, and themselves engage mobilities as they produce the media artifacts as well. They produce knowledge that moves, remaking music videos and creating their own versions of popular narratives and engaging stories that have actors with international ties as they do civic engagement. This project is defined by movement—young people moving across international and national spaces in order to participate—and as such is concerned with the ways in which media pedagogies “address us as bodies whose movements and sensations are crucial to our understandings” (Ellsworth, 2005, p. 27). Because the stories youth tell are situated within a certain pedagogical practices that are directly linked to development, their stories are shaped by the beliefs, movements, and practices allowed for and implied by pedagogy.

Mobility, Narrative, and Methodology

In recent decades, there has been rapid change in the ways in which people, materials, media, and other social capital move and inhabit changing and new spaces and places (Leander, Phillips, & Taylor, 2010; Urry, 2002). Urry (2002) pays special attention to the ways in which intensified corporeal travel produces new constellations of a presence that otherwise might not have existed. Necessarily, these shifts and new mobilities have changed spaces of pedagogy and learning, provoking new constellations of capacity, movement, and
collaboration in youth media, especially as more organizations offer international experiences of media making to youth around the world. For example, the small non-profit Barefoot Workshops\(^8\) aims to provide documentary production skills to communities internationally in effort to promote voice from traditionally silenced communities, and Global Action Project\(^9\) works with young people in all parts of the world most affected by injustice on media projects to spark political change.

A number of organizations working in development at the community level have shifted their language away from traditional notions of development and towards a language and practice defined by civic participation, many of them getting at civic participation through media programming. In examining how capacity operates within youth media and media literacy projects within this context, I look at how media production that occurs in a space of globalization and how movement intersects with and enables democratic participation. Because youth media is often preoccupied with “documenting the impressive multiliteracy benefits” (Soep, 2006, p. 200) of pedagogical projects like this one, questions about the social significance and mobilities enabled and disenabled by participating in such projects are often overlooked, even to the point that voice “tends to be romanticized” (Soep, 2006, p. 256). The excitement and romanticization of youth voice in liberatory media projects can inadvertently work against the liberatory project, by obscuring the power dynamics in the name of celebrating a much sought after and hoped for egalitarian environment (Soep, 2006).

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\(^8\) The Barefoot Workshops website can be found here: http://www.barefootworkshops.org/

\(^9\) The Global Action Project website can be found here: http://global-action.org/
The response to this concern has been the documentation of complicated stories of literacy and agency in youth media (Brushwood Rose, 2009; Datoo, 2010; Hull, 2003; Poyntz, 2010; Soep & Chavez, 2010). Building on these accounts of complexity, I turn to movement and relationships in space and place and the multiple players and forces that make particular narratives im/possible in different spaces and places.

I understand place to be a configuration of things, ideas, bodies, and positions that is somewhat more stable than space, where space is a constantly shifting ensemble of connections and intersections “situated as the act of a present (or of a time), and modified by the transformations caused by successive contexts” (De Certeau, 1988, p. 117). In Latin America, movement is produced in spaces that are instances of hybrid—social modernization that has not mirrored the cultural movement of modernity and postmodernity, producing a distinct sense of hybrid modernities (Canclini, 1995). In the West, industrialization produced a “model of public space in which citizens would live together democratically and participate in the evolution of society” (Canclini, 1995, p. 7). The uneven development and cultural practices in Latin America have produced a different kind of space of democratic practice. Distinct from Western concepts of democracy, in Latin America “a more complex articulation of traditions and modernities (diverse and unequal), . . . [produce] multiple logics of development” (Canclini, 1995, p. 9) that exist alongside each other. This may mean that communities have postmodern cultural sensibilities and Internet access yet no running water and/or little access to transportation in and out of communities. It is from within these multiple logics of development and conflicting temporalities that the ways in which space structures experience makes embodiment and relationality so crucial.
Considering the spatial engagements of media production, learning becomes an engagement with movement through time and space. The hope that youth participants in this program will become agents of social change and engage in democratic practice is organized through the international and local relationships between organizations like AMIGOS, IDA, and communities that participate in these development programs, as well as by beliefs about different kinds of people and communities in the global North and global South. Youth are pedagogically newly in relation to each other and to the world when they participate in the AMIGOS/IDA media program. The everyday spatial configurations they are used to are shaken up and reconfigured as they participate in the media-making process. Their spatial engagements as media makers are many and could be inclusive of sharing a bedroom with someone from a far-away country, trekking across the community to charge a computer, squeezing into a one-room house to view videos projected on cement walls, or taking the bus into the city to petition the mayor for funds for another camera.

Programmatically, this is the intention of the AMIGOS/IDA program—by setting up spaces where youth, who would otherwise not know each other, collaborate in intense media and community work situations, we intend to create opportunities for thinking anew, and learning about civic engagement and democratic practice. The affective relationships and embodied experiences produced within this space of media learning are of relevance to how youth collaborate on articulations of story, and on how their movements affect and change the world around them, and themselves. These movements, and the way youth collaborate and exist within these spaces are what I would consider democratic practice. Scholars of youth media have documented how the production of voice is a sign or is representative of
participation and democratic practice. Building on this work, I am interested in how narratives are constructed from within this space of media production, and in the affective, embodied experiences that shape the space of youth media pedagogy in the AMIGOS/IDA youth media project.

Young people engage literacy practices and performances as they create media together in the AMIGOS/IDA program. Their literacy practices are shaped by lengthy histories of race, class, and gender. The collage of stories that make up this space are situated within the postcolonial situation and it is from within this context that the space of media pedagogy is produced. Youth in this program are situated pedagogically in ways such that they perform democratic practice, taking up a variety of mechanisms including language, relationships, and media. The way youth move “among language, images, bodies, and other actors in literacy performances are creative, innovative, and affective, producing the subjectivities [of participants]. . . . Rather than merely signifying them” (Leander & Rowe, 2006, p. 432). Media production—a process of telling stories and constructing narratives, cobbling them together while they can still be rearranged in any which way—is especially appropriate to examine learning and democratic practice in emergent publics and spaces.

**Research Design**

Methodologically, my research is designed as a multi-sited qualitative study using ethnographic methods. I draw mainly on global ethnographic research and visual ethnography to structure my understanding of the data collection and analysis process, bringing the two together in order to examine the production of videos from within the context of global media studies. The global ethnographic research by Burowoy (2001), Tsing
(2005), and Katz (2001) provides a model that privileges global connectivity and illuminates how global flows intersect with situated, material practices in local spaces. The global ethnographic model functions by drawing on ethnographic methods including interviews, observation, and the relevant cultural texts in order to identify individual experiences with global narratives. Historical context about the relationships in the program allows for understanding of how particular narratives move through global media networks, illuminating local relationships to global information media networks. My understanding of the visual is likewise situated in local and global relationality, with attention to how narratives that travel through transnational networks come to manifest in the visual productions of youth participants. I draw on Pink’s (2012) work on visual ethnography and the spatial turn and Rose’s (2001) work on the sites of visual production and the media event in order to structure how I think about the visual as it relates to media production and to analysis of the video artifacts produced in the program.

I address multiple communities of youth working on media production. Each group of youth is understood as a site of research that has various connections to other sites and to global networks. Each group of youth produced a series of videos, and the surrounding media pedagogy, production process, and video artifact is of central interest. What follows in this chapter will address the design of the research process. I begin by outlining my orientation to global and visual ethnographic practice before moving specifically into information about the sites of research, program setting, researcher positioning, data collection, and procedures, and finally, my data organization and analysis procedures as they played out in the writing stage of my dissertation.
Critical Ethnographic Media Research

My research is situated within the broader histories of media literacy and youth media production, particularly in out-of-school pedagogical environments, and addresses practices and discourses of civic engagement as they intersect with mobilities in youth media work. How youth capacities are manifest in youth media is currently under-theorized, and sometimes overly celebrated within the existent body of literature. Research focuses on enabling youth to participate in media spaces, yet we need more information on how participation actually happens, especially about how participation is situated in global networks. Often, the practices of media production and pedagogy are obscured because of the need to tell particular stories that fuse media and the production of liberation. In response, my research pays particular attention to capacity through a mobilities framework that contributes a fine-grained analysis of a) how pedagogy and youth participants collaboratively produce spaces of production, b) how engagement with global networks, ideologies, and media manifest locally in youth media programming, and c) how the resulting media narratives are created from within global and local webs of movement and relationality.

Researchers interested in the ways in which young people understand and negotiate issues of social justice have created and addressed pedagogical situations in which participants engage in small groups to explore ideas about social justice in relation to their own narratives about the world. Hull (2009) created a social networking site in which she engaged youth from different parts of the world in sharing media pieces in order to better understand how young people come to understand and negotiate difference. Brushwood Rose (2009) analyzes video pieces made in a community centre setting, where, in collaboration with community
organizations she facilitates workshops in which women and girls are guided in the
construction of media narratives and the screening of those narratives. Soep (2006, 2010) has
done extensive research with youth at a youth radio station, where she is at once researcher,
producer, and pedagogue. The use of visual and otherwise mediated methods in pedagogical
interventions supposes there is something critical and timely about engaging youth in the
production of visual media texts, and their critique—about creating the opportunities for
youth to story the world (Bennett, 2007; Dahl, 2009; Datoo, 2010; Goodman, 2003; Poyntz,
2008). A number of youth media researchers have looked at the ways in which youth make
use of visual grammar in their media production pieces in order to make meaning
(Brushwood Rose, 2009; Rogers, Winters, LaMonde, & Perry, 2010). Many of these
qualitative projects draw on ethnographic traditions, and I hope to build on this work by
exploring the global relationships that shape youth media production and the related
mobilities of youth in mediated spaces. In order to do this, I follow those scholars who have
taken up global and visual ethnographic methods.

Ethnography as method “takes the reader into an actual world to reveal the cultural
knowledge working in a particular place and time as it is lived through the subjectivities of
its inhabitants” (Britzman, 2000, p. 27). Ethnographic research is the study of another by
getting close enough to participate in an unknown world in order to better understand that
world, accompanied by the detailed production of written accounts about that world that are
based in consistent participation. Ethnography as a method is a mode of understanding social
worlds by focusing on sustained interaction and on how communities make meaning with
others (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995). Ethnographic method and representation of
knowledge sometimes functions so that we can operate with the delusion that ethnography might actually foster something like “true” or “real” understanding. Positivist ethnographic practice like this has been critiqued by poststructuralists, who question the possibility that any true or real account exists, instead moving to understand ethnographic accounts as always subjective, situated, and partial (Britzman, 2000; Pierre & Pillow, 2000).

The representations of knowledge in participants’ observation and through the ethnographic interview, and also in the program itself are situated and provisional representations, which through ethnographic writing, become fixed accounts. Indeed, “the problem is to theorize the modes of intelligibility that constitute subjects . . . [as such] the ethnographer traces, but not without argument, the circulation of competing regimes of truth” (Britzman, 2000, p. 36). The collection of ethnographic data itself constructs a particular version of the world where there is an assumption that experience can be narrated and can constitute knowledge about the world. Through this critique has emerged “a keener understanding today of the fact that all knowledge is negotiated and constructed through language, which is to say all knowledge is relational and political” (Poyntz, 2008, p. 90). Poststructural critiques of ethnography tend to the multiple crises of representation, where tellings of the material are always constrained, limited, and in flux.

Ethnographic methods offer a mode of engagement that focuses on multiple subject positionings and stories as well as engagement with broad social contexts. Ethnographic methods are “ideally suited to a study which examines how a youth media production program nurtures democratic practice by helping young people to think with an enlarged mentalité” (Poyntz, 2008, p. 87). In my own case, ethnographic methods allow me to focus
on how youth engage the discourses and practise of media production, and how their engagement intersects with global publics. A critical understanding of the ways in which ethnographic language constructs youths’ participation in video production is important in considering how the youth negotiate civic engagement and publics. Ethnographic methods allowed me to attend to how youth are situated in global networks and to their complex practices of mobility and literacy. I have followed the models of those scholars working in visual ethnography and global ethnographic practice, which I discuss below. Later in this section, I will explore the ethnographic methods I used such as interviews, participant observation, field notes, and video of the media-making events during my two years of data collection.

**Global Research and Ethnographic Methods**

This research was organized as a qualitative global project, for which I draw heavily on traditions of globalization ethnography. While traditional ethnographic methods employ a close-up view in order to understand the local, globalization ethnography addresses the relationship between local sites and global dynamics. Getting at global dimensions of the local, this method focuses on the relationship between local people, experiences, and spaces to global networks and movement (Burawoy, 2001). Taking as foundational that “globalization [is] the recomposition of time and space,” (Burawoy, 2001, p. 4) the promise of globalization ethnography is that it illuminates the relationships and connectivity to global networks as they happen in local sites. Globalization ethnographic methods focus on the global networks and associations that connect intimate, local spaces (Burawoy, 2001). Working on a similarly global project, Tsing (2005) discusses how interaction between local
spaces and globally travelling knowledge, which she calls friction, changes how these media pieces were understood by the involved organizations as was data about the pedagogy that constituted the youth media program. In my own work, each of my dissertation chapters includes data from between one and three sites that speak to a particular issue of concern. Data was collected ethnographically and includes my observations and field notes, interviews, and artifacts from the program including agendas for media workshops, the media artifacts the youth produced, and video and audio from their production processes and from the organizations’ planning and pedagogical meetings.

**Program Setting and Specifics**

In this section, I will explain the AMIGOS and IDA programming in rural Nicaragua in order to provide a sense of how the program works and how I orient my research from within this program. Amigos de las Américas (AMIGOS)\(^{10}\) is an international nonprofit whose mission and vision are:

**Vision:** A world where each young person becomes a catalyst for social change.

**Mission:** Amigos de las Américas inspires and builds young leaders through collaborative community development and immersion in cross-cultural experience.

**Values:** Leadership by youth; Health and safety of our Volunteers and Project Staff; Respect in all of our relationships; High quality programs developed with and relevant to the communities we serve; Programs that transform both youth and

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\(^{10}\) More information about Amigos de las Américas (AMIGOS) is available at www.amigoslink.org
Since 1965, AMIGOS has facilitated programming for young people interested in working on development, youth leadership, and intercultural exchange in the Americas. While AMIGOS runs multiple programs that enable young people from throughout the Americas to travel to other parts of the Americas to participate in community and youth leadership programming, the classic AMIGOS experience is one in which young people from North America spend a period of eight weeks living in rural communities in Latin America. They partner with young people from these Latin American communities and carry out programming designed around a particular theme, such as children’s rights and media. Since 2000, there has been a focus on supporting young people from Latin America who have participated in their own Latin American communities to become volunteers both in other

Figure 3 Youth in the AMIGOS-Boaco program participating in a social justice workshop, 2011.

communities. (www.amigoslink.org)
AMIGOS partners with development and youth agencies and organizations throughout Latin America in order to identify, execute, and evaluate programming in communities where those organizations already have existing and ongoing relationships. These partnerships are key to facilitating AMIGOS’ work ensuring sustainable and participatory processes in communities, and in engaging ongoing feedback and improvement in youth programming. AMIGOS is a youth leadership organization and supports participants in these programs to grow within the organization. Programs are run by young people who have participated at the volunteer level successfully and who wish to continue their relationship with the organization. Each year, AMIGOS trains nearly a thousand young people throughout the Americas to carry out these programs, and each summer, AMIGOS oversees over twelve programs in different countries in Latin America.
In Nicaragua, AMIGOS partners with a major international development agency that works on development, poverty, and children’s rights around the world, and which is referred to in this dissertation as IDA. In order to keep their identity confidential, I cannot share their mission. However, IDA works all over the world on issues of poverty and development through a community-oriented rights-based model, where children’s lives are at the center of community decisions and collaborations with IDA on development issues. AMIGOS runs programs in several countries with IDA.

In each country where AMIGOS runs programming, there is a specific programmatic focus developed by the Project Director, who is a young person that has come up through the AMIGOS leadership ladder. In Boaco, I developed the media program in partnership with

Figure 5 Youth from Boaco presenting on Children's Rights at a workshop, 2011.
IDA, and in 2009, we agreed to shift the program focus from a general arts program to a children’s rights and media program for the following summer. In this program, international and national teenage volunteers (2 to 3 per community) and local youth\(^\text{11}\) (2 to 5 per community) lead daily workshops with children and young people around Children’s rights. Local youth select a set of rights, and then in partnership with the international volunteers, they design workshops around those rights for younger youth and children.

The work they do about rights is done through media production. In addition to their work with youth and children on media production and rights, the youth participants also collaborated on a community project that the community, in partnership with the volunteers and organizations, designs, proposes, and facilitates. These community projects vary in scope and size, but can take the form of repairing a community school, building a well, hiring an expert to train a community group on a particular skill, buying costumes or supplies for cultural groups (such as local dance groups), or forming collectives, for example.

The media and children’s rights program ran in twelve of twenty-six communities where AMIGOS and IDA ran programming from 2009 – 2012. The other fourteen communities participated in a parallel arts program that integrated artistic practices including theatre,

\(^\text{11}\) AMIGOS calls local youth Local Volunteers. Youth who participate internationally—who are from the United States or elsewhere in Latin American are called International Volunteers. Some youth from Nicaragua participate as volunteers in other areas of the country, they are called National Volunteers. For the purpose of this dissertation and to avoid confusion, I will refer to International/National youth as volunteers, and youth participating in their own communities as local youth. The title Local Volunteer is meant to soften the distinction between different participants, however for the purpose of this dissertation is not useful.
painting, poetry, dance, and more. As part of the media program, youth work with one laptop computer, four video/photo cameras, a tripod, two audio recorders, and advanced editing software. Most communities have no Internet access, though a few have Mobile Internet sticks which function in some parts of the community when and where there is a cell phone signal. Volunteers and local youth participate in a series of workshops about media production and are expected to produce a series of media work with local youth, in addition to their work with younger children on rights and media production. Most of these workshops took the form of regional group meetings. Regional groups were made up of 3 – 5 communities all working on the media production program who came together to learn more about media production and to give and receive feedback on each other’s’ work. I led or co-led all of these workshops. Due to transportations challenges in the area, and the long distances between communities, these meetings provided an opportunity to work with many youth at once on their project at regular intervals. They were a focused time for media production within the broader program, and make up a significant portion of my data. Youth also participated in program-wide workshops and trainings, however they were much less frequent than the weekly regional meetings.

12 A cell phone signal can be a challenge to locate. A typical scenario might be that there is a cell phone signal on the top of a hill in the community, if you sit on a certain rock facing north. This is a very hard way to connect to the Internet.
The media program was developed in order to address structural inequalities of access to media and technology. It arose both from my excitement about media and youth’s sense of urgency around learning about media production. Frustration was expressed by some rural youth that IDA runs several media programs for urban youth, while they were left out of this kind of programming because they were from rural communities. I myself am passionate about media production, and I often asked rural youth about media programming and if it was an area of interest. The media program was developed because it related to my own interests in media production and my belief that young people have important stories to tell. I
believe that these stories should be critically explored through media, and that engagement with media is related to youths’ development as leaders and ability to navigate civic engagement at both the local and global levels. My interest in youth and media was developed during the many years I spent working with AMIGOS as a young person. As a participants in AMIGOS programming, I was encouraged to think about youth and civic engagement, and given the opportunity and resources to develop new approaches and programming. My own trajectory through AMIGOS, which began when I was a teenaged participant, shaped the initiation of the AMIGOS Boaco youth media program. My own socialization into this program is intertwined with AMIGOS pedagogy and the way that the program structures of social justice. AMIGOS pedagogy conceptualizes of problems in the world in particular ways, and as such the project on media and civic engagement was a fit with the Amigos and IDA programs, which both aim to foster youth leadership through community development programming.
Regional Groups

The research specifically engaged a particular group of youth leaders from rural Nicaraguan communities who have formed regional alliances as part of their work with AMIGOS and IDA. Because at times it can be difficult to bring rural youth together due to family obligations, difficult transportation, excessive rain, and other challenges, I opted to work with this group of local youth with whom I met once a week at regional group trainings. The Nicaraguan youth involved with the regional groups also participated with AMIGOS and IDA at a formal level, in collaboration with the North American, Dominican, and urban Nicaraguan National and International Volunteers. The formality of their association with the organizations and with the volunteers makes this group of youth leaders easier to bring together and work with on a consistent basis. Funded by AMIGOS and IDA, youth involved

Figure 7 Youth participating in a regional workshop, 2011.
in the Regional Groups attended weekly regional meetings with volunteers, and facilitated

the media production process in their local communities with volunteers. These youth
collaborate with IDA on community development and sometimes media initiatives year
round, and work directly with international AMIGOS volunteers from June to August.

I worked on a weekly basis with three regional groups, each composed of youth from 3 – 5
communities. The Regional Groups were formed by youth at the end of the program in 2010,
so they could have continued structure and support, and the Nicaraguan youth decided which
communities should meet together based on which communities were closest and where there
was public transportation. Most communities had 1 – 2 youth who participated very
consistently in the regional groups in addition to the 2 – 3 international volunteers working in
the community, and 2 – 3 youth who came sometimes but not consistently to the regional

Figure 8 Hauge leading a regional workshop in Villa de Ada, 2011.
During the summer months, and for the purpose of this study, the regional group included 2 – 3 National and International Volunteers (North American, Dominican, Nicaraguan from another community) and 2 – 3 local youth from each community. Regional groups met in order to learn media skills, watch a variety of youth and professionally produced video pieces, and provide support and critique each other’s work. This structure was especially necessary programmatically as often youth were at a loss as to what to do with the media equipment in communities, not really knowing how to begin. At every regional meeting, youth participated in a media activity they could then replicate in their communities. It was also within the regional media groups that youth planned and presented their work and discussed the storylines and how their work was received within their communities and networks.

**Researcher Positioning**

In research where the researcher also works directly with young people, she becomes tangled between identities including researcher, teacher, pedagogue, and producer, which produces a complex relationship both to the research and to the participants. In their recent book about the work done by the organization Youth Radio, Soep and Chavez (2010) write about their own “thick participation” at their research site, Youth Radio. They write, “the truth is, off the page we ‘converse’ with the young people and adults who populate this narrative…. not only for the purposes of research” but also for programmatic reasons. They go on to discuss how they “developed a dialogic approach to fieldwork, analysis, and writing” in which they move between their experiences as thick participants, using their own “personal accounts [to]
connect the cultural and structural, placing the self and the conventions and eccentricities of storytelling in a social context” (Soep & Chavez, 2010, p. 7).

In my own work, I played multiple and interconnected roles as a thick participant, conversing, collaborating, supporting, and working with youth participants not only for the purpose of this research, but also for program purposes and as a mentor. I was very involved in the programmatic aspects of this work a—I wrote the program goals, I took youth to the doctor, I provided instruction on how to operate a camera, I collaborated with IDA, I communicated urgent messages, and listened to frustrations and successes; at the same time I interviewed youth, wrote field notes, and engaged in other research activities. As the Project Director for this program, I was responsible for all aspects of the program, ranging from budgeting to staff training to pedagogical design. As a thick participant, my research also
became possible because of the other roles I played. Because of my role as Project Director, the organizations trusted me, as did the youth, communities, and families. If I had not been the Project Director, it would have been impossible for me to carry out the research.

My relationship with AMIGOS and IDA is how I became involved in the Boaco media project. The AMIGOS/IDA media program ran May – August annually. AMIGOS runs the majority of programming, and IDA provides the structure and historical relationship with local communities that make it possible to do so. My relationship with AMIGOS began in 2000, when I was an international teenage volunteer in Honduras. The following summer, I was a volunteer again in the Dominican Republic. From 2000 – 2012, I played a series of other roles including Project Supervisor, Project Director, and International Board Member. During 2009, 2010, and 2011, I was the Project Director of the program in Boaco, which means that I had ultimate decision-making power and overall responsibility for the entirety of the program. The time I spent shaping this program in Nicaragua afforded, constrained, and shaped the research I was able to do. This involvement provided structure and legitimization around my work with the youth, my research in these communities, and my connection to what was going on for youth participants.

IDA works in these Boaco communities year-round. I have intimate relationships with the IDA practitioners working in the communities, and with many of the youth and communities involved. I consider many of them friends, and some of them are very close friends—the relationships extend far beyond the research and project. These relationships shaped those who are touched by and involved with my research, and the ways in which they are involved.

While my involvement in theory influenced the decisions I made practically on the ground,
my intimate involvement with the program likewise influences my theoretical analysis. For many practitioners in youth development, theory is rife with incomprehensible words and ideas that seem unmoored from the lives of the people involved in the practice, producing an aversion to theory and academics. Both IDA and AMIGOS expressed to me that the reason they approved of my Ph.D. research was directly related to my relationships with both organizations and to the communities/youth involved. Both organizations have turned down other research proposals because they do not directly link back to and inform youth organizing—in fact, I have turned down research interests in the Boaco project in order to protect the participating youth. Both AMIGOS and IDA have expressed an interest in participatory research and in the role of research in their own practices. Others in my position with AMIGOS have also carried out research programs as part of their own graduate training, often in programs related to development and international health. These projects often provide information about the direct impact of programming to both organizations, and this does seem to be the preferred kind of research. My role with AMIGOS, however, facilitated my research despite the fact that it does not provide direct feedback but rather, attempts to intervene in theoretical debates. As part of my evaluation process, I also provided significant feedback, information, and suggestions with regard to programming, as well as programming resources, that were of use to AMIGOS and IDA.

As Project Director, my responsibilities were general oversight and management of the program in Boaco. I was responsible for a senior staff of three (a leadership team), and a staff of seven supervisors who directly oversaw projects in the communities. While the staff spends more time directly in the communities, I was ultimately responsible for the sixty
international and national youth who participated, as well as (though to a lesser degree) the experiences of the sixty local youth volunteers. I oversaw budget management, emergency procedures, staff management and training, and project pedagogy. I liaised with communities, trained staff and youth, and managed the relationship with IDA Nicaragua. I was responsible for program planning, fundraising, and preparation. In Boaco, I worked directly with an IDA representative who became a dear friend, Mariana\textsuperscript{13}, in the management of the program. During the summer months while I was collecting my data, I was entirely immersed in the program. Often program issues unrelated to media took up significant time blocks, even interrupting my research practice, while I dealt with issues including illness, community safety, coordinating transportation, technology breakdowns, and coordinating with IDA. I was responsible for the project all the time, and could not take time off or away. My lengthy relationships with AMIGOS, IDA, the communities and youth, and this all-immersive environment means that I am very close to my data, and have to work hard to look at it critically and with fresh eyes.

\textbf{Data collection and Procedures}

I collected data during the summer months of 2010 and 2011, using visual ethnographic methods. I began by gathering information about the youth participants who were involved. This information included age, hometown, and some previous experiences with international, volunteer, and media production and practice. This information was purely demographic information and is helpful in understanding the youth participants. I also gathered

\textsuperscript{13} The names of participants in this research have all been replaced with pseudonyms.
information about the structure and goals of the program, in the form of meeting agendas,
notes, goals, and agreements for programming produced by both AMIGOS and IDA
Nicaragua. After gathering this initial data, the rest of the data gathering process took place
throughout the summer program period.

Observations

Much of my data comes from direct observation of and participation in the media program.
Participant observation is critical in ethnographic practice, where participant observation is
understood to allow a researcher to get close to participants in order to better understand how
social worlds are made (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995). I participated in and observed the
four-month program for two consecutive years, with the majority of the data coming from the
second year, as the first year was more of a pilot. I also have two years of prior informal
observations and knowledge of this project as well as a decade of involvement with
AMIGOS in other ways. While this is a lengthy relationship the data collection periods was
condensed into three and four month chunks in the summer while the program was running.
My condensed fieldwork model is common across educational research, where often
programs and pedagogy are contained by short time spans (Poyntz, 2008). Likewise, my
extended relationship with these organizations and the involved youth is common in
educational research where there is often an overlap in roles like teacher, mentor, facilitator,
and researcher (Soep & Chavez, 2010). My observations are framed through my experience
in the field, close connection to this particular project, and the theoretical frameworks around
democratic practice, mobilities, and media literacy that I use in this dissertation. My
assumptions orient the project and research insofar as I understand this project to be an
instance in which complex mobilities and democratic practice shape media production and the development of a narrative, and that engagement with media is related to civic participation on the part of youth involved. My observations are situated within my leadership and oversight of the project over a four-year time period.

I began by observing and taking notes on interactions that structured the program, namely meetings of the two organizations and training and support provided for my staff, which was directly overseeing the media program. I often recorded the meetings and planning sessions with the organizational leaders. I frequently took lengthy car trips to visit communities with integral players in IDA and with my staff, and took advantage of these opportunities to have extended conversations about research related questions. During many trips to communities, I did not record conversations as it would have been inappropriate, but did take detailed field notes about the questions and concerns of community leaders as we presented the media program to them. Many of these conversations, and the notes I took about them, were framed by concern about how youth were able to be mobile within communities and networks of communities in ways that evidenced practices of citizenship and belonging to local and global networks. For example, some community leaders expressed skepticism that youth would follow through with the program, or be interested in working on development issues in their communities. Others were concerned about the frequent travel involved, or about how the community would store, share, and care for the media tools. I continued to engage in these kinds of conversations with youth, community leaders, and IDA and AMIGOS staff throughout the summer. While some of those conversations took the more formal shape of an interview, a number of them occurred in the back of trucks, over a quick lunch, or during
long walks between communities and I later wrote down detailed notes from them. Throughout the summer, I had numerous opportunities to observe workshops, at the project, regional, and local level. During many of these workshops and community events, especially at the project-wide and regional level, I played a leadership role. In these cases, I took mental and/or shorthand notes and wrote them down later.

Field Notes

Most of my field notes are descriptive and reflect consistent writing about events during the time I spent participating in and observing the media program (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995). I recorded notes after every event, describing the event, participants, and any interesting or unusual happenings. At times, this was done verbally and later transcribed. I also wrote field notes about my perceptions of interviews, as well as recorded group meetings, after each of those events.

Where possible, I focused on the fine-grained detail of what youth were doing, and what was happening programmatically in order to make the event happen. There were significant complications in some of the carrying out of this project, including intense epistemological differences between myself and the local leader of IDA Nicaragua. I wrote about the complicated processes we dealt with on a regular basis and our many clashes and disagreements, ultimately leading to her being fired. In the field notes there are stories of challenges in teaching youth to use computers, and about dealing with severe infrastructural issues like the electricity being out for days at a time, or only available in certain homes. Because of my involvement with the moment-to-moment handling of this program, I frequently relied on my own recollection of events, as I needed to write them down later. I
often relied on the staff I lived with to help me recall the events of the day, and wrote about those interactions in the evening. Ultimately, these notes are structured by date and the place in which the event took place—often times, in one day I might write about visiting a community to resolve a tech issue, running a youth media workshop on experimental video, intervening in a meeting my staff was holding with IDA staff to clarify expectations, and planning a workshop for the following morning.

**Formal Interviews**

To gather information about how youth understood their participation in the program after workshops, events, and other media making activities, I did interviews with most of the Nicaraguan youth who participated in the regional meetings, and who were leading the media projects in their communities. I experienced some difficulty in containing the interview and finding a private space and composing questions youth could answer with more than a few words, despite my familiarity with the youth and communities. I found it much more productive to interview two or three youth at a time, to allow people to “join” the interview if they were so inclined, and to allow a more informal conversation to develop. These interviews focused on the community development projects which frequently intersected with media projects and relationships with other youth, including international volunteers, and the daily challenges and movements required to participate in media programming (i.e. negotiating which home the media equipment would be kept in, building a bike to generate electricity to charge a camera, asking the mayor for funding for another camera, or hiking three hours to another community to charge a computer). I also talked with these youths about why they were interested in making media and how they understood their media
projects in relation to broader development projects and community projects with which they were involved.

In all of the communities where I interviewed Nicaraguan youth, I interviewed international volunteers. While I did not have trouble getting most international volunteers to discuss their projects in the way I did with local Nicaraguan youth, I still often interviewed two or three international volunteers at once, and found these to be much richer in content when I involved more than one volunteer. Because of my role as Project Director, these conversations often blended into emotional and project support for volunteers, who sometimes really needed to discuss issues they encountered. Due to time constraints, I could give them much more attention as a small group than as individuals. These interviews attended to a variety of issues arising in the media projects, ranging from how the media program intersected with community development to the challenges of cross-cultural understanding of issues such as where to charge the media equipment in communities where electricity was scarce. There were a number of informal interviews that are represented in my field notes, such as opportunities when I was taking youth to the doctor or helping out with a community issue or for whatever other reason, with youth participants getting something else taken care of. These conversations are represented in my field notes.

Finally, I interviewed the staff carrying out the program—the staff working directly under me, as well as the IDA personnel collaborating with me. At times, the rocky relationship between the IDA leader and me made interviewing some of the IDA staff challenging or impossible. I interviewed them about their intentions, why these projects are important, what they hoped to accomplish, challenges, and successes. They are insightful in terms of how we,
as pedagogues and older youth, interact with youth participants, the challenges and motivations in carrying out such programs, and in what ways we programmatically made particular narratives and kinds of civic engagement possible. Because of my role mentoring my own staff, in these interviews a lot of frustration is expressed, and problem solving ensues. There is also a significant amount of sharing stories and media efforts they are proud of and that were exceptional. In interviews with the IDA staff, some concerns are expressed, yet we tended to stay on fairly theoretical terrain, discussing why we were carrying out programs and hashing through differing opinions. There is also a significant amount of discussion about the technical aspects of how things were working in communities, and some problem solving. There is a distinct difference between interviews with those IDA representatives who are close friends of mine, like Mariana, and those with whom I was not so close, especially when and where the existent tension between me and the IDA program director played out.

**Artifacts**

Data collection included gathering promotional and informational materials about the program, often produced by me and/or my staff. This includes materials such as informational fliers communities receive, training agendas, preparatory material volunteers receive, AMIGOS and IDA documents, and extensive documentation and evaluative materials produced by the AMIGOS staff during and after the summer about the program. Youth and program staff as well as community leaders engaged in evaluation processes twice during the summer, and the data from those evaluations was collected. During the end of summer final evaluation, I collected the resulting materials (posters, brainstorm, community
work plans, criticisms), and the written summary of those materials, which was written up by my AMIGOS staff and me, and shared with organizations, and where appropriate, communities and, youth participants.

I have collected all of the videos youth produced during the summer. To a limited extent, some youth produced storyboards and other planning materials I have collected. Many youth elected not to make formal storyboards. I have a series of youth produced videos covering a wide range of topics and ranging in 2 minutes-17 minutes in length. Those videos discussed in this dissertation are included on the USB at the front of this dissertation.

While I was often running the workshops and events, I also videotaped and/or audio recorded regional group meetings and youth planning sessions. I have video and audio/transcriptions of meetings I held with the Regional Groups. Regional Groups are groups of youth leaders from 3-4 communities that met once a week. Regional Groups watched videos, discussed their projects, and did workshops. We watched the pieces they were making and had discussions about the form and topic. These discussions about the videos were incredibly rich. I have some planning meetings in which youth discuss the videos they would like to make and decide on storyboards. These videos and audio transcriptions are important in understanding why youth choose certain issues, how the struggle of choosing videos played out, and the roles of different youth involved in the planning process.

Likewise, because I was participating and thus not always able to attentively observe and record during planning meetings, I recorded a number of meetings and planning sessions held by IDA and AMIGOS. Because sometimes the answers I got during more formal interviews were so idealistic, the meetings where we were planning tend to show another side of how
we were constructing the space for youth to participate and deciding which youth could participate and making decisions about what constituted effective participation.

**Language**

The majority of the research was carried out in Spanish. The workshops, programming, media pieces, and interviews were all executed in Spanish, except those interviews with North American volunteers when no Spanish-speaking youth were present—those interviews were done in English. All participants speak Spanish, with the levels of the International Volunteers varying, though all have some basic Spanish (at least 2 years of high school Spanish). I have been speaking Spanish formally for over a decade. I did significant coursework during high school and college in Spanish. I lived in Latin America for about three years and taken several four and five month trips to Latin America. At present, I speak Spanish almost exclusively with my partner at home. I am a fluent Spanish speaker, reader, and writer, though it is not my first language. I have translated the data for the purpose of sharing this dissertation with others in the field, though I worked with the raw data untranslated. I am aware that meaning is lost in translation, as is feeling—there are a number of words whose aura is simply not translatable. This is why I have chosen to work with the raw data in Spanish. However, this does present some methodological issues in terms of how data is understood and worked with. While these issues are magnified because I am working with data in Spanish and writing in English, I do not think they are significantly different from issues of meaning and understanding informed by multiple or differing subject positionings when working with participants whose life worlds are different than one’s own. I have done my best to translate data included in this dissertation in ways that best represent the words
and feeling from the original data.

Data Analysis

In the analysis of my data, I foreground the global dimensions of local practices by attending to the networks and associations that connect local spaces and practices to global networks. Following Tsing, I understand these networks and connections to be in a state of flux because “globalization [is the] recomposition of time and space” (Tsing, 2005, p. 4). In my data, this manifests as young peoples’ connections to global media networks and their lives experiences of media production. In order to understand youths’ experiences in local spaces that are part of transnational networks, a theory of place becomes essential, as it “allows us to understand what we are researching as a constantly shifting configuration- or ecology of things- that encompasses web-based and material/local contexts” (Pink, 2012, p.128). My analysis traces how the pedagogy, artifacts, and production process are tied to historical media stories, practices, and organization of people, power, and places. My analysis considers the media production process of the youth at the site of production, the site of the artifact, and the site of audiencing.

At the site of production, I consider data in relation to technological and compositional modalities. This means I think through the various pedagogical decisions and structures that shape production. For example, this means considering the way in which each community engages with the media technology and the surrounding challenges. The compositional modality is also very important here, insofar as what youth are envisioned to do programmatically shapes what they can create. In the AMIGOS/IDA program, the focus on voice and social documentary constrains the compositional modality, and I address how
youth fit their productions into the framework provided. In discussing how the visual comes to acquire meaning, Pink (2012) writes

I understand places in visual Internet ethnography as constituted by intensities of flows that converge, become interwoven or entangled, and in which the visual ethnographer her- or himself- becomes implicated . . . in visual ethnography particular attention will be paid to the images and visual practices that form part of these places. Yet this must be qualified by situating the visual as part of multi-sensory experience in screen-related ethnography. (Pink, 2012, p. 121)

Pink discusses visual ethnography here with relation to the Internet, similar to how I consider the various global mediated networks that youth are involved in in this project, including the Internet. My own presence in the construction of these images is especially important because not only did I make decisions about which data to collect I supported youth as they created and shaped the programs’ pedagogy. Young peoples’ experiences in AMIGOS’ pedagogy, their mobilities in the communities and as part of the program, and their interactions with each other and multiple other networks inform their production experiences, and it is in relation to these networks and mobilities that I situate their production in my analysis.

At the site of the artifact, I consider the stories young people in their videos with an understanding that knowledge is visually constructed and that its interpretation is just that, an interpretation as opposed to a discovery (Rose, 2001). My lens of interpretation looks to identify links between the local storytelling practices of youth media makers and global networks, in order to understand how these videos are situated within broader practices and
discourses of production and to identify global dimensions of the local (Burawoy, 2001; Tsing, 2005). I take a critical approach to considering these links between the local and global as they appear in the youth videos, which I understand to be:

an approach that thinks about the visual in terms of cultural significance, social practices, and power relations in which it is embedded and that means thinking about the power relations that produce, are articulated through, and can be challenged by ways of seeing and imagining (Rose, 2001, p. 3).

I understand the videos the youth make in the program as situated in broad networks of media and meaning-making, and consider how “the meanings of any one discursive image or text depend[s] not only on that one text or image, but also on the meanings carried by other images and texts” (Rose, 2001, p. 136). I analyze the videos in relation to the stories the youth draw on in order to produce their videos, and in relation to this particular pedagogical call to production. I understand both the pedagogical call to production and the narratives youth draw on to be textual narratives that are related to the meaning carried by the images and texts youth produce.

At the site of audiencing media texts are taken up by others and given meaning (Rose, 2001). In the case of the media production program, the site of audiencing and the site of production are very linked because they are sites at which pedagogy can be managed. My analysis at the site of audiencing mostly focuses on this kind of management of what youth should produce. At this site I address questions of power and knowledge, with relation to how particular narratives and productions are given meaning, and what sorts of clusters of images make sense in this particular management situation. The social situations in which these texts are
given meaning and deemed appropriate, inappropriate, exemplary, etc., allow for an understanding of power as it arises in an image.

**Data Organization**

The video artifacts that the youth created drove how I made sense of and organized the data for analysis. In Atlas Ti, I created a series of case studies around each video, where the video is situated at the center of interviews, field notes, videos of youth work, and other pedagogical documents. I did those so I could consider the context from within which each group of youth was working, and the multiple connections that surrounded each media making process. Around each video, this related information is structured into three phases-data about the planning process, the production and/or artifact itself, and the presentation process and/or data about the life of the artifact after its production.

I was interested in mobility, and in how pedagogy and global connectivity shape mobility and play out in the program at the site of production, and in the media pieces themselves, and to a lesser extent, as youth share out and discuss their media artifacts with diverse publics. I understand these artifacts to be narratives that organize movement, in which youth draw on diverse meanings and language in order to situate themselves and each other- and in doing so, illustrate complex mobilities. In many ways, the way youth situate themselves and others discursively is a performance related to how youth locate themselves and their peers in larger contexts, and how that understanding dovetails with relational mobilities. As such, I then mapped connections about the relationships and patterns between youth, their stories and pieces, their communities, the development agencies, and other entities relevant to the stories they told that become apparent both in the production process and later, as I spent time with
the data. Mapping these connections helped me to consider the local and global aspects of participation, useful in considering residual colonialism and for thinking about contemporary relationships between local and global spaces and bodies.

**Thinking with Big Ideas**

In each of three chapters, I have focused on three key theoretical components to this dissertation, applying those lenses to the artifacts and related data. After organizing my data and identifying the main themes in the data, I applied each of three theoretical lenses in order to understand the complex negotiations and commitments in youth media production.

**Chapter 3: Civic Engagement, Popular Culture, and the Global**

Civic engagement denotes a particular language and culture around youth, community development, and engagement with non-profits. As youth *do* civic engagement media production, they re/produce cultural narratives including Disney movies, popular songs, and national poems. This chapter explores how pop culture narratives move about the world, and how, why, and when youth take them up in their media narratives, with attention to the complex implications of reproducing gendered, racialized narratives in programs that define themselves as doing civic engagement. In thinking about civic engagement, voice, and social change, I consider the implications of understanding particular narratives drawn from popular culture to represent “voice” for certain youth participants. This chapter engages the complex mobilities of narratives from popular culture and what it means to perform civic engagement with stories that move through media networks.
Chapter 4: Gender, Media and Development

I reflect on the intersection of gender and social justice programming, as they occur in transnational spaces. Gender emerges as a popular focus for media production in the programmatic context of media for social change, and this chapter examines conditions of post-feminism and rights-based programming in order to map the conditions that make gender a prominent social change topic. I argue that rights-based development along with post-feminist sensibilities contribute to the assemblage of complex pedagogical spaces that animate gender as an alterity vector, particularly among youth working on issues of social justice in the global South. This chapter addresses a particular video and the related experiences of the youth media producers, where gendered storylines are shaped by programmatic expectations and movement of postfeminist ideas through media networks. Communication for development emphasizes the participatory media, and here I consider the politics of participating in communication for development when development is situated from within broad contemporary sensibilities of post-feminism.

Chapter 5: Agency, Mobility, and Global Connectivity

This chapter addresses how capacity is conceived of and understood in youth media/civic education programming, and how beliefs about agency and youth manifest in the discourses and practices of youth media programs. I argue that a turn to mobilities and attention to the role of global connectivity in the shaping of transnational social justice programming is imperative. Through attention to the media program in Villa de Ada, one of the AMIGOS/IDA communities, the chapter addresses a key gap in theorizing how capacity operates within discourses and related practices that constitute “youth media.” In particular, it
critically investigates how youth media discourse rests on an assumed foundation where capacity is defined as agency, empowerment, or voice, and as such is individualized. By mapping out the local and transnational relationships in youth media production and development, I situate youth media discourses and practices within modernist ideals about education, development, and “change,” in order to re-conceptualize agency through a mobilities framework that more fully attends to the complex and affective moments in youth media discourses.
Chapter 3: Pop Culture and the Global in Youth Media Production

The first image is of a group of girls working on a project the same day one of their peers wore an AMIGOS t-shirt that read “AMIGOS changing the world.” It’s not in the AMIGOS mission or the vision, the idea that we’re changing the world. However, when push comes to shove, that is what most of us think we’re doing. A couple years back, I sat around a table with involved young adults, while a consultant pushed us to articulate exactly, what we were trying to do with the AMIGOS program. We recited the mission dutifully, sprinkling our
language with words like “global,” “youth leadership,” “development,” “participation,” and “civic engagement.” Moreover, when push came to shove, and the consultant really asked what we were doing, I wasn’t the only one who blurted out “We’re trying to change the world.” What does it mean to try to change the world? What happens at the intersection of civic engagement, youth and media? How are young people situated both in world-changing discourses and in transnational media cultures and relationships of power that shape their experiences?

Introduction

The global features prominently in studies of youth and media. Sometimes global denotes media projects in parts of the world other than North America, and other times global can mean communication for social change in the global South, or global can be used to write about the potential of international groups of young people to congregate in media spaces. A significant stream of this work is about communication for social change, which assumes “that by communicating in particular ways the group or organization behind the communication intervention can orchestrate a particular change process” (Tufte, 2013, p. 19). NGO-led media literacy and production programs tend towards the language and practices of public debate, social change, advocacy, public deliberation, and participation (Tufte & Wildermuth, 2013).

Recent debates about activism, agency, and youth participation have polarized beliefs about the potential and meaning of digital spaces and participation. In response to accusations of colonialism and deconstruction of critical pedagogy (among other factors), more and more youth programs turn to civic engagement frameworks to conceptualize youth as actors who
can create change. Civic engagement is conceptualized as “a viable means for young people to develop and exercise leadership while effecting concrete changes in their communities” (Inca & Wheeler, 2001, p. 3). The basic belief is that participation, is fundamental to a functioning civil society and that young people need more opportunities for civic engagement (Camino & Zeldin, 2002). Participatory media then becomes a tool to facilitate civic engagement to “help students communicate in their public voices about issues they care about (Rheingold, 2008, p. 97).

What happens when civic engagement and “the global” meet in the context of youth media production? Global encounters in youth media are persistently awkward and unstable, shaping the uneven relationships we engage in as different youth come together in pedagogical situations to tell mediated stories. This program relies on North American youth being able to move internationally, just as I can as a white researcher situated in the United States and Canada. And so the question arises: is this project global because I traveled somewhere to do the fieldwork? What does it mean to call the AMIGOS/IDA program a “global youth media project?” What are the universal beliefs that drive youth media, and what is the relationship between civic engagement and media production, and what of the friction caused when programming ideals come into contact with youth in rural communities? What sorts of narratives are produced in this context, and what do those narratives do?

In this chapter, I argue that youth media production is global because of the encounter between the global and local that occurs as youth do civic engagement and make media. The youth take up stories that have traveled in transnational media networks and they re-narrate
these stories. Pedagogically, the way we think about particular relations between the local and global become visible from within the context of civic engagement. I will address the experiences of youth who produced narratives that knit together local and global spaces through reproducing pop culture, in order to consider the implications of media and civic engagement in development initiatives. I conclude this chapter by engaging with the idea of what it might mean to be able to imagine something different for youth articulated in this context and the particular spatial relationships assumed when youth are asked to imagine something different at all.

Questions

What is the relationship between global and local in youth media production? What kinds of narratives do youth tell, and how is popular culture related to and implicated in civic engagement and the challenges of doing civic engagement? What kind of movement are we talking about when we talk about civic engagement?

In order to address these questions, I will narrate the stories and production experiences of Los Limones and Villa de Ada, two of the communities AMIGOS and IDA worked in from 2009 – 2011. Los Limones produced two videos that I will address in this chapter, Pocahontas and Amor y Sacrificio. After I discuss their experiences with the media program and these two videos, I will discuss the experiences of youth from Villa de Ada, in the production of their video La Martina. All three of these videos are reproductions from popular culture: Pocahontas comes from the Disney movie by the same name and a popular telenovela; Amor y Sacrificio and La Martina are reproductions of popular songs. After I address these videos and their production process, I will delve into analysis and conclusions.
about the trend of repurposing pop culture in these videos, considering the ramifications for civic engagement, development programming, and practices of imagination.

*Amor y Sacrificio* and *Pocahontas* by Los Limones

- **Figure 13** Youth from Los Limones pose with youth from nearby communities at a regional workshop, 2010.

**Participant Demographics**

Youth from the Nicaraguan community of Los Limones participated in the AMIGOS/IDA media program from 2010 until 2012. One of their first videos was titled *Pocahontas*, based on a popular telenovela called *Ojo por Ojo* and on the Disney film *Pocahontas*. The next production, *Amor y Sacrificio*, was produced as part of a 48-Hour Video Challenge hosted by
AMIGOS/IDA in which youth were tasked with making a video about a social issue. Amor y Sacrificio was produced to a popular song “200 Pesos”. Both Pocahontas and Amor y Sacrificio were based on narratives from pop culture. Many youth were involved in the production of these videos, and there was a core group of leaders, who were:

Table 1 Participants in the AMIGOS-IDA program from the community of Los Limones, 2010.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Hometown</th>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Notes</th>
<th>Recruitment Process</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Leila</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Florida, USA</td>
<td>International Volunteer</td>
<td>Leila has intermediate Spanish and has some media knowledge.</td>
<td>Leila learned about AMIGOS from a family member who participated, wanted to do it since she was 14.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marcus</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Arizona, United States</td>
<td>International Volunteer</td>
<td>Marcus has a high level of Spanish and knows a lot about media, especially music production.</td>
<td>Recruited through his high school Spanish class.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maya</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Masatepe, Nicaragua</td>
<td>National Volunteer</td>
<td>Maya has worked on IDA media initiatives in urban settings in her hometown of Masatepe.</td>
<td>Maya was recruited as part of an initiative to include Nicaraguan youth as AMIGOS volunteers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isodoro</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Los Limones, Boaco, Nicaragua</td>
<td>Local Youth Participant</td>
<td>Isodoro has great computer skills and editing skills and is in university in</td>
<td>Isodoro was identified by IDA professionals who knew of his</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pseudonym</td>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Hometown</td>
<td>Role</td>
<td>Notes</td>
<td>Recruitment Process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>-------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andres</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Los Limones, Boaco, Nicaragua</td>
<td>Local Youth Participant</td>
<td>Andres is very involved in the community and in sports teams.</td>
<td>Andres became good friends with Marcus, who convinced him to participate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elian</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Los Limones, Boaco, Nicaragua</td>
<td>Local Youth Participant</td>
<td>Elian is Andres’ twin brother and very involved in the community.</td>
<td>Elian was the first point of contact between the Volunteers and the twins, later becoming good friends with Marcus and Leila.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kia</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Los Limones, Boaco, Nicaragua</td>
<td>Local Youth Participant</td>
<td>Kia is a young mother and enjoys volunteering in the elementary school.</td>
<td>Kia became good friends with Maya and Leila, who convinced her to participate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Julieta</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Los Limones, Boaco, Nicaragua</td>
<td>Local Youth Participant</td>
<td>Julia is involved with many IDA initiatives in the community, especially a women’s health initiative.</td>
<td>Julia was identified by IDA professionals who knew her from other organizing.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Before moving into a description and analysis of the multiple media production events these youth participated in, I will narrate the stories of *Pocahontas* and *Amor y Sacrificio* to provide some clarity to the trajectory of their work.
**Pocahontas: The Story**

The youth in Los Limones produced a rendition of *Pocahontas* as one of their first media production projects. Los Limones’ film is based on the animated Disney film *Pocahontas* that was produced in 1995. *Pocahontas* is Disney’s first historical film, based on an encounter between the Native American woman Pocahontas and a settler, Englishman John Smith. In Disney’s version, Pocahontas and the settler have a forbidden affair while the group of settlers are at odds with Pocahontas’ tribe. When her family finds out about the affair John Smith is sentenced to die. Pocahontas saves him, and peace is reached between the two groups. However, he ends up being shot by friendly fire and has to go home for medical care, vowing he will return to visit Pocahontas and her Native American community.

It is important to note that it is the Disney version the youth were familiar with and remaking in their *Pocahontas* video. When Disney produced this film, they did so in response to critique of their racialized representation practices in previous films like *The Lion King* and *Aladdin*. Disney officials discussed this film as a story about learning about other cultures and diverse folks getting along through cultural sensitivity and respect, as opposed to a story of assimilation, domination, and gender marginalization. In the Disney film, Pocahontas is a young woman who falls in love with the first white settler she meets; in the historical version she is a child of twelve, and any sexual interaction with an adult settler would have been based in sexual assault (Edgerton & Jackson, 1996; Edwards, 1999). There is important work being done in Disney’s retelling of *Pocahontas* so that the multicultural narrative can be central and appealing, and so that the white settler is situated as a benevolent, caring figure that can help Pocahontas’ community. Disney effectively resituated meaning such that this
story of assimilation became the cultural reference point for different communities getting along.

When the youth from Los Limones set out to reproduce *Pocahontas*, they hoped to make a “fun” video that would generate interest in the media project. Settling on Disney’s *Pocahontas*, they basically followed the script from the Disney movie, with settlers arriving to search for gold. In the Los Limones version, the settlers are met by indigenous people dancing in circles. One of the settlers falls in love with the indigenous princess, Pocahontas. The settlers brokered a peace deal with the indigenous groups, and then the settler who fell in love with Pocahontas was accidentally shot and he is required to return home for medical care. Before leaving he promises to return to court his beloved Pocahontas, and to visit the community. He leaves, and the Los Limones remake of *Pocahontas* ends with his departure.

Andres, from Los Limones, directed the video. Isodoro, Marcus, Leila, and Julieta filmed Los Limones’ version of *Pocahontas*. Maya, the AMIGOS volunteer from urban Nicaragua, played Pocahontas, the lead role. The white volunteers Leila and Marcus played the settlers, and the youth participants from Los Limones, and the children they recruited, played the indigenous tribe. Marcus mostly edited the video, though Leila and Isodoro did some editing as well. Whenever they edited, the young person at the computer was surrounded by other youth participants, who at times gave directions on editing decisions, and other times were just hanging out while the editing happened. Before I move into a discussion of the production process, I will introduce the other video this same group of youth from Los Limones made, *Amor y Sacrificio*. 
Amor y Sacrificio: The Story

Amor y Sacrificio was produced during the summer program by the youth from Los Limones. Amor y Sacrificio follows the script of a poem that was written by Nicaraguan poet Jorge Calderón Gutiérrez in 1973, titled “200 Pesos.” The poem was not famous until 2004, when a popular Costa Rican music group called La Banda made the poem into a song. The song was very well received throughout Central America. Andres, a youth from Los Limones and one of the main participants in the production of Amor y Sacrifico, knows of and loves this very famous song, and led the youth in the production of the video to “200 Pesos.” Some of the song lyrics for “200 Pesos” are shown in Table 2.

The video begins with a mother and her young child, Jose, in their home, where she is folding laundry. The mother is beaten by her husband, and she takes Jose and leaves her abusive husband. She looks for work, finding a job washing clothing and cleaning for a wealthier family. Jose grows up and wants to attend school, so she enrolls him in the local school and supports him through his elementary years. Jose is not a popular child, other children make fun of him in school because of his clothing and because he is poor.

14 Amor y Sacrificio can be accessed online here: https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?v=1257574659590&set=vb.1836346644&type=3&theater
Table 2 Partial lyrics to “200 Pesos”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chorus: I had a good mother, I had a saintly mother.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>With so many issues in her life. She could barely pay, the poor thing, for my elementary school, with so much washing and ironing, my mom, she barely paid my high school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I wanted to study medicine and the specialty I wanted didn’t exist in my country, and so I studied abroad.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I did it. I got home crazy happy, pounding the window because the door would not open, and a neighbor said,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who are you looking for?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My mom, I said to her, proud</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The old woman who washed floors days and night?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes, I said, This is my mom! She is the best in the world</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>And how do you not know, the neighbor said to me, she died washing floors. The day before yesterday, and yesterday, when we buried her, I found 200 pesos folded up in her hand, they were the last ones she would send to her son, so that soon, he could come home.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. *Amor y Sacrifico/Love and Sacrifice* was produced by Los Limones to the tune and story of “200 Pesos.”
Jose grows and is consistently successful in school. His mother is always in the background, working to support him as he studies hard. He graduates from high school and is accepted into a medical program in the United States. Jose leaves the community, and his mother stays behind, still working hard so she can help him achieve his dreams. She sends him money on a regular basis. Finally, Jose finishes his medical degree and returns to Nicaragua, looking for his mother. He cannot find her, and a neighbor girl tells him his mother died washing floors two days ago, and that she was just buried. The girl hands him the 200 pesos that were in his mothers’ hands when she died, money she planned on sending to him. Jose goes to his mothers’ fresh grave to grieve. He gives the 200 pesos his mother was going to send to him...
to the children for their school supplies, vowing to send more money back to the community in the future to support education. The video fades to black as he walks away, surrounded by school children delighted to have the money channeled into their education.

**Transnational Youth Collaborating and Coming to Tell Particular Stories**

In this section, I will discuss how the youth from Los Limones decided to produce their videos, as well as their production process. *Pocahontas* was produced early in their work together. The initial planning meeting was held in a darkened church, and the group was loud and large.

**Field notes**

We are gathered in a dark church in the middle of Los Limones, and the youth are sitting in an almost-circle of plastic chairs. Off to a chaotic start, they finally called things to order and started asking for ideas for the video they will make. Leila, Marcus, and Maya were leading with some help from Elian, Andres, and Kia. They talked about a popular *telednovela* in
which a dark-skinned man from a rural community dates a light-skinned city woman. This relationship seemed to attract a lot of attention in relation to the presence of the AMIGOS volunteers—Leila and Marcus are white, while Maya is from urban Nicaragua. When people talk about the Volunteers, they are talking about Leila and Marcus, mostly, even though Maya is also a Volunteer. The young people from Los Limones shared many ideas, and when synthesized, Marcus, one of the American AMIGOS volunteers, suggested that their ideas sounded a lot like a Disney story he knew, *Pocahontas*. The youth in the community didn’t know of the story, but Marcus and Leila shared the Disney story of *Pocahontas*. Everyone was on board with doing *Pocahontas*, and seemed excited about it.

Marcus did most of the editing for *Pocahontas*. Isodoro did some of the editing, and Leila did a bit as well. Every time I’ve seen Marcus working on it, there’s a small crew of teenage boys from Los Limones standing around. Sometimes they give direction, but mostly Marcus is working. Sometimes he has Andres work for a while, and Marcus gives direction to Andres—such as, now drag the little arrow with the mouse over a section and double click—but it never lasts long because Andres gets frustrated easily and gives up. It’s a very slow process. Sometimes when Isodoro is around he edits—he’s the only youth who really has a grasp of how to use the computer. Even so, the youth from Los Limones acted in *Pocahontas*.
and had a lot of fun with it. Leila and Maya convinced Andres to do most of the directing, which he took great pride in, showing his peers how to walk, where to look, and how to talk in order to become convincing characters. It was interesting to watch him show and tell the youth to “act like a gringo” or to “act indigenous.” The video was passed around the town, and it was this video that inspired the youth to want to produce the next, longer video, *Amor y Sacrificio*. I am a little uncomfortable with the *Pocahontas* video, but the youth seem to be having quite a bit of fun, and they are all participating. When I talked about some of the concerns with them, they didn’t seem to share any of my worry about the appropriateness of this video.\(^{15}\)

In this field note, I write about the first meeting the youth had about their *Pocahontas* video and about their editing process. That first meeting was rowdy, a fun meeting, a meeting youth were excited to participate in. It was also an important moment in which the American volunteers framed their peers’ ideas for the video through their own cultural reference point. Knowing that this video has racist and misogynistic overtones to it, I was uncomfortable. In my role as Project Director, I might have intervened, however I attended this meeting as a researcher, sitting quietly in the back of the church, outside the circle and letting the meeting run its course. In their rendition of *Pocahontas*, relations of power play out in easy, comfortable ways. The American youth organized the Nicaraguan youths’ ideas, and then the

\(^{15}\) Excerpts from field notes taken during a production workshop, Los Limones, 2011.
American and Nicaraguan youth communicated about how to perform in indigenous and gringo ways, and later in the editing process, Marcus arranged his peers’ images and video through his own experiences and lens on racialized storytelling. The point of reference about race for the American youth was Disney’s movie *Pocahontas*. Their framing of the world significantly influenced how the video turned out. Below in this quote from an interview, Andres talks about directing the video *Pocahontas*, even though he has never seen the movie, and about having his peers act certain ways—indigenous ways and gringo ways.

Andres: And we made Pocahontas and the other movies out of that friendship. I laughed so hard because the kids . . . they are so funny when they do things. With so much energy. It makes me smile. In the movie, I am smiling. I’m not serious.

Chelsey: What was so funny that they did?

Andres: Well, because when it was *Pocahontas*, there are parts that are indigenous, and gringo parts. And so I had to show them how they were going to act if they were gringos, or if they were Indians. And so I told them, You guys are going to do an Indian dance. And how do we dance, they asked? And so I gave them an example, and when I saw them dancing, it made me laugh.

Chelsey: And why did you guys choose to produce about Indians?

Andres: Because that is what *Pocahontas* is about. There are Indians and gringos.

Chelsey: And how did you pick *Pocahontas*?

Andres: Well, I don’t know, I’ve never seen it.
Chelsey: Really, how, then!??

Andres: I don’t know, it came to mind that idea, gringo and Indian. As I was saying, there’s a soap opera right now about a dark boy who falls in love with a white girl, and it is forbidden. A white woman and an Indian. And in the soap opera, it is a city person and a rural person. And so we decided to do a video like this, and then they [the AMIGOS Volunteers] were saying, it’s like Pocahontas, why don’t we do that? I asked them what Pocahontas was, and they told me, and they told me how the story was and I told the kids what to do. But it’s the second video, Amor y Sacrificio, that made so much more sense to me.

Chelsey: Oh?

Andres: Pocohontas was really their video, Marcus and Leila’s. They had to make I don’t know how many videos. And so they did, we have to make this. But I imagine that the most important part is how to edit on the computer. For me acting is important, because I am actor. But they have never acted, and I imagine they don’t think it’s that important. What was important, what they [the AMIGOS volunteers] tried to tell us was the most important, was learning how to make the video. How to edit it. Because if someone knows how to use the camera, they can shoot a party. You have to put the video into the computer, edit it. Take out the bad parts. Burn the discs. And if the person does it well, they have to pay you to do. And so the idea was to learn how... how to edit the bad parts out and make it
really into a video.\textsuperscript{16}

In this interview I had with Andres, and also in the field notes from the production process, race is prominent in the way young people relate to each other and how they imagine telling, naming, and sharing the media pieces they will produce. The stories they draw on to formulate their video are built from the \textit{telenovela} \textit{Ojo por Ojo}, the Disney movie \textit{Pocahontas}, and the relationship between the volunteers and youth in Los Limones. \textit{Ojo por Ojo} is the \textit{telenovela} Andres references above, and the one that sparked the conversation about doing a video about a biracial couple, and about the biracial friendships happening between the volunteers and the youth in Los Limones. Mainstream media like \textit{Ojo por Ojo} and \textit{Pocahontas} configure race in particular ways. In both stories, white people are afforded privilege to move into other spaces, while indigenous people and people of color face imperiled movement. The white person in these stories is positioned as a friendly, helpful, and benevolent presence.

\textit{Ojo por Ojo} was produced in the United States by Telemundo and RTI Columbia, and tells the story of a racialized couple. It is based on a novel, \textit{El Leopardo al Sol}, written by Leila Restrepo, and the screenplay adaptation was written by Gustavo Bolivar. The \textit{telenovela} narrative is reminiscent of \textit{Romeo and Juliette} as well. \textit{Ojo por Ojo} was first aired in Venezuela in 2010, and subsequently in Ecuador, Costa Rica, Peru, Panama, Nicaragua, Colombia, Honduras, Georgia, Paraguay, and finally, the United States. This \textit{telenovela} has

\textsuperscript{16} Excerpts from an interview with Andres, a youth very involved in the Los Limones video production process, 2010.
screened all over Latin America, and its joint production by American and Columbian companies illustrates the transnational movement of cultural media narratives.\textsuperscript{17} \textit{Ojo por Ojo} was religiously watched by most youth participants in the AMIGOS/IDA program, and became a bonding point for the North American and Nicaraguan youth participants.

The youth came to the \textit{Pocahontas} narrative out of their experiences with each other and \textit{Ojo por Ojo}, and the American youths’ experience with \textit{Pocahontas}. The youth brainstormed their ideas about couples and race and, as Andres, Elian, and Kia were talking with their peers, about biracial relationships and friendships and \textit{Ojo por Ojo}. It was during this conversation that the young American volunteers suggested that the narrative “sounds like \textit{Pocahontas}.” They framed their peers’ ideas through their own cultural reference point. The way in which the Nicaraguan youth generated ideas and the American youth framed them through the \textit{Pocahontas} narrative is rather similar to the editing process in which the local Nicaraguan youth participate by giving ideas, and then those ideas are given form and shape by the AMIGOS volunteer sitting at the computer because he (in this case, Marcus was the one with editing skills) has the most technological know-how. It should be noted that while Marcus did much of the editing, Isodoro from Los Limones, and Leila also did some of the editing, and often they sat at the computer and took direction from a larger group of peers.

This initial \textit{Pocahontas} story is important because it illustrates how group decision making processes happen outside of the very structured pedagogical space of workshops, and is an example of how decision making happens when many more youth are involved.

\textsuperscript{17} More can be found about \textit{Ojo por Ojo} here: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ojo_Por_Ojo
After they finished *Pocahontas*, the youth leaders attended an AMIGOS workshop on video production, during which time they became involved in the 48-Hour Video Challenge on Social Issues. The storyboard for *Amor y Sacrificio* was made by four youth—the two American volunteers, Marcus and Leila, and two teenage boys, Andres and Isodoro—during this time. The young women—Julieta and Kia—were not allowed to attend the workshop because it was overnight and their parents did not want them spending the night away from home. Maya was in another part of Nicaragua attending to a family emergency. Some youth were unable to participate in workshops because they were held overnight in bigger cities and often girls and younger youth were not allowed to attend. While Julieta’s family was less explicit about why she could not attend, Kia’s family did not allow her to attend because the workshop was an overnight experience. This was a common issue for many Nicaraguan girls participating in the program.

During the workshop, youth were asked to come up with social issues they were really passionate about and about which they wanted to produce a video. Individually the youth brainstormed social issues important to them, and wrote short stories or drew pictures about a time the social issues they selected had mattered in their lives. The youth then shared their social issues and stories with the other participants from their own communities. The AMIGOS facilitator then drew a big picture of a river on poster paper. She asked the group to identify the qualities of a river—how it moves, how it changes, what might obstruct its path. She added in these qualities to her river as the youth shouted them out, drawing rocks, rapids, and pools of water onto her depiction of a river. She then likened the river movement to how a story moves—sometimes it goes faster, sometimes slower, there are waterfalls where water
moves quickly and there are swimming holes where water is deep and cold at the bottom, and still and warm on the top. In community groups, the youth drew their own river, and considered how a video story that incorporated at least three of the social issues the youth had individually come up with might be addressed through a story, and how that story would move like the river. In the Los Limones group, youth came up with three social issues they wanted to address—love (Andres’s theme), family (Leila’s theme), and education (Marcus’ theme). Andres then came up with the idea of producing the piece to the popular song “200 Pesos”, and titling their video *Amor y Sacrificio*, stating that all three themes would be addressed through this narrative. Andres discussed his participation in making this story:

Andres: From the very beginning, when we were in the workshop, we decided on the theme love and sacrifice. We made that description of our story, like it was a river. And when we got home and showed people the river-story, they liked it. And so we got to do this story. And I was like, perfect, because I had an idea of how it would go. And Marcus and Leila were like, how are we going to do this? We had Leila’s theme family, Marcus’ theme education, and mine, love. And I told them about my idea about “200 Pesos,” and they were like “You’re a genius!” and so we did it this way, even though I’m not.

Chelsey: Why this theme?

Andres: Oh, because here in Nicaragua, tons of examples like this song happen, real ones. Lots of fathers who leave the mother with the child. And the mother has to fight to get her son ahead. And . . .
Chelsey: And the child always goes to school?

Andres: Well, sometimes. These songs are like stories. And when someone is listening to the song, you imagine what happens. So this is the song for the movie, it is called “200 Pesos” . . . but we called it *Love and Sacrifice* from the beginning. Because this is reality. The mother sacrifices for her son. But she does this because she loves him so much. That’s why we decided to call it *Love and Sacrifice*. I was the director of the movie, because it was my idea. So I told people, you need to be serious, you need to cry. Breathe, and don’t look at the camera, because it looks horrible when an actor looks into the camera. I told them to act like it was real, not on camera, and they did. We had to do a lot of parts over and over again, and the kids got bored, and I told them they had to do it well so we didn’t have to do it even more, and they did. We knew that it was going to be a success, and we were right—we won the prize!  

This video was produced from within the context of a 48-Hour Video Production Contest, in which youth were tasked to make a video about a social issue in their communities in 48 hours, after having spent an overnight workshop working on planning issues, video editing, and social justice media. As they did in their *Pocahontas* video, the youth drew on narratives from popular culture to produce their video. When they made *Amor y Sacrificio*, the youth from Los Limones were responding to the call to make a video about a social issue that was instituted in the 48-Hour Video Contest. There were prizes in the 48-Hour Video Contest and 

18 Excerpt from an interview with Andres about *Amor y Sacrificio*, 2010.
Amor y Sacrificio won the first place prize for “Best Video.”

**Media Production Program in Los Limones**

In 2009, AMIGOS did not work in Los Limones, but in the community of El Canuco. El Canuco is a slightly bigger community, and Los Limones is served by IDA as a neighborhood of El Canuco, as opposed to as a community in its own right. This has caused tension and frustration between Los Limones, El Canuco, and IDA. In 2010, the community asked to work with AMIGOS apart from El Canuco. The youth in Los Limones were eager to participate and to show that they could manage a program without El Canuco, and AMIGOS and IDA leaders agreed. Many of the youth participants from the community of Los Limones became involved in the program through friendships with the AMIGOS volunteers or other youth involved, and/or because they were interested in media and in storytelling more broadly. Because Andres had had a positive experience making a dance video with a local dance group, which they sold to fundraise for dance costumes, Andres wanted to learn more video editing skills, and was very interested in acting. Andres became involved with the Media Committee, a group of mostly youth (and some adult advisors) that were responsible for oversight of the media project. The Media Committee was formed after youth attended the 48-Hour Video Challenge with AMIGOS/IDA, where they learned about video production and discussed some of the challenges they were having with the media project, as well as how they might deal with those challenges. Upon returning to Los Limones, they worked with their peers and leaders in the community to form a media committee that would be in charge of coming up with projects, involving youth in their production, and overseeing the media equipment. Andres, a young person from Los Limones who was very involved in
the media committee explains:

Andres: We had meetings about what everything was about, what the projects could be like, how we wanted to work together and on what. That’s how we made the Media Committee.

Chelsey: Who is on the Media Committee?

Andres: A few boys from down the road, who are in Amor y Sacrifico, Isodoro, my mom. Another girl named Julieta. There’s like six people. There are adults too, in the Media Committee, because they have more ideas than youth. Or, their ideas are more logical.

Chelsey: Why do you think that?

Andres: Because they have more experience. They know more what things will work well, and what won’t work. But they don’t decide. They give us their opinion, and then we all say, “Oh, ok, that’s an interesting opinion. Ok, perfect.” This way everyone has a say and the opinion that is the most... well that most people like and... that is most needed... I got involved because when we decided to make Pocahontas, my twin told everyone I was an experienced actor, and that I could be the director of the movie, and show the other teens how to act. And so Marcus asked me what my name was, and we became good friends. With Leila, too. They
Andres discusses how he became involved in the media program, and his own involvement in the Media Committee. Civic engagement efforts often attempt to link young people with older people to support them, and Andres’s description of the Media Committee in Los Limones is an illustration of how this happened organically in Los Limones, where youth participants wanted the ideas and input of their elders. The Media Committee functioned as an advisory body, with a number of the most involved youth being part of the Media Committee. The Media Committee fell apart towards the end of 2010 after a period of very little use of the media equipment, and was reformed in July of 2011 with two new youth leaders in charge and excited. Significant effort was made by IDA and AMIGOS to keep the committee active and involved in the media project so that the project would not fall into a pattern of multiple failed technology projects led by multiple non-profits in the region. AMIGOS and IDA were supportive of the relationships between adults and youth on the media committee, because it was understood to be reflective of the civic engagement goal that youth connect with and build on the assets of community members and already existing community knowledge.

Civic Engagement and Media Production in Los Limones

Both the AMIGOS volunteers and the youth from Los Limones who participated in the AMIGOS/IDA program were familiar with participatory development and media for

19 Excerpt from an interview with Andres, who played a major leadership role in the media program in Los Limones, 2010.
development from their extensive training with AMIGOS and IDA. Pedagogically, multiple activities that youth participated in focused on the importance of relationships, participatory video, and collaboration. It was heavily emphasized that the American youth should not be doing all of the shooting, acting, or editing. Programmatically, it was clear that the media tools were to be used to facilitate community participation and interest in development processes among young people, and American youth were encouraged to focus their work with their Latin American peers. Though they had varying levels of technical expertise, the American youth volunteers were envisioned to have the technological expertise so that they could support the learning of their Nicaraguan peers. The uneven knowledge of volunteers and youth participants in the media program meant that youth spent significant time problem solving, teaching each other, and locating support for issues they could not resolve. This was often brought up as a challenge by American volunteers who did not have much video experience. Many volunteers learned quite a bit while working on the project. Leila, here, reflects on the media program and her role as a technology-teacher, and how the program affected her and her peers:

Leila: It’s been a learning experience too. Because we spent a lot of time editing videos. And before it’s not like I was a master at editing videos and I’m not that great at it even now. But I learned a lot about editing videos and computer functions that I didn’t really look at before that I had a lot of time to look at while teaching it to the youth. But I think that also changed me . . . What you can do just with basic equipment. And how important these things are. I don’t really think of a camera as being able to do much other than take photos. But we were really able to
change the lives of the youth in this community. And I’m not just saying I changed their lives. I know I changed their lives because they told me. They told me that I was important to them and that this project made them want to study and do things. It’s important.²⁰

Leila learned quite a bit about media and media production during her time in Los Limones. She connects the media project and the program in general to being “life-changing” and connects the program to being progressive because it “made them [the Nicaraguan youth] want to study.”

Here, Leila considers the notion that education is progressive and will better the lives of the involved youth and communities, and that technology can play a role in fostering

Figure 17 AMIGOS Volunteers Maya, Marcus, and Leila, who worked in Los Limones, 2010.

²⁰ Excerpt from an interview with American AMIGOS volunteer Leila, who worked and lived in Los Limones, 2010.
environments where youth want to pursue particular constructs of education and progress. The link between development and education is frequently made by development agencies, and is evidenced in the multiple educational initiatives both IDA and AMIGOS run separately and together, including those with technology components. The youth in Los Limones quickly understood what the media project was about and how they would work within the media project, perhaps because this belief driving the project is familiar. It was stressed that the media equipment, which was donated by AMIGOS to Los Limones, would stay in Los Limones and be used for community purposes as opposed to for individual gain or use. When the youth formed the Media Committee in Los Limones, they took up these ideals and integrated them into their group’s charter. Andres discusses the goals of Media Committee and project in this interview:

Andres: So here’s how it will work. The group will go and record video, if we learn. The group will go, because it is a committee. A union. A community. It is not personal, and individuals do not go. It is plural. For everyone. And so, if someone records something, and someone gets money, I imagine that will go to the fund that stays for another project, as we see necessary in the community

Chelsey: What kinds of projects?

Andres: A basketball court for the kids in the school. It’s a project we will do sometime later, always using our creativity in the community. And the computer. Because if we learn to edit, we can make any video that will catch people’s eye. And if the people like it, they will buy it. And from that point we can go collecting projects that we want to do. Because the media things will stay in the community, so they
can be used. So making a basketball court by saving up from videos, it will work. It is a great thing we are working on. And we won’t have to go to pay to the internet café just to burn a disc. This is a very good thing. 21

Here, Andres explains how he envisions the media program working in Los Limones, chiefly as a way to fundraise for other community projects. It is clear he has understood and is able to negotiate our goal of media for development. The idea behind the media program as Andres explains it, is to be able to raise money for other kinds of projects. For Andres, this project is not a development project itself, but the means to fundraising for and completing more development projects. While for Andres the media project is a fundraising tool, Leila, Marcus, and Maya expressed that they tried to focus the media project around children and adolescents’ rights, which is the main theme of IDA. The AMIGOS media program was formally structured around rights that the Nicaraguan youth elected as important to them prior to the summer program:

Leila: We’ve made a lot of videos, but it’s interesting. We tried to focus on the rights that our AMIGOS project is centered around. The right to education, healthy families, healthy bodies and nutrition and everything. But at the same time, yah, that’s what was planned for us and what the AMIGOS staff wanted us to do. But it [the project] was mostly what the jóvenes [youth] wanted to do. So we kind of just let things play out. But it was interesting to see because when we did our video Amor y Sacrificio, which was a big success, the jóvenes were able to write

21 Excerpt from an interview with Andres, a youth from Los Limones, 2010.
this amazing story and come up with their ideas and it was interesting to see how many rights it covered. And we didn’t tell them: Oh, it needs to be about rights and talk about this. But it was mostly about the right to healthy families and a lot of individual rights. Really interesting.²²

Leila and Andres understand the program differently, though they are participating together and have gone through a number of trainings and workshops together. Leila here also discusses *Amor y Sacrificio* as being written by the youth, even though it was a music video and what they did was build upon the song’s script, adding in a few lines for particular characters. Leila links the video back to multiple rights, but acknowledges that was not the starting place. While many youth participated, Andres was really the individual involved in writing the script and in making decisions about the production of *Amor y Sacrificio*.

Andres imagined the media program to be one that is useful insofar as it supports funding for future community development projects such as a children’s basketball court at the school. When they made *Amor y Sacrificio* for the 48-Hour Video Contest, they won a monetary prize for producing the best social issue video. The youth then made decisions about how to

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*Figure 18 Youth from Los Limones in a community workshop, 2010.*
spend the money they won. Andres’ focus is on these sorts of monetary rewards that will fund other development projects in Los Limones. On the other hand, Leila understands her involvement through the program structure, and the idea that her Latin American peers can become more interested in education and development through media for development and the production of voice. She talks about how she stopped caring about rights in the production of the videos, but is still able to recognize how these universal themes emerged in their videos. Though both videos were re-made from texts in popular culture, she celebrates Latin American youth voice when she notes that “the jóvenes were able to write this amazing story and come up with their ideas.” Leila’s and Andres’s different perspectives on the purpose of the AMIGOS/IDA media program illustrates the complex histories and relationships that propel these youth to produce video together and that structure their collaboration together. Their collaboration and distinct framing of both the videos they make and how they discuss their participation gives us an opportunity to consider the multiple local and global networks youth draw on in order to tell their stories.

La Martina by Villa de Ada

Villa de Ada is a community about 45 minutes off the highway in Boaco that has participated in AMIGOS/IDA programming since 2009. Villa de Ada is heavily involved with IDA programming, and youth from Villa de Ada have historically been very active with AMIGOS. Some youth from Villa de Ada have been volunteers on other AMIGOS programs in other parts of Nicaragua. The media project has been running in Villa de Ada since 2010, but AMIGOS has worked in Villa de Ada since 2009. During the summer of 2011, the youth in Villa de Ada produced a video titled La Martina. La Martina was produced at the end of
their summer work together in 2011, and was a celebration of the project in many ways. Many youth participated in this video, and a newly formed youth committee oversaw its production.

**Participant Demographics in Villa de Ada**

**Table 3 Participants in the AMIGOS-IDA program in the community of Villa de Ada**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Hometown</th>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kara</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Arizona, USA</td>
<td>International Volunteer-AMIGOS; Volunteer-IDA</td>
<td>Kara studied abroad during high school and found AMIGOS because she wanted to spend time in a community in Latin America.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christina</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Boston, United States</td>
<td>International Volunteer-AMIGOS</td>
<td>Christina was recruited via her high school Spanish class.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Julia</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>United States</td>
<td>International Volunteer-AMIGOS</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clemente</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Villa de Ada, Boaco, Nicaragua</td>
<td>Local Volunteer-AMIGOS</td>
<td>Clemente was interested in the AMIGOS program and his mother was involved because she is a teacher; she encouraged him to get involved.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bea</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Villa de Ada,</td>
<td>Local Volunteer-</td>
<td>Bea was recruited by</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pseudonym</td>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Hometown</td>
<td>Role</td>
<td>Notes</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Boaco, Nicaragua</td>
<td>AMIGOS</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sonia</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Villa de Ada, Boaco, Nicaragua</td>
<td>Local Volunteer-AMIGOS</td>
<td>University student in journalism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belia</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Villa de Ada, Boaco, Nicaragua</td>
<td>Local Volunteer-AMIGOS</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dora</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Villa de Ada, Boaco, Nicaragua</td>
<td>Local Volunteer-AMIGOS</td>
<td>Dora really wants to get out of Villa de Ada, however her parents rarely allow her to leave the community or participate in overnight initiatives.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

“La Martina”: The Story

“La Martina” is a Mexican ranchera (a ranchera is traditional Mexican song performed by a solo singer with a guitar that typically tells a story, and dates to the Mexican revolution) written and sung by Mexican singer Antonio Aguilar, who released the song in 1998 for the first time. The story was also produced as a movie in Mexico, by director Rene Cardona Jr. in 1972, so clearly it has been around for a long period of time. Anecdotal evidence suggests that many heard this song and knew this story long before then, though the origins are
unclear. Mexican *rancheros* are very popular in Nicaragua, and often can be heard playing from homes, bars, and cars. Most people know many of these Mexican *rancheros*, especially those sung by stars like Aguilar. Below, youth involved in their reproduction video of this song explain the story:

Sonia: Martina is a girl who is 15. And her parents force her to get married to someone with money. But what they don’t know is that the guy is very jealous. And one year after getting married, the guy wishes he did not marry Martina and he starts asking her all these accusatory questions. And he doesn’t trust her.

Chelsey: Where does the story come from?

Bea: It’s from a song.

Dora: A very popular song. Yes, everyone knows this song. Like Bea said, after a year of being married, he asks her these accusatory questions. There’s one part where he asks, “Who’s horse is this? Who’s watch? And then a gun . . . .

Bea: He thinks someone is sleeping with her, even living in the bed with her while he is away.

Dora: And so she says that in her home, no one is sleeping with her, and no one is even there. But then she goes to her father’s home, but her parents won’t let her in.

Sonia: They won’t let her in, they reject her. Because they had already taken her and given her away in the church during the wedding. And so, the husband comes home and takes Martina to her parents. The won’t do anything because now they
have married her off and she is the responsibility of her husband. He is very angry, and he throws her on the ground. And then he asks her to kneel in front of him. And then he shoots her six times.\(^{23}\)

In “La Martina,”\(^{24}\) the young girl Martina dies not because she is immobile, but because she tries (and fails) to be mobile. Played on the radio in Nicaragua, the song is broadcast in many communities and countries where there are Spanish speakers. It has traversed time and space, and occupies a space on the radio and more recently, on sites like YouTube. In the song and music video, Martina is married off against her will to a much older man because he is wealthy, and her family is impoverished. She is stuck in the house all day, yet her husband accuses her of cheating on him. When she tries to return to her own family, they reject her.

\(^{23}\) Excerpt from a planning session with youth from Villa de Ada as they worked on La Martina, 2011

\(^{24}\) The video the youth made to La Martina can be found here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6S_Ue__Y-f4.
Martina’s husband asks Martina’s father what to do, and Martina’s father refuses responsibility. For a suspected affair, and because she tried to run away to her family home, Martina is shot, execution style, six times in the head. She is both mobile and immobile—she cannot choose her own husband, and when she does move away from this man, she, like the mother in *Amor y Sacrificio*, dies. Martina is shot because of her mobility.
Table 4 Partial Lyrics to “La Martina”

Martina was 15 when she gave me her hand in love
Who’s pistol is this?
Who’s watch is this?
Who’s horse is that in my corral? Screamed her husband

Oh poor Martina
She looked so stupid.
He quieted her then
With hands on her

Kneeling on her knees
Six bullets he put in her
The guy with the horse
Didn’t even return for his saddle.

Note. Produced in 1994 by Antonio Aguilar a Mexican Ranchero singer. The story, set in the
time of the revolution, was told for many years before it was made into a song. Above are
partial lyrics to the song “La Martina,” to which Villa de Ada made a music video. Complete
lyrics can be found here: http://bit.ly/1h0XgqK

The youth in Villa de Ada had a lot of fun producing La Martina, and spent time making the
costumes and sets, and coming up with silly names for all of the characters since, with the
exception of Martina, all are nameless in the song. The production had many characters, and
so many young people were involved, especially in the wedding scene. Even so, the
American volunteers, Kara, Christina, and Julia who did most of the filming were only in the
video briefly as wedding guests. During a group meeting I attended, they explained why:
Chelsey: And are you guys [American AMIGOS volunteers] going to be in the video?

Julia: No

Chelsey: Why not?

Julia: It’s the community’s video

Christina: Yah, it’s the youths’. We are going to film.

Kara: We are going to be people at the wedding.

Chelsey: People at the wedding?

Julia: But we don’t have roles.

Bea: They are just going to be like guests.

Kara: It’s a community project, and so they [the Nicaraguan youth] should be in the movie. But we can be people attending the wedding. But they also want everyone who is on the Media Committee in that scene and we can support and film when its necessary. 25

The American AMIGOS volunteers were very invested in not being in the video precisely because they thought it was their video, the Nicaraguan youths’ video, their story. It is worth considering whether this story is truly theirs, whether this story—a Mexican folklore song

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25 Excerpt from a longer conversation about how the final project was progressing in Villa de Ada, 2011
reproduced by Nicaraguan youth decades after its making—can really be considered to be theirs. This story has traveled over time and space to end up in Villa de Ada’s production of “La Martina,” and yet, the programmatic focus on voice is taken up by the American volunteers when they discuss La Martina. It is interesting this story—a Mexican ranchero—gets fixed as the voice of Nicaraguan youth when American volunteers discuss their project using AMIGOS program language. The American volunteers shot most of the video, framing the scenes, and literally, deciding what got into the video and what did not. They talk about this decision as a result of the fact that all the Nicaraguan youth were in the video. While Bea, Sonia, and Dora, young women from Villa de Ada, were consistently present in the editing process and involved in decisions about how to organize scenes and where to cut video, it’s the minuscule, gritty decisions that Julia, Christina, and Kara were making without even considering them—decisions such as where to stand while shooting a scene, and when to start the music that come together to shape the story and our experience of La Martina.
Youth draw from familiar cultural narratives and development discourse in order to make sense of what kinds of stories could be both “fun” and fit squarely into the development programs. They draw on program language such as voice and program values such as centralizing Latin American youth voice when they discuss their video with me; it would seem this kind of discursive positioning would signal their success to me, as the Project Director. Here, cultural narratives like popular songs function alongside development discourse to inscribe lived realities, and when we assign those stories as “the” stories of certain youth in the name of civic engagement, we limit the multiple ways youth can be understood in the world.

Civic Engagement in Villa de Ada

The youth in Villa de Ada struggled, during the first year of the program, and during the
interim time between summer programs, to manage the media equipment. After the first summer, the youth leaders planned on rotating the equipment between the homes of two youth leaders—Bea and Clemente—two very involved youth who both come from prominent families. Bea’s family owns the only store in the community and her parents are very involved with IDA, and Clemente’s mother, Aurelia, is the schoolteacher in Villa de Ada. For reasons that are unclear, and that no one seems to agree on, the media equipment was never moved from Aurelia and Clemente’ home into Bea and her family’s home, and both families—and many of the other community members—were angry about the way things turned out, as I describe in this field note:

The computer situation in Villa de Ada is a mess. There is a major fight going on between two families about where to keep the computer equipment—the main people involved are Clemente and his mother Aurelia, the schoolteacher, and Bea and her family. It was supposed to move between these two homes. It’s been at Aurelia’s all year, though, and everyone says she only lets her son Clemente and his friends use it. She is very worried about lending it out and it getting broken, and then her having to pay to cover the costs. She does not have the funds to pay for a broken computer, and does not have the technical skills to check the computer each time it is returned. There are many rumors that Clemente takes the computer to school in Teustepe every day. When we left the media equipment last year, we were very clear that this was to be a community media resource, and not for individual use. IDA really wants
us to work on this with the community this year, so it doesn’t happen again. Untangling the rumors and the accusations is a challenge, and I think it might be better if we back out of this discussion and let the Community Development Committee be in charge. They want to form a committee of youth to manage this.  

In 2011, the concerns over where to store the media equipment were a major focus of AMIGOS work in Villa de Ada, and eventually, the youth formed a media committee and asked the Community Development Committee to help them identify homes to store the equipment in on a monthly basis throughout the different neighborhoods in Villa de Ada. AMIGOS and IDA had a role in creating this awkward and challenging situation when we selected Villa de Ada as a community where we would run the media project. We initiated a series of relationships in which AMIGOS/IDA was entangled, that caused stress, challenges, and bad feeling in Villa de Ada. Villa de Ada was selected because there is electricity in Villa de Ada, and because there are a number of very involved youth and a history of successful initiatives in Villa de Ada. Even so, youth had trouble finding people who were willing to let them charge the equipment from their outlets. When the Community Development Committee accepted the opportunity to participate, they offered to support the youth participants and oversee how the media equipment was stored and used during the

26 Excerpt from a field note about community visits before the youth program began, 2011.

27 In all IDA communities, the Community Development Committee (CDC) is responsible for overseeing community progress and leading initiatives. The CDC receives training and support from IDA.
year. The IDA/AMIGOS media program was attractive to the community because they were working on a broad development plan and considered having access to computer equipment—and possibly to the Internet in the future—would be very useful. They immediately accepted, because the media equipment would all be donated to the community at the end of the project. While the youth were always excited about the media program and in participating, there was consistently significant tension between community leaders, youth participants, and IDA/AMIGOS around what the youth should and could produce, and much time was spent “managing” youth productions so that they were about development. There were also many arguments between AMIGOS and IDA about what was appropriate or not for the media production.

*La Martina* was the last piece the youth made during the 2011 summer program with
AMIGOS/IDA, and before the production of this video there was quite a bit of tension about what the youth could produce, what was appropriate to produce, and how the production would relate to and interact with the ongoing development projects in the community. At the time of production of *La Martina*, the tension had significantly calmed. During the production of *La Martina*, the youth justified their making what basically amounts to a music video as an opportunity to explore early marriage and hold workshops for girls and their families about not getting married in the teen years. Gender, constructed as it was by youth participants as an issue, was understood to be an appropriate topic by all bodies involved in the oversight of Villa de Ada’s media program. IDA works on gender issues in other areas of their work, including a program especially for girls that addresses issues like sexual health, sexuality, marriage, and other relevant topics—it is likely that this group of youth knew that these sorts of issues would be considered “development” and thus appropriate, by IDA and AMIGOS.

**Sustainability and Media Use in Villa de Ada**

In Villa de Ada, AMIGOS and IDA have been running a variety of programs, including the youth media program, for multiple years. Like Los Limones, the equipment in Villa de Ada languished without use after the first summer of the program. There was significant strife over how and who was allowed to use the media equipment in Villa de Ada, a disagreement that resulted, more than anything, in lack of use of the media equipment at all. The youth, in 2011, came together and formed a media committee, and were excited about participating in the program, especially when they made *La Martina*. Even so, it was challenging for the AMIGOS volunteers to imagine the youth in Villa de Ada using the computers and cameras
after their departure. Sustainability was heavily stressed to the volunteers with regard to their projects during their yearlong training with AMIGOS. Sustainability is especially stressed to AMIGOS Volunteers because of historical colonial and unsustainable programming AMIGOS and IDA have led in the past. Even so, in the interview excerpt below the AMIGOS volunteers in Villa de Ada wondered if the media production program was sustainable at all.

Julia: And the computers. They’re really interested and they . . . I feel like it’s kind of like they think that someone’s taking an interest in them and giving them the power to express themselves. But I can’t imagine them just being like: Guys we’re going to create a video about water problems affecting the community. So I think that they feel more empowered but that they lack the motivation, almost, to use the tools that they have.

Christina: Yeah, I feel like it’s a really great project while we’re here. But I don’t really see it being all that sustainable. Just because it takes a lot from us to get them motivated. But once they were motivated and once we started the 48-hour challenge they were really into it.

Julia: Really into it.

Christina: But talking about it the days before they were like: Yeah, maybe . . .

Kara: They were like: We don’t want to write a script. We just want to write down ideas. Once we get into it they like it but I don’t see them starting any projects themselves.
Julia: They don’t really like to plan.

Kara: No they like to get there and try it.

Julia: I can see them using the media though for like . . . . even already while we’re here people have taken the cameras and taken pictures of the IDA project. Just for their own use.

Chelsey: Do you guys use the printer?

Kara: It’s still in the box because we don’t know where to put it or what to do with it.

Julia: Yah, we don’t want to use it at Bertha’s, so . .

Kara: It’s just kind of chilling in the box.

Christina: They said that the equipment was going to stay at our house until we left. So we could probably use it at Bertha’s. But we also wanted to talk to the youth about if we’re going to charge to use it or what they think about that.

Kara: The ink is expensive. 28

In this interview, Julia, Kara, and Christina reflect on the challenges of collaborating on the media project with their Nicaraguan peers. They faced challenges getting youth involved and moving beyond the arguments in Villa de Ada about where to store the media equipment and

28 Excerpt from an interview with Kara, Christina, and Julia, three American youth working and living in Villa de Ada, 2011.
about who would be able to use the equipment. In the 48-Hour Video Contest in the beginning of the summer, these youth produced a video that won third place in the program, and they got, as a prize, a computer printer. However, three weeks later the computer printer had not been removed from its box, and sat in their bedroom, unopened, and unused. Julia discusses the media equipment and its sustainability, and states that she “can’t imagine” the youth using the computer equipment without the American girls as an impetus, that she can’t imagine them taking the media equipment out simply to tell a story. The material presence of the unused media equipment brings the unsustainable nature of the youth program into clarity because there was an object that, when unused, physically represents un/sustainability and the unfair relationships between communities and the non-profit. Other AMIGOS/IDA programs, aware of this issue, have eliminated all material donations or program tools. While this results in no object to signal colonial practices, the practices and educational focus remain the same. It may be easier to distance oneself, programmatically, from colonial practices when there is not a technological object that embodies colonialism, however they maintain presence in discourse and relationality.

Discussion

Repurposing Popular Culture for Socially Engaged Media Narratives

The youth who made Amor y Sacrificio, Pocohantas, and La Martina, repurposed cultural narratives in order to participate in development and civic engagement initiatives. These three videos were crafted from multiple narratives that moved through complex transnational radio, TV, and Internet networks (Appadurai, 1996). These are stories that move, and that are mobilized for production because they are fun, familiar, and exciting. During the time the
program ran, these re-purposed stories provided an exciting, engaging way for youth to participate in the media program. When the youth encounter and re-produce these stories, they weave them into local cultural fabric and in doing so they shift these stories, reframing them from their own cultural contexts. They mold them so that they fit into the discourses of development and civic engagement that define the AMIGOS/IDA media program.

For Tsing (2005), what is constitutively global is the encounter between universal ideas like rights and local realities. The global is where universals and local realities crash together producing friction and sparks. Friction should not be confused with resistance, but rather, as the encounter and the production of meaning in the encounter. The AMIGOS/IDA media program was built around IDA’s focus on children’s and adolescents’ rights. Rights are universal seemingly neutral statements about how youth should live, and are given form, shape, and reality in the youths’ media pieces. Through the production of La Martina, Amor y Sacrificio, and Pocahontas, the youth came together under the rights-based programmatic structure to make media. The media they actually produced articulated familiar cultural narratives available to them through global media networks. They took these familiar narratives and molded them to the rights-based structure AMIGOS/IDA were reinforcing. In participating this way, they situated themselves as part of a global network of transnational storytelling. While the program emphasized personal storytelling, the youth, for the most part, turned away from this call to produce about social issues in their own lives. On the other hand, it could be argued that the personal social issues the youth might have chosen are already reflected in texts from popular culture.

Los Limones’ video production process of Pocohontas illustrates how young people come
together and the various power dynamics they engage as they produce. The Nicaraguan youth were excited about producing something similar to *Ojo por Ojo*, especially because they saw that, like the characters in *Ojo por Ojo*, they were in a racially diverse friendship with the AMIGOS volunteers. The relationship between the AMIGOS volunteers and the Nicaraguan youth are, like the relationships in *Ojo por Ojo* and *Pocahontas*, racially diverse. Two volunteers were white, one was Latina from urban Nicaragua, and the local youth from Los Limones were all of *mestizo* descent. With these kinds of relationships present in their lives, it is not surprising that the youth from Los Limones decided to produce something similar. They saw their own experiences reflected in pop culture. It was in the discussion of a video about a friendship or relationship that crossed racial lines that the American youth suggested the story sounded like *Pocahontas* to them, and that they could just re-make *Pocahontas*.

The cultural reference point for a race-based story was a Disney movie about conquest and colonialism for the American youth, but it is a story Disney also remade. While in the historical version, Pocahontas was a child of twelve who did not have a romantic relationship of any sort with Smith, Disney portrayed her as a young woman in a romanticized relationship (Edwards, 1999). Disney understands this story as a narrative about diverse cultures getting along, and in telling it as such they craft particular versions of multiculturalism in which race plays out in specific, non-threatening ways, and is tied together with gender. The songs that tell the story in Disney’s film centralize cross cultural understanding and respect, but the songs and the centrality of the romantic coupling minimize the issues of race, gender, and colonialism that arise in the name of peaceful multiculturalism (Edgerton & Jackson, 1996). In many ways, the *Pocahontas* narrative is
similar to the volunteers’ experience going to a new country and making friends with people radically different from themselves, especially because of the benevolent program that they come with: they bring resources for local communities, who then get to participate in decisions about how those resources are used. Both Pocahontas and the AMIGOS program shy away from colonialism by focusing on a language of friendship and partnership. As in the film, language distracts attention from some issues in order to centralize the ideas of youth leadership and partnership, empowerment, and community based solutions.

In the production of Pocahontas, we see how the group of Nicaraguan and American youths brainstorm drawing on cultural narratives and their own realities (soap operas, movies, friendships, programs present in their lives), and then the literal framing of those ideas from the cultural perspective of the American youth. The Nicaraguan youth drew from popular media narratives a story about two racialized lovers; the American youth drew from their own media narratives—Disney, in this case—to frame their peers’ ideas on race. The Nicaraguan youth had never even seen Pocahontas before deciding to produce their video. They did not argue about how to choose this storyline, nor was there friction when the American youth suggested framing the story on race as Pocahontas. On the contrary, they were excited to remake Pocahontas, which the Nicaraguan youth saw playing out in Ojo por Ojo and in their lives and friendships with the AMIGOS volunteers. However, the subtleties, when youth come together to produce and frame particular ideas from particular standpoints, make for an interesting set of relationship dynamics in international youth media production. Through the mainstream media, the youth are exposed to stories that seem every day and that inform colonial and racialized relationships in their present form. The interaction between
these global stories and the youth production process is a kind of friction, where there is no resistance between or among the youth, but there is a negotiation of meaning and framing of story that can be understood vis-à-vis the historical relationships in play within the program, and the local and global relationships that make it possible. The program is possible because particular North American youth can move about the world, and because of their participation in a non-profit enterprise that focuses on youth leadership and development and does so by partnering North American youth with communities in the global South. This particular kind of movement is especially valued in North American circles where global civic engagement is popular.

Voice and Colonialism: Pocahontas

In the three videos discussed in this chapter, the Latin American youth are, for the most part, the actors in the videos, the bodies that appear on screen and the voices that tell the story. In Pocahontas, the white volunteers play the roles of the English settlers and the youth from Los Limones are the indigenous people they encounter. The Nicaraguan volunteer, Maya, plays the lead role of Pocahontas. In La Martina, the three white AMIGOS volunteers are briefly in the video as guests at the wedding ceremony, and in Amor y Sacrificio, the AMIGOS volunteers do not appear at all, except for in the credits. The mostly white and mostly North American AMIGOS volunteers often justify their absence from the screen by explaining that these are their stories, the stories of Nicaraguan youth, and that the AMIGOS volunteers want to empower their Nicaraguan peers by staying out of the spotlight. This is an attitude that has been documented in development workers who, wary of being part of the neo-colonial development project, focus on participatory approaches and make significant
effort to evidence how they value local knowledge and work in partnership with locals, showing they are not practicing colonialism (Mckinnon, 2006). However, the focus on voice and personal storytelling complicates the attempt to untangle development practice from colonialism. Youth collaborate on a storytelling project, but the American youth erase their participation in the name of valuing their Nicaraguan peers’ voice. However, what is lost when the American youths’ voice is not recognized as central is both that the story is situated in overlapping cultural contexts, and that the role of the North American youth and their cultural reference points were significant in creating these particular media narratives. The visible participation of North American youth is important because it illustrates the collaboration between youth and ownership over the story by both North and Latin American youth as opposed to being symbolic of Latin American youth voice alone. However, acknowledging or foregrounding this collaboration would leave no discursive space for the sort of participatory language that allows development agencies, organizations, and workers to situate themselves as undoing colonialism and/or oppressive development practice.

Both Pocahontas and Ojo por Ojo are cultural and pedagogical stories about race, gender, and relationality in the world. Pocahontas depicts the good white man, coming to search for riches but ultimately becoming involved in brokering peace between the white men and the Native Americans through his relationship with Pocahontas. In this story, there is a good, friendly white man who falls in love with a Native American girl and he works with people to make peace. He is a man who can move about the world easily and freely. The parallels between the North American AMIGOS volunteers’ ability to move about freely and create relationships that foster social good are striking. Both AMIGOS and IDA shy away from
very political language such as social justice, turning instead to more benign language such as social issues. This orientation to youth work in communities in the global South does not address these deep inequalities around what kind of movement is possible for diverse youth, nor does it challenge the colonial, racist, misogynistic histories of media programs and development organizations. On the contrary, moving away from political language obscures that history of colonialism through the promotion of friendly, benevolent encounters. These friendly encounters maintain a role for the development agency in international community development. However, they fail to challenge the transnational relationships that have created the need for development agencies in the first place.

Both *Ojo por Ojo* and Disney’s *Pocahontas*, the two cultural narratives the youth discussed when they were preparing to make their video in Los Limones, are media scripts that have traveled transnationally, becoming cultural narratives in diverse settings that are then taken up by the youth in the name of civic engagement. *Pocahontas* is a story about the control and conquest of indigenous bodies and land, especially and literally, over Pocahontas’ body. In both Disney’s *Pocahontas* and in the AMIGOS/IDA program, white bodies move about the world under a language of friendship, and although the circumstances are different, what is obscured is white participation in the colonial situation. Los Limones’ version of *Pocahontas* was an initial video project that carried the goal of getting young people excited to participate in the media project. The reproduction of both *Ojo por Ojo* and *Pocahontas* in Los Limones’ *Pocahontas* and the production events that led up to it repurposes a familiar narrative of colonialism that centralizes racist and misogynistic discourse in the name of civic engagement and participation. The question remains though, participation in what?
Both *Ojo por Ojo* and *Pocahontas* are narratives that suggest that groups are historically segregated and that it is the white settler who is able to move into indigenous spaces and conquer both land and female bodies. We see here, how the pursuit of civic engagement narratives is so easily and frequently tied to popular narratives of colonialism and racism because youth repurpose stories from popular cultural narratives. Youth draw on narratives from pop culture because that is what they know. These are the available stories from which they have learned how to tell stories. Certainly, it is not the case that these young people set out to make racist, misogynistic, or colonial narratives; rather, these are the stories available to them about race in popular culture. Even as youth media programs hope to give young people the tools to deconstruct these narratives and imagine different possibilities, it is quite a challenge to be able to think outside of the narratives and knowledge based in popular culture. The focus on local knowledge does not produce “their” stories or voice; rather it denies the relationships between youth and transnational popular culture. In order to consider what might be outside of these frameworks youth likely need to move beyond discursive structures of participation; yet the participatory language that is so necessary in order to make the non-profit model productive and able to produce resources does not allow them to do so.

**Ownership Over Story in Transnational Media Networks**

Like *Pocahontas*, both *Amor y Sacrificio* and *La Martina* come into being because of the transnational media networks that propel the narratives around the world. Both videos are set to the stories of popular songs. *Amor y Sacrificio* journeyed from a poet’s writing in Nicaragua to, about three decades later, the sounds of a popular band in Costa Rica, and then back again to Nicaragua and elsewhere in Latin America via radio and on burned CDs. While
some knew of the poem already, its fame exploded when it was recorded as a song by a Costa Rican group, and now it is a song frequently shared in public venues on Mothers’ Day to honor mothers.

In “200 Pesos,” the song that the youth repurposed for the video Amor y Sacrificio, we see how gender roles are framed in available pop culture narratives. The mother in the story is honored because she doesn’t move—she can’t. She works to the bone, saving and sending money to her son who is a medical student. She is consistently and repeatedly immobilized. Again and again throughout the story, education is positioned as the pathway out of poverty, and it is a pathway boys move on while women sacrifice to make that movement possible. This dynamic, in which women (particularly mothers) sacrifice movement so that boys can attain resources and participate in the public sphere, is compounded by the fact that the resources in this story are located in the global North—the boy must go away to the US to get his medical education. This story sets up the idea that if you work hard enough, triumph is around the corner, affirming the colonial notion reinforced by contemporary global economic practices that resources are located in the Global North and that it is the individual who carries the responsibility of failure to access those resources. The popular belief that if only you work hard enough you will be able to rise out of poverty is an organizing mechanism of “200 Pesos.”

For the mother, the consequence of immobility is death: in the end of the movie, she dies, money in hand, and is buried before she even gets to see her son return from his degree program, now a doctor. Those that are not mobile, die. The message here is that you cannot survive in the contemporary global economic pathways and networks unless you can be
mobile. Others have written about how globalization and the related economic structures make it even more necessary for folks in the global South to travel longer and longer distances in order to access resources. The stories available for youth to draw on for their own media productions consistently situate only particular bodies as being able to move (male, white, non-indigenous, from the global North). Likewise, these are the kinds of bodies officially allowed to move in program structures and through national and international visa regulations. “200 Pesos” reflects these limitations, as does the youths’ production of Amor y Sacrificio. It is interesting that the youth rename this video, noting that the mother made this sacrifice for her son out of love.

These stories are not the youths’ own. Rather, youth draw them from the networks of transnational popular culture that they participate in as they consume songs, poems, movies, and TV shows. Yet, even though all three of these stories can be traced back to cultural texts, there is an insistence that they constitute the Nicaraguan youth voice. This insistence on the production of voice blinds us to the origin of the stories. Tying them through voice to Latin American youth is problematic because it links particular stories about immobility, misogyny, and racism to Nicaraguan youth without emphasizing the ways that American youth participate in crafting those stories. The American youth involved in this program insisted on not showing themselves in the videos as actors because the stories belonged to the Nicaraguan youth involved, and it seems as though they believed their presence in the video artifact as a role-playing character would take away from their Nicaraguan peers’ experiences of voice and empowerment. The AMIGOS Volunteers learned to do development this way from AMIGOS pedagogy. During training for the AMIGOS program it was emphasized that
AMIGOS volunteers should not take up too much space, and that their projects should be executed in partnership with local youth. In these videos, though, we see an interesting erasure of their involvement at all. In all three videos, the American AMIGOS volunteers understood the story’s ownership to belong to the Nicaraguan youth. As a result, the American youth stayed mostly behind the scenes, pointing cameras, making costumes, and editing videos. In doing so, they fulfilled the AMIGOS program expectations to centralize Latin American youth voice and youth leadership.

What is troubling about assigning these stories drawn from popular culture to particular bodies in the name of civic engagement that emphasizes partnership but centralizes Nicaraguan youth voice is that assumptions about the kind of experiences and lives led by Nicaraguan young people becomes fixed to particular narratives of popular culture where race, gender, and poverty are essentialized. As this narrative becomes fixed to particular bodies, racism, misogyny, and colonialism are reinforced even as critical pedagogy attempts to dismantle inequity. These are not stories drawn from the lives of the Nicaraguan youth directly, but stories re-crafted from transnational media companies. The way in which power relations are mapped in popular culture, from which young people draw inspiration for their stories, sets up relationships between development agencies, youth organizations, and communities in the global South. These relationships function to allow for particular bodies, ideas, and resources from the global North to move about the global South in the name of doing civic engagement. Likewise, these relationships are set up such that people in the global South are positioned as in need of receiving progressive development through the civic engagement model. The white AMIGOS volunteers disown the video stories made from
pop culture and their participation in re/creating these videos in order to successfully situate themselves as not oppressing their Latin American peers by patterning colonial relations and telling them what to do. Yet, removing themselves entirely from the picture fixes the popular narratives as the life story of their Latin American peers.

Thinking Through Movement: Popular Culture and Development

Civic engagement is understood as the capacity to enact and support progressive changes in one’s own life and community (Mohamed & Wheeler, 2001). Practically speaking, in community development, this means being able to call meetings, organize committees, and ask for resources. It means being able to write grants and go to the hardware store to ask for discounts on materials. In media production, civic engagement means being able to use media to tell stories important to young people in order to move others and in doing so enact change. Civic engagement requires being able to move and being able to move others to participate in initiatives in particular ways. This kind of engagement in the world is predicated on a healthy public sphere that depends on participation in order to maintain robustness and continuously evolve. Civic engagement is understood to be local such as when youth moves local governments, businesses, other communities and other individuals to participate in their endeavors. Civic engagement relies on the ability of people and ideas to move, and people’s ability to move others to participate.

How youth think about movements that constitute civic engagement is shaped by popular culture narratives, the values of international development agencies, and the kinds of programs available for youth to do civic engagement. The desire for youth to move in these ways that symbolize civic engagement does not necessarily account for the complexities of
movement along historical, colonial, raced, and gendered lines. *Amor y Sacrificio*, *Pocahontas*, and *La Martina* illustrate the complexities of being able to move about public spaces and *do* civic engagement, just as how they are situated in and draw from global mediascapes illustrates the problems with assigning them to be the “voice” of any particular youth or group of youth. Movement, and being able to move, is one productive way to think about how power happens, and the multiple ways in which young people are continuously situated in and by the programs they participate in and communities and spaces to which they belong.

*Amor y Sacrificio*, *Pocahontas*, and *La Martina* are all stories about people who move in particular ways in order to attain resources. In *Amor y Sacrificio*, the young man goes to the U.S. in order to study medicine on a fellowship, and comes back clearly wealthy, wearing a suit and carrying a bunch of red roses for his mother. In *Pocahontas*, John Smith and his crew are on a voyage searching for resources. In the end, John Smith returns home to England because he needs medical resources. However, he promises to return to continue his affair with Pocahontas and to explore the lands. He is the one able to move while she and her indigenous community are unable to move. He will return to continue his conquest both of her body and of the land. In *La Martina*, Martina is married off because her family needs more resources, and she is another mouth to feed. Her attempts to leaving her husband to feel safe in her parent’s home are unsuccessful, and ultimately the consequence for her attempted movement is death. In each story, the resources are located away from those who need them: with men, in the global North, outside of indigenous communities. To access resources, one must move. In both stories, marginalized communities of color are configured in relation to a
friendly benefactor who provides resources and paths of mobility. In *Pocahontas*, that person is John Smith; in *Amor y Sacrificio*, the United States is the benevolent government that offers fellowships to deserving students. In *La Martina*, when the young bride tries to have power over her own mobility, she is killed.

The dynamic in which resources and mobility are located in figures of power is also present in the AMIGOS/IDA media program. In the AMIGOS/IDA media program the flow of resources is adjoined with the flow of North American youth into Latin American communities. Participation in the program means that the AMIGOS volunteers bring with them cameras and computers for media projects, which will be donated, to the communities. Certainly, AMIGOS and IDA have worked hard to partner with communities, to encourage participatory decision-making, and to arrange relationships so that communities are in charge. However, the fact remains that it is through participation in this program that communities attain resources like media equipment and funding for community based projects. There is a dynamic here in which resources both flow into communities and become stagnant upon their arrival or after the official program ends. Yet, AMIGOS/IDA focuses on language that celebrates local resources and solutions, and local leadership and participation. For the communities, the media program often represents access to tools that will enable them to participate in discourses and practices of development and communication of which they were previously left outside. However, in many communities the media equipment becomes dormant for a wide range of reasons at the end of the summer program, including lack of funds for repair and little knowledge about how to use computers. The media project, when it functions, is most often a tool for fundraising during the time when AMIGOS
volunteers are gone, if it is used at all.

When the Nicaraguan youth consider the media project, they talk about it in terms of being a support structure to fundraise for other kinds of projects such as basketball courts and bus stops and other projects. For them, this project is not a development project in and of itself. They do not consider the production of voice through media to constitute development, but rather, that the production of artifacts is one strategy they can draw on in order to raise more funds for other projects. This is an interesting disconnect between American youth participants, Nicaraguan youth participants, and the organizations. AMIGOS and IDA both understand the production of voice that interrogates social issues and concerns to be integral to the development process, with IDA urging communities and youth to document their development processes and projects in order to create a record and in order to be able to use this documentation as support in applying for funding in the future. Likewise, almost all the funding for this project was attained by situating the project as an opportunity for youth to produce media about their lives because their voices are frequently left out of mainstream media. This discord about the underlying driving force of the media production program for different constituents probably caused a significant amount of the friction about which youth were allowed to produce what, and what sorts of video projects should be made with the donated media equipment. However, given that for Nicaraguan youth, the video projects represent a source of possible income, it makes sense that they draw on popular cultural narratives that people will be interested in watching and buying. The media project becomes a way to move and channel funds into particular projects. For these youth, being able to participate and move within the public sphere is economically fueled. Without funds, they
are unable to participate in the public sphere that is shaped through development programs and needs. Participating civically in the development-based public sphere has more to do with economic needs and resources than with debate and conversation over issues. Not to participate becomes challenging in this set-up, because it is to deny oneself and/or one’s community access to resources. Participation becomes a particular kind of economic mobility, and not to participate becomes a privilege, as I will address in Chapter 4.

**Discourses of Local and Global in Youth Media Production**

It is clear that when young people take up popular cultural narratives in their media productions, they situate themselves within broad transnational networks of culture, globalization, and media. They do this from within the circumscribed development context, which has, in recent decades, been intensely focused on local particularities and needs in response to the colonial accusations that development doesn’t pay attention to particularity and local community context. AMIGOS and IDA often aim to empower young people and to facilitate community development through participatory practices that emphasize participation in the public sphere and focus on local practices and dynamics. The organizations provide patterns of local mobility for youth to engage the public sphere in particular ways. For example, youth become mobile by working with government officials on a running water project or petitioning a private company to fund a reforestation project. These local movements and initiatives are important for youth and communities; however, they don’t address the transnational relationships that shape poverty, race, gender, and other social issues. The focus on the local and on doing development in ways that emphasize local practices, people, and issues circumscribes “development” to local communities. Doing so
conceals global ties and investments in maintaining colonial systems from the West.

Circumscribing development locally and not attending to the web of transnational relationships in which youth are situated obscures the historically colonial relationships that bind communities to development organizations. It also is not realistic: youth produce from within transnational networks, re-telling stories they know, and these are the stories they know because of increasingly interconnected media networks. While circumscribing development to the local addresses some of the concerns of imperialism by focusing on local issues, it denies the possibility of transnational organizing that would recognize the multiple links between youth from the global North and global South, in which both parts of the world have responsibility for the contemporary situation. Importantly, circumscribing development to the local leaves little room for transnational popular culture, despite the fact that transnational pop culture is a site from which young people could consider their lives from within the context of globalization.

There is much hopefulness around the production of voice and its perceived link to public and civic engagement. The idea here is that youth will engage critically with the world and imagine new possibilities and arrangements of power when they are engaged in socially oriented media production. What is a challenge in this configuration is imagining something different at all. The building blocks of media storytelling are found in popular culture and in mainstream media, it is no wonder young people draw on these narratives as they are what they know. Youth are surrounded by and immersed in stories of racism, misogyny, and colonialism. It is this encounter between transnational stories and youth, and local realities and local practices of media production in which new power relations are produced: youth
frame each other’s work through their own cultural points of reference. They engage popular narratives and negotiate colonial patterns of domination by removing certain voices from the stories they tell about their own media production. These are the relationships and relations of production that make this program constitutively global in the sense Tsing (2005) offers, which is that the interaction between transnational stories like *Pocahontas, La Martina,* and *Amor y Sacrificio* and local, lived realities indicates engagement with both local and global discursive realities. For rural Nicaraguan youth and for American youth in rural Nicaragua, who have been immersed in localist development models, imagining something outside of what is, outside of the kinds of stories that permeate their lives is outrageously challenging.

The youth from Los Limones and Villa de Ada refuse public programming that is tied to localism by re-producing texts from popular culture that situate them within transnational relationships between communities and people. These stories are important sites at which to consider what kind of political work is achieved by reading voice-of-youth stories. As we see in the desire to read local voice of these pieces, the tendency to localize shifts the onus to solve community injustices away from transnational companies and relationships that are at the root of injustice, and onto local communities and youth. Dean’s (2009) warns that to tell stories that are more about media participation instead of the issues themselves serves to distract from political action around the issues that arise in the stories, like gender, race, and colonialism. While media programming is of significant importance in the lives of young people, it is the stories they tell and how they are connected to issues in their own experiences in transnational youthscesses, and to histories of development, participation, and colonialism that will be an important site for further study.
Chapter 4: Gender, Media Pedagogy and Development Practice

“Young women are a good investment, they can be trusted with micro-credit, they are the privileged subjects of social change. But the terms of these great expectations on the part of governments are that young women must do without more autonomous feminist politics. What is consistent is the displacement of feminism as a political movement.” (McRobbie, 2009, p. 15).

Introduction

As part of their work together, the youth participants in the AMIGOS/IDA program identify and produce media about social issues. Again and again, they elect to produce media about gender, crafting videos about women who cannot work, girls who don’t attend school, women who are physically abused, girls who are married or pregnant in their teen years, and mothers who work themselves to death to send their sons to school. In this chapter I advance an argument that examines the emergence of gender as a social issue that the youth who
came together to produce media in the AMIGOS/IDA program frequently chose to address. I address the multiple ways that those learning encounters in which gender emerged as a social issue are structured through post-feminist sensibilities and located in a particular time-space continuum in rural Latin America, where gender is widely understood to be a form of marginalization. To do so, I consider the post-feminist conditions, the relationships of colonialism in development practice, and the AMIGOS/IDA youth media program focus on social issues and rights pedagogy, in order to understand how media, gender, and development intersect in the context of youth-led development programming. I argue that rights-based pedagogy and the post-feminist political climate that pervades youth development practice, together produce a situation in which gender emerges as a viable “social issue” for youth to address in a media for development program in rural Nicaragua.

Intensive globalization means some people have easier, more rapid access to resources of all kinds, and it also means that the inverse is true for others. Many of those others for whom globalization does not mean easy, rapid, access are in the global South. Those most affected by globalization in ways that are harmful are:

Girls and women around the world, especially in the Third World/South . . . [who] bear the brunt of globalization. Poor women and girls are the hardest hit by the degradation of environmental conditions, wars, famines, privatization of services and deregulation of governments, the dismantling of welfare states, the restructuring of paid and unpaid work, increasing surveillance and incarceration in prisons, and so on. (Mohanty, 2002, p. 514)

Development agencies know this, and IDA runs many programs specifically for girls and
women. In the global South, women’s ability to access education and resources is directly linked to addressing issues of poverty and community development (Cornwall & Edwards, 2010). Development agencies provide girls with school support and emphasize strengthening women’s community organizations and leadership activities (Grabska, 2011; King, Sintes, & Alemu, 2012), yet rarely do they examine their own institutionalized discrimination practices (Grabska, 2011; Sandler & Rao, 2012). Development agencies construct gender as an issue in communities in the global South that must be dealt with to achieve equality. Gender programs in the global South tend to focus on issues of empowerment, agency, and access to education, financial resources, and community leadership (Kabeer, 2005). These programs focus most of their attention on girls and women, obscuring the ways in which men and boys are implicated in and affected by gender relations and reinforcing a gender binary that designates people as either man or woman. Interestingly, AMIGOS rarely addresses gender issues, even though program participants from both North and Latin America are almost exclusively young women, and even though many of the organizations, like IDA, with whom AMIGOS partners run girl-specific programming.

In development practice, gender is addressed by including women in decisions, meetings, and committees (Grabska, 2011), yet this sort of invited participation is often wished upon rural people. The assumption is that everyone—including women—would participate if possible, yet

[p]articipation cannot merely be reclaimed or wished upon rural people in the Third World; it must begin by recognizing the powerful, multi-dimensional, and in many instances, anti-participatory forces that dominate the lives of rural people. Centuries
of domination and subservience will not disappear overnight just because we have
“discovered” the concept of participation. (Cornwall, 2008 p. 281)

While it is generally understood that people need ownership over their own processes of empowerment, “the fact that women’s pathways of empowerment are pursued under conditions that are not of their own choosing” (Cornwall & Edwards, 2010, p. 2) is overlooked. In their pursuit of participatory discourses and practices, “development agencies often evoke images of empowered and autonomous subjects, able to choose, make and shape their own directions. . . . In reality, very few of us have the capacity to make independent choices and follow them through” (Cornwall & Edwards, 2010, p. 2). Images of empowered women in the global South have replaced images of women who are pregnant and powerless (Mohanty, 1991; Cornwall & Edwards, 2010) as these kinds of values around empowerment and individual agency take hold. Development discourse on gender is framed through rights language that consistently constructs gender as “women” and women as marginalized but happy subjects of good investment.

In North America, the post-feminist climate has come to dominate an understanding of gender in which girls in the modern/first world have access to resources in exchange for being thankful and for abandoning a critique of patriarchy because progress has afforded girls so many opportunities. Post-feminism produces a situation where gender difference is understood as an issue progressive societies have solved, and as such, gender becomes an issue particular to the global South (Minh-ha, 1987; Mohanty, 1991). A functional role for the content North American girl in relation to her peers in the global South becomes one of advocacy (McRobbie, 2009). That is to say, gender matters, over there, for them. Helping
functions as a dominant and constitutive mode of relationality, eliminating the need for anger or critique of capitalist patriarchy and ensuring that it is very hard to conceptualize of a transnational movement around gender. It becomes hard to imagine a transnational movement around gender precisely because the state becomes responsible for providing and protecting gender rights, meaning that it is either that a girl needs to demand her rights or that the government is failing in providing and protecting rights when girls are marginalized. Gender, then, becomes an issue based in individuality and in the relationship between the state and the girl, as opposed to an urgent transnational issue. Girls’ involvement in public processes and helping becomes a symbol of social progress (Spivak, 1999). A celebratory culture around helping and a related vision of the girl as a good investment functions so that refusing to participate positions girls as bad citizens.

Questions

Like other development agencies and programs, the AMIGOS/IDA media program facilitates media literacy for development; however, there is an absence of research on how the production of media about gender as a social issue is shaped pedagogically by development practices, and on the broad circulation of post-feminist ideology in the pedagogical initiatives of these organizations. There is a compelling political urgency for the reflexive analysis of youth media production on gender in broader contexts and discourses concerning post-feminism, pedagogy, and development. In situating my analysis of media production experiences in the broader political context of post-feminism, I consider how youth media production programming articulates a boundary around social issues such that gender can be addressed in this particular space-time location, given post-feminist ideology and rights-
based development practice. My analysis of media production in the AMIGOS/IDA program about gender and machismo is organized and animated by the following questions:

1. How are the relationships between youth media producers, development agencies, and media pedagogy shaped by ideologies of social change, development, and gender?

2. What experiences and relationships reinforce the emergence of gender as a topic youth wish to “change”?

3. How might media production serve as a site within which international youth groups articulate the multiple and conflicting ideologies of development and progress, specifically as related to gender?

In order to address these issues, I will concentrate on three components of the AMIGOS/IDA media program. First, I address who participates in the program, and how that participation is gendered, by looking at the AMIGOS/IDA community selection and decision making process to participate in the AMIGOS/IDA media program in the community of Sierra Alta. Next, I consider AMIGOS/IDA pedagogy, with attention to the structural focus on children’s and adolescent’s rights and media about social issues, through which gender rights are articulated as an area of interest. Finally, I will discuss the one of the multiple videos youth produced about gender and machismo, in order to evaluate how those narratives are situated within post-feminist sensibilities and rights-based development practices.
Programmatic Concerns: Development, Rights & Media

Taking Care of Development: Gender in Development Participation

When we made the decision on the AMIGOS/IDA program in Boaco to start a media program we knew that only half of the twenty-six communities that AMIGOS/IDA worked in would participate in the AMIGOS/IDA media program due to funding constraints. Many of the communities where IDA and AMIGOS work in Boaco are very rural, and do not have running water or electricity. This was a major factor in selecting which communities would be working on the media program, and we selected communities where at least a couple of families had electricity and/or there were electrical outlets in the school or in a nearby community that the youth could use to charge the equipment. There was also some attention given to communities where young people had more access to education and schooling, because there was a belief that those youth would already have had some exposure to and experience with computers and be able to participate more easily in the media program. After we selected communities to participate in the media program, I presented the proposal with IDA, and most often, interested youth attended to discuss their interest in the media program with community leaders. In Boaco, all AMIGOS programs are presented to IDA communities in this format. The Community Development Committee accepted and supported the program in all the communities where we proposed the program.

Sierra Alta was a late addition to the AMIGOS/IDA program starting with the media project in 2011 instead of 2010. There was an opening to participate because we opted not to continue working in another community due to challenges IDA and AMIGOS were having due to a major disagreement between two factions in the community. Sierra Alta was
selected to participate because there is a school in Sierra Alta that goes up to eighth grade, and because many of the youth go to high school in a larger town. We invited youth leaders to a media workshop to learn about the media program. After that, we had a meeting to discuss the media project with the whole community in June of 2011. I was present with IDA, as were the two youth leaders who had been to the workshop and the AMIGOS supervisor working directly in Sierra Alta. The following field note describes that meeting.

We crammed ourselves into a classroom in the school: all the chairs were filled, lots of people sat on the floor, and youth stood outside peering in from between the barred windows. Ronaldo, the IDA community development facilitator for Sierra Alta, asked the youth to come inside and some of the girls did. The girls working on the media project came right in and sat on the floor in front. All of the boys hung outside on the

Figure 23 The community meeting in Sierra Alta, 2011.
bars, none came in. We had a discussion about the media project, and the main concern was that the community still wanted to work on the well for their Community Based Initiative, the project that they design together and carry out as part of the summer program. They were planning to put a pump in the well so that when they draw water from it they do not have to haul the very heavy bucket up by hand. They also had plans to dig subsidiary wells throughout the community. This means more people would be able to use the wells, because it will be faster and easier. At present, many people use the well but many also have to walk down to the river when the line for water gets very long. I clarified that the Community Based Initiative funds were separate from either the media or art project funds and that seemed to make people feel more at ease. The Community Development Committee from Sierra Alta took over and discussed what the youth would make, and how this might benefit the community. They wanted the youth who were interested—all girls—to produce a video about the health center. They appointed the two girls already working with AMIGOS who had attended the workshop and one adult (to oversee the media project) to come up with a management and storage plan. They had heard about the challenges in Villa de Ada with the media project, so everyone really wanted to make sure we avoided those issues in Sierra Alta.
The boys outside, however, were unhappy. After the community discussed the well, and moved on to accept the media project, the boys voiced that they did not want to do the media project, rather, they wanted to build a basketball court. This argument went on for some time. I explained that the Community Based Initiative funds that would go to the well (or whatever other community project was decided on) were separate funds that the community had to agree on how to spend. They would have to discuss the basketball court with everyone who had just decided to repair and dig new wells throughout the community using the Community Based Initiative funds. They were angry and could not understand why we could not repurpose the media project funds. The boys insisted we should change the media project for a basketball court. An old man scolded them for not coming inside and then praised the girls for their work with the AMIGOS/IDA program. He said these girls are the ones who care, the ones who are interested. The boys, he said, didn’t care, were worthless. The teenage

Figure 24 Community meeting in Sierra Alta, 2011.
boys left the meeting then, because they could not find a way to make the basketball
court happen. They made a tight circle a couple hundred feet away while we
continued discussing the well and the media project. The girls were praised over and
over again by community members and by Ronaldo, for their involvement and
participation in community affairs like the media project and the well repair.

I am so proud of these girls. They were taking leadership roles in their community.
They were talking about making videos about the health centre and the community’s
history. They were excited to write a grant proposal for the well project. At the same
time, though, something felt a little off. It was with a lot of privilege that the boys
were able to refuse participation and walk away. The girls need that well—they are
the ones waiting in line, the girls are the ones late to school because they had to haul
water from the river. These community issues, health center included, really affect the
girls. It’s a privilege to be able to refuse participation in community matters because
you wish you could use the funds for a basketball court. 29

This is the shape of participation on the AMIGOS/IDA media program. Certain
communities are chosen to participate in the media program because they have access
to electricity and education. Youth leaders are identified and often they are girls, and
like these two girls in Sierra Alta they play a critical role in executing the program. In

29 Excerpt from a field note about a community visit to discuss the media program with the
community of Sierra Alta in 2011.
both AMIGOS and IDA work, community programming is frequently dominated by women. IDA and AMIGOS hold meetings during the daytime, when men are working in the fields. While programming can grind to a halt if the men don’t agree with decisions women make in community meetings, women make up the majority of participants more often than not. Issues that are prominent in communities where IDA works like water and access to health clinics, for example, disproportionately affect girls and women. The majority of North American AMIGOS volunteers, like their local counterparts in Boaco’s rural communities, are girls. In this context, youth participants—mostly girls—are expected to become empowered, agentive individuals who know how to navigate governing bodies, companies, and non-profits in order to engage their support in funding projects and/or providing in kind donations and support. This responsibility is a public caring for the community, and it is a responsibility the boys in Sierra Alta were able to refuse, while the girls carried the program with their participation.

Figure 25 A poster in a classroom about Human Rights, 2011.

Figure 26 A group of youth brainstorming about human rights media storylines.
Rights-Based Programming

A hallmark of AMIGOS programming is the relationship between AMIGOS and host organizations in Latin America. Host organizations work in Latin America on development and/or youth issues in rural communities all year long, and collaborate with AMIGOS staff in order to design a project that will build on their ongoing programming. In Boaco, Nicaragua, AMIGOS works with IDA. IDA works through a child-centered, rights-based development approach. For this reason, when we structured the AMIGOS/IDA media program, we did so using a rights lens, which would already be familiar in the communities and which would complement IDA’s existing programming. The social issue focus grew directly out of the rights-based approach: because we wanted youth to be able to tell their own stories, and to choose what topic they would address, we called them social issues and consistently referred back to how social issues were grounded in one or more rights. At the beginning of each summer program, Nicaraguan youth participants selected what rights they would like to work with on a weekly basis, for the duration of the program. They were supposed to teach younger children about these rights each week, in addition to working on their own media projects with other youth. In 2011, they chose the weekly themes to be:

Week 1: Right to Creative Expression

Week 2: Right to Healthy Environment

Week 3: Right to Healthy Bodies: Nutrition Focus

Week 4: Right to Identity, Traditions, and Cultural Expression
Week 5: Right to Healthy Relationships with Family and Friends

Weeks 6-7: Right to Education and Final Project

For each week, I provided examples of activities they could do with younger children that I came up with in collaboration with IDA facilitators and youth leaders from the communities. I also provided them with broad goals for youth. Children’s activity ideas included possibilities such as, for Week 2 Right to Healthy Environment, surveying the community to see what different foods people were growing, and making a photo-plant-identification book. For the youth, goals were broader such as, in Week 1, reviewing what had happened with the media equipment in the interim time between summers, and working with youth and the development committee to identify and confirm a storage location and management plan for

Figure 27 Youth at a regional meeting, 2011.
the equipment. The youth goals were provided because many of the youth previously struggled with direction as far as what they should be doing during the media part of the program.

AMIGOS/IDA programming framed through the weekly activities and goals was a tangible way for youth to work together. Rights functioned as neutral concepts and taken-for-granted values upon which communities, non-profits, and youth could agree. The rights-based framework, in part, developed from the failure of needs-based development programming. In needs-based programming, the underlying principle is that impoverished communities are lacking a particular resource and that if an organization or governing body provides that resource, poverty will be resolve and the community will develop. This needs-based framework is clearly very colonial as it depends on an outside assessment of what a community requires in order to develop and situates communities as disempowered recipients of aid.

The rights-based model understands communities and people in communities as the bearers of rights, in relation to the agencies, governments, and other bodies that provides and protects those rights. In this model, people are empowered to demand their rights, and non-profit organizations play a role in supporting them to be able to do so. It holds government and other agencies accountable for providing and protecting those rights. Because of this dynamic relationship between rights-bearers and the bodies accountable for providing and protecting rights, there is a tremendous focus on civic engagement. Civically engaged community members are able to a) know the rights they can and should have, and b) navigate structural relationships in order to hold the government and governing bodies accountable for
the multiple facets of development, using rights as leverage. In civic engagement programming, young people learn to ask for resources in their communities by appealing to local governing bodies and involve other local people using this kind of language.

AMIGOS/IDA pedagogy is built to first make young people aware of this kind of structure and language, and the possibility that they have rights. We showed them many videos about youth doing civic engagement and/or working on rights-based issues. Consistently, we asked them to extrapolate the relevant rights from videos, stories, and other pieces of media. Youth then produced media about a right or social issue, and these videos were used, often, to present issues to governing bodies and other resource holders specifically to ask those bodies to engage in supporting local communities by donating resources, money, or time.

**Defining the Program: Media is For Social Issues**

The AMIGOS/IDA program had youth make media productions explicitly to address social issues. In a workshop in which most of the youth involved in the media project from all twelve communities were present, the Associate Project Director, Tamina, and I talked to youth about the media program using the following language:

Chelsey:  It isn’t always easy to share our own stories, and that is what the media project is for. To begin to share and move ideas . . . to make the community and others sensitive to our own issues, to make the municipal government and the mayor and the community down the road listen, listen to things affecting your lives, your lives as young people. It’s about what’s important to you guys.

Tamina:  The media project is focused on exploring themes from your lives, on
communicating feeling about what is happening in the world, and through this communication, generating change, generating support from teachers, groups, politicians, other communities, other youth. Opening more spaces for other youth to participate. So that you are not alone. So that if someone is living a particular kind of issue, we can explore it through media. So that no one is alone.  

Tamina and I articulated a particular role for media production, such that others listen to youth and that those with power are connected to and affected to action by youth stories. We want these youth participants to understand their lives in relationship to each other, and hope that media will bridge individual experience in such a way that youth care about issues affecting their peers. When we explained the media project this way, and even when we named the kick-off workshop and video competition the 48-Hour Video Contest on Social Issues we set a particular tone for youth participants. We were the authority figures in these spaces, and we structured them so that it was explicitly about social issues. We would have liked to use language like social justice, but both IDA and AMIGOS were concerned about that sort of language because of its political connotations.

A young woman named Rosalina often worked with Tamina and me on programmatic management. Rosalina was older than other youth participants were, closer in age to Tamina and me. Rosalina might have been chosen to be a volunteer in another country if she was younger, but because she was in her mid-twenties and IDA/AMIGOS have an explicit youth agenda, other youth were chosen to participate as international volunteers. Instead, Rosalina

30 Excerpts from a program workshop on social issues, 2011.
worked closely with the Senior Staff team in Boaco, mentoring youth in her own community and also supporting planning, and facilitation for the youth media program. Rosalina was very committed to supporting youth to learn how to speak out about issues important to them. Like Tamina and me, Rosalina played a significant role in shaping understanding about why youth should be making media. She worked with many of the communities and youth that were struggling with the media program, helping them to further define the program and to resolve any issues that arose, as well as working on programming, workshop facilitation, and pedagogical support. Rosalina explained the program this way:

Well, for me the youth need to learn to be creative and stop . . . how to put it . . . well, be creative and learn to leave behind a mental complex. A complex they have. A complex about being quiet, never speaking up. And with the media project they are using the camera and learning to speak without being afraid. They are learning to use cameras even though some of them had never seen a camera before. And they have come to know so much more. For example, the computer in the community, the one we had before, no one knew how to use it. But now, the youth use them, and they know how to take photos and upload them to the computer. The media project is really helpful in organizing. An organized community is able to accept and follow through with offers from non-profits to do work in the community, opportunities to collaborate on development projects. If we are organized, any organization can come and do projects in our community. And multimedia has helped us to get the youth get organized.
Now we are a group. Why does it help to organize? Now that we are a formed group . . . we can help with community development. For example, we work with AMIGOS, with IDA, and we work with ADM (Asociacion de Desarrollo Municipal), and with PCAC (Programa Campesino a Campesino). And it just helps because now with an organized youth group they have to pay attention. The organization works for other projects, too.31

For Rosalina, the most valuable aspect of the media program is about organizing. She talks about how organized groups of youth are more able to access and affect other organizations that come into communities. Rosalina’s opinion works with Tamina’s and mine, there is a shared concern for social organizing and communities having autonomy over programming in their community. For Rosalina, the program is less about storytelling and more about speaking up to influence an idea or program, and/or learning to express collective voice in order to influence community decision-making processes. Participating in AMIGOS programming shows young people how to be successful participants in the non-profit and development model, particularly where there are international stakeholders involved.

Youth participants, immersed in the pedagogy that Tamina, Rosalina, and I designed with AMIGOS and IDA staff, quickly understand the kind of language we use and integrate their own participation into the social issue model. One, an American youth participant, reflecting

31 Excerpt from an interview-turned-informal-conversation with participant Rosalina, who partnered with the staff in delivering the program and also was a leader in her own community, 2011.
on their time with AMIGOS and the media and social justice program, spoke about the
contemporary challenges in actualizing social change and the potential at the intersection of change and
media:

I think that art and media are important to creating awareness about the
issues that could be changed in Nicaragua. They’re kind of not only
unique to Nicaragua but around the world. I think that most people support
social change and want to make change in their community. Especially
youth. But it’s hard to be just like, OK, let’s go change things and make
our community better. And I think that media gives youth a tangible way
to help and make change, yah.32

This young person clearly articulates how media is conceptualized in the AMIGOS/IDA
media program: *media gives youth a tangible way to help and make change*. Media becomes
a way to conceptualize something different, a tangible way to make change. AMIGOS’
pedagogical function is to provide media and technology resources to youth so that they can
make change. In discussing what the program is for and what they learned, youth respond in
such ways that show us they understand how funds for their projects are tied to the presence
and success of North American AMIGOS volunteers in their community:

Chelsey: What do you think you’ve learned from this?

32 Excerpt from an evaluation session in which youth considered the impact and importance
of producing media with other youth, 2011.
Ana: We’ve learned to share things with our community, with the volunteers who come from AMIGOS. Get along well the AMIGOS volunteers so they come back and have more youth projects in our community.

Joel: I think what I have learned is how much value my community has, and how to help make it better. 33

Ana and Joel, Nicaraguan youth from participating communities in Boaco, discuss the need to maintain a good relationship with AMIGOS so that the program continues, and evoke language associated with civic engagement and progressive asset-based development. All of the youth involved in the program are clearly able to articulate programmatic goals about what we are trying to do that align closely with our own programmatic vision. This articulation of media and social change that Ana and Joel reflected in their interview frame who can participate in the media program, how they should participate and what is possible in participation.

The videos that youth produced in the AMIGOS/IDA media program grew out of a programmatic focus on social issues. The focus on social issues was built through an ongoing set of workshops and meetings in which youth were encouraged and challenged to consider media, social change, and community development as closely intertwined. In the early summertime, the youth participated in a workshop where we discussed what social issues are and what kinds of social issues were touching the lives of youth participants. Tasked to come

33 Excerpt from an interview with youth from the community of Colipa, 2011.
up with a definition of *social issue*, a group of youth working on the AMIGOS/IDA media program came up with the following:

A social issue can be something of great importance that interests the population of a community, that probably calls attention to most of the community. . . . A tendency in our community that we think should be different, a problem we wish did not exist.\(^{34}\)

In their definition of a social issue, youth consider a social issue to be something they *think should be different, a problem (they) wish did not exist*. Here, pedagogy conceptualizes problems in the world, which is interesting, because pedagogically, the staff struggled significantly to frame social issue in precisely the opposite way, such that it did not *have* to be a problem.

Jaminah:  We just want them to think about, oh, what is the significance of the piece that we’re creating? We can ask that and try to make them realize more. And hopefully they can take that back with them in community so that can work with other youth to see what is important as opposed to what they think is funny or creative.

Jonathan:  Also, you know that activity when they make storyboards, we have to make sure we are rotating so we can help with them come up with questions and frame it the

\(^{34}\) Excerpt from field notes about a regional meeting in which participants were tasked to come up with a definition of a social issue, 2011.
way they should be framing it to think critically. So if their issue is education and how there’s no opportunity, and they tell a story about how Johnny didn’t go to school but then graduated or something anyway, then we can help ask questions like “Why wasn’t Johnny able to go to school? Did he have to work? Why? Was he at an age where he couldn’t go to school? Was there money for the bus to school and food at school? Stuff like that. I don’t know if that was a good example.

Chelsey: I think it’s a good example. I think it’s OK for them to do positive things, too. They don’t have to be “faltas”.

Handel: I think that’s what people revert to in these situations. That’s what I revert to when I think about social issues.

The staff spends a significant amount of time trying to think about how to move youth away from telling stories about lacking components of their lives, to balance these stories with social justice narratives; however, they struggled in supporting youth to move beyond telling stories about challenges in the lives of the Nicaraguan youth participants. Youth were frequently engaged by the AMIGOS/IDA program to share instances of social in/justice in their own lives. Our intention was to brainstorm a cluster of issues from their own lives that

35 In Spanish, the verb faltar means to lack.

36 Excerpt from a planning session in which staff members were working together on planning the “48-Hour Video Challenge on Social Issues.” Staff were working on how to support youth in understanding and defining a social issue, 2011.
youth could draw from for their videos. We hoped that youth would use their own personal experience in order to craft media pieces, an approach others have taken to facilitate learning about social in/justice (Rogers, Marshall & Tyson, 2006). The belief that through the telling of personal stories youth can gain a deeper understanding of justice is situated in pedagogy that links liberation and storytelling (Fleetwood, 2005; Soep, 2006). This belief is manifest in numerous media programs that rely on youths’ experiences in their communities and in the world to build video stories in and about their own communities (Broughton, 2012; Goodman, 2003). While all youth were encouraged to share social issues affecting their lives, most of their videos directly addressed the Nicaraguan communities.

**Pedagogy: Regional Workshops**

During Regional Workshops, youth participated in activities about media production and community leadership, which I designed in coordination with other AMIGOS/IDA staff and/or with youth leaders from some of the communities, like Rosalina. During one workshop early in the summer program, the meeting began, after an icebreaker, with youth brainstorming answers to questions written on poster paper about why we were making

![Figure 28 Youth at a regional workshop, 2011.](image1)
![Figure 29 Youth at a regional workshop, 2011.](image2)
media, what was really awesome and important about making media, and what the challenges about making media were. After all the youth had an opportunity to brainstorm, we discussed the answers, shared success stories, and came up with solutions for some of the challenges presented.

![Image of a brainstorm poster](image-url)

Figure 30 A brainstorm poster youth made about what rights the videos made by ListenUp! And Global Action Project youth corresponded with, 2011.

After this activity, youth watched two short videos made by other youth in other parts of the world. Those videos were *Nuestra Dignidad*, produced by a young woman who emigrated from Mexico to the US about the contradictions between US immigration philosophy and policy, and *Rapeando al Miedo* about an adolescent boy and his family who are forcibly displaced from their home in the Columbian countryside and move to the outskirts of a major city. Both videos were produced by young people participating in programs like the

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AMIGOS/IDA program—the ListenUp! Beyond Borders\textsuperscript{39} project and the Global Action Project\textsuperscript{40} had a hand in running the programs where youth produced these videos. Both videos draw on the personal experiences of young people in order to examine social justice issues in particular ways. Like AMIGOS, there is a focus on documentary and on social issues. I selected these two videos in particular because they were in Spanish, and because they addressed issues and contexts to which I thought both the North American and Latin American youth involved could relate. They represented, to me, success stories from media programs like ours. With the curtains drawn, these videos were projected on the inside walls of small homes to which we taped poster paper to make a screen.

We had small group and large group discussions after each video and talked about the lives of the youth who made the videos, how we could relate or not relate to their lives, and why they might have made those videos. The following is an excerpt from a group discussion about the video \textit{Nuestra Dignidad}:

Ana: I think she made this video because she is . . .

Jenna: An immigrant

Ana: Yes, and she wants to express life as an immigrant and . . .

Jenna: I think she is talking about the differences between Mexico and the US and the

\textsuperscript{39} Find out more about ListenUp!’s Beyond Borders project here: http://listenup.org/projects/beyondborders/

\textsuperscript{40} Find out more about Global Action Project here: http://global-action.org/
ideas that Mexicans in Mexico have about immigration and the ideas that the people in the US have about immigration . . .

Darlia: Well, I think if she made this video, it’s because she wanted others to know how hard it is to immigrate to another country, illegally.

Isodoro: I want to give my opinion. This is very sad, and I’m really sad. This is so sad because everyone lives like this as an immigrant. It’s a story of life she’s telling. I don’t know.

Julieta: Well, I felt kind of sad when she was telling her story. But also happy because we can realize what happened and it could be an experience that is useful for us to make sure that doesn’t happen to us.

Carafina: Well, I talked with my partner about what I understood, which was that she was telling her own story. But also, it is the story of many people, because in this world there are many people who emigrate from one country to another. She talks about how hard it is to be in another country. The challenges one has to face. The difficulties. Because when we are in another country, there are hard things and easy things. There are sad moments and happy ones. She also talked about how we need to remember our homeland. See everything in front of us. Even if we are in another country, always our mind, our heart, our being is like living in our own country, even if we are in another. And I also think it’s a piece of advice to other youth. What it’s like to live somewhere else. Some youth travel because they have to. Others travel for love, like the AMIGOS volunteers. These are challenges.
Carlo: She expressed in a creative way how immigrants are treated in the U.S. . . . that they are discriminated against. And it’s terrible because people are sad, a very big challenge

Chelsey: Is it OK to treat people like that?

Kia: I don’t think so. Everyone has a future, and a present, and there are moments when we need help from other people. And sometimes, we are rejected. But what is good is to share, help others, if at all possible. Even if they are from our country or another country and they are in our country. And if not, then at least try to understand and help.41

The youth discuss their feelings about the short video produced by the young woman who emigrated as a teenager from the United States to Mexico. There were quite a number of youth who expressed sadness at the story. Carafina differentiates between kinds of travel, between immigration for economic reasons and travel such as the North American volunteers engage, which she calls “for love.” Carlo brings up discrimination, and our follow-up question, in this case “Is it OK to treat people like that?” lead youth in a particular way. In asking “is it OK,” we orient the youth to a rights-based framework, in which there are universal ways to think about what is an “OK” way to treat both individuals and large groups of people.

41 An excerpt from a Regional Group Meeting discussion, after youth had viewed media production pieces youth in other youth media programs made about immigration, social justice, and displacement, 2011
It is from within this local application of rights-based programming in the AMIGOS/IDA program that gender emerged as a topic that youth identified as a social issue again and again, often through the lens of machismo. Videos produced about machismo/gender are listed in Table 5.

Table 5 Videos about gender produced in the AMIGOS/IDA media program in 2010 and 2011.\textsuperscript{42}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Community</th>
<th>Video Title</th>
<th>Relationship to Gender / Machismo</th>
<th>Brief Description of Video</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Colipa</td>
<td>Untitled 2011</td>
<td>Explicitly about gender/machismo</td>
<td>Youth wanted to address gender and machismo with this video. This video is about a family and how they overcome a struggle with machismo so the mother can work and both the son and daughter can attend school. It is discussed in detail in this chapter.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Los Limones</td>
<td>Pobresa y Desintegracion Familiar</td>
<td>Explicitly about gender/machismo</td>
<td>Youth wanted to address fathers abandoning their wives and children with this video. In this story, a father leaves his family because he has no money. His children grow and as teenagers, help their mother by assaulting and stealing from passersby. Their father returns and they assault/steal from him. The mother corrects them, they all say sorry, and the father is re-accepted into the family. He promises to provide for his family.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Los</td>
<td>Pocahontas</td>
<td>Intersects with</td>
<td>This video is a reproduction of the</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\textsuperscript{42} The third column in this table explains whether the youth chose to produce about gender/machismo explicitly, or whether their video is about another social issue that intersects with gender.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Community</th>
<th>Video Title</th>
<th>Relationship to Gender / Machismo</th>
<th>Brief Description of Video</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Limones</td>
<td></td>
<td>gender/machismo</td>
<td>Disney movie, Pocahontas, and is explicitly tied to popular narratives about gender and race. It is discussed in detail in Chapter 3.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Los Limones</td>
<td><em>Amor y Sacrificio</em></td>
<td>Intersects with gender/machismo</td>
<td>This video is a reproduction of a popular song about a mother and son who leave home due to domestic violence. She raises her son on her own, working to put him through school. He goes to medical school in the US, and she continues to support him from afar. This video is discussed in detail in Chapter 3.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Villa de Ada</td>
<td><em>La Martina</em></td>
<td>Explicitly about gender/machismo</td>
<td>The youth wanted to make a music video that could open conversation with adolescent girls about teenage marriage. The video is about a teenage girl who is married to an older man who accuses her of cheating on him. She tries to return to her parents. Eventually her husband shoots her. This video is discussed in Ch. 3.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Atotongo</td>
<td><em>Embarazo A Temprano Edad</em></td>
<td>Explicitly about gender/machismo</td>
<td>This video is about teenage pregnancy cycles and education. It tells the story of a teenage girl who gets pregnant and has to drop out of school. She works as a housecleaner but is unable to make enough money to support her child and send her to school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>El Canuco</td>
<td><em>La Inmigración</em></td>
<td>Intersects with gender/machismo</td>
<td>This video is an immigration story. A group of young people immigrates to the US and does backbreaking labor. It follows the story of one couple in this journey. Eventually, they return because they are owed significant back-wages. When they return they open a bar. The woman fades into the</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community</td>
<td>Video Title</td>
<td>Relationship to Gender / Machismo</td>
<td>Brief Description of Video</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>---------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>La Pana</td>
<td><em>Violencia Intrafamiliar</em></td>
<td>Explicitly about gender/machismo</td>
<td>This video is about domestic violence. The youth wanted to address a couple of ongoing situations in the community related to violence against women and girls. Unfortunately, because of technical issues, the video was not completed.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In each of these video projects, youth discussed gender as the main or tangential social issue. Mostly, gender was considered an issue vis-à-vis machismo. Gender and machismo were accepted and “appropriate” themes for youth to address. In the rights-based structure youth participate in, gender is an obvious and appropriate choice for youth to make when they select an issue that falls into the social issue and rights-based or change category.

*Untitled 2011 by Colipa*

In this section, I will discuss one of the multiple videos produced by youth about gender, which I chose specifically because the youth were very clear about their intention to make a video about gender and machismo. Youth from the Nicaraguan community of Colipa participated in this media program from 2010 – 2012. Volunteers from the United States and Nicaraguan youth from Colipa spent two months collaborating on media and community development projects each summer.
Participant Demographics

The participants during 2011, in which time they produced the video on gender, are listed in Table 6.

Table 6 Participants in the AMIGOS/IDA program in the community of Colipa.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Hometown</th>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Notes</th>
<th>Recruitment Process</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Carafina</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Colipa, Boaco, Nicaragua</td>
<td>Local Volunteer, AMIGOS; Volunteer, IDA</td>
<td>Carafina is a strong leader in the community and played a major role in shaping the media project.</td>
<td>Recruited by IDA leaders, worked with AMIGOS since 2009.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ana</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Colipa, Boaco, Nicaragua</td>
<td>Local Volunteer, AMIGOS</td>
<td>Ana is Carafina’s younger sister, and very quiet. She becomes involved in most initiatives her sister works on.</td>
<td>Recruited by Carafina, involved since 2010.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Darlia</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Colipa, Boaco, Nicaragua</td>
<td>Local Volunteer, AMIGOS</td>
<td>Darlia worked with AMIGOS for the first time in 2011.</td>
<td>Recruited by Carafina and Jaminah, with help from IDA representatives.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jorge</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Colipa, Boaco, Nicaragua</td>
<td>Local Volunteer, AMIGOS</td>
<td>Jorge is the only boy involved in the project from the community of Colipa.</td>
<td>Recruited by IDA representatives, encouraged by Jaminah to participate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ray</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>California, USA</td>
<td>International Volunteer, AMIGOS</td>
<td>Ray has a high level of Spanish, is very outgoing, and has significant technical skills.</td>
<td>Recruited in high school Spanish class.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manya</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>California, USA</td>
<td>International Volunteer, AMIGOS</td>
<td>Manya has a high level of Spanish, and has experience with</td>
<td>Learned about AMIGOS from friends who had</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pseudonym</td>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Hometown</td>
<td>Role</td>
<td>Notes</td>
<td>Recruitment Process</td>
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<td>---------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jenna</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Florida, USA</td>
<td>Internationa l Volunteer, AMIGOS</td>
<td>Jenna has a beginner – intermediate level of Spanish.</td>
<td>participated in the past.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>AMIGOS film and video production.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jaminah</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Washington, DC</td>
<td>Project Supervisor, AMIGOS</td>
<td>Jaminah is highly proficient in Spanish. She is very</td>
<td>Recruited to be an International Volunteer in high</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>USA</td>
<td></td>
<td>interested in social justice, and works with a community</td>
<td>school Spanish class, encouraged to continue on as a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>radio station at her college.</td>
<td>Project Supervisor.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Untitled 2011: The Story**

While many of their peers identified and produced about issues that intersect with and are relevant to gender, youth from the community of Colipa identified machismo as their social issue and produced a video and led workshops about gender and machismo. Led by Carafina, a young woman well known for her community leadership, they produced a piece about one family’s struggle around gendered expectations about work and school.43

43 The video the youth produced can be accessed here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XWqLMkuMz_s
While my primary concern is an analysis of the varied pedagogy and complex events of media production that led to *Untitled 2011*, here I will describe the video to provide clarity about the artifact that represents an end-point of the media making events that are described in the following pages. After this redaction concerning the artifact, I will move into a discussion of the media making events that led to the production of *Untitled 2011*.

*Untitled 2011* is about a family—mother (Margo), father (Eligio), and teenage children (girl Raquel and boy Ricardo). The video opens with an image of Ricardo, and his dog, the sun illuminating their bodies. It cuts to Eligio resting in a hammock. Ricardo and his sister Raquel want to go to school but their *machista* father won’t allow it. He refuses to change his mind, sending the boy to the fields and the daughter and mother into the kitchen. Secretly, Margo teaches Raquel to read and write. In the next scene, Eligio comes home, asking Margo
to prepare him a bucket of water and soap to shower. He gets angry because the soap is pink, and demands Margo purchase not-pink soap, but she has no money.

An opportunity arises for Margo when she is offered a job working on women’s rights. Eligio comes home and chases the human rights worker offering the job out of town. Next, Raquel writes a letter to her father Eligio, asking him to love his family. Eligio cannot read, and his eyes fill with tears as he listens to a little boy read the letter aloud. Eligio repents, pulls his family together and apologizes. Margo begins the job and Ricardo and Raquel go to school. The story ends as the mother interviews community leaders about machismo as part of her new job.

**Progress and Social Issues**

The youth who produced *Untitled 2011* participated in numerous media workshops during which they refined their ideas and received feedback. During an interview, we discussed why they produced the video and how they came to settle on machismo as a central issue for their video.

Chelsey: I want to talk a bit about this last video you guys made about machismo. How did that topic come up?

Ana: This theme came up, a few times, mostly because of the fathers who do not let their sons and daughters study. Or, sometimes the wife . . . wants to work. The men do not give that opportunity. Because they believe they alone are the kings of the home.
Carafina: In Colipa there are very few women who do any kind of work outside the home. So because of that, we focused a lot on machismo. And we went to talk with the other youth, and we all thought it was really important to talk about machismo, change things. So we decided to make the video

The youth identify gender as a social issue and intend to use media as a tool for intervening in their community. They reflect back the AMIGOS/IDA belief that links production and social justice by taking up discourses of progress and change. They discuss Untitled 2011 as a piece that will intervene in the popular discourse around gender. It is not insignificant that they produce about gender as a social issue, and it is important to note that gender is rarely a central point of discussion in rural Nicaragua, among American teenage volunteers, or within the AMIGOS/IDA programs. Rather, gender is mostly understood within the AMIGOS program as historical marginalization that currently only affects Latin American youth. They are discussing gender in a rural community in the global South, where popular discourse reinforces gender marginalization as a compelling issue.

**Machismo? It Doesn’t Affect Me: Transitional Learning Spaces and Media Programming**

The AMIGOS/IDA media program was set up so youth could produce media about their own lives, following popular media literacy pedagogy (Goodman, 2003). Even so, youth often chose gender as a topic to produce about and also kept their distance from gender as

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44 Interview excerpt, with Nicaraguan youth from Colipa who played leadership roles in the production of *Untitled 2011*, 2011.
personal. This raises questions about how youth relate to social change programs, and about whether the telling of personal story is actually liberatory.

Chelsey: So write down machisimo. What is the story that goes along with machismo?

Carafina: That in our community a lot of years ago . . . people were really afraid. Like, for example, of men. Fathers of families were afraid to let their daughters leave to study. And also, they did not allow women to work. Only them. And they only worked the fields. Women were supposed to be at home. Always at home. The women do not have liberty. There exists terrible machismo in the community.

Chelsey: And how do you feel about that?

Carafina: I feel like it is hurting the families, and also the women. There are many girls who want to study. But men, they are the ones that decide, and they do not want their daughters to study. The moms want them to, but the dads don’t. So, this exists and it is damaging the whole education system, a lot.

Chelsey: And you, personally, how is it affecting you?

Carafina: Machisimo? Not at all.\textsuperscript{45}

\textsuperscript{45} Excerpt from a storyboarding session in which youth leaders worked on a video about a “social issue,” 2011.
Carafina distances herself from the stories of gender injustice. She shares a story about how gender plays out in her community Colipa, but when pressed for her personal relationship to gender, she says machismo is not affecting her at all. Following Carafina’s lead, most of the youth agreed they personally were not affected, though others were affected. Likewise, when asked to recount their own relationships with gender, their American peers recounted stories of their lives while living in Nicaragua. They talked about watching their Nicaraguan host mothers and sisters do all of the housework, as opposed to discussing gender in their own contexts and lives. In refusing the invitation to narrate their own personal experiences, they situate themselves as having overcome gendered marginalization. For these youth, other people are affected by gender, and their role is to support education about gender. They draw on discourses of progress, situating themselves as enlightened subjects who can help others move beyond the “gender issue.” Their refusal to be implicated shows they are “in the know” as modern girls and that they have “overcome” any kind of gender discrimination.

Figure 32 Youth from Colipa solving a computer issue at a tech workshop, 2011.
Knowing How to Know About Machismo

As we continue to discuss what their production will look like, the youth begin to articulate their story as a learning experience for girls who are being affected by machismo. The youth participants allude to how *Untitled 2011* could serve as a learning space for others in Colipa during the planning phase of *Untitled 2011*:

Chelsey: So, what kind of story do you want to tell in the video to change this? A story that people can relate to.

Ana: About machismo?

Chelsey: Yep. This conversation we’ve had.

Carafina: It could be about family. . . . We need to do workshops with women. Because there are women who are shut in and no one helps them, no one. So, we need to educate them. Do a workshop and talk clearly. Tell them their rights, because they
don’t know them.

Chelsey:  So what kind of story could we tell to begin this process?

Carafina:  We could tell a story about women in the community who are not even aware of the cause of their oppression as machismo. So, we can make a story about a girl who is being affected by machismo, her and her mom. Her mom is affected because she cannot work, she cannot go anywhere. She is stuck in the house. She can’t leave.

Jaminah:  What will you do? Are you going to let other women know?

Ana:  No. What we can do is like a soap opera. Where we can focus on what machismo is, what it looks like. And after this we can have a workshop with the people.46

In this excerpt from a planning meeting, youth discuss teaching other young women how to know what machismo is on a meta-level. They discuss the need to educate others, and their video is didactic in this way. In situating themselves as teachers, they perform their expertise as participants, showing they know how to know and they know how to help others overcome gendered marginalization.

The video that resulted from this storyboarding session, Untitled 2011, makes one family’s struggle with machismo visible in a particular kind of way that is logical from within the

46 Excerpt from field notes about a workshop, where youth brainstorm ideas for their video on gender, with support from Chelsey and Project Supervisor, Jaminah, 2010.
development programming on gender. The youth say they are interested in focusing on machismo, “on what it looks like,” and on having workshops about machismo—expressing a need to make machismo visible by exaggerating it so it can be recognized and so that others can come into encounter with their idea, and in doing so, learn.

As Nicaraguan youth performed in particular ways as part of their participation with the AMIGOS/IDA program so did their North American peers. The North American youth were very hesitant to participate in the brainstorming sessions and in the production of the video, and shared many concerns about what their participation should look like. Despite these concerns, during the production phase of Untitled 2011, the North American youth shot all of the video while their Nicaraguan peers acted. The North American youth expressed they would not want to appear in the video because the story belongs to the Nicaraguan youth. However, they were shooting, and North American youth were consistently and literally framing the scenes. They expressed that their Nicaraguan peers were more interested in acting, and the Nicaraguan youth said they were better at acting and less adept than their North American peers at handling cameras. A similar situation arose with the editing of the video, in which the North American youth most often manipulated the computer under the direction of Carafina. Sometimes, Carafina and other participants from Colipa sat at the computer and received direction from Manya, Ray, and Jenna; however, because of their unfamiliarity with computers this was a very slow process.

**Discussion**

Despite a popular insistence that we are beyond gender that can be found in pedagogical and cultural texts and in development practices, it is clear that in multiple ways, gender plays an
important role in structuring the experiences of participants and the AMIGOS/IDA media program itself. Gender emerges as an organizing mechanism in the AMIGOS/IDA media program: most program participants are girls and in some communities, the media project is exclusively an all-girl program, and gender emerges as an appropriate topic for youth to address in the context of rights-based programming in the global South.

**The Right to Refuse Participation**

When Sierra Alta was selected as a community to participate in the AMIGOS/IDA media program, we entered into a particular pedagogical relationship with the youth and community as a whole. Much of this relationship was bound by the organizing logic that affirms that youth and media production, appropriately coupled, are liberatory functions. This pedagogical move is situated in a post-feminist context in which gender is treated in particular ways, both by and with the organizations and by and with the youth and communities.

Youth who participate in AMIGOS/IDA programming, both from the global North and global South, are overwhelmingly girls. This has been a historical shift in the AMIGOS program, where in the early days of the program (1965) the Volunteers were mostly young men. On the media/technology program, there are a higher number of boys, but girls still make up the majority of participants. On the media project, 63% of the AMIGOS Volunteers were girls, while in the parallel Arts program, 73% of them were girls. In many

47 There were 11 international boys involved (10 from the United States, 1 from the Dominican Republic) and 19 girls (17 from the United States, 2 from Nicaragua) as
communities, most, if not all, of the Nicaraguan youth participants were girls as well. In the community of Sierra Alta, the group that worked on the AMIGOS/IDA media project was exclusively girls, and was led by a group of four girls—two North American and two Nicaraguan.

In Sierra Alta, it was from the very beginning of programming that the media group became exclusively all-girl. During our initial meeting, the boys walked out because they refused to participate in any community programming that did not involve the construction of a basketball court. The girls were left behind in the schoolroom with leaders from the community, and IDA and AMIGOS. The girls then expressed that they would work on both the community well project and the media project. They patiently agreed when suggestions were made about what kind of media they could make, and were applauded by the organizations and community, especially in relation to the boys who refused to participate.

Pedagogy’s call interpolates the young women in this program in ways that are distinct from the young men who easily refused participation by walking out. The Nicaraguan girls have a different, more urgent relationship to and with the community’s issues. As the people who draw well water, they are invested in the well project. They inhabit a space of caring for their community, where by involvement in this community-based program they are situated as involved, participatory, good citizens. The girls were celebrated as the good, productive model young people. It is as though their caring requirements, once situated in the family, are compared to the Arts program, where there were 25 girls and 9 boys involved at the international level.
now expanded through interpellation with organizational programming to extend to the community. The move to involve young people as citizens, through a rights-based lens, is gendered such that in communities like Sierra Alta the responsibility discussed as belonging to “youth” falls squarely on the shoulders of girls. The word “youth” functions to assure us gender no longer matters. This allows us to conceptualize the communities as progressing in such a way that gender will eventually not matter, and only matters at present because of the particular space-time location in the global South. This belief situates these communities such that progress around gender difference will pattern off the global North, where a post-feminist gender reality is culturally accepted. After all, Sierra Alta is a community in which an all-girls media program was very successful, and in the rights-based discourse in which we operate it is nearly impossible to consider not wanting girls to take leadership roles, given that historically, they have faced much marginalization. What is important is to recognize how civic engagement becomes a gendered issue in which girls cannot refuse participation.

While historically, many girls and women were denied access to public spaces and decision-making processes, the post-feminist drive to rights-based pedagogy and the focus on progress in the development context has shifted this relationship, such that girls can’t help but participate, and power becomes situated in the ability to refuse participation. To be able to feel careless about a well project is a demonstration of the kind of privilege development agencies, non-profits, and youth participants negotiate as we mutually build a pedagogical space for something like social justice.

However, because non-profits and development agencies play significant roles in the relationship between youth, communities, progress, and, in this case, media production there
are particular epistemologies that must be upheld. When we discussed the media project with youth participants from Nicaragua, Rosalina discussed the way the project allowed for youth to learn how to organize so that in the future, they might affect work being done in their communities by other non-profits. Ana and Joel, two younger youth participants, discussed that through their participation they learned to get along with American youth so the program could continue, and also, about valuing community leadership. Through their participation in AMIGOS, youth learn to engage with non-profits in particular ways, however they don’t learn to challenge the non-profit complex that, because of its deep funding structures tied to corporate America, is indebted to reproducing colonial relationships (Smith, 2007). It is this corporate structure and funding model that is also invested in the production of the post-feminist sensibility in the global North, which functions so as to evade any possibility of transnational organizing around gender by framing gender as an individualized experience to be overcome (McRobbie, 2009). The pressing question then becomes whether this is the sort of critical learning and engagement that will ever allow youth to work through gender as a social issue in such a way that they might engage in a change-making process.

Responding to Pedagogy’s Call

As part of the AMIGOS/IDA media program, youth learn to tell particular stories that subscribe to rights-based discourses and practices. In order to consider how this happens, I turn to the video *Untitled 2011* and situate it in the broader set of discourses and practices that constitute post-feminism. *Untitled 2011* draws on rights-based structures to tell its story. It works from within a rights-based pedagogical context, where rights organize our collaborations. In the rights-based model, citizens hold the state and/or other
providers/protectors of rights accountable for those rights. Citizens make a claim that is responded to by these entities, which have a powerful role in the relationship. The rights provider is held responsible for this role because they are somehow tied to citizens, often as governments, through popular democratic practice such as voting. It should be noted that democratic practice, thought in this way, is a Western construct (Zerilli, 2005). It does make sense that this might fall out of balance in the global South, where, as Canelini (1995) puts it, multiple temporalities and the collision of the modern, pre-modern, and postmodern are constitutive of everyday reality, and where, perhaps Western democratic practices have a tenuous hold on functioning governments.

*Untitled 2011* follows a model where some people do not have rights and need to claim them by affectively moving someone else or another entity like a government or paternal figure. Margo is unable to work and her two children are unable to go to school because her husband Eligio will not allow them. In this story, he is the provider or benefactor, the entity who is able to give rights. We see Margo and her daughter Raquel begin to engage their citizenship when Margo teaches Raquel to write. Raquel is the young woman trying to become a good citizen, to access her rights through writing and by holding her father accountable. She figures out a way to appeal to him that is non-threatening and effective, so that he will provide for and protect her right to education and her mother’s right to work.

Raquel is successful. Her letter, which asks her father to *love* his family, moves him to allow them to attend school, and to allow Margo to work. As a rights-based model, it is expected that there is an affinity between citizens and the rights-provider that is centered on caring. If the citizen can perform that caring in an effective way that moves the provider, then the
provider will engage the relationship. In this video, the citizenship work (learning to read and write, and using those skills to move Eligio) and the affective work is done by the teenage girl. Caring enough about her family results in positive and progressive change in her family and her father allows his family to work and go to school as a result. She moves him to respond to her demand and provide rights. Likewise, the responsibility to care enough about the community to participate, to make things better, fell on the all-girl group in Sierra Alta, they were those who needed to care enough to change things, to move others to change, and they were those subsequently applauded for their ability to move others through their participation.

The issue with this kind of model, which comes from AMIGOS/IDA programming, is twofold. On the one hand, rights-based claims to capacity such as the right to work, fixes identify such that the bearer of the right has that right *because* she is a woman or a youth, for example. This fixing of identity is problematic because it makes the provision of rights always necessary for an always already marginalized group—a group that needs rights in order to “be equal” (Brown, 2000). There is no space within this way of thinking about “equality” for these relationships to be deconstructed. This claim to rights is a call for recognition, where to have rights is to be recognized as a citizen. However, this claim to rights and to recognition does not redistribute power and address the root causes of social injustice. Rather, this claim sets up relationships between citizens, governments, and non-profits such that rights work is always and will always be needed (Markell, 2003).

In *Untitled 2011*, youth use rights-based epistemology to tell their story of gender, machismo, and marginalization. In the end, when Margo, Raquel, and Ricardo are able to go
to school and work, it is because when Raquel claimed her rights the benevolent figure of Eligio was convinced that he had been wrong and should change his practices. Raquel was successful in moving him. That Eligio was wrong and then was able to change his practices to be right also sets up a modernist relationship between governments providing rights.

Those who already provide them, and who are publically successful in doing so, are like the changed Eligio—benevolent like North American governments.

*Untitled 2011* does not challenge the underlying structures of machismo, and there are multiple moments in the video where this is clear. For example, the youth include a scene in which Eligio becomes angry with Margo for giving him pink soap for his shower. Ricardo and Raquel are part of this violent conversation, and Ricardo agrees with his father, scorning his mother for buying the pink soap. Here, we see that how youth map out mobilities as related to machismo. They make their story such that the brother follows in his father’s footsteps. Soon, he, too will regulate the mobility of women and his children in his life. The youth talked about this scene in particular as “showing” what machismo looks like.

Additionally, I think it opens a space for wider consideration of how gender intersects with local and global economic and capitalist structures. That is to say, this short video opens up multiple complex issues, even from within the AMIGOS/IDA framework for what is intelligible. Pedagogically, youth are immersed in this model, and produce to this narrative as such. Programmatically, the rights based model does not allow discursive space for language like social justice or for angry responses to injustice. In this space, it makes sense that youth would produce narratives like *Untitled 2011*. 
Telling Stories about Participation

The process of planning media programming with communities situates girls in particular ways. Girls do identity work to situate themselves in particular ways in relation to that programming. One of the hallmarks of critical media programming is the production of voice and the insistence on the telling of ones’ own story as liberating. This pedagogical call functions in the experience of the youth from Colipa, led by Carafina, as they produce their machismo video. My pedagogical call to Carafina and her peers asked them to recount their own experiences with machismo so they might critically examine them and in doing so, change them. However, when I asked Carafina to do this, she refused, saying instead that machismo doesn’t affect her, though it does affect others.

Carafina’s insistence that machismo does not affect her life functions so she can slip outside of critical pedagogy’s insistence on interpolating her as a subject with a story to tell about her own personal marginalization. There is a tension between recognizing how, and if, machismo structures the experiences of (some) girls in Colipa, and AMIGOS/IDA’s pedagogical call to personalize that story through media production, a common trope in youth media that uses personal stories as a springboard for mediated civic engagement that is close to the lives and cultural worlds of participants (Soep, 2006; Goodman, 2003; Fleetwood, 2005; Rogers, Marshal & Tyson, 2006). While they easily tell the story of machismo, they don’t take up the personal narrative that is linked to social justice learning in youth media pedagogy.

Instead of taking up a personal narrative, Carafina and her peers engage with learning about how to navigate non-profits from within colonial histories, acknowledging that those programs provide civic resources and foster public spaces when and where the state does not.
In managing civic engagement and public spaces, development agencies gain the power to structure what constitutes equality, and they do so with particular attention to gender and rights. One of the ways that the demarcation of what counts as equality and civic engagement is managed is through language about youth, voice, and empowerment. Civic engagement and media participation then become experiences that teach youth to participate in a colonial system that values progress because it approximates capitalism as opposed to supporting youth in critical reasoning about gendered colonial relations of power. Machismo and gender become solvable parts of the equation. We need to reconsider the assumptions about progress that underlie critical pedagogy’s call to youth voice and progressive development’s undying affiliation with participation. Gender is, in this way, constructed as part of the equation that spells liberatory progress. Carafina and her peers perform this desire for progress around gender when they situate themselves as beyond being affected by gender. What is values is being able to overcome gender marginalization in the post-feminist model where those who have overcome gender marginalization from the global North can help, through a relationship of advocacy, their peers to do so as well. As such, the girls perform their own success at having overcome gender marginalization such that they can now help others to do so. Yet, at the same time, the organizations work through a rights-based model, carving out a space in which this kind of work, predicated on identity, will always be necessary.

The AMIGOS/IDA program exists in a post-feminist context. Relationships between media pedagogy and development ideology structure the AMIGOS program so that the kind of tellable story is one in which gender marginalization can be overcome. In this tellable story,
there is little room for anger or critique of the underlying issues of misogyny or colonialism. Part of the complication in understanding what is happening in *Untitled 2011* and in the AMIGOS/IDA pedagogy and program writ large, is a desire, common in youth studies, to read politics off youth engagement and participation (Lesko & Talburt, 2012). Reading politics off of the participation and production processes of the media program and youths’ participation obscures how participation is shaped by development agencies and rights-based discourses. Relatedly, it becomes apparent that non-profit development agencies doing critical media work with youth are indeed reinforcing colonial and gendered relationalities in the world because their very existence is in complex ways, tied to the colonial project out of which development and rights-based methodologies spring. It is through these complex relationships that pedagogy is given form and shape, and pedagogy’s call to youth is complex and often even contradictory.

This is a story in which individual girls overcome gender marginalization. The individualizing of this marginalization makes transnational organizing hard to imagine, because gender becomes an issue belonging to the individual as opposed to the public. Transnational organizing around gender becomes unimaginable. Gender is thus linked to a particular set of rights for which the citizen is responsible for claiming. Rights-based pedagogy is situated in the post-feminist context; they are two puzzle pieces that fit together. This relationships and the deployment of rights-based and/or social issue focus in youth programming maintains a space for non-profits to continue their ongoing work with marginalized groups in need of rights, however it fails to address root causes that would rectify some of the injustice and ultimately, perhaps, result in non-profit work around rights.
becoming unnecessary. This work is important because it provides immediate relief for some people, but it is advocacy work on behalf of the other that will always be necessary, which consistently provides a role in these communities for the outsider, the other, the organization.

Concluding Thoughts: Pedagogy, Advocacy, and Post-feminism

*Untitled 2011* focused on machismo as an issue affecting youth, children, and women in the community of Colipa. The youth who made this video situated themselves as unaffected by machismo, though they hoped to help others. They untangled their personal stories from those that needed “changing” and gender emerged as affecting others. In this process, gender became an issue affecting some girls in rural Nicaraguan communities as opposed to an issue affecting youth globally. Because of their continuous work with AMIGOS/IDA, these youth knew how to tell particular stories, and did so in ways that evidence post-feminist sensibilities and awareness of enmeshment with the colonial patterns that plague development agencies.

Media production in the AMIGOS/IDA program is pedagogically crafted around an organizing logic, which affirms that international youth can collaborate on the telling of personal and/or social stories through media, and that this process is liberatory. Participation is understood to act as an important conduit for the materialization of liberatory pedagogy. What becomes clear in the AMIGOS/IDA program, is that a) successful participation in liberatory pedagogy approximates what is often termed “agency,” b) the rights-based and social issue model for media production faces challenges to examining root causes of marginalization, and c) the production of success in this development model requires knowing how to help others overcome marginalization and doing so through the production
of particular personal narratives. There is, here, an organizational or pedagogical logic that values personal storytelling and its ability to move social relationships forward in progressive ways.

In the production experiences and the video, which the youth from Colipa produced, gender is articulated and represented as a one-directional issue that affects rural communities in the global South. Patterned after colonial relationships between North and South and popular discourses that hold that gender is an issue only in the global South (Minh-ha, 1987) and working from within the context of AMIGOS/IDA, the youth addressed gender locally and through a modernist frame throughout the process of media production. Likewise, pedagogy is structured to reinforce this dynamic. While youth were encouraged to produce about issues that affected everyone’s lives, that discourse did not map onto material pedagogy. The sample videos both showcased life experiences of youth from Latin America, a decision made because those were the only videos available in Spanish. Perhaps these sorts of videos are produced when relationships between North American organizations doing media justice work collide with Latin American youth bodies. The American Volunteers (mostly, though not exclusively white) were repeatedly told to play a supporting role in relation to their peers, often through the focus on the language of partnership and empowerment. The message was clearly articulated on multiple occasions that Volunteers should focus on Latin American youth voice. Without using language like race and gender, the organizational pedagogy clearly articulates a certain subject of change—and she is from a rural community, heavily involved in civic engagement, and participatory in non-threatening, non-violent, helpful ways. While all the youth were asked to share stories about gender in their own lives, the
North American and Nicaraguan youth shared stories of others. The modernist framing of gender takes as assumption that progress and development facilitated through education will eventually resolve gender marginalization, and this framework shapes IDA’s gender programs and AMIGOS’ treatment of gender as an issue on which youth can collaborate. The modernist development narrative sets up progress as intertwined with education where individuals who are more progressive can help others along the way. The role of the young person from the global North is one of helping her peers along the road of personal education to development. It will be quite challenging to disrupt these kinds of colonial flows until the ideas about development as temporal progress is deconstructed, and as part of that, the idea that the presence of technology constitutes progress in the lives of the non-technological other (Gajjala, Zhang & Dako-Gyeke, 2010).

At issue here is the tendency to address gender locally. It is not immediately apparent how one might animate a more complex and distributed political analysis concerning how local and global communities are linked through issues of gender and machismo, and how transnational relationships produce situations in which gender emerges as something to be changed through the intercultural production of media by rural Nicaraguan youth with the support of North American peers. McRobbie (2009) argues that the forces of disarticulation in post-feminist modernity make the very basis of coming together around gender unthinkable. In the AMIGOS/IDA program, there are no opportunities to interact with artifacts or bodies that might challenge the idea that gender is an individualizing force. Rather, ideas about gender as an issue affecting girls in the global South while girls in the global North are liberated and can take up positions as helpful subjects is reinforced,
precisely because there is no scaffolding for youth to consider why relations of power are both local and global.
Chapter 5: Agency, Youth and Mapping Global Connections

Field notes

I think what I am experiencing and witnessing is the difficulty organizations like IDA and AMIGOS have in operationalizing discourse. We’re great at talking about agency. The meeting with Deliana [the regional IDA director] yesterday is about agency—we discussed how youth making media is development, regardless of subject matter. They don’t have to make it about a particular development issue or even a right. It is agency. We talked about all the networks youth have to deal with, and being able to access networks and being able to communicate about their...
own lives. It was so inspiring.

But then we operationalize, and what actually happens is something else entirely. We have Anabela [the local IDA director] defining what kinds of videos are appropriate, and constraining who can even participate by selecting which youth get to be leaders instead of letting them self-identify, and further complicating things by refusing to reimburse youth transportation. I reimburse them if they come to me, but they are so much more likely to go to one of her team members first. You have facilitators in the communities, totally overworked, and committed to the media program but without any actual time to implement it. There’s confusion over how the comité de desarrollo comunitario should be involved with storing and lending out the media equipment, and sometimes then the youth are not allowed to access computers or cameras. Sometimes it’s because the project isn’t deemed “civic engagement,” other times it’s because the person who is storing the equipment is afraid of something breaking, and being blamed and charged for the cost. Sometimes it’s just because of community politics.

Then, of course, you’ve got the workshops. Sometimes they are awe-inspiring, awesome, just magical. Other times, it’s the exact opposite. This afternoon I ran a workshop that failed miserably. There’s only one me, and the IDA tech people decided not to show up. We were making stop-motion animations. Youth get frustrated. Programs are in English. They don’t know how to use the mouse. They forgot the tripod. And you have a situation in which you just want to scream, because it wasn’t supposed to
be like this. IDA was supposed to send three people to help. This is supposed to be so empowering, and in fact, it’s just the opposite. I wanted it to work so bad once I even did part of the stop-motion for the youth, edited their little video for them in two seconds so I could move on to the next group. What I really did in that moment was stop them from learning how to fix things, how to participate, and I showed them that their American peers can do things faster, easier, quicker.

There’s a wide chasm between what we say we do, how we tell stories about what we do, and what we actually do on the ground. It’s not all youth leadership and empowerment and storytelling—today, we couldn’t get the stories out, it did not feel empowering, and the youth were not really in charge. And in the meeting with IDA after that, the youth weren’t really in charge either from the language we used to talk about them.

It’s not always like this. Last week I was literally running on fumes because the workshop went so incredibly well, when youth worked together to plan which rights we would address each week. That did feel empowering, magical, collaborative, and real. But it’s only half the story, and it’s time to tell the whole story.48

48 Excerpt from field notes, 2011.
Introduction

Civic engagement youth media is linked to a belief in youth capacity where capacity is youths’ ability to engage agentive action. The hope for a better and different future, and youths’ role to shape this better and different future, are tied up in capacity, civic engagement, and, in the case of the AMIGOS/IDA media program, media production. The particular modality of “hope” taken up in the context of youth media programming involves using media to tackle urgent issues like poverty and education within a framework wherein it is assumed a priori that media literacy will engage youth in becoming involved—by means of participation—in enacting solutions to issues in their lives, communities and world. This belief in agency, learning, media and hope for a better future foregrounds agency as the way to move forward creating change in the world, and it constructs youth participants as key bodies that can create change. Multiliteracy theory suggests that capacity, conceived of as agency, is more than the ability to produce media, it is the ability to critically analyze relations of power and representation in the world and in the context of media so that they might affect some kind of change (Hull, 2003; Soep, 2006). Because the concept of agency is surrounded by complications and historicity, it is useful to re-theorize the link between youth, media, and public practice through a “mobilities” lens that focuses on how youth move through and within systems including materialities, ideologies, and discourse (Bryson & MacIntosh, 2010).

This chapter addresses a key gap in theorizing how capacity operates within discourses and related practices that constitute the AMIGOS/IDA youth media program. In particular, it critically investigates how youth media discourse rests on an assumed foundation where
capacity is defined as agency, empowerment, or voice. Youth leadership and development discourse in the AMIGOS/IDA program has taken a (positive) turn towards capacity building and development, in which what works is celebrated and built upon. This turn is a response to the deficit models that once defined development practice, and AMIGOS’ and IDA’s desire to move away from this kind of paternalistic language and practice. However, the celebratory culture that pervades the AMIGOS and IDA culture can, at times, be counterproductive and/or make critical engagement without work challenging. In situations where formal institutional and organizational media programs are concerned, as is the case with AMIGOS/IDA, there is a tendency to celebrate and document the impressive multi-literacy benefits linked with media production. The problem with this approach is that it conceals how the structures that allow for youth to make media also marginalize youth. Only documenting and celebrating youth media production leaves both practitioners and researchers with little space to ask “tough questions about the actual quality and impact of young people’s learning experiences, or the extent to which the benefits carry over into measurable social and educational capital” (Soep, 2006). This tension has been a major one through the writing of this dissertation, while I am forever indebted to and a fan of AMIGOS work, and especially of the young people who participate in AMIGOS programming, finding a space to engage critically with our practices and even failures has proven difficult. Part of this difficulty comes form my own trepidation: I worked hard to convince AMIGOS and IDA of the merits of a youth media program in rural Nicaraguan communities, and subsequently, to raise the necessary funds. AMIGOS runs many types of youth programming and as a media person I hope there will be more media programming at AMIGOS. My own desire to tell pleasing and inspiring stories about this program so that it continues to grow and the
young people involved are looked favorably upon is part of the challenge of the story about how to tell a story about youth, media, and civic engagement. This chapter situates youth media production carried out in the youth-focused non-profit world within modernist discourses about development, progress, and “change,” in order to re-conceptualize agency through a mobilities framework that attends not only to optimistic youth media programming but also to the complex and affective moments in youth media discourses. That is to say, this chapter engages the complexities of communication for development work with young people while acknowledging the transnational relationships that foster communication for development programming. I address how and why there is urgency to theorize media programming in ways that counter the utopic discourses of empowerment and agency in youth media production.

Agency is often inferred based on the ability to produce media and engage communities. Programming that shows youth how to debunk popular media and to produce documentary media about and with their own communities engenders a positive feeling about youth and the future they represent (Broughton, 2012). The positive documentation of this phenomenon is problematic because it posits “a fully egalitarian environment where none exists, thereby obscuring rather than unsettling the uneven distribution of power” (Soep, 2006, p. 201). The embodied, affective moments in youth media and the feelings it produces may indicate a different and more complex set of experiences in youth media altogether. The focus on voice and its representation as agency or capacity obscures the broader socialities and materialities in which production is situated (Barad, 2003). The optimism about youth work and its potential for changing the world is an instance of “pan-optimism. . . [or t]he desire to feel
good about the outcomes of youth projects and youth studies” (Lesko & Talburt, 2012, p. 280). Pan-optimism within youth studies provides youth workers, theoreticians, and others with a site of hope that produces an orderly future, obscuring the underworkings and relations of power that occur in youth work (MacIntosh, Poyntz, & Bryson, 2012). It is important to carefully document and analyze how capacity operates, in a reflexive attempt to attend to more than just optimistic outcomes but to the complex and affective moments of mobility within youth media.

In order to move beyond the feel-good possibilities of youth media, critical engagement with the taken-for-granted notion of “agency” deployed as an outcome of youth work becomes urgent. The desire to produce agentive subjects is linked to the understanding of the individual person who can effect change, who is present in writing about development and youth media (Bryson & MacIntosh, 2010; Lesko & Talburt, 2012; MacIntosh, Poyntz & Bryson, 2012). Agentive capacity has been theorized as an ability possessed by the sovereign subject, and is frequently conceptualized this way in youth media (Davies, 2000; Zerilli, 2005). The change-producing subject can be challenged by foregrounding the complex constellation of transnational movements and forces that shape capacity with particular attention paid to the pedagogical spaces opened in development practice. The usefulness of the notion of agency is questionable given the historical and theoretical understandings that have plagued the concept, and in the case of media and capacity, it is more useful to conceptualize mobilities and how they are shaped, constrained, and released (Bryson & MacIntosh, 2010). Capacity and movement have to do with intervening in becoming, changing, or affecting what matters. It is imagination that “us to bring particulars into an
unexpected and potentially critical relation with each other—critical because we are able to see something new” (Zerilli, 2005, p. 61). A mobilities framework allows for capacity in movement through relationality where relationships are born of imaginative and affective practices (Bryson & MacIntosh, 2010). Mobility places an emphasis on publicness and being in the world in a relational way, fixating less on the individual’s ability to affect change and more on the constellations of movement that make participation and publicness possible.

When youth make media they engage multiple networks connected through new and old media and movement thereby engaging communities and people locally and globally (boyd, 2007; Hull, Stornaiuolo & Sahni, 2010; Jenkins, 2006a). This sharing can be wildly fun and energizing—it can also be riddled with tension between youth, communities, storytellers, subjects, organizations, and other constituents. As the media pieces move through diverse networks, youth mobilities shift dramatically dependent on a complicated constellation of who is involved, how the piece circulates, and the flows and constructions of those spaces and subjects (Sheller & Urry, 2006).

Questions

In order to consider how capacity, agency, and mobility function in youth media programming that operates in conjunction with local and global networks and relationality, this chapter addresses the following questions:

1. How does capacity operate in relation to transnational youth media programming?
2. What are the roles of local and global networks in shaping youth media engagement?
3. What are the material constraints and possibilities afforded in development and youth media programming?
Figure 35 Youth from Villa de Ada, 2011.

Villa de Ada: Context

Villa de Ada has been involved with the media program since 2010. That year, Villa de Ada was provided with media production tools—laptops, cameras, recorders, and media editing programs—and youth began participating in workshops on how to produce media projects and how to execute small-scale community development initiatives from 2010 – 12.

Participants Demographics in Villa de Ada

Table 7 Participants from the AMIGOS-IDA program in Villa de Ada.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Hometown</th>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Notes</th>
<th>Recruitment Process</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kara</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Arizona, USA</td>
<td>International Volunteer, AMIGOS; Volunteer, IDA</td>
<td>Kara studied abroad during high school and found AMIGOS because she wanted to spend time in a community in Latin America.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christina</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Boston, USA</td>
<td>International Volunteer-AMIGOS</td>
<td>Christina was recruited via her high school Spanish class.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Julia</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>International Volunteer, AMIGOS</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clemente</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Villa de Ada Boaco, Nicaragua</td>
<td>Local Volunteer, AMIGOS</td>
<td>Clemente was interested in the AMIGOS program and his mother was involved because she is a teacher; she encouraged him to get involved.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bea</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Asiento Vie Boaco, Nicaragua</td>
<td>Local Volunteer, AMIGOS</td>
<td>Bea was recruited by IDA, and has been very involved over a period of years.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sonia</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Villa de Ada Boaco, Nicaragua</td>
<td>Local Volunteer, AMIGOS</td>
<td>Sonia was recruited by Kara because she is a journalism student at the university level.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pseudonym</td>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Hometown</td>
<td>Role</td>
<td>Notes</td>
<td>Recruitment Process</td>
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<tr>
<td>Belia</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Villa de Ada, Boaco, Nicaragua</td>
<td>Local Volunteer, AMIGOS</td>
<td></td>
<td>Belia was recruited by IDA.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dora</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Villa de Ada, Boaco, Nicaragua</td>
<td>Local Volunteer, AMIGOS</td>
<td>Dora really wants to get out of Villa de Ada, however her parents rarely allow her to leave the community or participate in overnight initiatives.</td>
<td></td>
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</table>

In Villa de Ada there is an ongoing potable water project, initiated by IDA in 2010 in response to water-borne illnesses related to the presence of arsenic in the local river, and to the challenges faced by girls and women bringing water up the mountain on a daily basis. It was funded through a partnership between IDA and a foreign (European) donor. The youth from Villa de Ada were encouraged to make a video about the water project. IDA was hopeful the youth would learn how to do community participation through the documentation of this water project. IDA facilitators hoped that the video could be shared with the funders donating the money for the potable water project. The youth explain:

Chelsey: So how’d you decide to produce the story about the running water?

Clemente: Because here . . . maybe you noticed when you came. The population was having troubles with the water. Getting very sick. And it’s because of the arsenic that we cannot drink the water. And many people have died, and maybe they do but also
they don’t realize it’s from the arsenic problem in the water. And they die, and the people say, oh it’s because they were sick. It’s a natural death. And no one ever knows why these people die. But now, we know it is because of the arsenic. And that the water we were drinking is very contaminated. But now, thanks to IDA and AMIGOS, we are fixing this problem.

Chelsey: So why’d you decide to make a video about this?

Dora: Because it’s very important for us. Before we didn’t have . . . well, we really doubted this water project in Villa de Ada would ever happen. And there has been a miracle, and the project has come to Villa de Ada. And we made the story for the future.

Clemente: Because in the video we show people who got sick from the water. And we also show the part at the end, how it feels to have this project. Have it all done. How it is all going to be great. And how it will be great to drink water without arsenic in it. You can drink water with arsenic in it, but it has to be a low amount of arsenic. Because it was at level 39 of arsenic. That amount of the material. And now we have filters in all the homes, which lowers the amount of arsenic by 7%. But the running water will have even less arsenic.49

This was a major and multi-year project. The project was important for Villa de Ada because of high arsenic levels in the water. While I did not carry out any tests as part of this

49 Interview excerpt with youth participants from Villa de Ada, 2011.
dissertation, IDA and community members shared with me that arsenic levels were a result of Canadian gold miners upstream. For IDA, this project represented the kind of development they hoped to do, but could not always carry out because of funding complications. This project is built on a whole web of transnational issues and forces. The presence of the arsenic in the drinking water is one example of friction (Tsing, 2005) where global ideals like the free market and a company’s ability to invest in global projects meets with local reality. The miners run local development initiatives in the community where the mining initiative is located; however, it is the surrounding and much more rural communities that bear the brunt of the impact from the mining. Materials released into the environment, like the arsenic released in the process of gold mining, gets into the streams and rivers that provide drinking water in the surrounding area.

**Gold, Arsenic, and Running Water**

Before there was a running water system implemented in Villa de Ada, the community drew their water (for drinking, washing, and cooking) from the river. It was a steep walk down to the river; one that women and older children made frequently to bring up water to Villa de Ada. Gold mining has been around Nicaragua for a long time, however recently there has been a surge of foreign gold miners in Nicaragua because the price of gold has increased so much and because there are few legal constrains around gold mining in Nicaragua (Otis, 2012). While other countries in Latin America have outlawed gold mining because of its environmental effects and because of its disruption and challenges to local communities, Nicaragua, the second poorest country in the Western hemisphere has allowed it, ostensibly because of the economic benefits. Miners were allowed to return to Nicaragua under Daniel
Ortega’s presidency, which is ironic because Ortega was originally part of the Sandinista revolution that opposed mining in the 80s. Ortega is currently in his third term as president, which he facilitated after he changed the constitution to allow himself a third term. There is a major Canadian (based in Vancouver) gold mine in the town of La Libertad, Chontales—incidentally, Ortega’s hometown—run by the Vancouver based company B2Gold (Otis, 2012), which is not far from Villa de Ada and certainly shares rivers. B2Gold runs a number of small development projects in La Libertad.

Gold mining is known to be related to the presence of arsenic in water sources, particularly in streams near the mining site (Razo, Carrizles, Casto, Diaz-Barriga, & Monroy, 2004; Smedly & Kniburg, 2002). Arsenic has been identified as a health concern when it is in water that is consumed over long periods of time in many parts of the global South (Ber et al., 2001; Razo et al., 2004). Chronic and long term arsenic exposure or poisoning can lead to skin diseases, cancer of the bladder, liver, kidney, lung, blood vessel diseases in the legs and feet, diabetes,
and high blood pressure (World Health Organization [WHO], 201450). In the context of the water project in Villa de Ada, community members discussed the arsenic in the water (water was tested by IDA) in relation to the gold mining happening in La Libertad. There were some people in Villa de Ada who had fallen ill, and many people believed that the cause of the illness was the arsenic contaminated drinking water drawn from the river.

IDA sometimes has international guests tour communities with them, and it so happened that an international guest from Europe heard about this issue, visited the community on a tour, and decided to fund the water project. IDA also put some money towards the project and worked with community leaders to begin the project. The water was to come from a well in the community. Every couple of houses, there would be a water spigot. IDA invested significant resources into this project and was highly invested in its success both for the community and in order to maintain their relationship with the donor. IDA facilitators attended many meetings about the water project in Villa de Ada, and these meetings were often controversial.

Field notes

I went with Deliana today to Villa de Ada. We were supposed to meet about the media, but first we were meeting about the water project. We were late, it had already begun when we arrived. People were very heated, emotions running high. Some people want to move the site where they are

50 More information about arsenic can be found on the WHO website, here:
http://www.who.int/topics/arsenic/en/
going to dig the well. Right now, and digging has already begun, the site is located on one man’s property. The man agreed to donate the land, and tried to get a document from the local government saying he had donated the land to the community. However, he was unable to obtain the document because of errors in past documentation. So, the man says he will still donate the land, but the community doesn’t believe him. They are not OK with leaving the well where it is without proper documentation of the land as communal. The community is angry with IDA for having started digging without the documents. IDA is angry because the community already agreed to put it there, and made plans with IDA, and IDA has already invested $50,000 córdobas. During that meeting, about half the people stormed off.\textsuperscript{51}

This field note provides some of the contextual information to the challenges of doing development programming in rural communities, where there are multiple entities involved. Here, the community struggled to negotiate personal land ownership, government regulations, and IDA’s need to move the water project forward and balance a budget to be approved by an external, foreign donor. These are the kinds of challenges associated with the water project, but also with most development projects, and, notably, with the media project. This is important because often when stories are told about development projects what is shared is a clean version of what happened in this meeting where words like

\textsuperscript{51} Excerpt from field notes about a meeting in Villa de Ada I attended with Deliana, the Regional Director of the IDA program in the states of Boaco and Chontales, 2011
“empowerment,” “negotiation,” and “participation” are substituted for words like “anger,” “frustration,” and “disagreement.” Like the water project, the media project had multiple challenges that, while they seemed to be granular and more related to community oversight than the actual media project, set the tone for the program.

While frustration at the process is expressed with relation to the running water project, what is rarely discussed is the root cause, the reason why this project became so necessary. The gold mining company rarely comes up in conversation, although the undertone of urgency about finishing the water is tied up with the reality that because of the presence of the mining company, arsenic is being released into drinking water and causing health issues.

**Development and Funding**

While the adults are running the water project in Villa de Ada, the media project is meant to be entirely youth led. However, during the interim period between the two summer programs, from August 2010 to May 2011, there was a significant amount of tension among the youth and in the community about how the media equipment would be handled and who would be able to access the equipment. The original plan, made by the youth group and supported by the Community Development Committee, was that the equipment would rotate between Clemente’s home and Bea’s home. Clemente and Bea are both very involved in the media project, and both come from prominent families that are involved in the community in multiple ways. Clemente’s mother is the schoolteacher, Bea’s family runs the store in town, and they live in two of the four neighborhoods in the community. However, for whatever reason the plan did not work out, which caused extreme tension between the two families and between Clemente’s mother, Aurelia the schoolteacher, and the youth. The equipment first
stayed in Clemente’s home, and was never moved to the other home. Aurelia was afraid of being held responsible for any damage done to the equipment, and did not want to lend it out often. Youth who wanted to use the equipment became angry that they could not access the cameras and computers. Some complained Clemente was taking the equipment with him to school and that the family was holding on to the equipment so their son could benefit more than other youth. Hardly anyone used the equipment during this time, although many tried. As a result, a significant focus of AMIGOS work in Villa de Ada was spent working through what had happened, and what could happen differently moving forward so that the youth could collaborate in more productive ways. In the following field note, I describe a meeting in June in Villa de Ada, just after the water project meeting described above, in which the youth began to work towards some solutions:

Field note

As the water project meeting ended, we moved into a youth meeting about what to do about the media project. Bea and Aurelia and Clemente’s mother fought for a bit about what had happened with the media equipment over the past year. The comité de desarrollo comunitario (CDC) was pretty committed to letting the youth do their own thing. Deliana intervened and spoke her piece about communication and importance, and then I spoke mine, about leaving the past behind and the proposed kinds of projects for this year. Then Betty said she was leaving the media project and totally walked out. It was a big deal since she has been such a major player in the AMIGOS/IDA youth programming, and she said she quit.
Then Clemente went off with his mother, Aurelia, saying they did not want to be involved either. The other youth were pretty upset and frustrated with Betty when she stormed off. After Deliana came over and said her piece about youth participation and responsibility and investigating youth issues through media, she kind of separated off from the jóvenes and I, and we made a little circle on the corner of the basketball court with me. I talked to Maria, who at that point became the default leader with Bea and Clemente gone, and the others about the media project. We decided they would call a youth meeting for tomorrow afternoon. I will try to be there. They will go house to house tonight, inviting all the youth, and they will invite from all the neighborhoods, which is a step in the right direction. It’s been a challenge to get them to include youth from the other neighborhoods in Villa de Ada, and a lot of the dispute centers on neighborhood relationships. At that meeting tomorrow, they will decide who does what, who the leaders are, how they will deal with the equipment.

During all of this, Handel, the AMIGOS Project Supervisor, was talking to the volunteers. One is having major cultural adjustment issues. She wants to move out of Bea’s house and in with the other family. I’m certain this will be another blow to Bea and her family, they are already so upset that this volunteer is not thriving in their home. The three American volunteers did not know the youth. Neither did Handel. Yikes. I’m trying to steer this
thing right, but man it ain’t easy. It was a strange situation, me sitting on one corner of the court, working with the youth from Villa de Ada, Handel and the three volunteers sitting in another tight circle, dealing with cultural adjustment issues, and in the center of the court, the remaining adults and IDA professionals, mulling about how to manage the new developments with the water project.⁵²

Multiple and competing issues arise in this community meeting, where youth are asked to support the broader community’s efforts on the water project through media production, and the youth come together to try and negotiate some of the related challenges. While it was still the first week or so in Villa de Ada for the American young people, it is notable that they were dealing with their own challenges just being in another country while their peers worked on how to navigate the media program. While things eventually began to work a bit more smoothly in Villa de Ada, the youth really struggled in the beginning of the program to

![Figure 38 Youth in Villa de Ada work on a media project.](image)

⁵² Field note, from an afternoon in June 2011 spent with IDA leaders in Villa de Ada, working on community issues and providing programmatic support to the Nicaraguan youth and American youth involved in the program, 2011.
manage IDA’s demands, personality conflicts, and the cultural adjustment phase of the North American young women living and working in Villa de Ada.

Since the media equipment caused such tension in the community during the year, the adult community leaders, members of the CDC expressed concern not about what the youth were producing, but about management of the equipment. However, IDA employees were very concerned about what the youth were producing, in addition to where and how they would manage the equipment. IDA employees were invested in the production of a video about the water project, and requested that the youth consider making a video about this development project in 2010. Youth in the community were not terribly excited about documenting the water project, and did not mobilize after the request was made. Why they had not already made the video, and their subsequent lethargy around producing this video was a topic that arose again and again in meetings in 2011, a year after the request was made and the youth did not follow-through. Anabela, at the time the Local Director of IDA, who had a contentious relationship with local youth AMIGOS, expressed after long discussions a desire for youth to “do” civic engagement through media and their responsibilities to the water project and the community:

They should go and film it (the water project) and give an analysis, film it, and record it, with what they have learned. It would be nice for them to be able to present this to the funders. I even told them we could bring the projector to the community to show it. And look, none of them made a move. That’s where, I think, we need to tell the youth that they are part of the community and they are the future of the community—in five or ten
years, they’ll be the adults.\textsuperscript{53}

There is a feeling of urgency to ‘“get youth involved” with the funders now, and to make sure they learn these skills and develop an investment in community development so that they can lead the community in the very near future. There is a real urgency to show proof of development progress to the funder, to please them by sharing particular kinds of stories narrated by particular groups of community members. This feeling of frustration is not uncommon in youth programming especially when there is a desire for youth to be empowered, inspired leaders. The youth involved in this project are constructed as the future of the community, the community’s hope. Frustration ensues because there is a gap between what we hope we do, what we say we do publicly, and what actually happens on the ground in youth media production. What becomes valued is a certain kind of mobility that evidences, by means of participation, youth leadership. In Villa de Ada, this was not evidenced by making the water video. It is materialized through interaction with community media projects, organizations, and activities like canvassing the community to gather stories about community projects, or attending meetings about community issues. These activities are valorized and rewarded as representative of participation or civic engagement even when they conflict with responsibilities youth might have outside of community participation or when they have concerns about the mode of participation made possible through community development.

\textsuperscript{53} Excerpt from program planning meeting with IDA and AMIGOS leaders, 2011.
Organizational Pedagogy and Paths of Mobility

One way to think about the relationship between the youth and AMIGOS/IDA is to consider the multiple ways in which AMIGOS/IDA set up particular paths for youth to follow.

Pedagogically, the practices and ideals made clear through our programming shape how young participants become or “do” what shows up in our discourse as “empowerment” and what, for the purpose of thinking about what we actually mean, I refer to in this dissertation as mobility. In a meeting between IDA staff and me before the program began in the late spring of 2011, we discussed concerns with the production, or more specifically, the lack of production of a video about the water project:

Anabela: Something I remember that was really important from when we met with the national office. Juan Carlos said that this work with AMIGOS, with the youth, that the projects we should promote with the youth should be in accordance with the Community Development Plan

Chelsey: Well yes, but I think he meant more for the Community Based Initiatives, because we want the youth to be able to do whatever they want for the media project.

Anabela: I understood it at the integral level, Juan Carlos meant the whole thing. And it’s a great suggestion.

Chelsey: We cannot force the youth to produce about the Community Development Plan. For example, in Villa de Ada, when we wanted the youth to make the video about the water . . .
Anabela: Yes, that is still an issue.

Chelsey: The youth didn’t want to do it, and we wanted them to. I think this has happened in many communities, and this is not our pedagogy. AMIGOS doesn’t work like that. We do not need them to make media about the CDC projects just because those projects are important to us as organizations or to the CDC.

Anabela: But listen, the donors on this Villa de Ada project where this is an issue are from a business in Europe. And they came last year, in September or October. We started to prepare for the donor visit. And I remember when we got the committee together and I told the committee, I talked with the group of multimedia youth and told them it would be interesting to record where the women go to bring water from the river. The woman and children, the girls are in charge of bringing water in any underdeveloped country in the world, these girls are not the exception. I told them to film this and do an analysis, that they should film it and talk about what they learned, and with the AMIGOS youth make it a little prettier, and the day the donors come, they should have presented. We even brought the projector so they could show it. And look, none of the youth even made a move. And that is where I think we have to tell these youth they are part of the community and the future of the community, in five, ten years, they will be the adults.

Chelsey: Yes, I understand it would be nice if they wanted to do this. However, logically we cannot force them into making this video if they don’t want to. Or we have to change the program to be only about community development projects. Or we
would have to change how we train them, so they are more interested in this. I don’t think anyone has really talked with them about doing this kind of community development committee work. I haven’t.\(^{54}\)

Here, we struggle over what kind of mobility the AMIGOS/IDA program offers. Anabela expresses the urgency with which she wants the youth to participate in the water project by making a video about it, discussing her frustration that, even though she encouraged the youth to make this video and provided a projector and audience for them to show it, they did not take up her suggestion. As the conversation continues, the meeting takes the tone common in current progressive development practices, where participatory discourses and words like empowerment, capacity, reinforcing, and training take center stage as we discuss how the young peoples’ role in the water project in Villa de Ada:

Felipe: I think that group just needs to be reinforced. And first reinforce and train and empower them, make them a little more aware of what they can accomplish on their own. We are all in agreement that it needs to come from them they want to make something, but I think we can have an exchange with them, too.

Adrian: Well, also the minds are not in the same place as ours, the adolescent mind has other interests. They are into other initiatives. At the end of the day, we need to empower them so that the community becomes a priority for them. . . . And what is the purpose of being empowered, investing if they are not empowered to do

\(^{54}\) Excerpt from a planning meeting with AMIGOS and IDA leaders, 2011.
what IDA really is. It’s true it is based also in the promotion of children’s rights but all . . .

Felipe: Responsibility. We cannot forget, Chelsey, that youth are also responsible for part of the community, for their family, the school and the organization and structure of the community.

Chelsey: I just want to remind us, that they are not working for AMIGOS or IDA. We cannot expect that they make videos for us or that they make videos that will help our organizations move forward or that we want them to make. That is not the objective of the work. 55

Figure 39 Youth from Villa de Ada after winning their printer.

55 Excerpt from a field note about a meeting between me and the IDA local team, prior to the start of the 2011 summer youth media program, 2011.
In this meeting, there is disagreement and negotiation over how best to support the youth in Villa de Ada in particular ways so that they both produce a video about the water project and so that they can become productive, responsible citizens who will come to manage the development projects of the community in the future. There is a focus on empowering the youth so that the community becomes a priority and on responsibility, mostly so that in the future there are people ready to move into community leadership roles. This is a setting up of how youth can move in the world in responsible ways that centralize community development concerns and responsibility to and for each other and the future. Youth need to be responsible, and in this setting being responsible means producing a video about the water project not to challenge the presence of gold miners releasing arsenic into the water, but to please a European donor so that he continues to provide funding for community projects.

The AMIGOS staffs, as well, set up particular kinds of mobilities for young people even though they may vary slightly from those set up by IDA. Steeped in “progressive” development approaches, the AMIGOS staff struggled with the request to make a video about the water project because it situated the community as needy and tied to the help of far-away development funding. As we designed the workshop on media and social justice issues, we dealt with the challenges of supporting youth to move beyond social justice as situating Nicaraguan communities as lacking in particular ways or facing particularly challenging issues:

Jaminah: Also, you know that activity when they did the story board about the social issues . . . just make sure we’re rotating them enough so we can see what story they do come up with and ask them questions to help frame it the way they should be
framing it in order to think about it critically. So like, if there social issue is education and how there’s not opportunity for education in their community. And they tell a story about, Johnny didn’t go to school and then he graduated with a diploma, and we can help them ask questions to think critically, like: Why wasn’t Johnny able to go to school? Did he have to work? Why would he have to work? Was he at an age where he couldn’t go to school? Stuff like that. I don’t know if that was a good enough example.

Chelsey: Great example. I think it’s also OK for them to do positive things too. They don’t have to be “faltas.”

Handel: I feel like that’s what people revert too. That’s what I revert to in these particular issues.

Chelsey: Like, community development could be a social issue. Documenting your CBI could be a social issue. What are the social issues inherent in the work you’re doing with kids everyday? What . . .

Jaminah: Like community organizing.

Chelsey: We need to be careful about imposing what we think are social issues. You know? Certain things that, narratives that make us uncomfortable because they’re not PC enough.

56 In Spanish, the verb Faltar means to lack.
Jonathan: Right, I think it’s interesting though because for a lot of these youth who we’re making videos with, their . . . I know from what I’ve created, I’ve been inspired by things. And the majority of what these youth watch are telenovelas, right? They’re not going to indie movie theatres and watching innovative stories and characters. It’s very much . . . . Like 90% of the media they see doesn’t provoke critical thought, then how can we, it’s tough. How can we encourage them to make something so different from what’s familiar and be excited about that, when what would be exciting would be creating something that seems real? What seems real to them is this media that they see that we think is totally unreal.

_Telenovelas._

As we planned the workshop for youth, we discussed how to support youth in thinking about critical issues in certain ways, and how to help them move beyond thinking about social issues as _only_ the perceived negatives in communities. As young people steeped in participatory development and capacity building approaches, it feels like a failure to watch youth produce videos about needs as opposed to about action around issues and/or positive developments in their communities and lives. Jonathan identifies a challenge here about how to engage a particular kind of criticality in media production in this context, where the media youth are exposed to is mostly telenovelas.

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_57_ Excerpt from an AMIGOS planning meeting during which leaders created a workshop for youth to make social issue videos, 2011.
La Contaminación: The Story

Youth in Villa de Ada eventually made the video about the potable water project for an AMIGOS 48-Hour Video Contest in 2011. The project came about independent of IDA’s requests for a video about the water project. It occurred to one of the American volunteers, Christina, that they could make this video for the 48-Hour Video Contest, for which they had to produce something about a social issue. While Christina was present during the earlier meeting, she did not participate as she was working through cultural adjustment issues with her AMIGOS Supervisor. After a workshop about video editing and storytelling, the idea took hold. Christina explains:

I was just sitting there, and they were like “issues in the community,” and I was like “Oh, the IDA project. They’re doing all these things in the streets. Making it hard to walk everywhere. They have super controversial meetings every week. The IDA guy’s in the community every day.” So I was like, “That’s kind of big!” I told Kara, and Kara told Clemente, and Clemente was like, “Yah, let’s do a dramatic spin on it . . . let’s do this.” And we were like, “Oh, ok. That’s way more interesting than a documentary.”

58 Excerpt from an interview with international volunteer Christina, who lived and worked in Villa de Ada
In discussing how they came to this idea, Christina talks about her physical environment, and the presence of the water project and how her daily life, which was shaped by the presence of the water project, leads to her idea. She then talks about deciding to “do a dramatic spin on it” which would be “way more interesting than a documentary.” The “dramatic spin” on the water project became a short video, which they titled La Contaminación. The documentary aesthetic is portrayed here by the youth as AMIGOS and IDA’s agenda, which is labeled by the youth as “boring”, while a dramatic spin makes things fun and exciting. The video opens with a “welcome to Villa de Ada” painting the youth made the year prior on the side of a community building, and a pan of the green hills of the community. There is a screen shot that reads, “Once, a family depended on the river for all of their water,” and then the video

Figure 40 Youth from Villa de Ada brainstorming a storyboard for La Contaminación, 2011.
cuts to a scene of a family carrying buckets of water on their heads up a steep hill. The little girl faints, and her brother calls to their parents as he comes to her aid. They carry the lifeless girl home where she continues to grow sicker and sicker. The parents explain that the water in the river is contaminated; it makes people ill, and is the source of the many mosquitos that also cause illness. The children ask for water and their father hands them glasses of water, presumably, from what they carried up earlier. Screen titles appear with the words “IDA Nicaragua wanted to help and support the community with the biggest problem they had . . . water.” We see an IDA official approach two adults in the community and talk to them about “the biggest problem” in the community, water. The IDA official says he will return with a solution. While he is away, the little girl gets sicker, and dies. The IDA official returns,
telling the people that there is no financing for a solution to the water problem. Multiple people, mostly children, approach the IDA official, asking him to please solve the problem, including the mother of the dead little girl. The IDA official leaves, promising to try to solve the problem. Another screen title appears, that says “IDA and Villa de Ada together started a project for running water, healthy and purified.” This is followed by photos of men digging the ditches that will hold the pipelines for the water project and then photos of the children’s and other community members’ faces. The video ends as these faces flash and give way to credits.

In *La Contaminación*, the community is approached by IDA, and asked what “the biggest problem” is in the community. It seems IDA brings help, hope, and a better future to a plagued community, though soon it becomes clear that IDA is also reliant on outside financial support. The community waits for news of this funding from the IDA representative who bears hope. The community is dependent on European benefactors to facilitate the provision of resources like running water. All the actors in the story are caught in globalized relationships of development that situates power firmly in Western hands, and makes resources increasingly challenging to access across the space-time continuum that expands, as opposed to compresses, for those in the global South as globalization occurs and it becomes harder to access resources that become farther away (Katz, 2004). In this development context, resources filter through numerous hands, fostering a sense of hopelessness in those who requested the resources. Likewise, civic engagement theories and asset-based development practices attempt to connect communities with resources and help them become mobile within networks that are rich with resources, yet, this often involves
numerous steps in terms of whose hands the resources pass through, and in *La Contaminación*, it is apparent how this becomes immobilizing.

**Telling Stories to Move Others**

Youth involved in producing *La Contaminación* understood, from prior engagements and conversations with IDA, that this video should *move* others. It should move the European funder so that he may be satisfied with his decision to fund the progress of this community. Youth participants know about the multiple players involved in funding a project like this. They are familiar with the kind of language that easily results in successfully funded programming. In this interaction with me, youth explain the project, its transnational funding entanglements, and their affective responsibility:

Chelsey: I heard that you feel proud of the project, and that’s why you made the video.

Clemente: Yes, we are proud of the project.

Dora: And blessed. Even though it will be a project . . . . It won’t get to all the houses, but will be. . . . Well, a water spigot for every 10 people. So it will be more flexible. Because the amount of money that there is for the project is not enough for us to have a spigot in every house. So that’s how it’s going to be. But at the same time maybe with the help from this program we can coordinate with other organizations to have help so that the water can get to every community and every person . . . . so that every home has its own water spigot.

Chelsey: So are you going to use the video to show to other organizations and ask for help?
Clemente: Yes. To see if, when they see the video, they are surpised or feel an emotion of sadness. I don’t know. They could come and talk to someone from the community or maybe someone with money/influence here in Nicaragua, and come to our community and say to us: We want to help with this project. We will give a donation so it can continue.59

The youth understand the complexities of transnational development organizing and that to gain access they must affectively move people in faraway places. In order for youth to gain access to resources such as those they mention, there are multiple levels of funding support they need to approach. For example, in order for youth to propose a project to be funded by IDA or AMIGOS, the proposal has to be approved by the Community Development Committee, and either already be a part of or able to be integrated into the Community Development Plan. Then the proposal is presented to IDA and/or AMIGOS, who approves the project (or not). Once in the IDA/AMIGOS office, the IDA facilitator or AMIGOS supervisor must also gain approval from their superiors, and proposals must be in synch with the IDA goals about children’s rights. Oftentimes, the kinds of projects young people are involved in are not the kinds of projects included in the Community Development Plan. Youth are often interested in building sports fields and/or participating in local youth workshops, whereas the CDC more often includes items like hygiene, potable water, and communal building repair. Through the media project, there is a move for youth to be able to produce freely; however, it is constrained by real needs around being able to move funders

59 Excerpt from an interview with two youth from Villa de Ada who were very involved with the media program, 2011.
and integrate youth into the development process.

Youth involved in Villa de Ada’s youth media project were encouraged to share their media productions with each other and with other nearby communities and/or other groups they might think of as important. Significant time was spent working with youth on civic engagement that was conceptualized like this:

Communities

Non-Profits

Government

Figure 44 Diagram showing civic engagement stakeholders.

Youth were encouraged to involve all three stakeholders shown in Figure 58 in their projects. From within the context of AMIGOS/IDA youth pedagogy, non-profits, government, and communities make up the public to which youth should be addressing their projects. Through our pedagogy, this “public” becomes the public in which civic engagement happens.

Reflecting on such training during an interview, two leaders from Villa de Ada invoke another public—a donor public abroad—as part of their civic engagement constellation. When asked to discuss the video, the Nicaraguan youth return to development discourse that
situates them as recipients—disempowered—even though it is clear they cannot be so simply constructed as disempowered. Youth understand their projects and their development as related to global movement:

Clemente: We are deciding what to do with these. Last year with the media project we did not put anything onto Facebook or anything. It stayed right here. So we are now going to try to put things up to have more help. . . . That way we can express ourselves to the world. Not be quiet and scared of saying that we are here. So we will be heard. So that different organizations can hear the issues and then they can give a solution to an issue. And not just organizations, but the government. So the government can see what problems there are in their own country, in their own communities. So that they will bring help. Also hear the culture. Show our culture. Because in many countries, because of social networks, they see different cultures. So they can see our culture, and how it’s different. So they see it’s different than theirs. And that we can all have different experiences.

Chelsey: Well, I know you guys have the Internet stick now so maybe you’ll have a chance to upload stuff to Facebook, or to a blog or something, about Villa de Ada.

Clemente: Yes, so that the whole world can see and get excited about bringing help to the community.

Chelsey: Aside from help, is there any other reason you want to put stuff up on Facebook?
Clemente: I don’t know. Right now it’s to ask for help with community projects. It would be for help.60

Clemente imagines the global public he engages with on Facebook to be one that is benevolent, and if that public is properly moved that public will want to help financially with development projects in in Villa de Ada. Clemente addresses himself through new media not only to an imagined, global Facebook public, but also, to organizations and the government. Discussing media and development with me, a researcher but also the AMIGOS/IDA Project Director, Clemente envisions his participation in this public such that his community will receive help.

**Mobility and Participation**

Given the historical challenges around agency and the sovereign subject, I have turned to mobility and how youth move through and with their participation in media programming. In *La Contaminación*, the community members and family of the young girl who dies stayed exclusively in Villa de Ada. The character that moves in and out of Villa de Ada is the development worker, and this is the only person who has access to the knowledge, information, and resources to take action around the water issue. The family does discuss the government and that they don’t seem to care about the issues happening in the community and/or are uninvolved, and in the end, it is to the organization that they are “grateful” for the help with the worst problem in the community. They acknowledge, in the video, the three

60 Excerpt from an interview with youth who were very involved with the media program from Villa de Ada, 2011.
sectors we identified in AMIGOS/IDA pedagogy in the space of civic engagement, however the power and resources of each of those sectors differs significantly.

In the interviews, the desire to move in and out of communities is frequently expressed. Often, program facilitators from IDA and AMIGOS expressed a concern that programming, such as the workshops outside of the community, served as little more than an opportunity for youth to convince parents to allow them to leave Villa de Ada. Programming was designed with particular intentions—civic engagement, media literacy, community development—but often taken up with intentions by youth to become mobile outside of Villa de Ada and in doing so, see friends from other communities, and access resources only available in larger towns and small cities like an Internet café or a grocery store. Youth expressed a desire, frequently, to be able to move in and out of Villa de Ada, though in the video all of these characters waited *in the community* for help. Youth navigate complex relationships in development and leadership programming as they go about media production and video storytelling that may have little to do with media and more to do with being able to move across spatial networks. When youth try to move in and out of Villa de Ada, they deal with multiple issues, including parental permission, only one bus in/out of the community each day, financial challenges, and other responsibilities. North American volunteers described the mobility of their peers from the community this way:

Kara: Mona is great. But she’s in college, and home only half the week.

Christina: And Dora . . . But she wants to go places and . . .

Chelsey: What do you mean “go places”?
Kara: She’s not going to be in Villa de Ada too much longer?

Chelsey: Where’s she going?

Kara: She’s dying to get out of this community. It’s so obvious. She’s like, “Can we go to Boaco please?” And William . . .

Julia: It sucks for Dora. Because her family doesn’t really . . .

Kara: . . . let her do much. Like they wouldn’t let her go to Boaco (for an overnight video screening and workshop).

Christina: Then Bea. We don’t know. Because she has a problem . . . They have a big store in the community. And she can only go if her mom doesn’t go milking. But her mom doesn’t really know if she’s going milking until the morning. So we don’t really know. If she says she’s going to Boaco, there’s a good chance she won’t actually go. So we don’t really know. And Mercedes . . . this meeting even. She didn’t do an experimental video because she was like “I don’t know if I can go in the morning.”

These kinds of differing demands on youths’ time and how they spend it make interesting challenges for the ways in which organizations can involve youth in something resembling “civic engagement” or “community development.” The line between programmatic concerns

61 Excerpt from an interview with AMIGOS volunteers from the US who lived and worked in Villa de Ada, 2011.
about civic engagement and the youths’ desire for mobility (for all media/program activities, the organizations pay for transportation and related costs to attend programming) is complex, and makes it challenging to interpret civic engagement, community ownership, or empowerment, from young people’s participation with media production. Youth navigate organizational goals about civic engagement as well as the desire for increased mobility and access to resources not related to development, media, and civic engagement through their participation. Development discourse and practice offers a particular set of mobilities to youth.

By offering certain mobilities instead of others, the development organizations create certain paths, and participation in development/media initiatives becomes a particular kind of mobility. This particular kind of mobility involves speaking and doing “rights” and youth leadership and producing videos that satisfy social justice aims. Of course, these social justice aims are situated in a development organization that historically is imbricated with colonialism and particularly in Villa de Ada is trying to maintain a European funding stream.
Tsing (2005) writes about the global connections and relationships that give form and shape to lives and communities in the age of transnationalism and globalization. In Villa de Ada, the shape that the water project takes is one of urgency, and it is a shape connected at multiple points to stakeholders and communities that, at first glance might have very little to do with each other and with the youth in Villa de Ada. One way we might visualize those connections is like this:
Figure 46 A map of the transnational connections between those involved in the water project in Villa de Ada, 2011.

In this map, all of these players have a role in the local situation as well as important and strong transnational connections. AMIGOS and B2Gold are headquartered in Houston, Texas and in Vancouver, Canada; IDA receives most of its funding from the global North primarily the United States, Western Europe, and Canada. Community members from Villa de Ada travel regularly to Costa Rica and the United States looking for work. The government of Nicaragua has released any previous restrictions on gold mining because, as the second poorest country in the Western hemisphere, they need to open sources of revenue. Taken together, the historical patterns of colonialism become very clear: those causing damage to Villa de Ada’s water source and those trying to help the community rectify the issue both have ties to or are directly from the global North. Regardless of which perspective we take, this is a community and a group of youth media producers whose lives are significantly impacted and shaped by the presence of transnational companies and organizations and the
ways in which these transnational companies and organizations structure resources and livelihood. They change the community’s ability to access safe-to-drink water, and then they also provide the resources for the community to construct a potable water system. Yet, they have very different goals for doing so: even between AMIGOS and IDA, there are differing rationales for youth media production. For IDA, the media program is an opportunity to produce media for community development, to reinforce young people who will be particular kinds of community leaders in the future, and to produce a video that will maintain the kinds of funding connections to donors that allow them to do this kind of work. For AMIGOS, the purpose of the media program is to produce media for international understanding, and to foster qualities of leadership among youth both from Nicaragua and from the United States. For the government, who at some points did give some funding to the project after pressuring from IDA, this will be an opportunity to show that they have supported local communities without having to invest very much support or resources. Differing demands on youth media producers can become both conflicting and confusing to navigate, but it is from within this web of connectivity that young people take up the media project and produce media such as the water project video, *La Contaminación*.

**Performing Community Development**

The challenges surrounding management of the well project and the media project illustrate the multiple ways in which the hopeful narrative of participatory development practice can encounter serious challenges. While the organizations are still involved, in both cases resources have been given to the community to manage. What is really interesting is how the partnership with the organizations still so strictly defines what is possible and what will
When the youth were given the media equipment, we all hoped they would become agents of change. At the same time, we supported them to do so without becoming too political about the situation. While IDA and community leaders regularly discussed the arsenic in the water as a result of the miners upstream, a concerted effort to consider the role of B2Gold and the lack of government sanctions around mining did not enter into our work with the youth at all. Rather, youth were expected to make a video showcasing the community’s work for the funders, and the community’s work was celebrated as one of many ways in which Villa de Ada was doing, or performing, community development.

When the youth first refused the request to make a video about the water project, they did so precisely by not moving in the ways that the organizations wanted them to: they refused the path of mobility that would evidence their doing and performing community development. Performing community development the way that IDA hoped would have been to document the project, the work community members were putting in, and the successes they were having with enthusiasm and excitement. Performing community development this way would be to integrate into the vision that was desired by the IDA for and with the European donor. This kind of performance is tied to mobility of economic resources, and to the community’s continued ability to access funds from the European donor via IDA, although it is unclear if this donor would continue to donate to Villa de Ada or, more broadly, to IDA’s development programs in Nicaragua.

The refusal by the Nicaraguan youth to perform community development through media production after the first request was made in 2010 complicates our ability to read positive
participation and agency from youth media production and literacy practices. While there is a desire to tie literacy, and here media literacy, to a more productive, hopeful, “better” future, this is actually a desire situated in Western understandings and ideals about literacy. Literacy is always a social practice, and even in situations where there is an encounter between the local and the global, what emerges is not a local adoption of something like neutral literacy practices, but, a new hybrid in which practices initially from elsewhere are adopted and adapted locally (Street, 2003). The refusal, then of the youth to participate initially might be thought of as a particular kind of literacy, a particular refusal to perform the development mobilities offered by the development agencies in Villa de Ada. This refusal collides with the Western belief that the ability to represent oneself in the public sphere through media production is neutral and universally empowering. In the case in which the youth from Villa de Ada did not respond to IDA’s production call, they did not do so with anger, but rather with passivity. Here, the arsenic in the water source ends up with more agency: it is the arsenic that is moving quickly and forcing this community to change its practices with the support of IDA.

**Telling Stories to Which Publics? Moving Others**

Networked publics are groups of people bound together by digital media (Ito, 2008). Access to cultural narratives that are shared in networked publics are one way that youth construct their own identities (boyd, 2008). Through their participation in publics, young people take up stories in order to form their own identities, and participate in telling stories about themselves in relationship to others in the networked public. Clemente and Dora both discuss *La Contaminación* in relationship to others in the networked public in which they want to
share their piece. Clemente hopes distant others will see the video and that it will evoke feelings of helping, moving them to action. Clemente and Dora both express that the video might evoke feelings of helping and of sorrow, and that that sorrow will move others to action. In the beginning of the video, as well, the screen reads “Welcome to Villa de Ada,” addressing a public well beyond those who live in Villa de Ada, or in surrounding communities. *La Contaminación* ends with a message of thankfulness to IDA and AMIGOS, displaying a kind of gratefulness from the community towards outside others who come to Villa de Ada to support development. Through their media production, youth situate themselves in particular ways from within the publics where they share their work. Ideas about how they might be in the world, and the idea that those in the public from the global North will want to and be able to help after viewing the video is a particular kind of narrative shared in media publics.

There is a set of pedagogical beliefs about the sorts of possibilities opened up for youth in networked publics. Many of these pedagogical beliefs are tied to notions of transnational understanding and youth empowerment. There is a strong sense of hope that participation in networked publics will facilitate feelings that foster concern about far-away others, and that networked media can advance pedagogy that constructs spaces of engagement that transcend traditional barriers built around nation, place, race, and other difference (Stornaiuolo, A., Hull, G.A., & Sahni, U., 2011). Notions of understanding the other through media practices that somehow transcend or suspend difference obscure the ways in which youth come to participate, and the important mobilities that allow their participation to happen at all.

When the youth from Villa de Ada considered posting their video to Facebook and sharing it
with networked publics, they did so carefully and with a specific kind of vision involved. They were thinking about a particular kind of being in the world that would allow them access to more resources: they were negotiating complex mobilities. While there is a belief that by engaging with different others youth can and will build local, national, and international networks that produce “good” in the world, what the youth were envisioning was not political organizing that would deal with the root causes of inequality or the systemic and global issues affecting their community, but rather, they were hoping to play into a relationship of advocacy. They wanted to move others to participate in this relationship of advocacy. Media practices, especially those that transpire in liberatory pedagogical spaces must not only be celebrated for their possibility (Bryson & MacIntosh, 2010), but examined for complex feeling and disjuncture. In media programming, youths’ productions are shaped by the kinds of narratives crafted through and in AMIGOS and IDA pedagogy and by their own experiences in networked media about what sorts of stories are possible and which they draw upon to construct their own identities.

AMIGOS and IDA teach young people about what civic engagement looks like by using a particular notion of the public and what it looks like, where the key players are the government (including local and municipal government), non-profit organizations and other civil society groups, and communities. Youth learn that civic engagement means being able to negotiate with these entities, and that these are the groups that need to be moved in order for change to happen and for them to be able to access resources. This model, though, leaves the networked publics to which the youth from Villa de Ada want to address their work outside of the pedagogical model of “civic engagement.” Here, youth engage multiple
publics and perhaps some of the tension between IDA and the youth in Villa de Ada around the production of *La Contaminación* can be thought through a different understanding of how resources are accessed, one that, instead of privileging the donors related to the civil society point on the triangle (see Figure 58), privileges relationships of advocacy fostered through social networking spaces like Facebook. This is not to suggest that youth might actually gain more resources by *moving* people in their networked public when they see their video, it is merely to consider the way youth orient themselves to sharing about what is happening in their community, as different from how IDA and AMIGOS envision them sharing about what is happening in their community.

Both AMIGOS and IDA share a vision for youth participation that evokes a specific kind of public that centralizes the role of local and municipal government, a civil society populated by non-profit organizations, and engagement with those two entities by community members and communities. This is a model of how contemporary organizations and groups relate to communities. These are post-colonial relationships that have roots in colonialism and they are relationships that extend to include funders and international governmental ties. The kind of mobility shaped here is participation in what already exists, and the underlying assumption is that if young people learn to move and participate in particular ways, then they will be able to develop their community and, in doing so, will in a few short years, become leaders who continue to collaborate with civil society entities like non-profits in order to continue to foster development in Villa de Ada.

**Pedagogy and Paths of Mobility**

We as activists are no longer accountable to our constituents or members because we
don’t depend on them for our existence. Instead, we’ve become primarily accountable to public and private foundations as we try to prove to them that we are still relevant and efficient and thus worthy of continued funding. (Jones de Almedia, 2007, p. 186)

IDA and AMIGOS are invested in youth organizing and programming with particular ends, and in the meetings quoted earlier, it is clear they are invested in futurity and youths’ future participation in community initiatives. A major theme in the conversation between me and IDA about what kind of media the youth in Villa de Ada should produce, and their apathy towards producing *La Contaminación*, is responsibility and youths’ perceived responsibility to and for the community. During that meeting, Anabela and Felipe noted:

Anabela: But listen, the donors on this Villa de Ada project where this is an issue are from a business in Europe. . . . The woman and children, the girls are in charge of bringing water in any underdeveloped country in the world, these girls are not the exception. I told them to film this and do an analysis, that they should film it and talk about what they learned, and with the AMIGOS youth make it a little prettier, and the day the donors come, they should have presented . . . . And look, none of the youth even made a move. And that is where I think we have to tell these youth they are part of the community and the future of the community, in 5, 10 years, they will be the adults.

Felipe: Responsibility. We cannot forget, Chelsey, that youth are also responsible for part of the community, for their family, the school and the organization and structure
In this conversation, the entity to which the organizations are responsible is not, as Jones de Almedia (2007) notes, the population that we are addressing—youth—but rather, the funders, and the idea that in the future a) they will continue to give funding and that b) the youth will become adults who continue to desire that kind of funding. The media project becomes one of the multiple ways in which the youth in Villa de Ada can become oriented to a particular kind of relationship with organizations, development, and funding. One of the significant issues with this model is that the focus on “funding also shapes and dictates our work by forcing us to conceptualize our communities as victims. We are forced to talk about our members as being “disadvantaged” and “at risk” and to highlight what we doing to prevent them” (Jones de Almedia, 2007, p. 186) from continuing on a path riddled with risk. Above, Anabela situates the girls and young women in Villa de Ada as at risk because of the gendered responsibility to bring water, and then critiques them for not taking a particular kind of action in which they would re-situate themselves as at-risk in a video about the issue to continuously stimulate a donor source that relies on their marginalization. The kind of media piece possible is one that will “work” in this system, and these kinds of parameters around responsibility, futurity, and relationship to donors is one particular kind of mobility often termed agency from within this context.

Participation in development programming is a complex issue, even more so as it has become a popular mode of development. Participatory development takes up a whole set of

62 Excerpt from a planning meeting with AMIGOS and IDA leaders, 2011.
discourses and practices around participation, that can be a wide variety of practices, relationships, and politics. At best, it implies a collaborative relationship with communities and leaders, and at times, it is built on the backs of community leaders who do the work of organizing and often also the physical labor involved (Cornwall, 2008). Sometimes, the buzzwords involved in participatory development, such as empowerment and agency, stand-in for a do-it-yourself development that relieves the state and civil society of responsibilities to engage and support citizens and citizen processes (Cornwall, 2008). This kind of value system, in which empowerment figures large especially in relationship to the organizing groups role, manifests in our conversation through discussion about why the youth won’t produce *La Contaminación* in Villa de Ada:

Felipe: I think that group just needs to be reinforced. And first reinforce and train and empower them, make them a little more aware of what they can accomplish on their own. We are all in agreement that it needs to come from them they want to make something, but I think we can have an exchange with them, too.

Adrian: Well, also the minds are not in the same place as ours, the adolescent mind has other interests. They are into other initiatives. At the end of the day, we need to empower them so that the community becomes a priority for them. . . . And what is the purpose of being empowered, investing if they are not empowered to do what IDA really is. It’s true it is based also in the promotion of children’s rights
The language around reinforcement assumes that if they could participate, and that if they just have enough support and resources, all of the youth will want to participate in this system in which they need to make videos to sustain funding that situates them as already marginalized. The assumption here is that with enough support, they will decide to make what we want them to make, and it will come from them that they want to make this kind of video. Adrian then clarifies, suggesting the community needs to become a priority, which will be evidenced by doing development in particular ways, and that the reason they should be empowered is so that they can then do what IDA does—they can perform IDA. The kind of mobility offered is participation in development that maintains capitalistic tendencies within the non-profit system precisely because the non-profit system is tied to funding that comes from the capitalist system.

**Concluding Thoughts: From Agency to Mobility**

In *La Contaminación*, mobility is situated within relationships. The girl doesn’t survive a water-borne illness because her parents are unable to take her to the hospital for lack of resources like money and transportation. In the story, she is ill, because of the ability of a Canadian mining company to move into Nicaragua and mine gold, and because of the related mobility of arsenic to contaminate the drinking water from the river. She is rendered immobile and dies, because of the kinds of relationships. Her death results in a visit to the

63 Excerpt from a planning meeting with AMIGOS and IDA leaders, 2011.
community from a development organization attempting to provide assistance. Her death paves the way for a relationship between the grieving community and the development organization that construes people from the community as unable to take action about this serious situation until an outsider has arrived. In order for the movement of funds into the community to take place there is a parallel movement of solutions and ideas from the North to the South that the youth dance around in their video *La Contaminación*. In the shaping of mobilities this way in the film, the youth are both critical of development practices, and re-present the same kinds of colonial narratives that have produced this situation in the first place.

In the *Contaminación* film, the youth make very clear how access to clean water is tangled with colonialism—the layers involved in providing this public service extend far beyond the nation state. It is the goodwill of the Western donors that “brings” the potable water system. Local impotence is constructed as par for the course, resulting in an immobility that situates locals as being in need of help to access resources, allowing for the importance and necessity of the benefactor. For the youth involved, the program and video production functions as a discursive field where youth and community members are situated as grateful recipients of benevolent aid. This way of relating to and being in the world deeply affects how youth can move within networks, with community organizations, from within and around media and media production. While the video is fictional, its narrative grew out of the desire for a video for IDA to present to the Western funders of the actual water project in Villa de Ada. Youth make discursive moves to situate themselves so that they can have mobility within this global/local schemata in which funds, ideas, and collaboration are moved.
The youth involved in the production of *La Contaminación* situate themselves this way not because they believe that they are disempowered or in need of North American help, but because they are keenly aware of the relationships that render financial support to the community and programming possibilities for the youth. One of the ways that they effect changes in programming and funding is through immobility, and refusing participation.

If we were to read this video through the lens of agency that is commonly deployed in youth media, important observations about how youth become involved with their community, and how that involvement sets them up to continue working on community projects would be made. In the youth development agency paradigm, community participation reflects optimistic desire for the future to be better, and youth to be central in the future (Lesko & Talburt, 2012). The construction of the narrative about the development representative in the video could be understood as critical literacy on the part of the youth producers, such that we understand their story to be critical of the development complex through the portrayal of the representative as unable to access financial resources. The attachment to agency produces the belief that youth are rational beings, capable of critical thought about development and change. The desire to form agentive subjects brings us back to the idea that multiliteracy practices have inherent power to make the world a better place (Street, 2003) and to the idea that multiliteracies and media production are tools with the potential to almost always engage youth in civic ways (Rheingold, 2008). Within this paradigm the camera is a tool for producing agentive subjects through critical literacy (Goodman, 2003). Literacy and agency are intertwined with civic engagement, yet the focus on production, engagement, and participation leaves little space for considering ways in which media literacy and media
production are not tools simply for learning and critical citizenship, but politically situated tools of power embedded in development practices and pan-optimism about youth programming.

The mistake in using an agency lens is to assume that media production is representative of agency or civic participation. There are multiple and competing interests that play into every youth media project. The assumption made by interpreting agency or civic engagement from La Contaminación is that all self-expression is liberatory (Fleetwood, 2005) when clearly, these youth are caught in and producing media about competing dialogues about development, globalization, social organizing, and access to funding/resources. While civic engagement is taken up to mitigate paternalistic development practices (Youniss et al., 2002; Latouche, 1996), the language used to talk about civic engagement actually functions to further obscure paternalism in development practice, making it harder to identify. A focus on mobilities allows us to engage with and identify the complex networks and ideologies within which youth produce video, and the various networks involved in producing the situation as such. Mobilities attend to the temporal and spatial interactions and relationships that structures ways in which affect, images, organizations, and people move through different situations like the water project and video, and the related race to access resources in the development context. The ways in which the youth play with the failure of the development organization to respond to them, initially, is important. That playfulness might be situated critically in a mobilities lens that does not essentialize or fix youth participation in a way that allows for little understanding of workings of power through the movement of affect, images, organizations, and people, allowing for more latitude in youth motivation and learning
beyond civic engagement. A mobilities lens sheds light on some of the underworkings of power in ways that are otherwise overlooked by pan-optimism and the tendency to understand the subject as the interlocutor of social change (Bryson & MacIntosh, 2010). In Villa de Ada, the tendency to pan-optimism becomes necessary for IDA to attain funding — it is through youth video that they aim to secure future funding. The competing demands on the youth, organizations, and community illustrate how pedagogy affects and shapes agency, and vice versa. All elements of the video story made by Villa de Ada’s young participants: its hope, its production by youth, and the involvement of a foreign donor whose finances “saved the day” in a difficult and tragic situation affecting an entire community, are integral in affecting mobility of resources and people in the development context.

The complex mobilities involved in youth media are compounded by the belief that by engaging with different others youth can and will build local, national, and international networks that will produce “good” in the world. These beliefs extend to pedagogical practices that impact how agency, and more importantly, how mobilities, take shape. There is a strong sense of hope that participation in these programs will facilitate feelings that are cosmopolitan and that will serve to eradicate harmful assumptions about the other (Stornaiuolo et al., 2011). Notions of understanding the other through media practices that somehow transcend or suspend difference obscure the ways in which youth come to participate, and the important mobilities that allow that participation to happen at all. Media practices, especially those that transpire in liberatory pedagogical spaces, must not only be celebrated for their possibility (Bryson & MacIntosh, 2010), but examined for complex feeling and disjuncture because as youth integrate into programming their experiences of
telling are shaped by relationalities extending to include the construction of the pedagogical space by institutional actors and how youth come to participate at all.

Youth media programming has numerous positive outcomes for participants, and it is of utmost urgency to create and provide opportunities for young people to engage with each other, media, and their communities in ways that are useful, interesting, and engaging for them. When the desire to produce agentive subjects is situated in pan-optimism, it becomes very challenging to understand the myriad ways youth engage storytelling, and how that storytelling intersects with the necessary programmatic pedagogical structures and space. The intensity of celebration around youth driven social change obscures the mobilities that are not be as overtly politicized in the mode of “hopeful social change” but which tell important tales of mobility, media, and globalization in the lives of youth. How youth move into youth media projects, and how they negotiate movement once they are involved, is an important area of understanding in order to make sense of capacity. Understanding youth media production and pedagogy through relational mobility instead of agency positions a variety of actors—including development organizations, many community actors, globalization, media, and other youth, to name a few—as a network that produces the spaces of youth media, in which marginalization and resistance, moments of mobility, and emergent relationships can occur.
Youth media programming is underwritten by the particularly robust assumption that media production will support the development of youth agency and empowerment. International youth media programming has become more and more popular as global advocacy, service programming, and youth leadership have come to dominate discourses around global change. My dissertation addresses the need to trace how pedagogical practices that constitute youth media programming are situated, informed, and authorized by Western and modernist discourses concerning media, youth, and progress. To do this, I examined the context of media production programming with attention to how participants negotiate discourses of agency, mobility, and civic engagement and how they are situated in mediated networks and
transnational political movements about youth, media, and change. In this conclusion, I discuss how youth media production can be framed as an animated field of friction (Tsing, 2005), drawing on feminist theory about democratic practice (e.g. Dean, 2009; Zerilli, 2005).

**Agency, Politics, and Youth Media**

In modernist theories of agency the unitary subject’s public participation is central in change-making processes (Davies & Harre, 1990). In youth media programming concerned with civic engagement, this theory of agency is typically understood as the ability to act and control actions such that they result in particular relationships of social change. Non-profit organizations like AMIGOS that run youth media programing are beholden to this modernist notion of agency by colonial funding structures (Smith, 2007). In order to function in relation to various stakeholders that invest in the AMIGOS program, a familiar and modernist notion of agency is central to the set of discourses and practices that constitute AMIGOS youth media programming in Boaco, Nicaragua. AMIGOS’ pedagogy is necessarily steeped in progressive discourses that centralize the subject’s role in change and that are oriented to building a particular version of a better future. It is this modernist notion of agency that is typically deployed in the context of youth media and development.

At issue with the concept of agency is how Western modernity frames democratic practice, centralizing the individual subject and her ability to act (Dean, 2009; Zerilli, 2005). The typical reading of agency in youth media is dependent on this modernist understanding of the subject and social change (Zerilli, 2005). Because the agentive subject is the body that moves political change forward, agency has become a central concern in how we theorize justice and in how we design social change interventions. Typically, in youth media the space of
communication is the arena for change while agency is the ability of the individual subject to participate in the public sphere by producing communicative contributions. Youth video is then read and understood as civic engagement. The production of good feeling in modernist communities about youth, technology, and progress hinges on the ability to read agency in youth media (Lesko & Talburt, 2012). However, this way of thinking about change, media participation and the subject leaves little space to consider how global networks shape the production of voice, or how interaction between the various involved bodies shapes cultural production. In Chapter 5, I mapped the participants and relationships involved in the production of the Villa de Ada video about the water project, highlighting the role of development officials, Canadian gold miners, and foreign donors in producing La Contaminación. These complexities situate young people in networks of global and local power. Considering their participation through the mobility lens illuminates how young people navigate transnational networks and produce media with transnational ties.

In media programming, agency is tied up with a modernist hope that access to technologies and communications tools will mean communities in the global South progress along a trajectory of development that values participation in global capitalism. These modernist projects that situate technology and media as central to development draw on euphoric rhetoric about information communication technologies’ (ICTs) impact on economically disadvantaged communities, [that] given its implicit colonial legacy, recasts third world and rural women as somehow ignorant in light of our high-tech information age. (Gajjala, Zhang, & Dako-Gyeke, 2010, p. 70)

The colonial hopefulness about media and technology’s potential to invigorate, modernize,
and develop communities in the global South is implicitly violent. It assumes a needy, underprivileged other unaware of contemporary knowledge who requires others—development agencies—to bring them up to speed. Development organizations have done significant work to reinvent the language associated with development practice to distance development from colonialism. This has happened discursively with the proliferation of words like “empowerment,” “voice,” and “community leadership.” While the shift is well intentioned, this language functions to obscure the continued colonial violence that remains implicit in the provision of technology programming for development. Specifically, the relationship between communication technology and development is temporal: communities need to be brought up to speed in order to participate in (faster) communications with local and global networked spheres.

When we consider change, media participation, and the subject in media production, the complex ways in which social, cultural, and economic global networks shape the production of youth voice illuminates the impossibility of a unitary, agentive subject. In Chapter 5, I mapped out how La Contaminación was marked by IDA and AMIGOS as evidencing youth agency and traced the video’s production through various global networks. It is useful to think about youth engagement with the AMIGOS program not as a site of agency or even as an instance of development in the global South, but as an instance of friction in which transnational youth engage, evoke, and ignore colonial patterns at different times during participation. AMIGOS insists on a relationship between North American and Latin American organizations, communities, and youth; however, I am leery of reducing these relationships to acts of colonialism because in doing so creative youth engagement with
colonial structures and even resistance through media production is lost. For example, the youth in Villa de Ada resisted making *La Contaminación* for two years and even then, the tension as they interacted with various local and global networks during the video’s production was noteworthy. In making the piece, youth inhabited and negotiated colonial structures yet they also resisted them. They showed that they understood transnational relationships when they told stories crafted to move particular networked audiences. Youths’ ability to navigate networked publics is promising because it suggests a dimensionality to youth media production that cannot be captured by the focus on agency or by the focus on colonialism.

The making of *La Contaminación* is better understood in relation to Jodi Dean’s (2009) political-economic formulation of communicative capitalism. The fetishization of voice in networked publics is mistaken for an actualization of power, however because of the volume of communicative contributions like *La Contaminación* in networked publics, any sort of response that would result in conversation is negated. In fact, the positioning of the production of voice as powerful depoliticizes youth cultural production because it reduces their communicative contribution and fails to recognize the kind of relationality necessary between youth and governing bodies that would affect change. It is the response to voice, and the ensuing conversation that functions to situate subjects in relation to each other and in a position to affect change- and it is this ability to affect change and to be in relation that constitutes democratic practice. *La Contaminación* was certainly made in relation to development agencies, transnational funding networks, and particular visions of social change, however its’ production and subsequent posting to Facebook and YouTube did not
foster any sort of conversation. While the youth from Villa de Ada hoped it would move others far away to donate financially for future projects, the video languished shortly after it’s posting, garnering very few views. Youth media production is often heralded for its potential to amplify voice and to provide marginalized young people with an avenue to enact social justice, however more attention needs to be given to the political-economic condition of networked media, especially in relation to the function of voice in communicative capitalism.

As I show in my dissertation, the complexity with which youth engage media production on the AMIGOS program cannot be captured by the modernist frame of agency or by the colonialist tendency of development. To simply label how media programming happens and how youth do media production as colonialist is reductive of the rich interactions of cultural production that happen in the program. In their storytelling and participation, youth media producers often tell modernist narratives that reflect development discourses of empowerment and stories from pop culture that reflect racist, gendered relationalities common in popular media. Given their immersion in popular culture and development pedagogy, these are the communicative tools available to these youth. Youth sometimes, however, tell media stories in the context of the development program that are totally different from stories like La Contaminación, which achieves many of the goals set forward by IDA and AMIGOS to do civic engagement. Even when youth do produce media like La Contaminación, the ways that they negotiate non-profits, pedagogy, and media is not always so straightforward as to suggest civic engagement. I argue that by creating media that does not adhere to the tenants of civic engagement, youth resist the programmatic structures,
practices, and discourses that are rooted in colonialism.

Youth’s practice of media and cultural production both requires each other’s presence and is necessarily limited and circumscribed by relationality. Youth are capable of producing particular stories only because as young people they are mobile in relation to each other and in relation to transnational media. They draw both on their own lives and the discourses around them, including development, pop culture, and civic engagement pedagogy, in order to navigate media production. The encounter between youth and these various networks is an instance of politics, through which young people engage world-building that would be impossible without being in a community with each other (Zerilli, 2005). Youth participants in the AMIGOS program certainly need each other in order to do this kind of politics, and in this conclusion I move away from the relentless focus on agency as the construct for success in youth media and turn instead to Tsing’s (2005) concept of friction to unpack the complex and various relationships in youth cultural production not as evidencing agency but as instances of local and global interaction. According to Tsing:

Speaking of friction is a reminder of the importance of interaction in defining movement, cultural form, and agency. Friction is not just about slowing things down. Friction is required to keep global power in motion. It shows us . . . [w]here the rubber meets the road. Roads are a good image for conceptualizing how friction works. Roads create pathways that make motion easier and more efficient, but in doing so they limit where we go. The ease of travel they facilitate is also a structure of confinement. Friction inflects historical trajectories, enabling excluding, and particularizing. The effects of encounters across difference can be compromising or
empowering. Friction is not a synonym for resistance. (2005, p. 6)

The concept of friction is useful because it highlights movement and the ways in which interaction with others in cultural production functions as part of a global system. The AMIGOS program, as part of a much larger development movement illuminates particular civic engagement mobilities and in doing so simultaneously functions to constrain mobilities. Youth participate both within the historical trajectory illuminated by development agencies and non-profits, and also in other ways, as the youth who produced *Pocahontas* or *La Martina* did not pattern their participation off of familiar patterns of engagement in development agencies and non-profits. In my dissertation, I have offered another reading of youth media that proposes friction as a framework that allows researchers to identify the complex affective mobilities of youth media production.

**Friction: Media, Youth, and Citizenship**

Youth participants in the AMIGOS media program engage a mode of production that nests inside AMIGOS pedagogy. In order to produce media, they need to stitch together a mode of relationality that lays the groundwork for a common language about the world. During the eight weeks they spent together producing media, youth participants drew on various global mediascapes in order to make their videos. Mediascapes are narratives available to the public sphere through the global networks of politics, technology, and economy that play an important role in global culture. Mediascapes are image-centered, narrative-based accounts of strips of reality, and what they offer to those who experience and transform them is a series of elements (such as characters,
plots, and textual forms) out of which scripts can be formed of imagined lives, their own as well as those of others living in other places. (Appadurai, 1996, p. 35)

The discourses available in global mediascapes produce familiar epistemological knowledge about the global, the other, and politics. As knowledge cultivated through engagement with global mediascapes comes to settle in the production of youth videos, friction is produced that changes both the media narratives and the youth who re/produce them. Youth consistently drew on the media narratives available in the global mediascape (many of which provided broad—and often uncritical—knowledge to do with race, gender, and politics) to tell stories for civic engagement programming. For example, youth who wanted to produce videos centered on race drew on the American volunteers’ knowledge of Pocahontas. The American youth accessed their knowledge about race through their previous engagement with the Disney film Pocahontas. Youth who wanted to discuss early marriage with adolescent girls remixed a version of the tragic Mexican ranchero, La Martina. In their re-presentation of each story, they necessarily change and adapts its meaning. Youth interact with transnational mediascapes in order to craft video artifacts that are situated in transnational mediascapes and contemporary political relationality. While the tendency is to read youth voice from these narratives in order to link them to social change discourses that centralize the value of voice in the public sphere, to do so denies the transnational relationships from which youth media producers emerge and the friction that changes both youth and the narrative they re/produce. Addressing youth production through the friction lens supports non-emancipatory analysis of how the global media economy shapes the conditions of possibility for local youth media producers.
When the youth from Villa de Ada remixed *La Martina*, they did so with the particular goal of using their piece to address the local social justice issue of girls marrying early. They jovially engaged with the constructs of this Mexican *ranchero*, giving characters ridiculous names and fanciful costumes. They worked playfully with *La Martina* by engaging notions of gender and violence in silly ways. They used what was available to them through music networks to address a global issue of gender injustice in a local, situated way. In this instance of friction, global narratives about gender are taken up in youth cultural production through the re-mashing of a popular Mexican *ranchero*. The gender norms in the song, the goals of civic engagement programming, and the youth working together in Villa de Ada encounter each other and through that encounter they participate in a new constellation of media, power, and civic engagement. Programmatically the video was dismissed because it did not evidence interaction with community development goals and because it was reproduced from pop culture, it did not fit the civic engagement frame. This playful engagement with gender and violence do not pattern off typically oriented civic engagement videos, and nor do these videos take up the documentary genre, frequently engaged in communication for development programming. What these videos do is engage with broad transnational networks and playfully work with a Mexican *ranchero* about early marriage and gender violence. Thought through friction, this playful navigation of *La Martina* illustrates how civic engagement discourses are manipulated by young people who are situated in locally in transnational networks as they engage in cultural production.

Friction allows us to consider cultural production in situations where we are challenged to understand how videos like *La Martina* intervene in debates about citizenship and justice.
without relying on emancipation as a qualitative factor in understanding media production.

Arguing for how youth can claim public participation, Soep and Chavez (2010) discuss how converged literacy mediates citizenship. So that they may participate as citizens, young people need to be able to navigate, read, produce, and interact with texts across various media spaces and mediums about issues relevant in their lives. Youth engagement with pop culture in the AMIGOS program is an example of converged literacy. In order to fit their work into the civic engagement programmatic frame, the young producers of *La Martina* engaged in playful ways with both civic engagement and pop culture, identifying gender as an important issue they could play with in order to both meet the needs of the program, and also to engage contemporary pop culture. The friction framework Tsing (2005) offers illuminates the movement youth and media make in the production of *La Martina*.

In this dissertation, I have described how youth do video production through the lens of relational mobility. Tsing (2005) offers the concept of friction from her transnational ethnographic work to describe the relationship between the local and the global. Here, friction is a useful concept for describing the cultural production youth do when they participate in media programming, allowing us to consider their situatedness in the global landscape and their particular engagement at the local level. Friction gives us a way to think about how youth media programming is organized, and the structuring factors that make particular sorts of movement possible. In this context, civic engagement sets down particular pathways that make engaging in particular ways easier, and illuminates the connections between civic engagement and the modernist tendencies of development and media programming that maintain global power.
When youth produced media that did not evidence commitment to civic engagement and development through the documentary genre, programmatic attention turned elsewhere. We focused instead on youth videos more like *La Contaminación* that evidenced community development and civic engagement. Research on youth media production is, I would suggest, patterned as follows: videos that evidence success are highlighted, but an entirely rich cultural practice is missed in those videos that fail to demonstrate development or celebratory modernist progress. As a result, a particular kind of youth participation is made visible—a participation that evidences modernist narratives of change through the production of media artifacts about development. That our sustained attention moves away from the videos youth reproduced from popular culture illuminates the very strong relationship between civic engagement and modernist development practices. Accounting for video artifacts that do not meet the immediate goals of the non-profit/development funding regime is awkward.

However, youth are creatively negotiating multiple social justice issues in their pop culture videos: we only need to pay attention. When we fail to pay attention, we sustain modernist regimes of storytelling that ultimately undo our own social justice goals.

Desirable paths of citizenship are illuminated by the interaction between young people, critical pedagogy, and media, and what becomes visible and familiar are narratives of civic engagement defined by non-profits, even though citizenship implies interaction with various civic bodies. The non-profit has come to shape engagement and carve out a space of relevancy in civic politics that makes non-profit organizations necessary. When youth *do* civic engagement inclined activities, they participate in global power that values and maintains the structure of things precisely because of the historical relationship of
development non-profits to colonialism, and the outgrowth of civic engagement and media programming from these organizations. Yet, not all youth participation during the AMIGOS media program can be contained within the framework of civic engagement. A key construct of the program is that youth mostly work together unsupervised. As such, they need to negotiate some way to build community before they begin media production. It is in their resulting friendships that, at times, interesting and surprising interactions happen, leading them off the illuminated pathway of civic engagement to other kinds of production.

It is interesting to consider the youths’ knitting together of community through video production as an instance of friction and an active practice of politics, in which youth negotiate how they do media production. For Zerilli (2005) this navigation is politics, a friction-imbued world-making practice through which we cannot imagine social ills to be righted through the practice of media production, rather we might imagine it as politics youth engage as they come together and produce. Zerilli writes, “political freedom requires others and is limited by their presence” (2005, p. 19). In all of the media pieces, we see how youth engagement with each other, with media technologies, and with development epistemologies both requires the participation of all involved and is circumscribed by the multiple bodies involved. Necessarily, these bodies are historical in nature and as youth use them to knit together a mode of being present with each other, their spaces are haunted with old stories and modes of relationality—forces bigger than themselves. I do not want to suggest that when youth do not produce media in such a way that it can be read as civic engagement or that they are resisting colonialism, but rather that they are doing something differently than the civic engagement model suggests, which is hopeful because it denies the colonial roots of
civic engagement. It is critical that youth participation and their video artifacts be read as rich acts of complex political and relational work. Through their politics, we can understand how particular histories in relation to media tools knit together material and discursive space that make the production of particular narratives possible. In their collaborative work, power emerges in various formats, and certain youth have access to more and different power than others. This relationality is politics itself, and as youth produce within and encounter global media networks their power arises in ways that cannot be completely addressed through critical pedagogy. In this dissertation, I have attempted to historicize the kinds of tools and spaces—such as pop culture and development histories, video production and civic engagement programming—that youth navigate in order to become mobile in mediated spaces and networks.

Advocacy, Pedagogy, and Participants

The Boaco AMIGOS youth media program was the manifestation of a particular vision of social justice. The vision was influenced by organizational values and shaped the design of the program. Designed with values like civic engagement and youth empowerment in mind, the design process worked with certain figures of youth who would be involved, including both the figure of the Latin American youth participant and the figure of the North American volunteer. This is not to qualify the creation of particular youth subjects in programming, however it is to mark as interesting the way that pedagogy functions to create particular subjects of social change, and how subjectivity nests inside of global power and networks.

Both the North American volunteer and the Nicaraguan youth participants are gendered manifestations of the AMIGOS vision for global youth. It should be noted that after my
research was complete AMIGOS changed the language used to refer to Latin American youth participants to “local volunteers” in an effort to discursively augment inclusion, although the material constraints around such youth did not change. Largely, participants from both North and Latin America are girls, though this is not the only way in which the figures created through this programming are gendered. McRobbie (2009) discusses how girlhood has shifted in relation to the contemporary postfeminist moment, which requires the North American girl to give up any engagement with feminism in exchange for resources in a contract whose purpose is to illustrate why feminism is no longer needed. The North American girls’ racialized counterpart in the global South is patterned in similar ways. The participation of the girl in the global South in the citizenship affairs of her community is encouraged and invested in. Her participation, though, is monitored such that it stay safe: this girl cannot afford to participate in any sort of threatening feminist activity for fear of losing her stake in the contract with the North American funds channeled into her community. Together, both the girl in the global North and the girl in the global South are structured in particular ways such that advocacy is the only way for them to relate, making the possibility that girls from different parts of the world could relate to each other as anything other than advocates- perhaps, for example, as activists- difficult to imagine.

The language and pedagogy in the AMIGOS program evidences the kind of future and the relationality we imagined at its inception. AMIGOS pedagogy is defined by the relationship between North and Latin American youth, which is distinctly circumscribed and gendered as caring for developing communities in the global South. The Nicaraguan girl participates in her community, and the North American girl inspires and supports before fading into the
background so that her peer can shine in a way of relating documented in development workers who are critical of colonialism (Mckinnon, 2006). The mode of relationality between the youth is a collaborative one, and the emergence of each subject is dependent on her counterpart. The girls have important roles caring for their developing communities, shifting the historical role of the girl from caring about her home and family to caring about her community and society, and effectively gendering social change.

The pedagogical structure of the AMIGOS program envisions both North and Latin American subjects as participating in the media program. The North American volunteers are trained to support their peers, and they learn about colonial histories and about the politics of partnership in collaborative development. The training the Nicaraguan youth receive, however, focuses more on community engagement training than on what their role is in relation to their peers: they are being taught how to be involved in their communities through the civic engagement frame. The figure of the Nicaraguan girl at the center of development practice emerges in discussions between AMIGOS and IDA pedagogues and leaders; in particular, she is present in our work with youth to identify and claim rights. AMIGOS adopted the rights-based framework from IDA (who uses this frame in all of their work) to structure the youth media program in Boaco. Many of the rights youth work on directly relate to gender inequity, and overwhelmingly, our participants are girls and young women. While North American youth have an opportunity to consider the impact of colonialism on their relationships with Latin American youth during their training, little effort goes in to addressing the tie between colonialism and rights-based work, due to the assumption that a rights-based framework addresses inequities related to colonialism. As Brown (2000) asked
in her paper on rights, how could we not want girls to have rights? What are the politics of desiring something so far outside of what seems good enough that pedagogy cannot contain that desire? As Mignolo (2002) has noted, rights are the product of a colonial project that centralizes white Western ontology to the marginalization of other ways of doing and being in the world. It is in the adoption of these kinds of structures that AMIGOS and IDA create spaces of cultural engagement that are necessarily contained within post-feminism and modernist cultural values.

Programming happens such that engaging with modernist and post-feminist structures is common and familiar. It would be awkward to refuse these structures, yet it is these strange moments in which youth choose to produce outside of civic engagement patterns that illustrate the possibility of youth cultural production without liberation discourse. The AMIGOS program patterns relationality by shaping the figures of participants, with their incessant attitude of possibility, and through attention to activities that constitute participatory civic engagement. The orientation to the always-possible situates both North American and Latin American youth bodies as hopeful, limitless beings that can help each other to change the world, without giving much attention to the material possibility of changing the world. The optimist fantasy that takes as its mantra “we believe in the power of youth” positions the willing (Nicaraguan) subject of social change as having in common with her North American peers the desire to change the world and the ability to imagine and depend on a particular version of development, change, and futurity over which the non-profit has control.

McRobbie (2009) does an excellent job discussing why advocacy as relationality
disarticulates a shared political project, especially around gender. What is missing in her account of the politics of modernist media production is a space for youth to engage in other ways, a way to understand that in fact, some youth fly under the radar of the civic engagement programming that captures only particular mobilities of youth as they produce media, eclipsing much of their cultural production. Youth took a particular kind of risk in identifying race as a topic about which they wanted to produce before they took up *Pocahontas* as their storyline, and that risk must be accounted for. Critical pedagogy offers the intensive critique of the reproduction of *Pocahontas* as a racist, misogynistic narrative, but what about the risk the youth took in engaging race at all in a pedagogical space that rarely acknowledges race, before *Pocahontas* became the framing storyline? Nonprofit pedagogy does not have the capacity to support young people in this examination of race and colonialism because doing so would entail critically engaging with their own work and challenging the funding structures that make their work possible. In the case of *Pocahontas*, the reproduction of a popular rape narrative that was rewritten under Disney’s multicultural banner and reproduced by youth in the AMIGOS program, there was no space in the AMIGOS/IDA pedagogical frame to negotiate this issue with any kind of complexity, rather, the video was ignored and youth participants were steered toward producing videos about community development initiatives. By delineating what is important through how we pay attention to youth work and through our own pedagogical structures, and in doing so by ignoring attempts to deal with gender and race in youth-produced videos, AMIGOS/IDA youth media programming participates in global networks of colonialism and post-feminism.
Advocacy

Development practice is haunted by neoliberal and post-feminist complexities about gender and transnationalism such that relationality between youth focuses on helping girls in the global South achieve what is understood to be “equality” in the global North. This is a framework, too, that draws on mediascapes manipulated by the neoliberal urgency to provide non-threatening narratives of multi-racial engagement like Pocahontas in order to disarticulate any kind of notion of shared crisis around which young people might relate. Advocacy, instead, is based on the notion that one group has already achieved equality and the other needs to “catch up.” The construction of the group of North American youth as already having achieved equality and of the Latin American youth as being deficit in equality makes it impossible to craft a relationship between these youth that demands social justice for both North and Latin American young people. The impossibility of collaborative activism is further obscured by the organizational need to produce positive language about the relationship between the non-profit and the participating young people, ensuring there is always a space in development for the non-profit. Advocacy, shrouded in language such as “support,” “empowerment,” and “leadership” works through the structures of rights based framing and development support to disarticulate the transnational encounter of a pedagogical presence in which youth could engage shared issues. However, to encapsulate all youth cultural production in this neoliberal framework ignores how young people engage in ways other than these frameworks that are hopeful for something different from advocacy, rights, and capitalism. At times, youth participate in totalizing structures, and at other times they resist or create outside of these structures in strange and surprising ways. A pedagogy of
transnational encounter provides tools to think outside of the way we imagine things to be and from within and outside of normative ways of working and doing youth civic engagement, media production, and development.

**Hoping for What is Strange: Youth Negotiating Civic Engagement by Doing Something Else**

A particular hopefulness exists in youth media work that shapes the spatiotemporal relationships around which young people and organizations come together in the name of pedagogy (Lesko & Talburt, 2012). The particular hopefulness that drives youth media programming forward in the context of development is generated from a colonial and modernist vision of the world. It is a temporal hopefulness in which progress is oriented around technological innovation. Gajjala (2004) has investigated the relationship between temporality and development progress and discusses the multiple ways in which technology yokes development to Western notions of time. For example, in her examination of a weaving project in the global South she shows how the loom is a technology that actually slows things down in such a way that might approximate a sort of progress that counters Western narratives of progress, technology, and time. By imagining progress outside colonial narratives of development, the loom functions in contrast to media technologies that speed things up. The loom urges a hopefulness for something else, something slower, something refusing to march along to the ever intensifying speed of globalization. The civic engagement frame around technology and media production, on the contrary, is a rapidly paced endeavor to get young people participating in what Dean (2009) calls communicative capitalism.

Youth who participate in the AMIGOS media program are socialized to produce media about
social issues so as to have a voice in networked publics and affect change. It is striking that
to *not* participate in these kinds of discourses about progress through the production of videos
about social change is to step away from this socialization and consider doing something
else. The AMIGOS program socializes participants to think of youth as instrumental in
development and social change and to consider the extraordinary possibility in transnational
groups of youth coming together to *do* development. In the Boaco youth media program,
media pedagogy is the connective tissue between present realities and a changed future
where youth play a central role in development and civic engagement practices.

Development and media pedagogy, however, are invested development agendas and
networks like those discussed in Chapters 3 and 5 and are historically a colonial project of
Western oppression (Mignolo, 2002).

In the AMIGOS community, the kinds of paths of movement most valued are mapped
discursively, in particular, through celebratory practices when things “go right,” as discussed
in Chapters 3 and 5. To reject the configuration of values and interactions that constitute
mobilities and success in the AMIGOS program is a refusal of the very tight sense of
belonging and community around which the AMIGOS program was built. Any refusal,
however partial, is also awkward and strange because the path a refusal might take is not
already illuminated. When youth refuse the configuration of how things already are or when
they accidentally try something different, they sustain hope for a future whose contours are
not yet imagined. Hoping for a future whose contours are not yet imagined is persistently
awkward. How does one get somewhere without a map? How can we guide pedagogy
without a goal or vision for the future, and why would we want to refuse a future in which
transnational groups of youth are central to development and civic engagement? It is a vision impossible to not want. The pan-optimism about youth and media that Lesko and Talburt (2012) describe is easy to adopt because it reflects back the Western cultural assumptions and norms surrounding development and voice in communicative capitalism that are visible cultural production (Dean, 2009; McRobbie, 2009).
Survivor: That Which Did Not Fit

In their production of media pieces that did not fit in the civic engagement frame, youth navigate an awkwardness that cannot be contained by the technological fantasy of progress or by the pedagogy of civic engagement. While the videos discussed in the latter chapters about gender and development were easily applauded as civic engagement initiatives, those videos that remixed pop culture, as La Martina did, stood out strangely, awkwardly, uncategorizable in our framework as “successful.” A video that went unmentioned in this dissertation was a remake of the television show Survivor, produced by a group of youth who had also made videos on teen pregnancy and local cultural traditions. In Survivor, youth set up three contests—Rock-Paper-Scissors, a fruit foraging race, and crossing an alligator-infested river, in which they competed to win a million-dollar check sketched out on poster paper. In the video, the youth literally play with time, speeding up and slowing down different scenes as they tell their story.

As leaders of the AMIGOS youth media program, we barely discussed this video. Our management of these kinds of productions that re-mixed pop culture was clear: we simply

64 Survivor can be viewed here: www.youtube.com/watch?v=zyNDnknuYgs
did not acknowledge their presence. *Survivor* is strange because, like *La Martina*, it denies engagement with the familiar narratives of development repurposed in youth media production: there is no development project, no mention of organizations, and no local community issue. *Survivor* does not evidence ability to connect civically engaged actors and institutions, and it makes no apologies for turning away from the civic engagement frame. Instead, the youth who produced *Survivor* are playful in their surroundings and deal with narratives from a formerly popular American TV show. Their cultural production work turns away from the call for change to create a better world through pedagogy, and instead engages a more progressive future through interaction with technology. Moreover, youth turn to pop culture as a site for playfulness and as a site they draw from in order to engage their peers in media production. They did not make a script about or assign formal directing roles nor did they intervene in a social issue in their community; rather, when given freedom to “make whatever you want,” they had fun playing with media tools and familiar TV show narratives.

Their is a pedagogy of transnational encounter that is strange, hard to articulate, and outside the bounds of civic engagement. We recoil from it in part because it is too *popular*, it doesn’t show us that young people know how to celebrate youth leadership in development practice. As the leaders of their program, our “forgetting” to discuss this video is a refusal to witness the awkwardness presented by videos produced on our program that are explicitly not about critical civic engagement. It is notable that here, our pedagogy is intertwined with social class—our refusal to accept their video is a refusal to witness their engagement with TV show that is *too popular*—we would rather they engage ideas about social justice. In this way, we pedagogically communicate the value of performing with development agencies and
work in a particularly classed manner.

In the same way that development depends on the movement of time forward, the engagement of particular class knowledge, and the advancement of technology, critical pedagogy depends on youths’ ability to intervene in communities in order to make change happen. In *Survivor* and the other pop culture videos, the youth operate on another plane where instead of intervening they are interacting with contemporary and familiar narratives in ways that seem strange from the lens of critical pedagogy. They seem strange because non-profits and development agencies are particularly attached to the performance of the upper middle class values of civic engagement and social change. This kind of cultural production begs the question, why is it so awkward—so weird—to *not* participate in modernist narratives of development and civic engagement. Considered through the lens of what is strange, the various rifts between youth, communities, development agencies, and ideologies become clear.

In encountering strangeness in the archive of videos produced as part of the AMIGOS Boaco youth media program, we acknowledge the contours of the program, and at the heart of those contours what is made visible is that which is *not* strange. Through the valuing of particular narratives, we see how class values underwrite youth media programming. The video produced by the youth in Villa de Ada on the development of the water project was not strange, but rather, constitutive of our goals of supporting youth to become involved in their communities, even though, as we saw in Chapter 5, this video evidenced the multiple and ongoing ways in which youth production is relentlessly shaped both by local and global networks. Our work with *La Contaminación* clarifies how it is that the colonial movement of
resources becomes familiar in civic engagement pedagogy, so familiar, that to not produce in this way becomes strange. What is interesting here, too, is the function of the figure of the strange in relation to the classed effort to encourage civic engagement. In turning away from the pop culture videos, we deny cultural production too linked to popular media as not good enough, as too strange. AMIGOS discourse likewise focuses on the safety of participants, and there seems to be a link between civic engagement and safety, where the classed other story is unsafe. Civic engagement is doing the work of bringing youth into safe discourses, and in doing so, obscuring their interaction with class-based cultural production. In studying the strange and the awkward, we can come to know the community barriers defining our programs and the ways in which youth resist those barriers. The youth who produced La Martina and Survivor, for example, interfaced with popular narratives in ways that did not refuse to acknowledge our classed pedagogy and that in itself, is hopeful.

Familiar in both Untitled 2011 (the video on machismo I discuss in Chapter 4) and in La Contaminación (the video I discuss in Chapter 5) are the particularly modernist narratives that centralize the development agency and its various practices in effecting progress. Engaging something besides typically patterned civic engagement in ways that are unfamiliar in youth media and development practice is hopeful: thought this way, it is youth deciding not to replicate colonial resource distribution, deciding to engage playfully with media culture, and deciding not to produce about complex development relationships in their videos that is hopeful. There is instability in locating what happened in the AMIGOS program within any kind of framework. The balancing act between the strange and the familiar and, in that balancing act, the drawing and re-drawing of that which is familiar and safe and that
which is strange, is a kind of relationship between youth, media, and the global that we might call a pedagogy of transnational encounter. A pedagogy of transnational encounter is momentary and surprising. Sometimes the friction between youth and the media production process moves them in familiar directions of development and time. At other times, they literally move in other ways—playing with the time stamp of their videos and experimenting with narratives outside of the civic engagement frame.

Concluding Thoughts

Different bodies find particular kinds of movements are im/possible in the youth media world because of the varied histories and relationalities individuals bring to the youth media production space. The interaction of bodies with each other is both local and global in nature, and far-flung networks interact with each other in order to produce the conditions of possibility in the AMIGOS program that generated particular ideologies, experiences, and media artifacts. Friction allows us to imagine foregrounding relational mobility as formative in shaping youth’s experience of possibility, agency, and media practices in programming.

Friction (Tsing, 2005) as a concept requires that we consider how global power comes to bear in local situations and that we define how interactions make particular movement, cultural form, and agency possible. In the case of AMIGOS, friction magnifies how relationships between youth, non-profits, communities, and global networks interact at the most local of levels such that pathways of engagement and production result. It is this series of interactions- and not youth voice- which produces narratives of development like the one Villa de Ada produced as well as remixes like Pocahontas and Survivor. These interactions, seemingly localized and removed from the global networks that have created the post-
feminist colonial situation that generated the formation of these programs, also participate in the maintenance of global power itself. Yet, global power moves slowly. In their participation youth also shift and morph global power by flying under the radar and interacting in novel ways, while entertaining the awkward notion of imagining something different. The stickiness and awkwardness of the pedagogy of transnational encounter foregrounds the unpredictability of youth cultural production within the context of civic engagement or elsewhere. It is this sticky persistence to insist on something different, however problematic, that forces us to be hopeful, to connect to the strange and the unexpected, and to wonder about the possibility held in the awkward spaces of youth cultural production.

Youth media practice is ephemeral, a pedagogy of encounter. The AMIGOS youth media program will not and cannot last forever. Ultimately it is only a fleeting moment in time: program technology will break, North American youth will fly home, Latin American youth will move on from the program into other parts of their lives, the program will end, and new programs will begin in other place. Indeed, as I write this dissertation, it has already happened: the Boaco youth media production program came to a close in 2012. AMIGOS continues to open programs in other parts of the world, leaving behind residual experiences, material resources, and memories of how youth related and produced together. We may try to situate transnational youth media work as changing the world pedagogically through civic engagement. However it is in our attention to how youth do something different, something awkward, and something other in our programs that I locate hope and possibility for a way of relating, being, and doing in media and cultural production that refuses neoliberalism. Youth
media production is an opportunity for young people to come together across radical
differences. It offers them unparalleled opportunities, and I am hopeful that in situating this
practice in relation to ideas about mobility, friction, and democracy we can move away from
the defeating arguments of hope and hopelessness, agency, and empowerment that plague
discourse to focus instead on relational mobility and materiality in youth media production as
a hopeful encounter of transnational pedagogy.
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