

**Third Space: Catholicism, Global Adult Education, Feminism
APRRE, November, 2001, Minneapolis, MN**

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Abstract: To be effective in her daily life, the international adult educator needs to appear to be allied to the church system that she is part of, and sponsored by. Yet, she resists the regulating discourse of "western, feminist Catholic," and daily negotiates her identity as fluid and non static, or as operating in a third space. She also actively resists any other categorization that limits her active resistance, agency, and progressive theology. Using a case study, the author explicates the relationship of global adult education, feminism and Catholicism. The case is interpreted in light of the "third space" cultural theory of Homi Bhabha (1994), in order to reflect the destabilization of the fixed identity of this woman as "religious," "educators" and "Western."

It's important that the landscape be respected and cultivated with sensitivity, even at the expense of the growth of productivity; its infinite variety, the inscrutable complexity of its interconnections, be honored; it's important that cities and streets have their own face, their own atmosphere, their own style; it's important that human life not be reduced to stereotypes of production and consumption, but that it be open to all possibilities; it's important that people not be a herd, manipulated and standardized by the choice of consumer goods and consumer television culture. (Havel, 1990, p. 15.)

When the president of Czechoslovakia penned these words he was disturbing the stereotypic aspirations of Eastern European communist leaders to "herd" and "standardize" people. The disturbing of categories that has marked Havel's work is one that resonates with many of those who practice global adult education, since much of what they are about is disturbing categories of educational work and religious identity. They have been encouraging multiplicity and plurality of voices, even when they themselves have been herded and standardized by the religious organizations and communities they are part of. Women who educate for justice on a global scale run the risk of every label and stereotype imaginable: westernizer, Christianiser, feminist. In this article I explore how one woman negotiates the Catholic Christian and North American discourses that regulate her life in an international context. She does not have a monolithic identity--her identity is changing, fluid, non-static, complicated, and paradoxical.

I use the terms Catholic, feminist, and North American not to set up dualisms and binaries but to identify the discourse that stereotypes her as Catholic Christian, western and a colonizer; she stands apart and has her own identity. She is neither part of a colonizing or imperialistic force, nor totally divorced from the image of the North American do-gooder in the South. Her identity is at once simple and complex. As Carolyn Clark (1999) has observed of women's identity, "We also experience ourselves as multiple, as many selves, a complex reality of often conflicting inner experiences of who we are" (p. 39). Clark uses the language of nonunitary subjectivity to describe this experience.

Third Space

This is a life history interview study that explores the space in which a global adult educator practices progressive and political engagement in religious and secular realms. "Third space" refers to the constructing and re-constructing of identity, the fluidity of space where identity is in flux. In cultural studies, the term third space has gained prominence, primarily through the work of Homi Bhabha (1994), who focuses directly on the notion of identity. Third is used to denote the place that negotiation of identity takes place, where life in all its ambiguity is played out. This concept has also been developed by Spivak (1990; 1999), Soja (1996), Gutierrez (1999), Hollinshead (1998), Routledge (1996), and Khan (2000).

Feminism, Catholicism, and Patriarchal Discourse

The woman identified in this article is concerned with, and has been affiliated with, Roman Catholicism for all of her life. She has, perhaps unknowingly, been part of the colonizing force that is Christianity and has colluded in some ways with its patriarchal, masculinist, and western discourse. She is also affiliated with, and has been affiliated with for much of her life, with feminism which seems to "collide and collude" (Khan, 1998, p. 465) with Christianity and certainly with a North American feminist identity. Even though it is male-dominated and male-centered, Christianity, and more particularly Catholicism, is at once a comfort and a problem for this woman. The essentialist notions of the Catholic woman as antiabortion, conservative, and pious, are especially destructive, especially given the lingering reputation of missionaries who have engaged in overseas work. Although often anti-female and clerical, Catholic movements also include feminists and activists.

The feminist religious work of Schneiders (1991; 2000) and Chittister (1998) comes to mind as exemplary of resistance by women in the Northern church, and the work of Ivone Gebara (1995) as an example of women from the Global South. There are multiple other examples, as the growth of journals such as *Feminist Studies in Religion* attests. Similarly, the woman who articulates her story in this case is feminist in political orientation and lives a feminism that is neither static nor codifiable. It is not a feminism that seeks one definition of feminism nor does it seek to convert and change others--it is, as feminist adult education scholar Angela Miles (2000) terms it "globalized, not globalizing." This is not a feminism that is essentialist, static or monolithic, but one that is changing, fluid and which intersects with Catholicism. There is structured ambivalence between Catholicism and feminism.

Purpose of the Article and the Research

In this article I explore how one woman negotiates and translates the Catholic, Western and feminist discourses that regulate her life and which promote fear and loathing of her position. I use the terms Catholic, feminist, and Western, not to further categorize women but rather to establish some common ground for the discussion, knowing full well that these are labels and codes that themselves must be deconstructed. This article focuses on a North American adult educator who is Catholic and feminist, as a typical case of third space. My point is to destabilize what it means to be a Western Catholic feminist working internationally. The woman discussed in this study is neither at home in North America, in her church, nor in a totally secular feminism.

While she has long been sponsored by Christian non-governmental organizations to work globally, she at once adheres to and resists that categorization, fluctuating between those labels and at once rebelling against them, wanting to destabilize those codes and reinvent identity. She rejects being coded as and reduced to the help she gives others and to the stereotypes of western women, feminists, and Catholics. Inserted into a predetermined discourse and practice that shape her agency, she resists and claims for herself a progressive theology and politics that would not seem likely within the categories that she is inserted into. She thrives within this third space and within the boundary crossings that is a daily occurrence for her.

To the best of my knowledge, the notion of third space is not widely considered in theology or religious literature, though the fit is quite obvious. One place where it is discussed and delved is in Khan's (2000) *Muslim Women*, in which she works toward explicating the construction of Muslim's women identity outside the oriental world, and within a Canadian context. In this book she de-centers the stereotypic and monolithic notion of Muslim women in North America, making us aware of her identity as in "a space of always becoming" (p. 129). Her study of 14 women in Canada helps us to "complicate" their identity and to explore how they "negotiate a Muslim identity in Canada" (p. 26). The book is an exemplar of how their identity is negotiated daily as neither fully Oriental or Muslim or North American; it is "shifting, contradictory, and dynamic" (p. 130). Coded as Muslim, the women Khan interviewed resist the labels and yet remain connected to Islam. Khan centers her discussion on three groups of women: (a) those who disavow connections to Islam; (b) those who negotiate the ambivalence; and (c) those who select what to believe. In reading her work, I immediately saw the points of connection and affiliation to Catholic feminist women who work in the global South.

I limit my discussion to one woman, knowing full well that there are those who dismiss a single case study as minimalist. The question "*What can you tell from an N of 1?*" has been addressed elsewhere and will not be delved here (Merriam, 1995; Stake, 2000). This case will be used to explore the world of one woman who exercises her vocation in the global sphere and shows how her religious identity becomes both complicated and destabilized. This case will be used to eschew the categories of development workers, feminists, and even Catholics, as these labels become meaningless, in light of the need and thirst for global justice. Struggling against globalization even in small ways, this woman is part of a larger movement of women who organize, strategize, and enact new ways to bring about an equitable economic and social order.

Introducing Karen

Karen is in her late-40's, Scottish- Irish and Catholic. She teaches health and gender at a Canadian university in the winter, and facilitates courses for development workers in Africa in the summer months. Karen has spent her whole life working in adult education overseas, either in lengthy term assignments (1-3 years) in various African countries, or as a contract worker (2-6 months) there. Her focus has primarily been on health education, and has also included bedside nursing and orienting professional volunteers. For her first 10 years of extended term assignments she was sponsored by a religious organization. Karen grew up in a small, predominantly Roman Catholic town in Canada. She was influenced by her parents' lifelong involvement in international movements. Listen as she describes her early years and the people who influenced her. The effect of the home on spirituality is a common theme in the lives of

women who go overseas and in the lives of people in the service of the common good, generally (see Daloz et al., 1996).

Karen's Early Years

L: How would you describe your family of origin?

K: Uh, well, I describe my family as Irish Catholic. My mother was very, very Irish. My grandmother lived with us so we were very Irish Catholic.... I know it had an influence but I am not going to describe it. Ah, the very traditional Roman Catholic, following the rules all the time to the T. Church every Sunday, benediction every Sunday afternoon, rosary every night, the holy water things around every door frame. Every time you came in, you blessed yourself, every time you went out, you blessed yourself. That would be the thing. Very traditional Catholic.

Motivation for International Work

L: Why did you go overseas?

K: I was always interested from a young age...my father was teaching at [the international program]. From the time I was 12, thought I would be a nurse and go to Africa, I also said I was going to be a sister. At 16 I dropped that idea [she laughs]. These nuns...Sisters of Africa were here in our town, we would go and visit; they gave us Kool-Aid and showed us pictures and slides, and I kept that in mind, went out and did nursing, got experience and thought it was time to go overseas. I was interested in seeing the world. Yet, the stronger motive was to do good. I had so much to share. Actually I was going to Europe with some friends. We never did do that. My real interest was going to Africa, being with poor people, and helping out.

Karen's motivation was clear --to do good and to help out. She goes on to explain how this attitude changed over time for her and how her experience changed her. Her vision of international work and her motivation for it changed considerably over time.

L: How do you look at "I want to do good" now?

K: I did not give a lot. I learned a lot. I look back and I hope I didn't do anything bad. Well, forgive me for all of those things I have thought of in that way. But, I learned a lot about myself, about development, justice and injustice, and when I came back I saw the injustice here which I had not seen before. Over there you see the situation of women, and you come back and you get so angry and frustrated and you say omigod this is going on here and I never saw it.

Spirituality and Overseas Work

I asked Karen to tell me a little about the spirituality that she experienced at home and how that influenced her life choices overseas. Her home was very religious and very traditional; it was only later that she was able to sort out the rituals/traditions from spirituality.

L: How did spirituality or religion affect how you grew up in an RC home?

K: I think that helping the poor is what I got from religion that influenced my spirituality....[We tended] to drop Christian since there was the sense you would be seen as an evangelizer.... Going over to help people changed and the reality hit me that there wasn't one person who asked me to come, one person who needed me to be there.... As you go through and learn a lot more, spirituality carries you through helps you to see other possibilities. It can be very devastating when one looks at global economy. When you look at international problems, you are inclined to think forget it. Yet, spirituality motivates you to continue. There is where you get a lot of strength. It helps me personally in who I am and what I want to be in this world.

Karen became a nurse, then went overseas to do development work mainly because it was "who she was" and she wanted "to help them out." Karen is still working in a development context, though now her permanent residence is Western Canada. She is no longer a regularly practicing Catholic since she feels that there is no place in North American Catholicism for her. Walking the borderland between spirituality and religion, she is clear on how her spirituality intersects with her everyday work. She is also aware that spirituality and religion are taboo in certain development circles.

L: Tell me about spirituality and international development.

K: When I think of the ones I know in international development, they were there because of the Christian connection. [For some people in other ngo's] you didn't mention Christianity, religion, spirituality, it was a no-no. In fact, they would ask you if that were your motive and if you had that they got suspicious, and there were topics that would be avoided.... they were afraid people would evangelize. People don't use spirituality a lot because of fear of being labeled.

L: I can see not using religion. Do they shy away from spirituality?

K: Yes I think so, it wouldn't come up in an development context. Yet, in some organizations it does.... When you look at groups [like the Catholic] Development and Peace, they talk about Gospel justice. You get the non-Catholics talking about this as well, in different language. The basis is Gospel and social justice. You do hear it talked about, as a Christian call. But when you go off ...for fundize , you never mention it. You have another language you would use.

Shifting Views of Importance

Karen feels that her experience overseas really changed how she saw the world, and religion. She talks about how it was less black and white and more gray. She now sees religion as a more open concept for her, yet some of the traditional views of Catholic piety remain for her. The overseas experience makes it more difficult to see Catholicism as she did as a child; the world for her is more complex than was presented to her early on.

L. Tell me about how being overseas has affected your religious views?

K: It opened up my eyes a lot to Roman Catholicism. I became much more critical of the church, as I think I have become much more critical to everything. I think having been exposed and

looking at the world differently sort of opens your eyes quicker if you, some people do it, various students do it very quickly here. It took me to go overseas to sort of see that, you know, and I guess that I was able to look at things differently. And then growing up where I did was so Catholic. To this day I have not set foot in another church in town. I have been in the halls and stuff, but because you were never allowed to do that, and it wasn't until I started traveling that I got exposed to other religions and other ideas. The typical Catholic belief that we were the only ones that were going to get to heaven, and the non Catholics, the non Christians, they were done for it, you know [laughter]. I think being exposed to these other religions, my whole view started changing. Within that, I mean growing up thinking you were the only ones going to get to heaven and then all of a sudden you are surrounded by so many other people with so many other beliefs and religions and then you start questioning what was I taught all this time.

L: Is that what you mean about being more critical when you were overseas, as an example?

K: Yes, that would be one example of looking at it critically. I mean looking at it critically, not being critical.... As well I have become more critical of the church too...I can remember the first time overseas living in the apartment building and there were some sisters that lived up above us and these sisters used to fight all the time. There were some that were just hateful. For me it was just such a shock to see religious figures fighting, you know, and it was just that my image of nuns was that they lived in convents, they wore the habits, and they prayed all day. That is just becoming an adult as well, you know, but I think just being in that situation exposed to it, was just eye-opening....

L: Can you describe what spirituality means to you now?

K: Yeah, I guess belief in a supernatural being, belief in God. Belief that there are many different ways of connecting with God, Catholicism used to be one way for me. Now, it is not the way. Just having that sense of connection with God is what I would call spirituality. People and justice-- that is the expression of my belief. You see God in people and therefore there is motivation to do justice.

Religious and Feminist Identity

Karen has long been active in a Roman Catholic religious group dedicated to social justice and has been active at its national, regional and local levels. Despite her commitment to this aspect of Catholicism, she is no longer attends Sunday mass. An unfortunate encounter with her pastor has forced her to see the inevitable--she and her vision of church are not welcome in her local parish.

L: Can you explain your current relationship to Christianity and practicing Catholicism.

K: I haven't been going to church regularly for about 2 years now. A lot of it I was going because of my mother. She passed away so I don't have to go. I don't tell anyone I don't go. My aunt does not know. It is easier not to bring it up. I did have a discussion with a priest recently [that was the breaking point. I was supposed to speak after mass about a social justice activity.]

...A misunderstanding. Bottom line is he is the only one who speaks in church. Else everyone will want to, according to him. I don't feel welcome. I don't have any interest. I will continue my work with [this organization] but not in the church. First of all, it's not all his fault. This is probably the straw that broke the camel's back. I found it very sad. Something that is so important in life you just realize that is the way it is.

Karen is obviously saddened by this break with aspects of her tradition, and with her local parish. She has been forced to seek support and spiritual support outside this community. I went on to ask Karen to talk about her relationship to feminism and how that interests with her Catholicism.

L. Do you find any problems in defining yourself as Catholic and feminist.

K. Oh the F word [laughs] ...It depends where I am and who I am talking with. When teaching a course in gender I hardly every used it. That means you hate men. It has all those connotations. I use it in company that I know understands it. I would very much identify myself as a feminist. Catholic feminist??? It is not often I would use the terms together. I say that I am a Catholic, that is what I know and am comfortable with. Putting them together I guess I would be, I'd know who I would say what to.

L: Do people label you ? Do you ever encounter labels from people in the women's community...because you are Catholic and conversely from the Catholic community that you are involved in the women's associations?

K: Oh I would say so. And, I tend to be somewhat careful on which side of the street I am walking on as to what I say. Particularly when I was on the national council for [the social justice organization]. I would not say I was a member of a women's association. The people who know me would not have a problem, it would not be an issue. But for others there would be people who would have reservations. ... It all depends on what I want to do, what I want to accomplish.

L: Is that confusing?

K. No, it doesn't cause conflicts. Not in my mind. I speak to the people I am speaking to, whoever my audience is. Since I have been overseas and come back I talk to the Catholic Women's League. If I can make a difference I speak to the audience. I challenge them. Sometimes I do the "Jesus is a Feminist" talk [laughs], so you know I don't mind challenging. It all depends.

L: Do you think that there have been times when holding all those positions is hard?

K: Probably. I have not delved into it. I guess I wondered why I was. Others would stop and analyze the whole thing. And say okay this is what I believe. Nah, I don't have time. If someone is gonna ask me about church, I'd say there are times when I enjoyed church, when I found the

time with the ritual helpful. I guess I don't get bent out of shape. I am sometimes confused; you know, What do I believe and What should I do?

Karen's narrative makes it clear that she is in a borderland and that she has found peace in the inherent contradictions in her life. Her life has changed from the one of strict divisions and categories that she grew up in. She is displaced from the Catholicism of her youth, displaced from some of the connections of her early years, and has resisted a monolithic identity. Yet, she has not rejected Catholicism totally; she still identifies with it, however limited the connections, and has no intention of embracing another tradition. She wears the vestiges of Roman Catholicism, feminism, and adult educator all at once, and negotiates the conflicting identities that each of these brings.

L. Tell me more about your spirituality

K: People I know are very interested in justice. In the Catholic church it is so obvious. There is the problem when your whole spirituality is justice and then you go into a church. There is no justice so they leave. Especially if you are a woman in the injustice hits you in the face.... Other people, when [my overseas group] gets together, I find it very uplifting spiritually. Basically working for justice. That can also be very hard. Other people, at the moment it is not church. Maybe again.

Discussion

Karen is in a third space, a place of ambivalence that does not necessarily cause problems or unsettle the bearer, a place all too well known to Roman Catholic women who live it. Between Roman Catholic and feminist groups she has learned a middle-ground, a bilingual identity that she can readily use to switch languages dependent on the person or group she is speaking with. She refuses to accept or deny any of these positions fully, and resists the labeling and the negative aspects of both. She disrupts the artificial categories that attempt to restrict her, and thrives in the third space between the categories. Her global positioning has allowed her and forced her to see life as less essentialized and restricted. Her agency and her politics are freed. Karen's narrative contrasts the vision of Catholicism she grew up with, with the one that she is now part of, even if from the spaces in between.

The separation of feminism and Roman Catholicism is difficult for Karen to sustain, and is not a separation that she even seeks. Her global experience lets her see all the distinctions and finely tuned nuances as peripheral to some extent. The struggle for agency, independence and a nurturing spirituality is hard to maintain yet she has found the interstices. There is no need to reject one (feminism) to reject the other (Roman Catholic) fully, but rather a need to acknowledge that they operate in various ways in her life; she is holder of a surplus of meaning and a multiplicity of identities, all of which she manages to negotiate at the same time (see Clark, 2000). Karen has developed an openness to other religious forms, and her conception of religion has changed from being overseas, and from her engagement with a religious development organization. She has developed a feminism that is unique to her, and which shifts its shape dependent on the situation or the context. Hers is a globalized feminism and Catholicism, that is not globalizing (see Miles, 2000); it embraces difference, heterogeneity, and political activity.

Churches are a large part of the global civil society space. Neither market nor government, ideally they work toward the freedom and emancipation with people of the South. Working with liberation theology (e.g., Gutierrez, 1999; Richard, 1985, 1997) they enable people to undertake projects in their own freedom. These global civil society organizations network beyond the bounds of narrowly defined organizations and work with them so that the third space is nurtured and acknowledged.

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