Abstract: This paper builds on qualitative research with 15 international adult educators (female) who practice in the Global South. The cultural studies third space construct (Bhabha, 1994; Khan, 2000) is used to destabilize the fixed identity of these women as fluid and non-static. A specific case is used to explicate the relationship of global civil society, development work, feminism, and Christianity.

Women who work for justice on a global scale run the risk of labels and stereotypes such as westernizer, Christianiser, proselytizer, and feminist. In this paper I explore how one such woman negotiates the Christian and feminist discourses that regulate her life. She does not have a monolithic identity--her identity is changing, fluid, non-static, complicated, and paradoxical. I use the terms Christian, feminist, and western not to set up dualisms and binaries but to identify the discourse that stereotypes this woman and others like her. She is not a colonizer, nor right-wing Christian missionary, nor a feminist who eschews religion. Her identity is at once simple and complicated, translucent and opaque--this article is an attempt to render her as she sees herself. She openly resists categorization that limits her active resistance, agency, and progressive theology. This daily negotiation of identity disturbs the established categories of the westerner in the Global South and opens new possibilities for seeing and understanding women's identity.

Theorizing Third Space

Third space, migratory, hybridity, liminality, and interstices are terms that are coming into everyday academic discourse. They have entered research methodologies as working the hyphens (Fine, 1994), allegorical breaching (van Maanan, 1995), and troubling the categories (Lather, 2001); they reflect in some way the paradoxical and contradictory ways that woman's identity is too often coded. This identity is more helpfully understood as in flux, as a process of negotiating the spaces and the hyphens.

Notions of "third" have entered the public sphere as the Third Way of Tony Blair in UK politics, the third sector economy of civil society (Hall, 1997), and third space in cultural studies (Bhabha, 1994; Khan, 1998, 2000). "Third" refers to the constructing and re-constructing of identity, to the fluidity of space, to the space where identity is not fixed. In cultural studies, the term third space has gained prominence, primarily through the work of Homi Bhabha, who addresses the notion of identity. Third space is where we negotiate identity and become neither this nor that but our own. Third is used to denote the place where negotiation takes place, where identity is constructed and re-constructed, where life in all its ambiguity is played out. This term serves as a rebuttal or corrective to regulating views, and highlights a new way of seeing. Spivak (1990; 1999), Soja (1996), Gutierrez (1999), Hollinshead (1998), Routledge (1996), and Khan (2000) have all contributed to this discussion.

The post-colonial construct of third space is a place of resistance, a place "imbued with intent, that attempts to challenge, change, or retain particular circumstances, relating to societal relations, processes, and /or institutions" (Routledge, 1996, p. 415, n. 1). As they enter space as white, Christian, development workers, and feminists, the women in this study need to be political and strategic, in order to negotiate the complex terrain.

Feminist writers have discussed third space and related notions, albeit in different ways. hooks (1984), for instance, made much of the marginal space occupied by black women, one which she calls a
"special vantage point," and which she urges black feminists to use to "criticize the dominant racist, classist, sexist hegemony as well as to envision and create a counter-hegemony" (p. 15). Like a marginal space, a third space can be central in itself and can be a strategic vantage point for women. Yet, the nomenclature of third space avoids the denotation of marginal as peripheral. Another feminist writer, Sharon Todd (1997) describes third space, in a uniquely feminist way, as a "mucous space, a shared space where each is involved in an exchange with the other" (p. 251). Todd's rendering suggests that third space is not just an in-between space, but one where there is a continuous intermingling and flowing back and forth between the two spaces (to incorporate the mucous metaphor), not a totally separate sphere, but one that embraces both sides. This feminist rendering of a third space is especially appealing as it may indeed aid in understanding further the world of female international development workers.

Situating the Research

In looking at the case of this woman, I examine how she engages in knowledge production as a Christian, development worker, and feminist from the North. She signals a new type of international educator, albeit one with the same Western cultural capital (MacIntosh, 2001). Her already complicated identity is further complicated when she enters development space as a Christian resisting the regulating discourse that accompanies those labels. This study is an attempt to speak to larger theoretical questions about authority and ambiguity, and specifically to dislocate and de-center religion from identity. The focus is an exploration of the space in which women practice progressive and political engagement in religious and secular realms. Although there are many highly complex and contradictory ways that religion connects to identity, they are not always one and the same. This study attempts to shift from identity politics that essentializes groups such as feminists or Christians towards a politics of difference, which moves away from a static and dualistic worldview. It is an attempt to "read ourselves within and against how we have been written" (Willinsky, 1998, p. 264).

To the best of my knowledge, the notion of third space is not widely considered in theology or religious literature. One place where it is discussed and elaborated is in Khan's (2000) Muslim Women, who 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 nor Muslim nor North American; it is "shifting, contradictory, and dynamic” (p. 130).

Development work in the Global South has the dubious history of being entangled with colonization and Christian conversion; it has been seen to go hand in hand with stereotyping or what Havel (1990) refers to as the herding of humans. These colonizers have been known as trying to overtake the countries with sameness--same people, things, life, the MacDonalds' approach to the world (Richard, 1985). Nuns, priests, and ministers went overseas to convert and to make Christians of the natives (Bhabha, 1994). Now, those who do development work, even those who work in religion-sponsored civil society organizations (e.g., Canadian Organization for Development and Peace), are more inclined to think of the political implications of their work, especially in terms of respecting culture and resisting the reproduction of Western ideas. Catholic-sponsored agencies, by and large, would not subscribe to the notion that they are Christianizing others in the Global South (see also Ryan, 1995).
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 development work 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, rural Canadian town. 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 (see Daloz et al., 1996).

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, I 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....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…. Spirituality carries you through, and 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, and 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.

**Religious and Feminist Identity/ies**

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 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….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. Her critical engagement with the issues and the politics of the institution have unsettled and disrupted her social locations, especially her religious and political locations. While she is physically and intellectually removed from the pew, she continues her work with the justice committee and has been forced to seek spiritual support elsewhere. She has refused to be appropriated (Haraway, 1992) and to know her place. I went on to ask Karen to talk about her relationship to feminism and how that intersects 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 ever 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.

Karen's situation evokes Todd's (1997) descriptions of a mucous or shared space, in which there is an exchange or continuous mixing. She moves skillfully and tacitly from one position to the other, negotiating the ambivalence and the challenges, finding refuge or statis, however briefly, in one space or the other. She holds neither one position nor the other continuously but allows the give and take flow. In her situation and in her life story, this third space is both unique and workable.

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

K: Probably. I have not delved into it.... 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 accepted somewhat 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 development work all at once, and negotiates the conflicting identities that each of these brings.

Commentary

Karen has engaged actively with her own narrative, and in the process has highlighted her spirituality of commitment to right social and economic order. Both feminist and spiritual Karen still identifies as Catholic but is not a routine church attender, since she does not feel welcome. She corresponds to the women in Khan's (2000) study who identified as negotiating the ambivalence and selecting what to believe. She has found ways of negotiating the ambivalence, of walking the borderland and thriving in the midst of it.
In the hybridized third space past and future are continuously intermingling; culture is being re/negotiated in the here and now. The past figures greatly in the articulation of Karen’s identity. As she moves beyond the traditional Roman Catholic upbringing she draws on her early influences to negotiate the present; she learns how to adroitly negotiate family politics (“I don’t tell anyone I don’t go. My aunt does not know. It is easier not to bring it up”). Karen has the myths and stereotypes of Catholicism that she once performed, and which were carried over from her traditional Catholic home. Yet, she has transformed them, and yet not let them go entirely. Her identity signals a particular third space--it is one that is indeed mucous-like (Todd, 1997), a softer and less-rigid rendering of space (less-spatial, if you will) that suggests the intermingling and continuous flowing, and at times indistinct identities. At times these identities are traditional, at times less so; at times strongly institutionally affiliated, at times generically spiritual; at times vocal about their allegiances, at times quieter and less-audible. Yet at all times, her religion and her feminism are the facets of her identity through which her development work, political location, and gender are mediated.

"Hybridity is precisely about the fact that when a new situation, a new alliance formulates itself, it may demand that you should translate your principles, rethink them, extend them (Bhabha, 1990, p. 216). In the case of this woman there is an effort to think through and experience identity and authority in new ways. As Bhabha says, even the left has preconceived categories that they use, and which need to be challenged. In Karen’s case, when she is confronted with a new situation and new culture, she chooses neither a left nor a right way, a feminist or religious way--she opens up a new space where, as a hybridized subject, she is able to translate the polarities of Christianity and feminism into subversive and political categories of difference, religious identity, and feminist politics.

Churches are a large part of the global civil society space. Neither market nor government they work toward the freedom and emancipation of those in the South. In some cases, churches in the South became involved in liberation theology (e.g., Gebara 1995; Richard, 1985) and are organizing with 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. They are not a totally separate sphere, but rather function as, Valverde (1994) describes in her three-circuit model of civil society, "dynamic fluid-like processes taking places throughout the social" (p. 219). This paper has looked briefly at these fluid-like processes in the life of one international development worker, and has taken seriously Spivak's (1992) invitation to attend to the ways in which religion affects and is affected by women and culture.

References
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