

Negotiating the third space in Chitral Pakistan: Using education to advocate women's rights

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Abstract

The purpose of this project was to record the educational experiences of college women in a part of the world where educating girls and women is not a priority and can be dangerous. The literature on girl-child education in Pakistan is thin, and few have thought to study female students or credit their perspectives as legitimate knowledge. At the same time, Ismaili Muslims in the north Chitral District value education for daughters, who today are almost universally sent to primary school. This essay interprets the oral histories of seven Ismaili women attending college in Chitral, Pakistan. We argue that the students' accounts demonstrate indigenous third space feminism that negotiates the apparent contradictions and social invisibility of quiet activism that mimics yet changes the social order. The narrators view themselves as dutiful Muslim daughters educated in Western-style colleges where they learned to be women's rights advocates who wish to pay forward their knowledge. Three themes resulted from analyzing the seven oral histories: (1) narrators experienced hardship to attend school; (2) narrators are grateful for their families' sacrifices; and (3) honoring their families and communities, the narrators plan to become educators and advocates to empower girls and women as they have been empowered, and when they do return to their villages, the narrators employ careful tactics that respect local tradition while transforming it.

Keywords

education, girls, oral history, Pakistan, third space feminism, women

Introduction

This essay illustrates third space feminism by way of the oral history narratives of seven women enrolled in college in remote Chitral, Pakistan. Attending college in a society where educating girls and women ranks low on a long list of social and political concerns, these Ismaili Muslim women plan to return to their villages to advocate for women's

rights, including education for girls. As one narrator said: "I did not know until I was in college that according to Islamic Law, daughters should get 25% of her father's property. Knowing about our rights will make the women in our community stronger economically as well as socially." We argue that the narrators inhabit Pérez's (1999) decolonial third space where those

without status or power perform social change right under the noses of the dominant, privileged, and/or oppressive group(s) in power. The third space can be thought of as quiet revolution and ingenious practice not just for surviving inhospitable or overtly hostile circumstances but also for negotiating the tensions of invisible interstitial social locations (Anzaldúa, 1987; Bañuelos, 2006; Bhabha, 1990; Khan, 1998; Licona, 2005; Pérez, 1999; Sandoval, 1991, 2000; Villenas, 2006). The narrators' stories can be understood as decolonial third space feminism, representing organic indigenous practices that imitate but displace the social order.

The seven narrators' histories share themes: (1) Narrators traveled extraordinary distances daily to attend the equivalent of primary and secondary school and, in doing so, endured hardships, from the dangers of walking to school to corporal punishment once they arrived. (2) Their families sacrificed economically and socially to educate the narrators. (3) Narrators desired to improve the lives of women in their villages. Third space feminist practices often emerge in contradictory social contexts, such as the present case. For example, the narrators continue to honor their families and culture while also attending college away from the traditional Muslim women's boundaries of home. The narrators remain bound by the customs of their villages. At the same time, the narrators, because of their education, find that they no longer fit into traditional women's tribal and community social roles prescribed by ethnic and religious mores.

As Pakistan was granted its independence from Britain in 1947, these women as college students live in a formerly colonized country with a formal education

system based on the British educational legacy. In recent years, however, Pakistan has seen increasingly conservative Islamic groups eschew secular education for men and any education for women. Yet the seven narrators embrace the Western-style education of Pakistan's universities as a means of helping their villages. In their desire to help others, the narrators are self-effacing, but they also articulate a consciousness of gender issues compatible with feminist thought. The narrators do not reject their ethnicity or religion, but they see no reason not to question their rights as Muslim women or to advocate for other women's rights. We identify these tensions as evidence of the third space where normative categories and binaries fail to account for peoples' material circumstances and lived experiences. Indeed, the students' stories illustrate third space tactics where the voiceless enact small changes that eventually can amount to large social shifts (Anzaldúa, 1987; Bañuelos, 2006; Bhabha, 1990; Khan, 1998; Licona, 2005; Pérez, 1999; Sandoval, 1991, 2000; Villenas, 2006). The fact that there is little in the literature that records the perspectives of Pakistani women on the subject of education further illustrates these women as occupying a third space "like a shadow in the dark" (Pérez, 1999, p. 6).

Background: Chitral Pakistan and Ismaili Muslims

The oral history narrators are all Ismaili Muslim women from Chitral, Pakistan, which lies in the northernmost district in the Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa Province between the Hindu Kush and Himalaya Mountains. Consisting primarily of rugged barren mountains, Chitral

District borders Afghanistan to the North and Northwest. Extended winters isolate Chitral District from the rest of Pakistan during cold-weather months as heavy snowfalls block roads. Harsh conditions and subsistence farming in Chitral District make life difficult for its people who mostly live in small rural communities. This especially affects rural women, who spend 16-18 hours a day collecting fodder, cooking, cleaning, and caring for their families and the cattle (Pardhan, 2005). In fact, six of the seven narrators are from rural areas, and all seven attend college only because they are funded by charity or scholarship.

The Chitrali people are all Muslims except for the approximately 3,000 people of the Kalash ethnic group indigenous to Pakistan (Hilton, 2009). The majority Muslim population in Chitral is Sunni, and the remaining roughly 30% is Ismaili. Generally, the people living in southern Chitral District and Chitral Town are Sunni Muslims. In northern Chitral District, however, Ismaili Muslims represent the majority.

Ismaili Muslims, as followers of Aga Khan, value education, and educate both genders as long as it is financially possible for them to do so (Liljegren, 2002). Aga Khan the IV became the 49th spiritual leader or Imam of the Ismaili people in 1957. Settle (2012) writes, "Ismailis speak affectionately of the Aga Khan as their savior in historic times of famine and follow his guidance, which advocates capacity building through education and enterprise" (p. 390). Over the past three decades, with the aid of the Aga Khan Development Network, the literacy rate among girls and women has improved in Chitral District, especially in the north. The rate of Chitrali girls' enrollment in primary schools is

nearly equal to that of boys', despite high poverty and relatively conservative attitudes toward women (Dawn.com, 2003).

Literature Review: Universal Education and Women's Education in Pakistan

International development experts posit that increasing the rate of women's education increases the economic efficiency and the social welfare of a country; thus, investment in education is justified as an efficient resource allocation and economic rate of return (Mujahid-Mukhtar, 2008). However, studies find that increasing women's education boosts women's wages, which frequently results in women having a larger return on education investment than men (Schultz, 2002; World Bank, 2013). Empirical evidence also shows that an increase in women's education improves human development outcomes such as child survival, health, and schooling (Morrison, Raju, & Sinha, 2007).

Pakistan faces difficulties regarding education, in general, and women's education in particular. In much of Pakistani society, women are regarded as socially and intellectually inferior to men (Sudduth, 2009). Alavi's (1972) description of the patriarchal structure in Pakistani society has changed little in 40 years:

Pakistan remains a strictly patriarchal society, in which women are treated as 'given' or 'acquired' through arranged marriages, to spend their lives in the service of a male dominated social system. ...It is not only a single patriarch, the head of a nuclear family, but the whole male dominated kinship organization which has a stake in the subordination of women. (para. 4)

Attitudes towards educating girls and women remain mostly negative in

Pakistan because communities are concerned with preserving traditional values, which do not include educating women (Khattak, 2008). Furthermore, in recent years, the Taliban has been actively destroying girls' schools in Pakistan (Perlez, 2011).

Additionally, for decades, Pakistan underinvested in education, and in this environment of resource constraints, government spending on girls' education tends to be shortchanged (Aly, 2006; Coleman, 2004; Mujahid-Mukhtar, 2008; Rana, 2011; Strohlic, 2013). Girls comprise 75% of out-of-school children in Pakistan (Strohlic, 2013). The story in Chitral District, however, is more optimistic, in large part due to the Ismaili people's respect for the leadership of Aga Khan and the financial support of the Aga Khan Development Network. In Chitral, a female literacy rate of 2.3% in 1981 rose to 22.09% by 1998, and some gauge the Chitrali female literacy rate today as high as 40% (Nadeem, Elahi, Hadi, & Uddin, 2009). Female literacy has been calculated close to 100% in some Chitrali villages among girls and women aged 20 or younger (Aga Khan Rural Support Program, 2007).

While international development agencies emphasize the human and economic development benefits of educating girls and women, limited research in Chitral suggests there are some indigenous arguments for educating girls. Pardhan's (2005) data reveal that women in Chitral's geographic area of Booni Valley describe the value of education in terms of language proficiency. Women in Booni who had never attended school recognized that their knowledge of only their native language, Khowar, limited their interaction with anyone other than Khowar speakers. Educated women, however, with the ability

to read and write in languages other than Khowar, were more comfortable in their interactions with non-Khowar speakers. Although Khowar is the main language in Chitral, there are other tribal languages and dialects spoken in the region. Furthermore, Pakistan's national language is Urdu, and English is informally recognized as the language of the educated class in part due to Pakistan's history as a British colony. Pardhan's participants also reported that the biggest barrier to gaining further education was social convention that prevents them from leaving their homes (Pardhan, 2005). Even with literacy skills, women cannot go into public spaces, such as the market, a place reserved for men. Educated women in the study said they wanted to seek employment once their education was complete but reported that they were mostly unable to do so because they are confined to their homes afterwards. Women can be educated; only through primary school or all the way through college, but an education does not necessarily release them from accepting their traditional gender roles afterwards.

Liljegren (2002) also observed positive attitudes towards women's education in Chitral. Some families said educating a daughter increases the bride price that her parents can ask from the groom's family. A daughter's increased bride price not only helps to recoup some of the financial outlay of a daughter's education but also becomes a point of marriage negotiation between families to keep an educated daughter from having to do heavy agricultural labor for her husband's family in the likely event that they are farmers.

In sum, education has not been a priority in Pakistan due to traditional tribal, social, and religious values,

combined with harsh geographic and economic realities, and a changing political climate. Nonetheless, in Chitral, Ismaili Muslims have materialized their value for education into higher literacy rates both for women and men. In the case of women, however, despite their hopes and dreams for using their education, a conservative society keeps women bound to home and family. The value of girls' education is tied to bride price and family status. At the same time, development experts tie the value of women's education to monetizing health and home for the greater social gross domestic product and to improving the health and welfare of future citizens whom educated women produce as offspring. Amid these competing arguments on behalf of women, Pakistan in recent years has witnessed increasingly narrow and violent interpretations of Islamic law, enforcing even more restrictive rules for women. This includes some religious groups banning education for women and persecuting those who advocate on behalf of education for women. Indeed, this work has always been and remains dangerous. Moreover, we know very little about the first-person educational experiences of women in this region as few have thought to include them in the conversation.

Theoretical Framework: Third Space Feminism

Described in terms of Anzaldúa's (1987) "borderlands" and attributed to Sandoval's (1991, 2000) U.S. Third World feminism, the origins of third space politics emerge from both postcolonial critiques of Western imperialism (Bhabha, 1990) and Chicana feminist articulations of social erasure (Anzaldúa, 1987; Bañuelos, 2006;

Pérez, 1999; Sandoval, 1991, 2000; Villenas, 2006). In this essay, we argue that the narrators' stories illustrate the third space, which is a mostly invisible social location occupied by marginalized people. Furthermore, we contend that the narrators' descriptions of their own activism are compatible with third space feminism, which enacts social change from the third space.

One can think of the third space in material terms, first, as the embodied performative improvisation required to survive in "borderland" circumstances, and second, as a kind of interpretive sense making that navigates "borderland" existence (Anzaldúa, 1987; Bañuelos, 2006; Khan, 1998; Licona, 2005; Pérez, 1999; Sandoval, 1991, 2000; Villenas, 2006). Khan (1998) writes that the third space "helps to explain how individuals negotiate the contradictions and polarities of their lives" (p. 464). People who live in third spaces develop tactics for maneuvering and thriving in such circumstances, and these tactics "rupture" and "displace" former social practices and structures (Bhabha, 1990; Pérez, 1999).

Third space feminism builds on the third space as lived experience and political action. Pérez (1999, p. 33) notes that "women as agents have always constructed their own spaces interstitially, within nationalisms, nationalisms that often miss women's subtle interventions," and this kind of intervention is what she defines as third space feminism. Pérez's "decolonial imaginary" becomes "a tool that allows us to uncover 'interstitial' and 'rupturing' space between the colonial and the postcolonial that is also the space of oppositional agency for women who have been erased from history" (p. 96). We argue that the oral history narrators' stories of

their educational journeys illustrate third space feminism where the voiceless embody quiet revolution.

Method: Feminist Oral History and Thematic Analysis

This essay draws on our thematic analysis of oral histories that were audio-recorded via Skype interviews in 2013 and 2014 with seven Ismaili Muslim women attending college in Chitral, Pakistan. The oral history project focused on collecting first-person accounts of college women's educational histories. Oral history is a valued feminist method for allowing people without formal power to narrate their own biographies, which are then meant to become part of the historical record (Gluck & Patai, 1991; Maynard & Purvis, 1994; Reinhartz, 1992). In the present case, the purpose of the oral history project was to listen to the testimonies of women from a part of the world where women rarely express their thoughts in public forums. Using the transcripts of the narrators' oral histories, we first report three themes that emerged from the narrators' stories. Across these themes women described negotiating third space tensions that undermine oppositional binaries (such as dutiful Muslim daughter versus college-educated woman) to build unexpected and unique perspectives on social justice for women. Thus, in this essay, after we report the transcripts' narrative themes, we add an additional third space feminist interpretation to frame our explication of the seven oral history narratives.

The narrators were recruited by snowball sample from a women's student hostel in Chitral, Pakistan; the hostel is the equivalent of independent student housing

serving students attending several local colleges. The hostel is not associated with any particular education institution. The matron of the hostel agreed to the project and introduced it to the residents by distributing the recruitment letter, which invited interested residents to contact the first author directly via email. Once each volunteer narrator formally consented in her preferred language through the IRB-approved process, she chose her own pseudonym. Table 1 provides basic information regarding the backgrounds of the seven narrators, demonstrating their mostly rural backgrounds and financial insecurity. All other identifiable pieces of information have been disguised for personal security and to maintain confidentiality. The individual oral history interviews were one-time open-ended conversations that asked about the narrators' educational histories and experiences. Each student narrator chose whether to participate in English or Urdu, as the first author is fluent in both.

Although each oral history narrative is its own primary documentation, no voice is unmediated by the research process, including the researcher's research agenda and the co-constructed relationship between researcher and participant that emerges during the research process (Golombisky, 2006, 2010a, 2010b; Golombisky & Holtzhausen, 2005). Additionally, in the present case, given the dangers of making the narrators' identities public, these oral histories are further mediated by pseudonyms as well as translation, transcription, and editing. Our interpretations of the narrators' stories for academic audiences further mediate the recordings and their transcripts, which once collected represent a historical record and, it is hoped, one day will become public

history at a safer point in the future. As academics, one from Chitral and one from the United States, we are self-conscious about interpreting the narrators' stories,

but our goal is to honor the narrators as witnesses to their own lives.

Table 1: Description of Narrators

PSEUDONYM	COLLEGE YEAR	BACKGROUND	AGE	FUNDING SOURCE
Samina	Sophomore	Rural	21	Charity
Falak	Junior	Rural	20	Charity
Alyla	Senior	Town	22	Charity
Afeefa	Senior	Rural	25	Charity
Nabiha	Senior	Rural	22	Charity
Musarat	Senior	Rural	22	Government Scholarship
Shabana	Senior	Rural	23	Charity

Narrative Themes: Hardship, Sacrifice, and Empowerment

Narrators' early memories of school described hardship due to the geographic distance between their homes and their schools, suffering in the winters, and resentment towards corporal punishment. Narrators also shed light on the familial support that they received from mothers, sisters, fathers, and brothers. Last, when talking about the impact of education in their lives, the narrators shared that,

through education, they have become aware of their rights as women, and they wish to share this awareness when they return to their villages.

Distance from School

In South Asia, the distance between a girl's home and the school remains one of the reasons for low enrollment among girls (IRIN Humanitarian News and Analysis, 2008). In the present oral history narratives, a recurring theme was distance

to school because of traveling on foot, regardless of weather, and encountering “social evils” along the way. Alyla described her discomfort walking to school through the town’s marketplace:

When I was small it was fun. I used to look at all the toys and candies in the stores, but by the time I was in middle school, it became very hard for me and my friends to walk through the bazaar as we would be harassed with very sexual comments from some of the shopkeepers as well as other men in the bazaar.

Once she began to be harassed, Alyla told her mother that she did not want to go to school anymore. So, at age 13, Alyla went to live with an uncle in another village where she did not have to cross a bazaar on the way to school.

Falak comes from a village where there are no schools for girls after fifth grade. So, she walked an hour and 45 minutes each day to attend a boy’s school in a neighboring village. The emotional toll was as great as the physical:

I felt as if... I was committing a crime, like a theft or robbery or something. People used to stare as if I was going to school not to be educated but to learn how to be an ummm... a bad person. The worst stares were from male members of my own family, like my uncles... My uncles even came to my house to stop me from going to the school. They did not care about the distance; they cared about the fact that I would be exposed to boys and might end up having an affair and bring shame to the family.

Narrators had to contend with family members who did not accept the idea of women leaving their homes. Once a girl or woman starts traveling to school, she creates tension among kin and community.

Getting to school without transportation was exacerbated during winter. Narrators shared a loathing for going to school in the winter as well as for

the corporal punishment they endured once they arrived, both of which left visible and invisible scars. Afeefa described wearing so many layers of clothes for warmth that walking to school became difficult:

I used to take at least two to three falls by the time I got to school. By the end of winter, almost every year that I can recall, I ended up with an arm or leg fracture [laugh]. It was not fun. In short, I hated going to school in winters.

At school, teachers were not considerate of the fact that some students needed time to warm up before beginning their schoolwork. Alyla’s teachers punished her for not being able to write with numb fingers during morning classes. Samina’s story of punishment involved firewood. Chitrali schools often require students to “donate” one log of wood every day to fuel fireplaces, although government schools receive funding for firewood. Samina said:

I remember one time during winter, when I was unable to take a log of wood for the classroom fireplace, I was beaten with a stick five times on each hand... And to add to the humiliation, I was not allowed to be near the fire the entire day.

Corporal punishment at school represented a theme common to the narrators. Falak, with scars on her hand and near her right eye as a result of beatings by teachers, views corporal punishment as dehumanizing:

We were beaten as if we were livestock. Even my mother did not use as many sticks on our cow to keep her within the boundaries of the house as much as our teachers used on us to “discipline us.” To this day I still do not understand why they could not just talk to us, why we were treated like untamed animals.

According to Society for the Protection of the Rights of the Child, each year 35,000 high school pupils in Pakistan drop out of the education system due to corporal

punishment (IRIN Humanitarian News and Analysis, 2008).

Familial Support and Sacrifice

A family's socioeconomic status factors into educational outcomes, and poverty typically affects girls more negatively than boys (Chudgar & Shafiq, 2004). In Pakistani culture, sons are the ones who take care of their parents in old age, so the education of sons becomes a retirement investment for aging parents (Mujahid-Mukhtar, 2008). Among the narrators, six attend college supported with charity funding; the seventh is funded with government scholarships. Still, the narrators' families scrimped and sacrificed financially and socially to educate their daughters.

All the narrators shared stories of how their mothers had supported their educations. In Afeefa's case, her mother dreamed of sending her five daughters to college. However, after her father abandoned the family, Afeefa's mother and sisters lived in poverty. Afeefa, the oldest daughter, tells the story of her mother's sacrifice: "She...sold her most prized possession, her cow, so I could at least move to the town and get enrolled in college." Afeefa said that her mother went years without buying herself clothes and shoes so that she could pay for her daughters' schooling. Before Afeefa could find funding, she took college courses independently at home, which required sending her assignments to the college, an 8-hour drive away:

The only way to get my assignments to the college was through the taxi drivers from our village who make the trip to the town two to three times a week. They used to leave early in the morning, and my mother used to wake up with the morning azzan

(call to prayer) and stand on the main road so she could give my assignments to the drivers. Sometimes she would have to stand on the road for hours in the freezing winters just to make sure she did not miss the taxi.

Nabiha credits her stepmother: "She never asked me to help her with the household chores. She always asked me to study, do my homework, and excel at school." Nabiha recalls occasions when her aunt and women from the neighborhood would tell her stepmother to make Nabiha do more household work. Nabiha's stepmother always replied, "No, I want her to make something out of herself, not end up like me, illiterate." Nabiha said that her stepmother had wanted to become a teacher but never attended school. Now Nabiha wants to become a teacher to fulfill her stepmother's dream.

Parental support is important for girls' participation in school, given traditional community beliefs that discourage education for girls as not only a waste of scarce resources but an affront to social propriety. Shabana comes from a community where a majority of the girls either never go to school or leave school after fifth grade. She laughs that she is the old maid among her childhood friends. Shabana calls her father a "hero" for supporting for her education because, she says, the men in her village criticized him for sending her to school. "Now that I am in college, I do not know what he goes through. He never tells me what other people in the village say." Shabana said that her father is proud when she reads and translates newspapers for him. Once he cried with joy when a neighbor asked Shabana to read his medication prescription. Shabana's father wants her to work in a bank after graduation so everyone will respect her. Shabana believes she is

gaining respect in her village, but it will take time for people to express it out loud.

In Musarat's case, her father's financial support for her education ended after he was disabled in an accident. She said his first response after the accident was sorrow that he could not fulfill his promise to send her to college. Musarat became determined to complete a degree and start a career to support her family as her father supported her. "He does not understand much about my course work, but still he wants to know about every course that I am taking," she said. "Every time my father calls, I am more ambitious. I am re-energized, and I work harder."

Siblings also supported the narrators' schooling. After Falak's father died, Falak's sister leveraged her marriage on behalf of Falak's education. Her sister refused to get married until their uncles allowed Falak to continue with school. Eventually, the uncles relented. Falak said:

She accepted my brother-in-law's proposal only because he was from the (local) town area. She told me she did this so she might be able to continue with her education after marriage and, in future, I could live with her and continue my school. That is what I did; I lived with my sister and her family for my 11th and 12th grades. She supported me.

Nabiha said her older brother's sacrifice enabled her to attend college away from home:

After high school, my father wanted to send my brother to Peshawar for higher education. ...Sending my brother to Peshawar meant a huge burden on our family's finances. We knew it would be impossible for my father to afford to send any other child to college. My brother convinced my father that he would

continue his studies at a (less prestigious) college in Chitral, which would cost less, so I could attend college as well.

Samina also is grateful to an older brother. When Samina was not allowed to attend school anymore after one of the girls in her school eloped, her brother was the only male family member who supported Samina's education. Samina said:

If it was not for my brother, I do not think my family would have ever let me rejoin school. Even now, he was the one who bought me a small cell phone so we could keep connected and know what is going on in each other lives, as we get to see each other only once in two or more years.

It is a sign of trust that Samina's brother bought her a cell phone since community members generally believe that a young woman's access to cell phones will lead to illicit relations with men and thus impugn the family honor.

Alyla has strong opinions about women bearing the honor of the family and society. She says the society supports double standards. On one hand, people are ready to punish girls to the greatest extent possible—in some cases unto death—if they dishonor their family by even talking to a man. On the other hand, adult men—someone's fathers, uncles, brothers—sexually harass girls walking to school. Musarat also described how the men in her village opposed her achieving higher education, yet when those same men needed help with reading, it was she they approached for assistance. Inspired by family members, all the narrators are eager to improve their families' economic circumstances and keen to raise their communities' consciousness regarding women's issues, including education.

Education as Empowerment

All the narrators see themselves as empowered because of education. They all expressed a desire to work for women's rights and education, in addition to their desire to have careers that afford economic security for their families. Stable jobs with income will enable the narrators to take care of their parents and younger siblings, representing a gender role reversal in Pakistani culture.

Shabana wishes to earn a master's degree and work with an educational organization to educate girls in her village. Musarat hopes to teach after college and ultimately earn a graduate degree. Musarat said: "I am very well respected not only in my family but in my community as well. My thoughts about any matter in my extended family are respected." Narrators described changing roles from being simply college students to being women's education activists when they visit their villages. However, the narrators said they bear in mind their identities as women from villages and try to honor their families and communities.

College has also made the narrators determined to spread the message of education for girls. For example, when Shabana visits her village, she says she avoids flaunting her education. "That is not going to do me any good." Instead, she matches her dress and speech to the other girls and women in the village, which means speaking pure Khowar with no Urdu or English which would mark her as an outsider. She says, "But I always try to educate the women and men around me about educating their daughters, as they are

the ones who will up bring our future generations." Echoing development rationales about educating the mothers of future citizens, Shabana presents herself and interacts with the people in her village in the way that everyone expects a young woman to behave. By spending time with them, Shabana builds coalitions and focuses on using her knowledge to change people's understanding and attitudes.

Similarly, Nabiha said that she avoids imposing her education on others, but she always takes advantage of opportunities to talk about how women benefit from education. "Education has given me the ability to think critically," she said. "It is through education that today I can read and write about women's issues." Nabiha also wants to work with community-based organizations that support the girls' schools in her village and villages close by. She said, "I want to do it because all the women need to be aware of their basic rights."

Alyla, too, wants to be a women's rights advocate and fight against discrimination against women. She said, "Because of my education, I have access to all the knowledge in the world." Alyla says it disappoints her when educated men speak against women's rights. "I have heard some of my male teachers lecturing our male class fellows about not letting women outside of her Chardar¹ and Chardiwar², and it disgusts me."

The narrators indicate that they are still bound at times by the traditions and customs of their villages, but they are proud when men in their families support their education. Approval from those who hold the power is important. They also

¹ Cloak to cover the entire body and part of the face (veil)

² The four walls of the house

acknowledge the acts of agency in opposition to the status quo that their mothers perform to improve the life circumstances of their daughters. These daughters, because of their education, find themselves in a borderland where they do not perfectly fit into the cultural and tradition-bound roles prescribed for women. They cannot fully express their newly educated thinking in public, either. They don't reject their ethnic traditions or religion, but they see no reason not to question their rights as Muslim women or to advocate for women's rights.

Interpretation: The Decolonial Imaginary and Third Space Interventions

Third space feminism, according to Pérez (1999), requires a "decolonial imaginary" to get at the intangible places where women have always been more than mere victims, but instead "survive and persist" (pp. 6-7). The decolonial imaginary as a lens reveals the invisible and silenced, who, it turns out, are nonetheless present and active, even subversive, such as the oral history narrators *and* their families. Bañuelos (2006) writes, "Emma Pérez's (1999) third space feminism is the site of negotiation from which marginalized women speak and their 'agency is enacted'" (p. 96).

The decolonial imaginary as a method, then, pries apart interstitial spaces—third spaces—between normative symbolic and material categories, including, for example, college-educated Chitrali woman. Beyond the thinness of academic literature on women's education in Pakistan, let alone Chitral, research and scholarship on gender issues in education

tend to exclude the voices of girls and women. Moreover, the seven oral histories included stories, experiences, and feelings that the narrators had never thought about before or shared with anyone. The narrators said no one had ever asked them before, and it had not occurred to them to reminisce on their own.

More than lacking privilege, but rather mostly ignored as irrelevant, existence in third spaces requires interpretive strategies for reconciling contradictions. For example, girls walking to school through the bazaar are often sexually harassed by fathers, uncles, and brothers who locate their family honor in the chastity and obedience of their own daughters, nieces, and sisters, who must walk through the bazaar to attend school... and so on. Villenas (2006) describes the third space as "where political, social, and cultural dilemmas are always in the process of being worked out even as the lessons of the body, of everyday ritual, and of the spoken voice both clash and conspire" (p. 152).

Making sense of such dilemmas, as well as surviving their material consequences, is an achievement, which in turn becomes a kind of pedagogy passed on inter-generationally (Villenas, 2006). Indeed, the fact of survival, while ordinary, is itself a form of resistance. Afeefa's mother, abandoned by her husband, as a single-mother in Chitral Pakistan, reared and educated five daughters. Afeefa's recognition of her mother's strength is a sign that Afeefa has had another kind of education from her mother about what women can accomplish. Afeefa, combining these lessons with her college education, espouses an organic kind of third space feminism addressing the specifics of the society in which she lives; including the

need to educate women, not only for the sake of girls and women but for society as a whole.

Third space tactics may not be in direct opposition to the status quo because such opposition can be dangerous; instead, third space tactics are more subtle and stealthy, surviving codependent with the dominant power structure and over time transforming it into something else. One tactic Bhabha (1990) describes is “translation,” “a way of imitating, but in a mischievous, displacing sense” (p. 210). For example, Shabana performed the role of an obedient daughter when her father’s neighbor needed help deciphering the instructions for his medicine. The irony was not lost on Shabana, but she did not eschew the opportunity to demonstrate the value of education to her community, while disguised as an obedient woman using her skill to serve men, per gender custom. Similarly, Pérez (1999) describes “doubling,” which seems to mimic the social order’s rules while changing them. Both Musarat and Nabiha, like Shabana, are strategic about how they present themselves when they interact with their extended families and village neighbors; the narrators do their best to fit in and avoid drawing attention to the fact of their differences due to education; they mirror or “double” tradition. However, these narrators also mentor their younger sisters, cousins, and nieces, and try to persuade people about the importance of education for girls. Shabana also described a doubling tactic when she said, “I am one of them; my education does not change that, but what I can try to change is the attitude towards girls’ education.” She embraces the existing order (“I am one of them”) as she changes it (“I can try to change...the attitude towards girls’ education”).

Over time, the results of such tactics give “rise to something different, something new and unrecognizable” (Bhabha, 1990, p. 211.) The narrators’ stories demonstrate a different kind of formerly undocumented third space activism and promise a hopeful future for women’s justice in Northern Chitral. Bhabha (1990) writes, “This third space displaces the histories that constitute it, and sets up new structures of authority, new political initiatives, which are inadequately understood through received wisdom” (p. 211). Of course, it remains to be seen if the narrators, and their college peers, can find employment outside the home, whether as teachers and education advocates or, for example, bankers. Thus, it will be important to continue to research the educational experiences of women from this part of the world, not to mention support the causes they deem important.

Conclusion

Third space feminism has been described as the site of negotiation from which marginalized women engage in practices that displace dominant ideas (Bañuelos, 2006; Bhabha, 1990; Khan, 1998; Pérez, 1999; Sandoval, 1991, 2000; Villenas, 2006). As a tool or method, the decolonial imaginary reminds us to recognize the interstitial, where the limits of binaries are transcended (Pérez, 1999). The decolonial imaginary also troubles Western feminist perspectives and should make feminists uncomfortable with drawing easy conclusions about women while simultaneously obliging support for indigenous women’s perspectives and agendas.

In the present case, the Chitrali women who narrated their oral histories live in a largely isolated, rural, conservative,

and religiously and tribally patriarchal society where many rely on subsistence farming. These women also attend Western-style colleges in the tradition of their country's colonizers. As their transcripts show, they see nothing extraordinary about being both practicing Muslims and activists for progressive social change on behalf of women. For example, as Alyla said:

The more I attain knowledge about women's rights from different parts of the world, the more I am aware of the lies and double standards of our society. Men never tell us about our rights but will drum into our heads that the family's honor is dependent on us.

She combines what she learns from "different parts of the world" with "our society." There are no social scripts or cultural narratives for living with these apparent tensions; nevertheless, the narrators do live with them quite successfully. Indeed, if third space feminism ruptures old ways of thinking, then the narrators are third space feminists who deploy savvy strategies that change attitudes about women and women's education. They accomplish this without drawing censure (or worse) in a country where education (especially Western-style education) is increasingly viewed with suspicion and where it is literally dangerous for girls to go to school. ■

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