

KOLUM KRITIKA

RESPONSE TO “FEMINISM ACROSS OUR GENERATIONS”

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About the Author

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“Feminism across our Generations” is an engaging piece that allows us to understand the formation of two women as “feminists.” In place of a formal essay, the piece is offered as a dialogue where the authors “would draw out each other’s ideas” on feminism and, presumably, its discontents. Here the personal inexorably becomes political. I assume this is the underpinning reason for the article’s format. This kind of engagement has its power. Unfortunately, it also has a weakness that can undermine the wisdom it hopes to convey.

First of all, the article is difficult to place given, on the one hand, its form and, on the other, its scope. The article, for example, collects the two authors’ responses to a set of general questions the authors themselves have fashioned. The readers, however, may ask: Why, specifically, these two authors’ responses? For whom do they speak and for what specific purpose? What specifically do the readers stand to gain from the authors’ personal and, avowedly, political reflections?

Such an unnecessary confusion can be solved, perhaps, by providing a fuller and more nuanced preface that will explain to the readers the “theoretical” logic of the reflections. (I am aware the authors expressly avoid the theoretical. I use the term here to mean clarification.)

There is a need, in other words, to historicize, that is, contextualize the place and importance of the authors. In what particular way, for instance, do the meditations serve to illuminate what the authors call “the specific historical moments and ongoing sociopolitical changes”? In what particular way do their individual stories relate to what they say is

a “broader and more enduring collective narrative about gender, race, colonialism, and national liberation?”

I imagine an extended introduction will also serve to remedy the great leaps that the article makes as it moves from one point to another--from feminist formation, for instance, to contemporary Filipino-American women and their concerns.

The problem with the article is, therefore, its admission that it stands in for a formal co-authored essay, one academic task that the authors roundly criticize (more on this later). Their discomfort, no doubt, has merits. But given the nature of the journal which is academic, and one which has an academic audience, it is necessary for the article to rationalize its format.

Thus the choice to have an informal format, neither an essay nor an interview, must account for what it sacrifices. It is easy, for example, to ask for coherence from an essay than it is from an interview. The coherence that is demanded here has to do, fundamentally, with the fact that the authors assume that their readers can readily grasp their allusions and concerns. For example, who is the personality described as a “very articulate woman”? Why is she silenced by not being named? What is the political and historical significance of the struggle in the Philippines to the diasporic community of Filipino-American women? Do the experiences of women in Filipino political movements mirror those of Filipino-American women? These issues, among others, are admittedly taken up, albeit unevenly in the manuscript. A reader, however, not steeped in the history of the political communities they speak to can get lost, easily.

Thus, only a fuller introduction discussing these matters can serve to contextualize and historicize what the authors claim are their reflections.

More specifically, I would very much like to hear why one of the authors feels that feminism no longer gives “the same excitement or urgency.” Feminism, she laments, has deteriorated into an academic chic. But a feminist who sees the depredation of academic domestication must offer instead a spirited analysis rather than a swift dismissal of the issue. Moreover, I find disturbing the author’s suggestion that the “Battle of Seattle” is an alternative to the academic nature of current feminist movement. Does the author recommend anarchism in place of scrutiny? Commentators have suggested, for instance, that the violence that ensued in Seattle in 1990 has hijacked other forms of challenging globalization. If at all, the “Battle of Seattle” is just one of the many ways of addressing the ills of globalization. The author must clarify this lest readers accuse her, simplistically, of anti-intellectualism; for the great irony is that a work that severely criticizes academic domestication submits itself to see print in an invariably academic publication.

A supplementary question, therefore, must be added; one that deals with an academic species that feels troubled by academic practice but finds, nonetheless, comfort in the same place. The logic and possibility of this tendency must be explored and the authors are in the best position to start such an investigation.