

## KOLUM KRITIKA

### A RESPONSE

**Delia D. Aguilar**  
**Washington State University and Bowling Green State University**  
***deliadag@hotmail.com***

#### About the Author

Delia D. Aguilar is Associate Professor of Women's Studies and Comparative American Cultures at Washington State University and Bowling Green State University. She is the author of *Filipino Housewives Speak, The Feminist Challenge, and Toward a Nationalist Feminism*, all published in the Philippines. She has written numerous articles on Filipino women, feminist theory, and women and development that have appeared in *Feminist Review, Women's Studies International Forum, Race & Class, and Monthly Review*, among others. She now teaches women's studies courses at the University of Connecticut.

Dear Editors:

I should tell you at the outset that our piece, exactly as it was submitted to you, was printed in March by Routledge in an anthology titled *Pinay Power: Theorizing the Filipina/American Experience* edited by Melinda de Jesus. It also appeared on Znet online at almost the same time. However, I wanted it published and circulated in the Philippines, hoping that it might help generate a discussion of the early women's liberation movement heralded by MAKIBAKA, the events that led to the first stirrings of feminism and the conflicts involved therein, and where it stands today. If nothing else, your reader's comments confirmed the need for such a historical recounting.

It's too bad that your reader completely missed the theoretical underpinnings of our exchange. Above all else, our "dialogue" shows how the changes in our thinking as well as the differences in our feminist stances as mother and daughter have been a reaction to, and a reflection of, the shifts in the politics of the times. This shift has been profound: from the belief in revolution that impelled the people's movements of the 60s and 70s to the reformism and accommodationism that progressives have succumbed to as a result of the structural changes and neoconservative politics that began in the 80s. The theory that recognizes these shifts in thinking is called historical materialism.

A little familiarity with feminism might also have helped the reader understand

that early on, way before the affectations of the postmodern turn, feminists urged attention to the work of ordinary women and the formally untutored (the “informal”) as a way of bridging the gap between various forms of hierarchy inflected by gender, class, race, sexuality, etc. Such efforts, of course, can best be comprehended when placed alongside the so-called “separate spheres” and the valorization of women’s reproductive labor in the private sphere, the chief project of Marxist feminist theoreticians. All this took place when there was a women’s movement in the West (now referred to as the North). Today there is no women’s movement in industrialized countries; instead, feminism is confined to the academy. This is the simple reason why I do not feel “the same excitement or urgency” as in the past. Barbara Epstein, writing in *Monthly Review* of May 2001, was the first to acknowledge this, but it is now widely, if mostly still only tacitly, admitted. Knowledge of this history would have preempted the kinds of questions your reader raised regarding tensions within the academy, preoccupation with matters of “format,” and concerns about whether or not our submission was appropriate for your academic journal. (Here a rudimentary understanding of the primary function of higher education in late capitalism, particularly in a corporatized academy, wouldn’t have hurt.) If I read your mission statement correctly, I thought that you were, in fact, interested in having the academy serve social ends. If not, I apologize for the misreading.

The other issues raised are similarly a consequence of lack of information or misinformation on the part of your reader; for example, why the “very articulate woman” was unnamed. Her identity and my presumed “silencing” of her are totally beside the point. The issue is the strongly held notion by revolutionaries at the time—ask any feminist of that period—that there was no need for feminism or an autonomous women’s movement because mere involvement in the national democratic struggle in itself already liberated women. If this woman became head of a *feminist* NGO a mere two years after she uttered this position, wasn’t she proving the position false?

The “Battle of Seattle” anarchist? Now I’m afraid this one is just plainly wrong. While a small group of anarchists was clearly involved and predictably became the focus of US mainstream media coverage, a wide variety of forces including labor, environment, church, etc. took active part in its mobilization. There are a great many progressive journal articles and books that the reviewer might want to read to be more informed on the subject. Michael Denning, for one, underscores the anti-systemic character of the Battle of Seattle to distinguish it from previous movements. And what I was suggesting, given that feminism is academically confined, is that women who call themselves feminists should go out in the streets and join protests against globalization, against the war in Iraq, against US

intervention in various parts of the world if feminism is to be of relevance to the majority in the world today.

Your reader was right on target in writing that someone “not steeped in the history of the political communities they speak to might get lost.” With a little less presumption and more humility, the reader might have seen her reflection in this statement, possibly yielding to someone with a bit more theoretical and political savvy who could have engaged the substance of our piece.

As you might guess, I am disinclined to revise our essay for KK. But for whatever it is worth—and I trust you understand that nothing personal is intended here—I truly hope that this letter opens a conversation about some of the above issues among your staff.

Sincerely,  
Delia D. Aguilar