Social Movements Empowering Communication

Isis
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Positioning in global feminist critical collaboration

self-reflexive talk among manila-based feminists

Tesa Casal **de Vela**

Jasmine Nadua **Trice**

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About the Cover

Like the spiral figure, communication is not necessarily linear and direct. Within the social movements, communication facilitates exchanges and relationships, which allows continued collaborations and cooperation among actors.

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p r e f a c e

T HAT GLOBAL feminist movements have reached a critical stage in history was one of the key insights to emerge from the 2005 Feminist Dialogues (FD) in Porto Alegre, Brasil. In the midst of the ubiquitous threats of neo-liberal globalisation, market-driven nation states, and the moral backlash of the religious right—global feminist movements face the urgent task of revitalising its politics, strategies for intermovement collaboration, institutional engagements, and organisational ethics (Jones, 2005; Feminist Dialogues Coordinating Group or FDCG, 2006).

For Southern feminists in particular, this process was viewed as requiring rigorous self-reflexivity that accounted for multiple identities, interdependent subjective experiences, and transformative visions that are always contextualised in geo-political realities (Eschle, 2002; Seodu Herr, 2004; Sampaio, 2004; Vargas, 2006). This reflective mode drives the feminist impulse to "interrogate, subvert, and dream differently" (George, 2007). It allows feminists to transcend false unities within the global feminist project. It challenges the utility of institutionalised and consensus-based approaches to social and political transformation. And it paves the way for inclusive movements, networks, and relationships that respectfully navigate diversities (Eschle, 2002; Vargas, 2003; Vargas, 2005; Purkayastha & Subramaniam, 2004; Gandhi & Shah, 2006; FDCG, 2006).

The Feminist Dialogues (FD) was initially conceptualised as an alternative "strategy space" for feminists worldwide to develop methods for infusing the World Social Forum (WSF) with feminist principles and agendas. The objectives of the FD have, however, been extended to include the enhancement of transnational feminist organising and solidarity. Conceived at the Women's Strategy Meeting in Porto Alegre, Brasil, in January 2003, the FD is currently coordinated by several organisations including: **National** Network of Autonomous Women's Groups **(NNAWG),** India; Women's Environment and Development Organisation (WEDO), New York; Women's International Coalition for Economic Justice (WICEJ); African Women's Development and Communication Network (FEMNET), Africa; Development Alternatives for Women of a New Era–

Southeast Asia (DAWN–SEA); Isis International-Manila; INFORM, Sri Lanka; and Articulacion Feminist Marcosur (AFM), Latin America (FDCG, 2006).

The value of such strategy spaces for remobilisation efforts of global feminist movements is not to generate unnecessary fragmentation or to abandon foundational feminist traditions (Eschle, 2005; FDCG, 2006; George, 2007). It is rather to immerse new movement consciousness with the Southern feminist passion for multiplicity, contextualism (Vargas, 2003), and thinking borne out of the Southern feminist experience of colonisation and marginalisation (Eschle, 2005; FDCG, 2006; George, 2007).

This paper on **Positioning in Global Feminist Critical Collaboration: Self-Reflexive Talk among Manila-Based Feminists**, is a contribution to the global feminist self-reflexive exercise. As the first volume of the Isis International–Manila monograph series on Social Movements Empowering Communication, it serves as a testament to the thriving passions of a 33-year-old feminist development communication organisation that continuously learns from women who have steered it into global collaborations in the past, and supports the women who will steer it into the future.

Raijeli Nicole
Executive Director
Isis International–Manila
September 2007

positioning in global feminist critical collaboration: self-reflexive talk among manila-based feminists

THE FEMINIST DIALOGUES is a space outside the United Nations (UN) where women from different contexts bring in their networks, theorising, and activism. It is a space where feminists reflect on feminist movements at a given historical moment. As such, it can be seen as a space for self-reflexivity, where the "self" identity here is the "feminist self."

IN LATE 2006, Isis International–Manila held a series of round-table discussions among Filipina feminists in preparation for the Third Feminist Dialogues on "Feminist Transforming Democracies: Visions and Strategies." Called the Manila Dialogues, the discussions engaged Manila-based feminists in their own self-reflexive exercise.

As three relatively younger feminists engaged in academic work, we wanted to understand feminist practice as constructed by this group of highly-respected Manila-based feminists. Coming from our limited experience in global feminist strategies, we wanted to know how we can theorise from the experience of feminists who we believed have been deeply engaged in regional and international feminist movements. We do note that feminists carry multiple identities and can be both theorists and activists. In doing this paper, we purposely positioned ourselves as researchers despite our own involvements in feminist activism. We wanted to traverse the delicate line between feminist theory and praxis.

traversing along the feminist theory and praxis divide

WITHIN CONTEMPORARY identity politics, debates surrounding the assumed divide between the stable, intelligible identities of praxis often conflict with the more fluid, poststructuralist identities of critical theory. That is, feminists theorise that identities are fluid and yet present stable identities, roles, or positions in practice. Within feminist discourse, the notion of "strategic essentialism" put forth by Gayatri Spivak provides

one canonical framework for positioning oneself within these false divides between theory and practice, fluidity and stability, and so forth. Spivak offers a theoretical perspective from which one can both acknowledge the existing fluidity of identity categories, while simultaneously admitting the necessity of presenting those categories as stable enough to facilitate a particular course of action.

Can fluidity in theory and stability in practice be acknowledged simultaneously? Can feminist practice and its strategic essentialism be understood using a theoretical lens that asserts fluidity?

This paper aims to analyse feminist practice as discursively constructed in a discussion among Manila-based regional and international feminists, using *Positioning Theory* that emphasises the fluidity of identities from the position-location of academe-based feminists. The idea for this paper and the decision to use positioning theory emerged as early as the first round-table, when one author thought of analysing the discussion using positioning theory. Another author had recently used the theory in her own research and had conducted a workshop with Isis International-Manila on how to analyse talk and text using positioning. Briefly, positioning theory asserts how individuals or groups position each other within social interactions and how these positions consequently limit what one can say or do in specific social episodes ("Positioning Theory" will be discussed in another section). These positions are believed to be fluid across and within interactions.

We believe that this analysis is not only significant for feminist theorists but can be relevant to the practice

of feminist activists. By analysing how a specific group of feminists construct the meaning of "global feminist critical collaboration" using positioning theory, we can understand how feminist agendas are taken up and how feminist strategies are selected.

the manila dialogues

For the Manila Dialogues, Isis International–Manila deemed an ***examination of global feminist strategies*** as the area most apt given the organisation's location-position: (1) the role Isis International–Manila plays as information-communication support for feminist strategies; (2) the organisation's recent preoccupation with discursive constructions of meanings that are inherently crucial in understanding and advancing feminist communication strategies; and, (3) the challenge to critically link discursive analysis with historical and material social realities in the context of the developing South.

Isis International–Manila invited 10 Filipina feminists who have been involved in regional and international feminist advocacy. The organisation, however, could not bring in feminists from other parts of the developing South given resource limitations, but purposefully chose the participants based on their commitment to feminism within the Southeast Asian region, rather than a particular focus on the Philippine nation as a framework for their activism. As such, we believed that the Manila dialogues on global feminist critical collaborations were from the perspective of regional and international feminists based in Manila.

All 10 invited feminists came to the first round-table discussion in July 2006. Those who attended were a mix of women whose involvement in feminist movements represented varied generations, varied levels of advocacy (from local, national, regional, and international levels), and varied issues of concern, such as violence against women, women's political participation and legislative reforms, gender and trade, women's sexual and reproductive health, women's human rights, women and media, women and the academe, women's traditional knowledge, among others. As such, the experiences were rich and diverse.

During the first round-table discussion, positioning theory was presented to the group of participants, as the analytical tool that Isis International–Manila would use in examining the discussions on the topic, broadly defined then as "global feminist organising and strategising." In this context, Isis sought and was granted the permission by the group to use the data of the discussion for analysis in this paper.

This initial group of women, however, found the topic too broad and decided to re-focus the discussions on "global feminist critical collaborations," believing it a crucial aspect of feminist organising and strategising. The first meeting ended with a recommendation to further narrow down the discussion at the next round-table to "examining global feminist critical collaboration in the area of reproductive health." In addition, the participants selected four sectors that feminists collaborate with: the United Nations (UN), the State, the Left, and Donors.

The second meeting was held in October 2006. Unfortunately, half of the original group of women could

not come. Two other feminists, on the other hand, joined the group, along with one "observer," Isis staff who were there to document the process but were also asked for their inputs nevertheless, and one "assistant facilitator" who eventually co-authored this paper.

During this second meeting, Isis International–Manila presented the output of the first round-table as a diagram of the relationship between the global feminist movement(s) and the four sectors—the UN, the State, the Left, and Donors—as follows:

Figure 1. *Global feminist movement(s) as it relates to the UN, the State, the Left, and Donors*

This proposed agenda or framework for discussion was what Isis International–Manila understood as the proposal for the framing of the second round-table by the women at the first round-table. However, it was questioned by a new participant and a participant in the first round-table. They pointed out the problematic nature of what seemed to be fixed, broad categories or classifications of institutionalised forms of power, which then became the main topic of discussion. Rather than focusing on how feminists collaborate with these institutions in the area of reproductive health, the bulk of the conversation turned to the nature of critical collaboration itself. As such, we decided to focus on the storylines and positions on "global feminist critical collaboration" for this paper.

analysing the manila dialogues using positioning theory

WHAT ARE THE storylines or constructions of feminist critical collaboration that emerged in the discussion? How are feminists positioned within these storylines? What rights and duties are consequently ascribed to feminists within these storylines? Using Rom Harré and Luk van Langenhove's positioning theory as a mode of analysis, a close reading of the second dialogue was conducted. While the usefulness of a close reading of a small group discussion such as the Manila Dialogues could be questionable, van Langenhove and Harré argue:

> Symbolic exchanges in general, 'conversations,' are the most basic substance of the social realm. It is within

conversations that the social world is created, just as causality-linked things according to their properties constitute the natural world. Within conversations, social acts and social icons are created (van Langenhove & Harré, 1999, p. 15).

Conversations provide productive "raw materials" for analysis, linking to larger discourses in the social realm. The patterns of meaning that we use to talk about things or construct objects are discourses (Parker, 1992, 1997). Discourse frames the way we think about objects and the way we are positioned as subjects. It enables and constrains what can be said or done, by whom, where, and when (Parker, 1992). "Language users engaging in discourse accomplish social acts and participate in social interaction, typically so in conversation and other forms of dialogue" (van Dijk, 1997, p. 2). Within this discursive realm, positioning theory looks at conversations using a tri-polar structure consisting of (a) *positions*, (b) *storylines*, and (c) *speech-acts* (van Langenhove & Harré, 1999).

A *position* is a "loose set of rights and duties that limit the possibilities of action" (Harré & Moghaddam, 2003, p. 5). A position or location in a conversation is a reference made to a person or group's moral and personal attributes that limit what one can do or say in a given social episode (van Langenhove & Harré, 1999). Positions can arise from a given moral order, such as roles people occupy, and personal attributes or characteristics (Harré & van Langenhove, 1999*;* van Langenhove & Harré, 1999)*.* Positions are generally relational in nature, that is, if one is to be positioned as powerful, another must be positioned as powerless (Harré & van Langenhove, 1999). Positions are fluid, that is, they

may vary as the situation changes. For instance, one may not always be positioned as powerful and can sometimes be positioned as powerless even within a single conversation or social episode.

A *storyline* is the unfolding of the dynamics of a social episode, which tends to follow an already established pattern and is expressed as a "loose cluster of narrative conventions" (Harré & Moghaddam, 2003, p. 6). Conversations in social episodes have storylines. "And the positions people take in a conversation will be linked to these storylines" (van Langenhove & Harré, 1999, p. 17). Storylines are often familiar narrative forms. Storylines and positions are not freely constructed and are derived from the cultural context to which individuals belong (van Langenhove & Harré, 1999).

Finally, *speech-acts* are socially significant actions, intended movement, or speech that is interpreted as socially meaningful (Harré & Moghaddam, 2003). As a conversation unfolds, all participants make a joint effort to make their own and each other's actions socially determinate or understandable (Davies & Harré, 1990; 1999). As such, every speech-'action' must be interpreted as a meaningful or significant speech-'act' as the episode progresses (Harré & Moghaddam, 2003). In addition, the social force of speech or action and the position of the participants mutually determine each other (van Langenhove & Harré, 1999).

In the Manila Dialogues for example, storylines emerged as the feminist participants positioned themselves and each other in the course of the discussion. New storylines emerged as discussants changed positions or presented counter-

positions in reaction to previous positioning by themselves or by others.

We first conducted our own separate analyses of the text by doing a careful reading of the transcript. We individually identified the storylines in reference to "global feminist critical collaboration" and highlighted the text pertaining to these storylines. We then met as a group and discussed our analyses. Our storylines were largely similar. Together, we performed a re-reading of the text to decide on the final storylines and to reach a consensus on points of contention.

What appears in this paper is our own interpretation of the text. And though the feminist participants may not necessarily agree with our reading, this is our own analysis as relatively young academic-based feminists who have had limited direct experience in global feminist critical collaboration.

Certainly, there were many and varied storylines that emerged in the discussion as expected in a self-reflexive talk. Diverse issues were raised with regard to feminist practice in general and feminist movements in different historical moments and diverse space locations, including the Philippine women's movements and positions that have emerged in this specific context vis-à-vis diverse institutions in the past. It would be of interest to analyse all these storylines. However, we purposefully deselected storylines that did not pertain directly to global feminist critical collaboration as the discursive object and storylines that referred to other issues significant to feminist movements but not pertinent to critical collaboration per se. Finally, we identified the dominant storylines both in terms of the

amount of talk or text devoted to the storyline and what we perceive to be its direct relevance to global feminist critical collaboration.

dominant storylines on feminist crit̲ial collaboration

Five dominant storylines on global feminist critical collaboration were identified: [1] a broader analysis of power, [2] non-unified global feminist movements, [3] commitment to contradictions and contextualised moments, [4] commitment to temporal agreements and short-term agendas, and [5] commitment to bottom lines.

Storyline 1: A broader analysis of power

The first storyline was a critique of the four areas of critical collaboration as "reductionist," as the diagram implied that institutionalised forms of power are more important or primary than non-institutionalised sites of struggle, power emanating from the community for instance.

> You know, there are a lot of other collaborations that are not covered with this... I find the spheres too ordinary. Coming from an analysis of power, it continues to be reductionist rather than what brought its way... Coming from my Marxist-Communist background it's good, but I've been arguing as a feminist and... you take advantage of the very critical theories, to begin with, powers are not always institutionalised and not always from the state, not always from the economy. But also we look at it as largely cultural, looking at men's power over women in the

community setting, taking into consideration religious institutions or other institutions that truly have a real effect especially when we're talking of women's bodies (250-265).

Heavily influenced by poststructuralist critical theory, this feminist asserted that in order to avoid "fascist hegemony," one must embrace multiplicity. Part of this embrace includes shifting the recognition of power from institutions to non-institutions, in effect a broader understanding of where power lies:

> Well, let's look at first broadly as non-state... non-institutions, actors, stakeholders... non-economic analysis that could take cultural, social, anthropological, psychological... (348-365)

The women scrutinised the four areas. One feminist commented that they represent "spheres rather than concrete organisational forms or concrete agendas" (242-243). Having a clear preoccupation for feminist collaborations with "The Left" or what she concretises as "the global anti-globalisation movement" (379), the same feminist objects to the way in which the Left is presented as a unified and formally institutionalised structure akin to political parties. Instead she describes "The Left" as having "non-state, non-party, new social movement participants" (380-381) engaged in "people to people solidarity… and not just a contestation between North and South states" (408). The Left as constructed here is involved in a "political agenda of resistance" (383) and that feminist critical collaboration not only involved state and party entities but social movements as well.

> It doesn't really capture the nuances and the attempt to bring in... poststructuralist, post-modern, more cultural, broader new social movements types of perspectives, and that's where I think the challenge is (414-417).

The broader analysis of power storyline was generally agreed to by the participants of the second dialogue. An examination of the other spheres and a further elaboration of the meanings of global feminist critical collaboration ensued. Examined in terms of rights and duties within a positioning framework, the broader analysis of power storyline assigns to feminists the right to equally value non-institutionalised sites of power vis-à-vis institutionalised ones (i.e., the State, the Left, the U.N., and the Donors). At the same time, this storyline demands that feminists take on the duty to expand their analyses of power particularly in the context of critical collaboration work. Feminists who limit their framework of critical collaboration to formal institutions are positioned as "reductionist." As such, this storyline positions feminists as having the right to engage in poststructuralist analyses of power and the duty to avoid reductionist thinking.

Storyline 2: Non-unified global feminist movements

After scrutinising the nature of the various sites of struggle, the feminist participants continued with their self-reflexive exercise and examined the nature of the global feminist movement(s) itself. The second storyline, like the first, emerged as a critique of the synthesis of the first dialogue. Isis International–Manila had presented the global feminist movement(s) with an (s) or "s" in parenthesis in its visual

diagram, after no explicit reference to the nature of the movement was made in the first round-table discussion. The second storyline focused on the global feminist movement as movement*s* with emphasis on its diversity and non-unified nature. One feminist participant highlighted the multiplicity of and diversity of feminists/feminisms in the global feminist movements:

> The global feminist movement even if it is [with] an "s"... the "s" means nothing unless we talk about this not also being a unified structure... This also has varied agendas, varied positionalities, and resistances that can… that can come together… in conjunction of movements of power, or not (423-429).
>
> ...so I think we need to factor [in] that there are various feminist takes on issues and there is no agreement on what... within the diverse feminist movements, you know, what certain positions [are] contain[ed] on particular issues, in some cases (855-859).

A case in point was prostitution. The feminist participants elaborated on how certain feminist groups have argued that "prostitution is victimisation" whereas others have contended that "prostitution is sex work."

> CATW [Coalition Against Trafficking in Women] and GAATW [Global Alliance Against Traffic in Women] positions on trafficking for me are both feminist arguments. They both present a feminist argument (835-837).
>
> I would just say, for example, the issue of prostitution vs. sex work, that those positions were legitimate within particular power contexts. And I think the only comment we need today is that we must reiterate as feminists that

we live with these contradictions. We accept them. We cannot be going at each other and fighting all the time on this, because this is my problem, the very male politics which is problematic for me (1081-1098).

In a storyline that not only recognises the non-unified nature of the global feminist movements but emphasises it, feminists are positioned as having the right to have diverse and at times incompatible views on specific issues. The accompanying duty therefore is to accept this diversity of feminist arguments. One feminist, however, extends this storyline and further positions feminists as having the right to contradict each other and the duty "to live comfortably with these contradictions," that is, the duty to accept that an agreement may not always be reached. Feminists are further positioned as practising male or masculinist politics if they continue to fight over their contradictory arguments and if they do not accept the diversity of feminist positions possible in certain situations. In this discursive move, a kind of "performative positioning," the speaker positions the other participants around the table as masculinist if they cannot accept or live with contradictions. At this junction, the second storyline of non-unified global feminist movements is fused with a third storyline we have labelled a **commitment to contradictions and contextualised moments** (both storylines inferred from the same text, refer to 1081-1098 above).

However, the **commitment to contradictions** storyline is not the only position taken by this group of Manila-based feminists based on their own meanings to global feminist critical collaboration. Three dominant positions or storylines

emerged after having conceptualised critical collaboration as located in diverse sites of power, both institutionalised and non-institutionalised, on the one hand, and diverse feminist movements, on the other. A fourth storyline is a **commitment to temporal unities and short-term agendas.** And a fifth storyline is a **commitment to bottom lines**.

Storyline 3: Commitment to contradictions and contextualised moments

The third storyline positions feminists as having the right to contradict each other and the duty "to live comfortably with these contradictions," that is, the duty to accept that an agreement may not always be reached. From a critical theory perspective, this feminist argues that we have the duty to accept the diversity of feminist positions because each position is inherently derived from a feminist analysis at a particular moment in its own particular context. This storyline argues for respect; positioning feminists as having the right to take any position at a given moment and the duty to respect every other feminist's position.

> As long as we've all made the proper power analysis... women's agencies demand that each of us will make our positions... on the basis of an adequate analysis of what is happening at that particular political moment... in the UN, in the US, with the Left, culture, and fundamentalism... (925-930).
> The context is so important... [we can look at] women's diverse positions already taken, and then leave it at that. If we can have a feminist dialogue that leaves it at that, then that's fine... It is our understanding that we have also a principle of politics... principle of ethics that has

emerged from the development of critical theory as well as that development being fuelled by our experiences… (942-952).

…we have repeated over and over again, we cannot strip context… we cannot strip context so that when we decide within a particular context, we need respect… You have to stop this binary thinking… that's why we're comfortable with contradictions because that is our very strength, that is the very reason why we can fool and play around with them – those who are trying to go in… fascist, hegemonic, binary thinking…" (953-962).

Unique to this storyline is the stress on how any positioning requires analysis within a given context in a particular moment. It is such 'contextualised moments' that inevitably result in contradictions in feminist analyses and positions. As such, feminists are continued to be positioned as having the right to diverse opinions, specifically the right to disagree with one another and the right to *not* agree to any agreement. Feminists therefore have the right to *not* have a common or agreed upon position given each particular context at each particular moment. In addition, it is non-binary thinking that will allow feminists to live comfortably with contradictions and deal comfortably with reification. As such, feminists are positioned as having the right to non-binary thinking and the duty to avoid binary thinking.

My problem with committing to have an agreement is precisely I think that's coming from the old binary frameworks of political negotiations and coming together… I will agree we can vie for the consensus language but… I'm just saying this is still again a framework analysis issue… Reification and hegemony is

> inevitable… A hegemony arises within a particular field whether we're talking about a feminist movement, the UN… And that hegemony is always negotiated, always a unity that is not even really agreed upon (1640-1667).
>
> I'm not saying that I disagree that we can't come… to a unified position… Point is we will and the "we" there, that becomes is a different set of "we". It cannot be all of us… Something will emerge and that something for the moment is what emerged probably because a lot of people prefer that (1692-1700).

This feminist accepts that a "unified" or "hegemonic" position inevitably emerges within a feminist movement but notes that this unified position is not a result of agreement among all feminists. As such, even as feminists disagree and fail to reach an agreement (which is their right in this storyline), feminists have to accept that a hegemonic position inevitably emerges (which is their duty to accept in this storyline).

Storyline 4: Commitment to temporal agreements and short-term agendas

Though acknowledging the multiplicity or variety of feminisms and feminist positions, another feminist used a storyline diverging from the previous commitment to contradictions. Rather, she argued that temporal agreements and short-term agendas are not only possible but are necessary if feminist movements are to move forward.

> We have to start around certain basic temporal agreements so that we can move forward… If we don't create that… space where we can at least momentarily agree that these

are the concepts or the tentative agreements, our unities, [that we can] at least start from… we can forever contest each other (592-598).

This feminist argues that historically, the global feminist movements had to agree on a broad political agenda in order to put in place and to secure "what little or imperfect rights we have put into text, into the documents, into the regulations" (668-669). Though acknowledging the differences in feminisms and feminist positions, this feminist insists that a temporal unity around a short-term agenda is advantageous to feminist movements.

> …we were all implicated in the process as well as the vision of trying to transform or reform the state to make the state more "friendly" to women… that project of putting in place all of these rules and regulations… my proposition then is if we could agree that as a movement… the principle element of a social movement [is]… we have a political agenda… the global feminist movements did go more or less around a broad political agenda (635-652). You come out with verbs and questions, with… queries… you don't come out with clarity. You come out with the… contestations and the dilemmas… We start from those differences… [name omitted] is saying, "it's okay to maintain those differences." And I agree. I, I very much agree… But I also very much… insist that we can in fact have a temporal unity around a, an agenda, a short-term agenda… It could be an agenda in terms of clarifying ourselves and… aiming more bridges among the differences within the feminist movements (1541-1567).

Different from the commitment to contradictions

storyline, whose concern is for acceptance of difference as a way to escape masculinist binaries, the temporal agreements storyline argues for the possibility of short-term agendas as one way of moving forward. As such, difference remains the starting point from which one can form temporal agreements. The right this storyline assigns therefore is again the right of feminists to be diverse. But feminists are assigned the duty to bridge their differences to arrive at short-term agendas for the advancement of feminist movements.

Storyline 5: Commitment to bottom lines

The fifth and last dominant storyline is the one most comfortable with stability and centred on ideas of long-term commitment and shared values. As a response to the two previous storylines arguing for a commitment to contradictions and a commitment to temporal agreements, this storyline insists on a bottom line that all feminists can adhere to. This storyline was framed primarily in relation to feminist critical collaboration with the state:

> [name omitted] said that we should be comfortable with contradictions… But every moment in time, we… come face to face with contradictions…Sometimes we surrender, sometimes we fight. So perhaps that is how fluid we would like this framework to be… We have critical collaboration. We have to put flesh into that also… what would be the values, the norms, and a standpoint at any given point in time. So… my definition of critical collaboration is moving forward, two steps backward… compromising, and then… but again the bottom line, in terms of collaborating with the state? (545-563)
> Let's commit to have agreements, please? (1638)

This feminist raises the problem with embracing contradictions (in effect, the absence of bottom lines) particularly when collaborating with the state. In the bottom line storyline, she positions feminists as having the duty to agree to a bottom line position or standpoint. Feminists must adhere to a bottom line if critical collaboration at least with the state is to take place. In the succeeding texts, she affirms the previous positions committed to contradictions and temporal agreements but qualifies her agreement with concerns about reification. While this feminist agrees to the idea of momentary positions in "principle" or in "theory," she remains doubtful of its practical application.

> There's so much… debate, you know, even within the feminist [group]… But it's important for us to agree on certain norms and values beyond the framework… That we ourselves must be open to continuously critique even as we open our mouths, we must already start doubting what came out of our mouths... That's how tentative everything is… I agree in principle (743-752).
> I agree completely except that I want to qualify a little bit. So, when we talk of collaborations, that moment in time when we agree… that negotiated texts. But even as we come out with a negotiated something which is very fluid, which is maybe very temporary, we mustn't just start critiquing it again. My only problem is reify using Foucault's work – we put it in laws – and our ability to challenge it at the moment we recognise… that it doesn't work for us anymore… our ability to negotiate and to reassert our positionality again is weakened... Those are the things that make it so difficult for me to be totally poststructuralist... I agree in the moment, we can talk about it, we come out with a negotiated text... This moment,

this is our stand. *Kaya lang* (but then) we surrender all of this negotiated text to hegemonic powers... So those are just my dilemmas... But I'm theoretically committed to the stand that [name omitted] has presented to us (975-1007).

Consistent with the desire for a fundamental basis for unity, the bottom lines storyline advocates for a commitment to being a "nationalist-feminist." This plea is made in the context of feminists needing to be wary of not contributing to the "weakening of the state" in the face of globalisation.

Can we commit to being feminist-nationalist?... If we don't commit to be nationalist, then we... we are committed also to weakening the state at every point which doesn't serve us in the context of globalisation...We must be nationalist first and foremost which means while we engage the state and criticise the state, we will not weaken the state in the context of globalisation. These are very difficult problems for us now" (2120-2137).

Interestingly, similar to the two previous storylines, the bottom lines storyline recognises and accepts the diversity and differences in the feminist movements. As such the rights assigned to feminists by this storyline still remains as the right to diversity. But the unique duty it assigns to feminists is the duty to hold on to common values, norms and/or certain non-negotiables that serve as the basis for long-term commitments. Concretely, one such commitment or bottom line espoused by this storyline is the duty to protect the state from globalisation.

Visualising the Storylines

*non-unified global
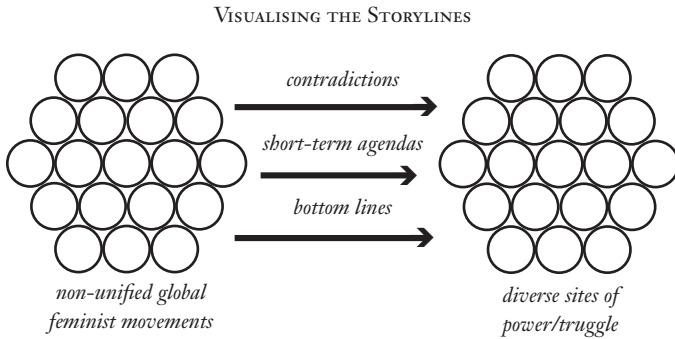feminist movements*

*diverse sites of
power/truggle*

Figure 2. *Global feminist critical collaboration
according to the 5 dominant storylines*

In summary, the first storyline asserts the diverse and non-homogenous nature of the sites of power or struggle, i.e., institutionalised vs. non-institutionalised, formal vs. informal, economic vs. cultural. The second storyline conceptualises the global feminist movements as likewise diverse and non-homogenous. As feminists or feminist movements engage in critical collaboration with diverse sites of power, the three dominant positions are: (1) to commit to contradictions and contextualised moments; (2) to commit to temporal agreements and short-term agendas; and, (3) to commit to bottom lines (Refer to Figure 2).

	contradictions		*short-term agendas*		*bottom lines*
Right	*to have diverse postitions*	=	*to have diverse positions*	=	*to have diverse positions*
Duty	*to disagree/ to accept contradictions/ to not have an agreement*	≠	*to agree to a temporal agreement or short-term agenda*	≠	*to agree to a bottom line or common values*

Figure 3. *The 3 dominant storylines as assigning the same rights but different
duties*

The three dominant storylines on the nature of critical collaboration assign the same right to feminists or feminist movements—the right to have diverse positions. However, each storyline assigns a unique set of duties. One asserts the duty to accept contradictions and not arrive at an agreement. Another claims the duty to agree to a temporal unity or short-term agenda. The third insists on the duty to agree to a fundamental bottom line (Refer to Figure 3).

	contradictions		*short-term agendas*		*bottom lines*
Duty	*to disagree/ to accept contradictions/ to not have an agreement*	=	*to agree to a temporal agreement or short-term agenda*	=	*to agree to a bottom line or common values*
Scenario 1	*accepts hegemonic position by others*	=	*short-term agenda*	=	*bottom line*
Scenario 2	*takes hegemonic position as others*	=	*short-term agenda*	=	*bottom line*

FIGURE 4. *The duties assigned by the 3 dominant storylines may converge if the short-term agenda is the same as the bottom line*

Though seemingly disparate, these storylines can converge once the position of the feminist insisting on a short-term agenda coincides with the position of the feminist demanding a bottom line. That is, one's short-term agenda is another's bottom line. Regardless of the position taken by the feminist committed to contradictions, convergence (or in her words, hegemony and reification) takes place as the "short-term agenda = bottom line" position emerges as the dominant or "unified" position (See Figure 4).

The three distinct storylines by which feminist movements collaborate with diverse sites of power may converge or not, but this is not to suggest that these are the only storylines. Certainly, there are varied storylines and positions available and actually taken up by feminists in practice that were not discursively produced in the particular self-reflexive talk analysed in this paper. Positioning theory can account for these storylines and serve as a map or model on how to analyse social movements in general and feminist movements in particular.

For instance, one can examine a particular moment where a particular segment or segments of the feminist movements collaborated with a particular segment or segments of a particular site of power. This moment of critical collaboration can be examined by first looking at the feminist movements (storyline #1): Who were the feminists or feminist groups or feminist movements involved? What were the feminist positions being taken up? Was there a singular position or diverse positions? Secondly, one can look at the particular site of power (storyline #2): Who were the entities within this site of power that were involved? What were the institutional positions being taken up? Was there a singular position or diverse positions? Finally, one can examine how critical collaboration was performed (storylines #3, #4, and #5): Was there a commitment to contradictions? Was there a commitment to a short-term agenda? Was there a commitment to a fundamental bottom line? How did these diverse positions converge or diverge? What was the position that was eventually taken up by these particular feminist movements and the particular site of

power at that particular moment?

The above is an example of how we can apply positioning analysis to understand global feminist critical collaboration. One may add more storylines relevant to one's particular context or situation. Positioning theory can help begin the analyses of feminist practice from a theoretical lens that emphasises fluidity of movements, sites of struggles, and positions. These analyses can be extended and applied to diverse social movements and diverse sites of power. Doing so may identify the unique and common storylines across movements.

Positioning, Strategic Essentialism, and Self-Reflexivity

Harré and van Langenhove's work is useful for this analysis because it functions on two main levels. First, it allows one to elaborate the positions participants in a conversation take in relation to one another. Second, it permits one to see the position discussants take in relation to the broader discourses at hand. More significantly, because the overall tone of the discussion involved a move away from stability and towards a more fluid notion of feminist strategies, the nature of positioning theory works well. Positioning theory functions in opposition to the role, which is a more stable, less fluid category from which to move. Positions for Harré and van Langenhove are relational, rather than ontological: "Fluid positionings, not fixed roles, are used by people to cope with the situation they usually find themselves in" (1999, p. 17).

Positioning theory provides one operational tool for our discussion—its use of rights and duties, its location of storylines, but principally, its openness to fluidity render it a useful methodological tool for analysis, particularly because the content of the discussion centres around moves towards multiplicity and flexibility within critical collaborations—it would only make sense that the tools we use follow that same multiplicity and flexibility. In a sense the operational tools provided by positioning theory allows for an emphasis on "strategy," rather than on essentialism, which somewhat works towards resolving the critique raised by Spivak on the limited use of strategic essentialism. Furthermore, Harré's positioning theory, when read against Spivak's strategic essentialism, touches on the concept's call for a critical use of the *language* of essentialism. Essentialism is a tool that one can apply critically, for specific purposes. Within feminist social movements, much "action" occurs at the level of discourse—in addition to the "material" realm of policy changes, the implementation of laws, and the rallies or marches on the streets. Beyond these kinds of manifestations lie the symbolic exchanges occurring in various forms of media circulated within and outside the movement, as well as those occurring at the level of everyday speech in conferences and non-government organisations. Organising a round-table discussion, for example, as opposed to a more formal series of presentations, allows members of the discussion to meander among their positions as speakers in mundane, everyday conversation, talking from personal experience, to members representing particular organisations, to players within a worldwide political movement with specific

commitments and agendas. The members of the round-table themselves use essentialism strategically, as they switch between these various positions—Harré's positioning theory allows the analyses of the ways in which that essentialism gets taken up and mobilised, moment to moment, even as the speakers discuss the implications of such unifications and collaborations. Positioning theory shifts emphasis from the "essence" to the "strategic," vivifying a potentially problematic term and allowing its use in micro-level exchanges, providing a flexible theoretical model from which one can link these micro-level symbolic exchanges with the broader, macro-level discourses that provide their content.

In addition, the usefulness of positioning theory stems not only from the positions participants took in relation to one another, but in relation to broader theoretical and political discourses as well. The self-reflexive tone of the conversation provides another avenue through which to locate feminist strategies. Self-reflexivity has become the preferred mode of theoretical writing in feminist anthropology and literary studies, providing an alternative to the dichotomies between text and reader, insider and outsider, data and analyst. There is an understanding that objectivity of the researcher is a myth, and that chosen methods produce the data, rather than merely observe it. In collaboration on this paper, for example, the authors' own positions as middle-class feminists working in both activism and academe—one in social psychology, one in cultural studies, and one in development studies, two Filipina, one Filipina-American, are naturally infused in the analysis. While acknowledging one's own subjectivity certainly does not alleviate or diminish its effects, it does

provide a more thorough context through which readers can discern their own assessments of this work.[1] This paper is a point in the continuing process of reflection and analysis—another storyline among those discussed above.

Finally, the spirit of reflexivity in which the conversations occurred, particularly the call of one feminist for a creation of a "safe space" where feminists can ethically contest each other's position without it getting "personalised," highlights a crucial guiding principle for the role that Isis International–Manila had played and will continue to play in the future.

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1   Kemmis and Patai provide useful critiques of reflexivity as an academic fad.

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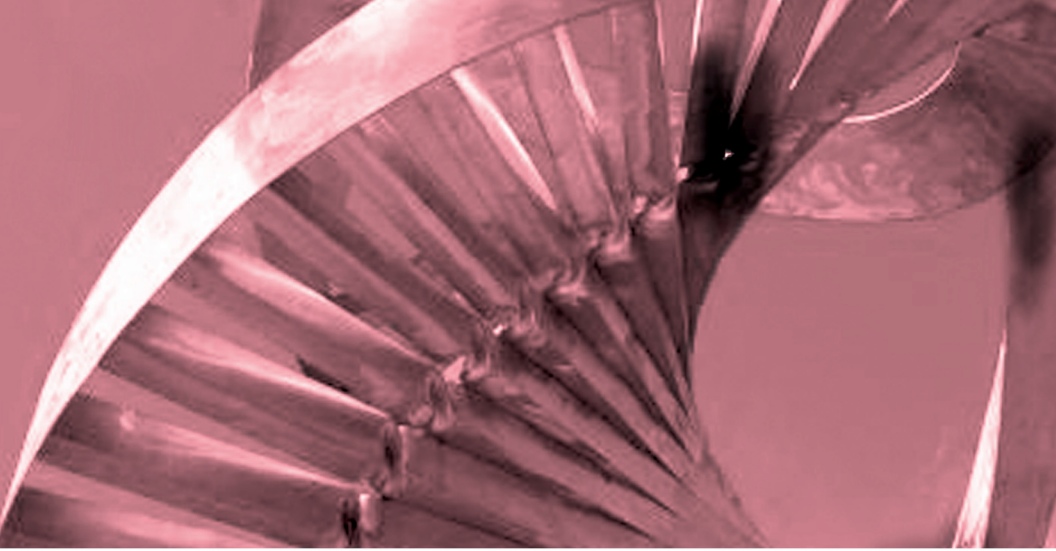*Community and Independent Media Programme*
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