

# The Personal is Political...Redux

During the second-wave of the feminist movement in the 1960s-70s, one of the prevailing philosophies that evolved was that "the personal is political"—i.e., matters that were regarded as personal had political meaning. There are two main opposing views to this. On one side are those who believe that in the lives of women, there is really just one continuum—meaning, there is no divide between personal relations and the more public world of work and politics. To this belongs Germaine Greer who once said "The personal is still political. The millennial feminist has to be aware that oppression exerts itself in and through her most intimate relationships, beginning with the most intimate, her relationship with her body." On the other are those who believe that there is a need to delink our personal and political lives because "identifying the personal and the political in too absolute and unyielding a way has led feminism to a dead end." As Natasha Walter in *The New Feminism* asserts, separating the personal from the political will achieve two things. First, you give the social and political demands of feminism more edge. Second, you will free up the personal realm. Feminism has over-determined our private lives and interpreted too many aspects of our cultural life as evidence of a simplistic battle, patriarchy versus women.

This issue of Women in Action (WIA), however doesn't take any side even as we examine the women's movement vis-a-vis the most personal aspects of women's lives including their familial relations, parenting principles, sexuality, and their personal battles with life-threatening diseases such as AIDS.

We believe that despite the debates, the edict "the personal is political" has provided a critical lens through which we interrogate sexual, social, and familial relations. The feminist research and discourse that has emerged has proved invaluable in establishing that the domestic sphere, and women's lives within it, must be given serious consideration within academic research and political thought. The fluidity of feminist

discourse and the willingness of feminists to stay open to new ideas is another indication of the strength of the women's movement.

In this issue of WIA, we have invited contributors from different parts of the world to tell us how individual women negotiate their private spaces even as they confront challenges posed by their larger communities and societies. Kumari Kimendhri Pillay discusses gender inequities in the family and how women as mothers themselves reproduce unequal relationships. Sarah Raymundo probes the interface of politics and familial relations in the life of Nere Guerrero, a woman mass leader from the Philippines. Roselle Pineda analyses how families have forced silence and uncertainty as necessary conditions for lesbian women to exist in the same realm as others. Meanwhile, Alia Levine speaks about her visions of an ideal society where it is no longer necessary for lesbians to continuously negotiate for their spaces and where one's family would be the core place where one is guaranteed of a safe space. Two male writers, Benedict Tembo and Jack Zimba also shared their observations of how women in Zambia are compelled to take full responsibility of the families in the face of a mounting death toll from AIDS and amidst economic woes.

We do hope that our attempt to provide a venue for women to speak about their personal stories including the ways by which they negotiate their private spaces will not be viewed as patronising nor essentialising. But rather, an attempt to further challenge the existence of distinct, gendered roles within families, communities, and the larger society that hopefully would lead to the construction of more analytical tools with which to examine women's oppression.

