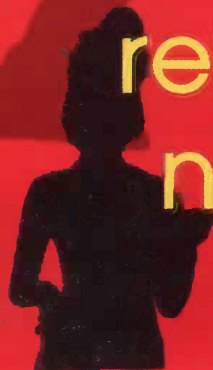


WOMEN *in Action*

No. 3-2004



reinterpreting
notions of
POWER

Top 10 Reasons to make Isis Women's Resource Centre a habit

1 A WORLD OF KNOWLEDGE ABOUT WOMEN.

As the first regional women's resource centres in Asia and the Pacific region, the Resource Centre do have a comprehensive, specialised collection of materials about, by and for women, covering a wide range of issues such as economy and work, development, reproductive health, violence against women, communication and information, among others. Over 10,000 indexed resources and still counting, our books, periodicals, country files, vertical files, special materials from all over the world with special focus on women from the Global South.

2 WOMEN'S INFORMATION AT YOUR SERVICE.

If you need assistance in locating online and off-line information, bibliographies, annotations, and even classic articles on various issues, feel free to ask our helpful staff. We can also respond to requests for information by mail and e-mail.

3 A FEMINIST AUDIO-VISUAL TROVE.

Check out the stacks of our growing audio-visual collection of interesting and rare CDs, VHS, DVD and VCD. Enjoy the free use of the in-house audio-visual equipment. We also have a rare, women-centric mounted poster collection, which can be borrowed for exhibitions.

4 MEET WILMA AND ENJOY OUR COMPUTERISED LIBRARY SERVICES.

Our Web-enabled Isis Library Management Automation (WILMA) system, a user-friendly, open source resource database, will help you find materials in a few mouse/keystrokes.

5 INFORMATION AND IMAGES AT YOUR FINGERTIPS.

Need contact information on social justice and other civil society organisations in the world? Asia Pacific country profiles with special emphasis on women, media and ICTs? Free women-themed graphics by talented women artists from all over the globe? Photo files of key women's movement activities and feminist images? Welcome to Isis' databases: our Human Resources database (HURES), Country Files, Clip Art and Photobank.

6 BE IN THE LOOP.

Get a free subscription to *Info-Cache*, our bimonthly electronic newsletter, which is free of charge and carries information on new acquisitions, upcoming events and activities, job postings, training information and urgent alerts.

7 GET FREEBIES AND OTHER DISCOUNTS.

Surf the Internet... on the house! Take turns with our two computers for a spin around the World Wide Web with bookmarked online resources about women. Need a meeting place? We also accommodate small (up to 5 persons only) group meetings for women without charge.

8 LOCATION. LOCATION. LOCATION.

Nestled in the centre of NGO country—Quezon City—the Isis Resource Centre is accessible to most commuters by public transportation. We're at the ground floor of Bahay ni Isis, #3 Marunong Street, Central District, Quezon City (a few blocks behind QC Hall and from Sulo Hotel). Open to the public from Mondays to Fridays, 9:00 am-5:00 p.m. (with a one hour lunch break, but we'll still be open for browsing).

9 NO MORE YEARLY MEMBERSHIP FEES.

On top of these privileges, anyone can access our room-use only resources for a reasonable walk-in fee of only PhP 50.00/visit. Photocopying services are available by request.

10 A CLEAN, WELL-LIGHTED PLACE FOR QUIET READING TIME,

our Resource Centre is also environment-friendly with smoking only allowed outside the building. Get your regular fix of the printed (and spoken and filmed) word at the Women's Resource Centre and nurture the bibliophile in you.

As I sit from where I stay in Puerto Rico, far away from my home in the Philippines, I was able to watch the tail end of the election to the successor of the first female Governor of this Caribbean island. Sila Maria Calderon. The first female to lead Puerto Rico, Calderon ended her term (2001-2004) amid accusations against her of corruption and of her party winning the election by, it is said, massive cheating. When I left the Philippines in November 2004, Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo had become the country's second elected female president, alongside accusations against her of corruption and massive cheating in the elections. Arroyo had earlier become president when she took over from being vice president to finish the term of ousted President Joseph Estrada, who has since been on trial for plunder. Two countries far away from each other, with different realities, each with a female head of state, both of them facing similar perceptions from their fellow citizens that they have behaved in the traditional, political male way of corruption and shady deals. As this issue goes to print, Condoleezza Rice was named by re-electionist President George Bush as U.S. Secretary of State. It seems that the leadership and power of these women have not changed patriarchal attitudes nor government behaviour in addressing the needs of those who are disempowered and marginalised, or women. In short, we have not seen—where these women had been able to reinterpret or change on how power is used. More and more we see that simply having women in positions of power does not necessarily change things in society. This is not to say that women should not continue struggling for power at all levels. But it does make a case about the need to analyse and re-define notions of power.

While we have seen that women themselves do not automatically change the notions of power simply by being women, we also have seen that just because women come into positions of power, they do not escape the patriarchal notions of their society. It is shameful how the personal lives of public women are held to different standards than their male counterparts. In the Philippines, journalists hounded Arroyo on her sex life. Calderon in Puerto Rico was labeled an immoral woman for divorcing her second husband and marrying again while in office. Male journalists often mention the shape of Rice's legs. Sexist jokes and expectations make sure that women know that just because they may have entered a male-dominated sphere, this does not make them one of the men. They are still women in a patriarchal world.

For decades women within and outside the women's movement have believed that by having women in positions of power, women in general would fare better as women are more sensitive to women's issues; that by having women in positions of power and decision-making, women would open the door to other women; that by having women in male dominated areas of life, they would break the molds of patriarchy. While there is truth to this and there are examples of where women have made a difference by breaking into patriarchal spheres, the other reality is that women just by being of the female gender does not automatically mean that they will care more about women or alter the patriarchal norms of power. What we are seeing is that the notions of power are complex. Power is embedded in tradition, power of the ruling families, corporations, patriarchal notions and the interest of a small group over a larger community. There is a need to deconstruct the notions of power and to identify ways in which power can be redefined and shifted to benefit women and the marginalised.

Isis International delves in this issue of *Women in Action* (WIA) on ways in which women in the region are Reinterpreting Notions of Power. Views on women's power and empowerment is presented from different perspectives. Activists and writers share examples and strategies on how women are refocusing this concept. What is furthermore interesting in this edition of WIA is seeing the diverse ways in which power shifts can occur. In Japan, for instance, economic power has allowed some women to make decisions that was not an option for women of previous generations. In other countries where women outnumber men due to male migratory patterns or armed conflict, women are breaking long-held societal taboos by stepping in and leading rituals that had been male prerogatives. This shows that in some situations, the realities of the environment are conducive for women to take the opportunity to reinterpret how to use their power. In other situations, there is the need to be analytical and strategic in deciding how power will be defined and acted upon.

Ava Vivian Gonzales, in "Resurrecting the Goddess: Exploring Powerful (Re) presentations of Women's Bodies," makes a compelling point that once bodies are removed from the concept of objectification, women will be able to shift power in society. Girlie Villariba looks at Hollywood's recent phase of producing movies that glorify vengeance done by beautiful women who kill. In her article "Why We Shouldn't Become Assassins to Defend Our Honour and Get Justice by Killing Bill," Villariba argues that women can achieve positive power through peace, spiritual strength, and physical control. Meanwhile, "Women's Movement and Media in India: Reshaping Notions of Power" by Kiran Prasad and "Reproductive Health Empowerment: A Struggle Against Conservatism" by Tess Raposas look at the media as an instrument that could re-define power but which itself requires lots of work to reshape its own notions of power and women. Prasad looks at the media in the context of the women's movement in India. Raposas gives the reader a glimpse of media as a force that often serves as an ally of conservative forces in the Philippines. In "Women do F/LOSS: Isis Migrates to Open Source on Desktop," Aileen Familiar of Isis International-Manila lets the reader understand how using open-source technology can strengthen an organisation's independence from multinational software corporations, thus putting information and the use and power of technology back into the hands and control of the users rather than of the makers. Lina Sagara Reyes contributes two interesting articles on the situation of Palestinian women and girls. In "Disempowered Palestinian Girls' Uncommon Death Wishes—Research Sheds Light" disempowered Palestinian Girls have Uncommon Death Wishes," Reyes informs the reader of a recent study on young women in Palestine who see volunteering to be suicide bombers as a way to take justice into their hands. In "Occupied Palestine Territories: "Olive Tree Campaign" Gives Purposeful Hope," Reyes talks about a creative peace campaign that is up against a solid, winding dividing wall.

The notion of power, especially if it concerns women, needs to be discussed, reviewed and reinterpreted. We hope that this issue of WIA will allow further discussions about power, looking at its different types and where, as part of the women's movement, we are able to come up with strategies to help one another in our respective realities. We also hope that where changes are taking place, we can document them and share the stories and lessons with one another. We invite you our readers to send in your ideas, and to document how women in your societies are changing and reinterpreting notions of power.



12 Politics and Power: A Gendered Perspective from South Asia

By Farida Shaheed

The author discusses women’s interaction with, and access to, power and politics in the more formalised political process and directly relates these to states and government in South Asia. She also raises some of the issues concerned with the various spaces available to women at different moments, and the strategies used by women activists to increase these spaces. The article also tackles some of the more disconcerting contradictions in this arena.

27 Disempowered Palestinian Girls’ Uncommon Death Wishes—Research sheds Light

by Lina Sagaral Reyes

This article discusses why young girls develop uncommon death wishes and become prone to recruitment to become suicide bombers. It is based on findings of a study on the subject by Prof. Nadira Shalhoub Kevorkian of the Hebrew University.

30 Occupied Palestine Territories: “Olive Tree Campaign” Gives Purposeful Hope

By Lina Sagaral Reyes

The Young Women’s Christian Association (YWCA) of Palestine is exploring non-violent ways of resisting the

continuing occupation of their territories through the “Olive Tree Campaign.” YWCA-Palestine works with farmers in the planting and nurturing of olive trees, the universal symbol of peace and peacemaking, and an important source of livelihood for peasants.

33 Why We Shouldn’t Become Assassins to Defend Our Honor and Get Justice by Killing Bill

By Marianita ‘aka’ “Girlie” Villariba

The author shares her reflections as a woman who is discovering the female body and meditation practices. She takes off from how the movie industry constructs and captures perceptions of female bodies, and imposes standards and values such as being attractive, ugly, beautiful, undesirable, or sexy. The article also seeks to help ease the burden of women and help protect their integrity by introducing a body and meditation practice.

38 Resurrecting the Goddess: Exploring Powerful (Re)presentations of Women’s Bodies

by Ava Vivian Gonzales

This essay attempts to (re)present ways the female body is (re)presented as both object and subject for the deployment of power in an effort to expand and explode the historical notion of beauty through (re)reading (re)presentations of the goddess. One thing the notion

of the goddess offers women is a potent image of beauty permitting uncorseted movement on unbound feet, empowering women to set and achieve unrestricted goals for themselves.

43 Women's Movement and Media in India: Reshaping Notions of Power

by Kiran Prasad

The article analyses the mass media reflection on power relations and struggles within the women's/feminist movement in India, based on some cases that are live issues and which challenge the policy for women's empowerment. The articles also highlights new directions for the media to take in order to sustain the momentum of women's struggle for their rights.

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By Aileen Familara

Walking our talk—Isis women share their experiences in using Open Office.

64 Media Section: **Reproductive Health Empowerment: A Struggle Against Conservatism**

By Tess Raposas

This article is an attempt to shed some light on the quagmire on the long-drawn reproductive health struggle, with focus on the how the Church and media are able to influence the influx of events related to the advocacy on reproductive health.

Cover art by Aileen Familara. "To be a woman is a never ceasing struggle to live and be free" writes the Filipina poet Joi Barrios. Power is bestowed, inherited, gained, earned, subverted and transformed. Women are part of power struggles and are also instrumental in transforming the nature of power, into one of equitable access and sharing.

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