

Why is family conflict always so potent?

We should not take for granted the harm that mismanaged bloodlines can cause and how far down the road the vitriol can go.

Last week, the Family Division of the High Court ruled that the biological children of a couple that was murdered last year have the final say on how and where their parents will be laid to rest. There had been a family dispute between the children, who wanted cremation and burial abroad, and members of the extended family, who had insisted on a customary burial in line with cultural norms.

I first watched this story on the NTV at the 9 bulletin on Wednesday night, and at some point, the reporter asked the clan leader, who was all for cultural norms, if he had personally engaged/talked to the children to sort matters, and he said he had not, but someone else had. At that point, I knew there was that oh so familiar family rift.

Thing is, even as I watched that story and later read it in the paper, it was not from a place of judgement.

Because I do not know of anyone without family wrangles, misunderstandings or complications somewhere along the family tree. I swear by my pencil case that there is no family without drama. Show me one and we will give them an Oscar for best performing act in the category of pretenders.

If your family has no problems, do not worry, they are coming. They are still crossing the road. By family, I mean both direct and indirect blood relations. That is why when I see family scandals and feuds strewn all over the media, I laugh and judge slowly because really,



we are all in the same WhatsApp group. Others are just unlucky to have their linen laid out for all and sundry.

But seriously though, why do family relationships usually tend towards the complicated zone? It is mostly always complicated. When there are interventions, they are superficial. The conflicting sides pretend to make up just to get away.

For some time I thought, these complications were mostly limited to extended family but now even nuclear ties are crazy. Is it because we are so emotionally invested? Are our expectations so high? Why are the hurts that come from family so deep and painful?

These potent unresolved negative

emotions are usually triggered by land conflicts, property rights, culture, ownership, expectations of older generations, such as Uncles and aunts differing from the younger generations whose realities are frankly miles apart.

Why are we saner, more reasonable more sober and objective when it comes to non-family relationships?

I have a few guesses. I think we do not work on those relationships at all. We assume that because we are blood relatives, our relationships will grow automatically. Even when people grow and acquire

different tastes, are exposed to different world views and suffer different misfortunes. We assume that because they are our sibling's children, they will love and like us as they did their parents without question.

We assume that because they are our parents' siblings, they will always treat us like their own. We think that because we are siblings, we will always stand by each other. But family, distant or otherwise, just like any other relationship, needs work to work.

And yet, when someone dies, we act shocked that even under that tent mourning the deceased family member, bile

boils, resentment simmers and bitterness brought on by words said years back thrives. Behind the stiff smiles and steel hugs lie unresolved issues, unmet expectations and unspent anger.

I hope that the people who come after us will manage family relationships better. That they will navigate those bonds with more wisdom. That they will not take for granted the harm that mismanaged bloodlines can cause and how far down the road the vitriol can go.

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with
Janet
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