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Naples: Endless War Occupation

Already in the early 1990s, after the end of the East-West conflict, the post-WW2 defence policy of the North Atlantic Treaty gave rise to a “security” organization linked to political, economic, and social factors whose purpose was to govern, by preventive and interventive means, the conflict between the the North of the world (the well-off nations) and the South (the impoverished countries). In 1992 the Western European Union, including Italy, overhauled its defense system, identifying NATO as Europe’s security model; once again a “policy of force” and “military solutions” were given priority, bearing out a patriarchal model of protection and control by the powerful over the other members in a subject role. By going along with this policy, Italy actually transgresses against the founding document of its democratic state, as laid down in Article 11 of the Constitution of the Republic.

Our history as *Women in Black*, which began in Jerusalem in 1988, bears witness to a deeply held feminist conviction: security cannot come from weapons, or the militarization of territories and cities, nor from our male comrades, because the attack against the female body and in general against women’s freedom is a hallmark of the growing violence that marks society, both Western and non-Western, in the 21st century. *Women in Black* sprang from a small group of Israeli women, hence members of an occupying people, who turned their gaze onto other women on the other side of the conflict, hence part of the occupied people – a gesture that signified a critique of the state as fatherland or nation, an impatience with territorial boundaries, and a distrust of the authority of governments and of their validity as a defense.

Starting from our own experience, we know that the security of everyone requires social justice and a culture of civil fellowship, not bastions and fortresses, walls and electronic surveillance devices, armies or vigilante squads, such as is being imposed in Italy. The idea of armed surveillance leads forcibly toward a male-oriented, military model that further shrinks women’s citizenship rights. Moreover, it signals a will to regulate interpersonal relationships, even including the bonds of affection. Those of us who are concerned with what goes on in everyday life are aware that the social expenditure for education, health, and housing dwindles continually compared to military expenditures; and this is first and foremost a reason for indignation and protest.

The South of Italy belongs to a developed and industrialized country, but, at the same time, it constitutes a bridge toward the many other Souths in the world, of which it feels part. NATO sees Naples as in the front line for preventive wars against the Mid East, Mediterranean Africa, the whole African continent, and South-East Asia.

In *Napoli chiama Vicenza* (‘Naples calls Vicenza’, a book edited by Angelica Romano of the *Comitato Pace e Disarmo*, the Peace and Disarmament Committee), the struggle in Vicenza, a city of art, against the enlarging of the U.S. base in the Dal Molin airport, is the starting point to focus on conditions in the Campania Region, seat of Africom, with regard to NATO bases, arms manufacture, and a nuclear risk of which the populace is mostly unaware. In other words, the Neapolitans are at war and they don’t even know it.

What we Neapolitan women do know very well is what is happening in Italy with the implementation of the military model with its regulation of everyday life and the progressive militarizing of the territory, even as regards ordinary civil administration. For almost a year now, on the outskirts of Naples, armed soldiers stand guard over dumps for urban garbage which are covered by military

secrecy. The effect of this military presence is to engender in the populace both the fear of being exposed to risks and the conviction that they are being defended. Actually though, the soldiers are there to protect with impunity the illegal dumping of toxic wastes – wastes such as those upon which, unbeknownst to the inhabitants, housing has been built for Americans serving at the NATO base and their families. Although the ghettos in which they are isolated may seem to be privileged locations, that bring no economic tripple-down to us, actually the NATO troops, like us, are the victims of environmental damage due to the development model they defend with their weapons. This goes to show that it is no longer possible, as it may have seemed to be fifty years ago, to separate the occupier from the occupied, guaranteeing absolute security to the one and none to the other.

So it is that eco-feminism is linked to the struggle against the pollution that weaponry, now highly technological, and military bases increasingly inflict on the environment, procreative health, risks of malformation, and violence against human bodies. We are deeply concerned with the safeguarding of mankind to come and are involved in withstanding pollution by dangerous weaponry stockpiled in our territory.

Our heartfelt analysis does not fail to note contradictions and woman-oriented questions:

Gender is no longer a sufficient cultural paradigm to defend us from the prevarications of virilistic male militarism. The opening of the military career to women scandalizes us. But then, how are we to relate to women in the institutions and economic agencies who carry out male roles? Differences among women need to be dealt with carefully so as not to reopen conflicts. At the same time, it is imperative to be pro-active, to act in order to know. Must our practice be one of opposition or of dialogue with the other gender? More and more we hear of the need to “work together.” Therefore either opposition to male designs must be very strong, or there must be dialogue – but cogent.

Our strategies: 1) A broad policy of educational interventions (counter-informing, awakening attention, linking with schools and universities...), even if the media work in the opposite direction. 2) Participation in actions with those “women of peace” who have not compromised with the government system, those who reinforce each other within the institutions, without coming apart at the seams. 3) Linking up with those military personnel who dissent, abandoning armed action; support for draft-dodgers, refuseniks, and deserters. 4) Support with/to other women far away, or better equipped, or just more desirous to relate to us (internet is still a valid tool). 5) Basic and probably possible for women is to act, always critically, small-scale, at local level, with awareness of their limits, in order not to undergo the defeat of a generalization that would make them powerless in the face of the world universe.

NATO at Agnano – NOTE on photos (by Maria Rosaria Mariniello, Donne in Nero, Naples)

Thanks to debatable economic operations subject to scarce public scrutiny, the NATO presence in Naples, especially on the outskirts and in the hinterland, has had some slight effect in terms of job openings, mostly limited to rental speculation and speculation on land areas for housing military personnel and their families. The Agnano basin, an ancient volcanic cone, taken over by NATO for military development (a hospital, schools, distribution centers for goods of primary and secondary necessity) to benefit stationed troops and officers, has been cementified into ruin by NATO itself and the speculator “satellites” that have sprung up and flourished there.

In the local mind the advantages of the presence of the base are over-estimated. To them NATO does not awaken images of a military threat but, on the one hand, protection, because it has allowed economic activities to proliferate in its shadow, and, on the other, consumerism, because it has created a consumer model of low-cost technology for those who had access to it.

Lately NATO has given up the Agnano basin in favor of a broader, more convenient area in Grazzanise in the province of Caserta. The Agnano site has been abandoned in a state of delapidation and decrepitude, symbolized by the U.S. military hospital, whose gaping, frameless windows look like the orbits of a huge skeleton guarding the hilltop. Who will foot the bill for reclaiming and restoring this area from its present state of degradation? Will the citizenry ever find out what has

been interred there, what toxic wastes?