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SINCE WE JOINED NATO: POINTS FOR A FEMINIST DEBATE

It was the impact of Women in Black (Žene u Crnom) in Belgrade, their huge energy and profound theorizations, that brought us together in Seville - a group of women coming from different backgrounds – from feminism, from the Movement for Conscientious Objection (military refusal), from the world of teaching and education, and so on. The words of the Belgrade women, the ideas on which their antiwar activism was founded, were on the face of it easy to understand: any woman, by virtue of being a woman, was likely to agree with their approach! Yet at the very same time, it wasn't altogether easy to integrate their ideas into our current conception of life, so immersed were we in the patriarchal vision of the world, so imprinted by it. Its pervasive discourse had trapped our minds in a great spider's web from which it was difficult to disentangle ourselves.

Well, this is how it was before we became 'Women in Black', as we clarified things for ourselves little by little in what was a personal process of learning. We came to understand that, in order to be feminist and antimilitarist women, we had to crack the code of patriarchy, to understand and interpret the way the long tentacles of patriarchal power, through the military system, reach into and contaminate every inch of our lives, from the furthest reaches to the closest and most immediate corners. To gain consciousness of how the militarisation of everyday life, scarcely perceptible but nonetheless real, and immensely effective for the authorities, we had to dig down to the very roots of the conflict and violence generated on this planet. Only that way could we disinfect ourselves, strip away what was masking violence and conflict, and actuate our determination to resolve them.

When Spain joined NATO

This introductory reflection, above, will perhaps throw some light on just what joining NATO meant for our people, what this alliance of Governments and States signifies in our particular history. [Editorial note: On 30 May 1982 following a referendum, Spain joined NATO. On 12 March 1986 a further referendum was held on whether to continue membership. This is the period in which the anti-NATO mobilization was at its height in Spain.] Our Government joined this military structure despite knowing full well that they lacked the support of a large section of civil society. After all, we were only just emerging from decades of oppression and subjugation, the effect of Franco's 50-year military rule. Opposition to that regime had been severely punished, and even now the marks of that violence, instilling fear, curbing freedom, were evident. We were emerging from a patriarchal-military system of government that had become profoundly rooted in our habits and ways of life. The struggle against it (by many different sectors of society) gave rise, among other developments, to a pacifist movement. We started to debate and theorize about militarization, prompted both by the strong campaign of refusal of obligatory military service (in Spain we called our conscientious objection "insumision" or insubordination), together with what we were beginning to learn from events in Yugoslavia and other Eastern bloc countries. So we began to generate a body of antimilitarist thought, which both men and women contributed to.

Thus Spain's accession to NATO was a hard, frustrating and disappointing time for us. The antimilitarist debate it gave rise to has been continued and developed along feminist lines since then by women working autonomously. Feminist antimilitarism is a distinctive understanding and interpretation of the world. Perhaps it's entirely new and fresh in its exposure of the entirety of the

violence that the military enacts on women: hierarchization in the family, poverty and neglect, and finally rape in armed conflict.

Defusing opposition

When the Spanish Government realized that our antimilitarist movement was likely to be a significant adversary to its plans regarding NATO membership, it quickly took “measures” to divert possible opposition and demands by women. They ‘sold’ us NATO as something remote and unfamiliar that should be of no concern to us. Joining NATO was a mere formality that had to be gone through. They were at pains to reassure us that it would not adversely affect our country, that we would continue to enjoy our current “peacefulness”. Thus, over time, the NATO issue was like a boomerang, there was a toxic back-and-forth effect, in which the whole problematic escalated in scale and violence.

Through NATO, this armed wing of Governments for the defence of a brutal globalization, a process in which we’re no longer just up to our necks but actually drowning, we have been taught to fear the Other, above all to fear the Arab world which they have set up as our great enemy. They have cleverly induced us to erect mental and physical frontiers, led us to ever greater intolerance, humiliation and arrogance towards the Subjugated. And if we take a closer look, we can see that this trend originates in military thinking, the introduction of military values into our lives, which instil fear, and impede our awareness. These values lead us to perceive “defence” and “security” as an imperative, they cleverly lead us to a condition of un-feeling, lack of sensitivity towards other human beings, especially those we don’t know. That way it becomes relatively easy to justify the Occupation and the genocide of the Palestinian people, the invasion of Iraq, invasion of people’s lives by humanitarian and non-humanitarian armies, the continual rape of people, their lands, their daily routines, their loved ones.

The incorporation of women into the Armed Forces.

Then, we experienced the incorporation of women into the military. The patriarchy dressed this up as a successful “equality” measure. It is just another strategy for giving the Armed Forces a more human face. It is yet another militarising trap: the fact of women entering the military order has changed neither its mode of intervention, its organization or its power structures. It represents a notion of “equality” designed and sustained by the machismo that pervades the Armed Forces. And at the same time the military hasn’t hesitated to exploit the affective, warm and sentimental traits assigned to women, with the idea that women joining the military institutions would give them a maternal, protective and compassionate image.

Our reflections on all this led us to uncover how military budgets, arms sales and trafficking, immigration, the destruction of life on our planet, the feminisation of poverty work...how that all works. Nowadays it is clear to us - what they sold to us as something distant has actually poisoned our lives and has installed itself ineluctably into interpersonal relationships and relations between peoples. Relationships of hierarchy, fear, oppression, arrogance... Relationships that invite us to think of ourselves as masters of the planet. It is the image of acid rain that comes to mind, the acid rain that falls onto our very homes, bringing with it the filth they produce in remote and secret places, telling us it is for our own good.

We, feminist and antimilitarist women, pacifist women refuse to think that there is no alternative to all this, that the army is the only way to resolve conflicts. We know from years of experience as women that violence leads to violence, that any attempt to resolve conflicts by use of violence can lead to nothing but more pain and death. It is our dream to be able to create and reproduce the power to break down the mental walls that the militarising and militarist patriarchal system have built in us, drawing on our immense and closely-woven web of work, affection, tenderness and energy. Saying “NO to NATO”, yet again, reaffirming our resistance to violence, to patriarchy and its Armed Forces, we can gather the power to “kick out the military and its wars from history”.