

**No-to-NATO, No-to-War  
3-5 April 2009 Strasbourg**

**WOMEN SAY NO-TO-NATO:  
THE FEMINIST CASE AGAINST NATO & EU MILITARIZATION  
A summary in four aspects<sup>1</sup>**

Fourteen papers were submitted for the workshop *NATO = Security? Gender Questions*, by women living in six countries: France, Germany, Spain, Italy, Denmark, the UK and Norway.<sup>2</sup> Together they make a cogent feminist case against NATO and the militarization of Europe. The contents were summarized and presented at the workshop in four five-minute reports on:

- the feminist case against NATO as an international actor;
- the feminist case against NATO, national and industrial military installations in our countries;
- the feminist case against NATO and the EU for their militarization of everyday life and culture in our countries;
- and the feminist case against NATO as a perpetrator of wars.

For the second half of the workshop, the 40 or more participants separated into five language-based groups (Italian, Spanish, French, German and English) to share our ideas on strategies for action by women against NATO and EU militarization.

### **1. The feminist case against NATO as an international actor.**

One important aspect of the feminist case against NATO is its role as an actor on the international scene – in diplomacy, international relations and military policy.

In their paper Margherita Granero and Anna Valente of Donne in Nero, Torino, Italy, point to the way NATO creates a bloc of nations. *Bloc logic* is the old security logic of the Cold War era, disastrously continued into the present. ‘Women,’ they write, ‘don’t recognize themselves in this logic’ of ‘Atlantic alliance’, ‘European fortress’, and ‘Western civilization’. By definition it marks some out as Others, threatening gross *insecurity* to those outside the compliant coalition (Cynthia Cockburn, Women in Black London).

NATO reinforces the idea that nation states are the only units that count in world affairs. Along with the concept of nation as ‘fatherland’ goes the racist idea of blood and belonging. Feminism absolutely rejects this, because it divides women on ethnic grounds and sets up women as the reproducers of race and culture, the ones who pass on the nation’s bloodline to their children. Secondly, it reinforces the sense that these nations are in a natural hierarchy of strong and weak. In NATO, the USA represents itself as a protector of its weaker junior partners. Women do not welcome this ‘paternalism’ which they have experienced first hand as the ‘husband and wife’ model of human relations.

So feminists say...NATO’s logic is a *patriarchal logic*. We have learned in our years of feminist antimilitarist theory and practice that nationalism, militarism and patriarchy are deeply intertwined and reinforce each other. Capitalism too. Patriarchal gender systems are

<sup>1</sup> This paper can be seen on-line from a link at <http://www.wloe.org/Women-say-no-to-NATO.555.0.html>

<sup>2</sup> The authors and titles are listed in the Appendix.

one of the root causes of militarism and war (Cynthia Cockburn, WIB, London). Nelly Martin (La Marche Mondiale des Femmes, Paris) in her paper says 'patriarchy and capitalism use war to maintain their dominion'. All these power systems have designs on women and special uses for women that feminism roundly rejects. NATO reflects the mentality that says that conflicts can only be resolved with weapons. By contrast, a feminist approach would be dialogue between countries and peoples, with mutual learning and respect for worldwide diversity (DiN, Torino).

In their paper the Mujeres de Negro from Sevilla (as also DiN Torino) deplore *the secrecy* surrounding NATO. Some national governments have made the decision to join the NATO bloc without even having it discussed in parliament. This authoritarianism is totally anti-democratic and excludes ordinary people, especially women, from having any choice or voice in international affairs.

NATO is expanding its scope across the world. It now has, as Irmgard Heilberger (WILPF, Neuburg, Munich) tells us in her diagrammatic paper, 28 members and 29 more states now drawn into what NATO calls its Partnership For Peace. What a joke that expression is! NATO openly admits that it exists to pursue and defend 'interests'. And it is not just NATO. Simona Ricciardelli (DiN, Napoli) in her text tells how NATO has become the security model for Europe too. There is no longer any independent European thought. Heidi Meinzolt (WILPF, Munich) tells us that in 2007 NATO and the European Union signed a declaration creating a partnership around 'shared strategic interests'. Anna Valente and Margherita Granero (DiN, Torino) ask: Whose interests are these? They are invoked by the rich countries and corporations and concern energy, economy and imperial control. They are certainly not women's interests.

Although the main motive of the European Economic Community was clearly the advancement of capital, many people, including many women, had hopes that European unity could prevent war in Europe from happening again. As we also had hopes of the United Nations. Marlene Tuininga's paper (FeN and WILPF, Paris) is interesting for showing how NATO's rules specifically contradict several clauses of the United Nations founding Charter. This makes it illegal on five counts under international law. Heidi Meinzolt (WILPF, Munich) shows us how there is a much better model for international cooperation on security already in existence, which deserves strengthening: the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). With 54 member states, it is 'a primary instrument' for early warning, conflict prevention and civil crisis management, but 'too marginalized and...totally underestimated'.

Strategies of action at the international level are perhaps the most difficult for us as women. A rare example is in Monique Dental's paper: women of the Collectif Feministe 'Ruptures' and others organized a 'Women Citizens' Letter' to the French President during the Gulf War calling for an international peace conference. But if, as Mujeres de Negro Sevilla write, we can 'crack the code of patriarchy', if we can see through it, we can understand that it is a mere myth that international relations is up there in the stratosphere, out of our reach. The diplomats and military policy makers would like us to think that. But it affects our daily lives, it is our natural concern, and it can't be beyond our imagination to intervene as women and as feminist antimilitarists!

## **2. The feminist case against NATO's military and industrial installations in our countries.**

NATO has a very tangible presence in our countries – with bases, installations and production facilities surrounded by barbed wire and security checkpoints. The paper by

Donne in Nero Napoli is the most outspoken against the impact of these on their well-being. Naples and the southern Campania region, they say, house more than their fair share of NATO bases, arms manufacturing and nuclear sites because the area is seen as 'the frontline for preventive wars against the Middle East...and the African continent' and beyond. 'Neapolitans are at war and they don't even know it.'

The Agnano basin, for instance, was used for years by NATO for military development –with a hospital, schools, distribution centres for goods for troops and officers. It was concreted over by NATO and satellite speculators. Then NATO moved on, abandoned the site, 'now in a state of delapidation and decrepitude symbolized by the US military hospital, whose gaping, frameless windows look like the orbits of a huge skeleton guarding the hilltop', leaving local people to speculate on what toxins are buried there, and how the trash-filled site can ever be restored to life. Instead, they now occupy Grazzanise in the province of Caserta. Meanwhile, the pollutants generated by military bases put at risk not only the native Italian population but also the families of the occupying US military. In this way, writes Simona, with regard to risk, it is no longer possible to separate the occupier from the occupied.

Doucha Belgrave (Femmes en Noir and Collectif Feministe 'Ruptures', Paris) points out that it is often women who most energetically campaign against the damaging local effects of military installations and bases in Europe, where the 'training' of NATO forces prefigures the 'bloody reality' that military action will visit on some other hapless country elsewhere in the world.

The nuclear option is intrinsic to NATO's military stance towards the rest of the world. It involves nuclear weapons manufacturing facilities, such as the Atomic Weapons Establishment at Aldermaston in the UK, and storage silos at many points in Europe. These are, as Cynthia Cockburn (WiB, London) points out, not only dangerous to those they may be used against but to those whose communities harbour them. One of the ways we can see 'security' to be a deceptive notion is that 'the nuclear umbrella also poisons those it's supposed to shelter, bringing risk of accident, explosion and radiation, turning us into targets'.

The rape of a girl by NATO military in Italy was used to create, in effect, a 'domestic enemy' out of the occupying forces. It justified the creation of groups of vigilantes controlling their territory to 'protect' women against 'the barbarous invaders'. The Catholic Church joined the fray using it as one more justification for controlling women's bodies (DiN, Torino).

Sian Jones of Women in Black London and the Aldermaston Women's Peace Camp in the UK contributed a paper on NATO and the trafficking of women for sexual exploitation. She draws on the experience of Bosnia and Kosovo where the NATO personnel in many bases (as well as in recreation zones in Macedonia) have not only used the sexual services of trafficked women but 'along with NATO contractors and UN police were actively involved in the trafficking process, receiving trafficked women and girls at borders, smuggling them into military bases and acting as pimps'. While NATO has a formal policy against trafficking it does not explicitly or effectively prohibit NATO forces from involvement in it. During the trafficking process, she writes, 'women are coerced, threatened, beaten and raped by their traffickers to keep them compliant. Their documents are taken away, their movement is controlled, they are often imprisoned. The promised wages often never materialize'. And even when women are not, as in this case, in sexual servitude, their prostitution is often the result of having lost all other options for supporting themselves and their children due to being in flight from war, or being rejected by their communities after being the victims of rape (Nelly Martin, La Marche Mondiale des Femmes, France).

### **3. The feminist case against NATO and the EU for their militarization of everyday life and culture in our countries**

Several of the papers submitted to the workshop mentioned the effects of the militarization of everyday life and culture in our countries and regions. 'Militarism has widened in scope and intensity to become, like war itself, intrinsic to civil life and democracy.' It has become 'the Western way of life' (DiN, Torino). First, military budgets drain funding from education, health and housing services. As Ana Azaria (Femmes Egalité, Paris), puts it, 'When you are laid off, when your fixed-term contract is not renewed, when you struggle to pay always more for less and when at the beginning of the month your wallet is already empty...you have nothing to win with an increase of military spending'.

It was during the 1980s that the Spanish antimilitarist movement campaigned fiercely, but ultimately unsuccessfully, against Spain joining NATO. Mujeres de Negro, Sevilla, say that this new phase of their national militarization was 'sold to us as something distant' but that it 'actually poisoned our lives and has installed itself ineluctably into interpersonal relationships...relationships of hierarchy, fear, oppression and arrogance'. To be an adequate member of NATO, Spain had to professionalize its army, ending obligatory service for men and enlisting women to give the military 'a human face'. They point out that this deformed the idea of 'sexual equality' and created a rift between different feminisms. In these ways they have felt 'the long tentacles of patriarchal power, through the military system, reach into and contaminate every inch of our lives'. Donne in Nero in Torino add that women joining the army is in effect yet another step in the militarization of everyday life: now even women wear khaki.

The military institution (writes Nelly Martin, MMF, Paris) contributes in various ways to training young men to occupy their dominant place in the social relations of gender...it is 'unfortunately a reference for growing young people'. Cynthia Cockburn (WiB London) mentions the 'hyped-up violence in popular cultures especially youth cultures, and specific forms of criminality including gun ownership' that are expressions of the militarization of everyday life. And Simona Ricciardelli (Napoli DiN) adds that the military model shrinks women's citizenship rights and regulates interpersonal relations.

The military notion of security appears to be addressed to potential enemies abroad. However it is readily turned on the internal landscape of the state, where it translates into surveillance and policing of citizens and leads to racism and the erosion of civil liberties (Cynthia Cockburn, WiB London).

NATO today has been obliged to recognize that the 'risks' its security apparatus faces are actually not posed by foreign 'enemies' but by circumstances that can and should be addressed 'at home': depletion of the ozone layer by CO<sup>2</sup> emissions, fuel shortages, inward migration (Christiane Reymann, El-fem, Berlin). She points out that even if migrants survive the watery grave of the Mediterranean they sink into miserable poverty and lack of rights in their European countries of destination. Just what can NATO, for all its huge budgets, contribute to averting such domestic risks as these?

### **4. The feminist case against NATO as a perpetrator of wars.**

Finally, NATO is a war-making machine and women have a great deal to say about wars. 'War always buries humankind's hopes for freedom and democracy' (Monique Dental, Collectif Feministe 'Ruptures', Paris). Irmgard Heilberger's map of NATO's effects shows war bringing violence, death, destruction, environmental devastation – in short trauma for body

and soul (WILPF, Neuburg, Munich).<sup>3</sup> The effects of war on women are well known. Civilians, predominantly women, suffer the most casualties. They are the majority of refugees, trying to keep dependents safe, fed and sheltered. Many women too of course are forcibly mobilized to fight. Sexual violence is redoubled in war. 'Violence against women and girls in situations of conflict and post-conflict is extreme, systematic and general' (Monique Dental, once again). Reduced to the rank of objects, the property of men, in war women are regarded as the 'spoils of war', 'bargaining chips', and the 'rest and recreation of warriors'. Rape is used to humiliate, shame and demoralize the enemy, as a means of propaganda, or as a means of ethnic cleansing (Nelly Martin, MMM, Paris). 'War is easier for men, they just die, sometimes even as heroes. We women must cope with the burden of survival for years and years,' a Bosnian woman told Marlene Tuininga (FeN and WILPF, France).

Sometimes, though, as Marlene continues, 'staying behind or fleeing with their children, they develop unknown qualities and a new solidarity'. Women's peace movements often arise out of the empathy and common sense born among women because of their direct experience of conflict. She cites the creation of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, of which she is a member. WILPF was founded in 1915 by 1300 women from the supposedly enemy countries of the time who got together in the middle of the war zone to demand a settlement from the politicians. In this connection she, as also Doucha Belgrave (FeN and Collectif Ruptures, Paris), mentions the creation of Women in Black, first in Israel, then in Serbia. In both countries women said 'not in my name' to their war-mongering national leaders. These same Serbian women and their allies were an inspiration to the women of MdN Sevilla, and others in Spain, as they developed their feminist antimilitarist movement.

Annelise Ebbe (WILPF, Denmark) devotes her paper to addressing NATO's current war: that in Afghanistan. After the attacks of 9/11, NATO member states invoked Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty 'that an armed attack against one or more of [the Parties] ... shall be considered an attack against them all'. In December 2001 the UN Security Council established the International Security Assistance Force, transferred to NATO's command in August 2003. Thus Afghanistan became NATO's first 'out of area' mission. Today ISAF in Kabul and its 'provincial reconstruction teams' in the countryside, are working alongside the Afghan national security forces and the US-led Coalition. Twenty-six NATO countries are contributing. Meanwhile, a study by Womankind Worldwide finds that 87% of Afghan women report violent abuse, the illiteracy rate among women is 88%, and one in nine women in Afghanistan dies in childbirth (Annelise Ebbe, WILPF, Denmark). As Ana Azarias (Femmes Egalité, France) observes, 'After having made most women fall into a state of destitution and poverty where the only right they have won is to live in conditions of total insecurity, after all this, still daring to affirm that this war is aimed at liberating women amounts to a huge hypocrisy'.

The militarization of European countries is no longer limited to NATO. The European Union is also changing its nature and becoming more militarised. Heidi Meinzolt (WILPF, Munich) submitted a paper to the workshop setting out how, unknown to many of its citizens, the European Union's military infrastructure is used for wars today. For example, in the recent Iraq war, military supplies, food, munitions and soldiers were flown to the Persian Gulf from airbases in many European countries. The global surveillance systems of the US and NATO in those countries were used to guide the air strikes on Iraq. European troops have sometimes replaced the soldiers of NATO countries (for instance in Kosovo) to free them for service in Afghanistan. EU and NATO missions are more and more integrated, with EU troops sometimes acting under the NATO flag. The solidarity clause in the Lisbon Treaty (it

<sup>3</sup> [http://wloe.org/fileadmin/Files-DE/PDF/Themen/NATO\\_April\\_09/IRMGARDmap2.pdf](http://wloe.org/fileadmin/Files-DE/PDF/Themen/NATO_April_09/IRMGARDmap2.pdf)

aspires to 'a spirit of complementarity and partnership') and the so-called 'structured co-operation' between the entities, obliges EU member states to participate in military actions of allies unless they assert a 'constructive abstention'. Thus the task of a feminist antimilitarist movement has to extend to resisting not only the expansion and extension of NATO but also the conversion of the EU into an agent of world domination by military means.

### **Feminist strategies of action against NATO and a militarized EU**

Many of the written submissions to our workshop prefigured the discussions we then had about strategies for action. It was clear to everyone that 'we can't completely understand [war, militarization and violence] without a gender perspective' (Christiane Reymann, EI-fem, Berlin). If patriarchy is part of the war problem, a feminist analysis is needed to find the solution. Feminist antimilitarism, as the Sevilla women say, is 'a distinctive understanding and interpretation of the world'. And it has to be holistic. For instance, given that war is such a massive pollutant, it has to include eco-feminism, as DiN Napoli reminds us.

The first conceptual step is to redefine 'security' – and this has already been started by feminists worldwide. The answer to insecurity is not military security. '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...in the 21<sup>st</sup> century' (Simona Ricciardelli, DiN, Napoli). 'We have to define the "real thing".' Human security yes, but a concept that encompasses even more: 'women's security' (Cynthia Cockburn, WiB, London). As the women of DiN Torino say, 'We do not accept [military security] as the only answer to the problem'. On the contrary we think the answer should be relationship and mutual acquaintance, solidarity...'

We should not be afraid to set ourselves clear targets, even if at the outset they seem too ambitious. Several women mention, yes, let us close down all foreign military bases in EU countries; let us systematically reduce cooperation between the EU and NATO; let us put pressure on our own governments to reduce their national military spending; let's say 'troops out of Afghanistan'; let's end the impunity of perpetrators of violence; let's boycott companies benefiting from war etc. etc. But we need to act on these aims 'always critically, in small scale, at the local level, with awareness of [our] limits' (DiN, Napoli). And we need mental strategies, clear thinking. For instance, we must get beyond the erroneous belief that 'the enemy of my enemy' is necessarily 'my friend' (Christiane Reymann, EI-fem, Berlin). We may sometimes have to say 'a plague on both your houses' - we are looking for a feminist alternative that may not yet have been invented. There are many practical questions. For instance, must our practice be one of opposition to men, or must we work with them, asks Simona? For sure, if we engage with them in dialogue it must be, they warn, truly 'cogent' (DiN, Napoli).

'How can we create our road to peace?' asks Christiane Reymann (EI-fem, Berlin). One by one she takes the 'risks' by which NATO justifies defence spending and shows how resources spent in other ways could avert them. Cynthia Cockburn says 'we must lay down the road as we walk it', by prefiguring our struggle the world we want to create: 'simultaneously creating and protesting, demonstrating peace while opposing war, modelling justice, equality and inclusion while resisting violence, touching people while challenging authorities' (WiB, London). It is not a mere absence of war, Nelly Martin reminds us, what we need is a culture of peace (MMM, Paris). For MdN Sevilla, the 'dream' is 'to be able to create and reproduce the power to break down the mental walls that the militarizing and militarist patriarchal system has built in us, drawing on our immense and closely-woven web of work,

affection, tenderness and energy'. Only drawing on these resources may we be able to 'kick the military and its wars out of history'.

The second half of the workshop was dedicated to small-group work (in five language groups). Deciphering the resulting 'flip-charts' revealed that all proposed to continue, back home, the analysis of NATO and EU militarization from a feminist antimilitarist perspective. But some concrete plans of action were recorded. The following are just a selection from wide-ranging discussions. The Spanish language group proposed continued counter information activity, intervening at the various levels of education, and acting directly against military bases. They stressed the importance of working with nearby groups; fixing particular appropriate dates for action e.g. on Afghanistan, Palestine; being creative in our actions; and continually updating our messages.

The English language group proposed that information about militarization be transmitted in simple everyday language, and the costs of NATO's and EU military budgets be compared to social expenditures that people can readily grasp. The French language group discussed getting our themes and women present in the World March of Women planned for 2010. Those in the German language group proposed campaigns of action to increase awareness of NATO, the EU and Euratom, and to do more work women and men together. In the Italian language group DiN Napoli noted that this was the first time they had really put their minds to NATO, despite its clear significance in their region. Now they plan to work both locally and internationally to expose 'the protection concept', with a gender perspective.

**Compiled by Cynthia Cockburn from the 14 papers submitted to the workshop, as listed below, and 5 flip-charts summarizing group discussions.**

**London. 3 May, 2009**

## **APPENDIX**

### **TEXTS SUBMITTED TO OUR WORKSHOP**

- 1 Sian Jones of London Women in Black, *"NATO and the trafficking of women"*
- 2 Anna Valente and Margherita Granero of Torino Donne in Nero, *"Women denounce NATO's bloc logic"*
- 3 Cynthia Cockburn of London Women in Black, *"Uncovering the falsehoods of NATO's 'security': steps along the road of a feminist peace activism"*
- 4 Marlene Tuininga, WILPF and Femmes en Noir, Paris, *"What women in conflict areas would tell the men from Nato."*
- 5 Simona Ricciardelli, Donne in Nero, Napoli (with photos) *Naples: endless war occupation"*
- 6 Irmgard Heilberger, WILPF, Germany *"A mental map: New NATO and the threat to our lives"*
- 7 Mujeres de Negro de Sevilla, *"Since we joined NATO: points for a feminist debate"*

- 8 Ana Azaria, Femmes Egalité, Paris, *"Women say No to War and NATO"*
- 9 Annelise Ebbe, Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, Denmark, *"Afghanistan, NATO and Women's Security."*
- 10 Nelly Martin, La Marche Mondiale des Femmes, Paris *"Peace and Demilitarization"*
- 11 Monique Dental, Collectif Feministe 'Ruptures', *"NATO: a Warmonger Drift. War is anti-Feminist."*
- 12 Heidi Meinzolt, Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, Germany. *"The EU in a multi-polar world"*.
- 13 Christiane Reymann, El-fem, Berlin. *"Aspects of a Feminist Peace-Strategy"*.
- 14 Doucha Belgrave, Femmes en Noir and Collectif Feministe 'Ruptures', Paris. *"Women's Peace"*.

**Papers can be read or downloaded at:**

<http://wloe.org/Workshop-papers.551.0.html>