

TORINO “No NATO” MEETING
May 31 / June 1st, 2009

Report on the meeting attended by Donne in Nero (Women in Black)
from the cities of Alba, Napoli, Padova, Torino, Udine and Verona

We titled our meeting “No NATO”, but we actually used NATO and the Strasbourg events of 3-5 April 2009 as a prompt to stimulate a wider-ranging discussion on related themes. We used the texts from the Strasbourg events and other papers on arms and militarization, plus two written contributions that arrived from the Italian net of DiN. This document is a summary, organized according to the points discussed, with suggestions for future work. We hope it can be useful to everyone, lead to further discussion, and perhaps to continuing along this path together.

1. Lessons from the No-to-NATO events in Strasbourg

The feminist analysis presented at the Strasbourg workshop:
the feminist case against NATO in 4 points, the general framework.

We felt that the content and the feminist perspective of this document are very important - but that they need to be deepened. It seems to us that it set out in an orderly way what we already knew. Now we need to detail the links between different points, and clarify the general framework of which they are part. We had some criticisms of the paper too: items that were missing, e.g. environmental feminism and (particularly) proposals for action at local, national and international level.

How we can add detail to the 4 points, concretizing them locally and internationally?

Is NATO a ‘model’ or not? Is it a model of militarization in our societies, territories, relations? Starting from the actions in which we are involved in our local situations, we recognize themes and connections we have to work on. What are the *connections* eg. between militarization/ NATO/war on the one hand and violence against women/family violence on the other? Between militarization/NATO/war and immigration/oppression of Roma/and lack of other rights? Between militarization/NATO/war and waste/land management?

There is a risk that our actions may be too limited, dealing with only one or other problem, that we may lose sight of the connections to the wider political level. The ‘bloc logic’ concerns us - we want to deconstruct this “military option” that is accepted everywhere as if there is no alternative. It is about military bases, nuclear weapons, USA intervention but also about (all of) our everyday lives.

Working methods shared by women.

The way the Strasbourg events were prepared, carried out and evaluated afterwards was a good lesson, from which we can find directions and ideas for our activities. The women who coordinated the participation – it was Marlene (WiB and WILPF, France), Irmgard (WILPF, Germany), Anna (WLOE, Germany) and Cynthia (WiB and WILPF, London) - gave particular importance to the quality of relations. They sent the ‘call’ to participate in No-to-NATO to known women’s networks - Women in Black, Women and Life on Earth, and Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom. They stimulated contributions to the workshop, calling for papers and setting a deadline; and they asked us to send our evaluations afterwards. This made us think in advance, discussing it in our local groups; and it made us re-think it afterwards. They were careful about the quality of communication: they informed us of the various steps before the events, prepared presentations for the workshop, and made a round-up of the evaluations after the event, summarizing and organizing them under headings, reporting women’s different reflections, questions, criticisms and self-criticisms. It was a good basis on which to continue walking along the path on which we had started together. To be present in Strasbourg was important: we got to know

women and networks who brought different stories, some of them not known to us in Italy previously. We were confirmed in our idea that is very useful to think and discuss things among women, and then to propose our analysis for a debate. And even if 50 women from 6 countries are not after all so very many – nonetheless we can at least begin a process of a collective reasoning from a feminist perspective.

2. DiN activities in our cities

Working with other groups, with the general movement, participating in demonstrations.

Relations with mixed groups. We think that the relations we all have with “mixed” (male/female) groups in our local activities are very important, even if they are laborious and at times unproductive. Running to conform to particular dates, sometimes we feel swept along, as if we aren’t acting on our own choices, and don’t have time to reflect carefully on what we are doing. In our situation there are a lot of local actions with which we associate ourselves, just in order to have more visibility. But often we don’t build on these together. Mass demonstrations are more and more problematic for us, due to the presence of violent elements. We wonder what we share in those situations, and what the public can understand from them. There are examples, in Vicenza for example, in which those groups are “limited”, “contained”, by a sustained practice of mutual knowledge, discussion and “mediation” - mainly led by the women’s group. But it is not easy to do this in every situation. Usually we participate in demonstrations relying on the group that organizes them, without having participated in the preparation, and simply try to keep a distinct presence as Women in Black.

Relations with other women groups. We have all shared initiatives with other feminist/women’s groups, for instance on March 8 (International Women’s Day), on the issue of violence against women, about feminicide. Those relations are not easy, but are partially successful, in being all together once again after a lapse of time. Our women’s movement now is fragmented, relations are not close. The *feminist generation* has disappeared, and the new generation seems uninterested in thinking only as and among women. And, maybe with good reason, the young women don’t like to learn lessons from their mothers. So we need a lot of time and effort to restart our common work, and even more to make the relations lasting.

Communication: toward whom? in what form?

It is difficult to talk about NATO and militarization. We need a simple language to explain that these are not distant questions, that they really concern all of us. We need to deepen our knowledge, share perspectives and experiences - because often we’re invited to participate and speak on these themes in various situations. Sometime we feel uncomfortable about speaking to a public audience. But each of us has some skills, and the important thing is to share the preparation, to adapt the presentation to each specific context and to choose the appropriate woman to speak. We think interventions for peace education in schools at the different levels of education are valuable. It is worth cultivating what relations we can with local educational institutions, aiming to create, together with responsive teachers, a process rather than a single event. Some women suggest using more effective means of getting ideas across (video etc.) and writing a book for boys and girls about arms, war, peace etc. for use in schools.

To improve our effectiveness and visibility: political/parliamentary means, lobbying, education, meetings, leaflets, street actions...

Working in our local places seems very important to us. So we try to put pressure on local institutions, to share initiatives with other local groups working on citizens rights, violence, immigration etc. It is useful also to attend court cases or municipal council meetings – to make use of every alliance and activity in which we can defend our spaces. We suffer a lot from the disappearance of the left. The movement (outside political parties) is silenced. We (as WiB) are not

used to serious lobbying activity, addressed to national and international institutions of official politics, in the way older and more structured women's organizations do it.

At a European level, we are interested, if possible, to continue the thinking process with other women (WiB, but not only WiB).

3. How can we continue our work?

Our goal as WiB is: to get away from a perspective grounded in arms and war.

- by analyzing and deepening our knowledge of the context, and the connections on a general political level;
- by identifying the questions in specific local situations - from the world scale, to Europe, to everyday life;
- by using down-to-earth arguments (the shopping bag, the home economy...)

In Europe we would like to propose to those women we met in Strasbourg that we travel on a common path, so as to get to know each other better, to share themes starting from the priorities of women, themes that pertain to *Fortress Europe* that rejects people from outside its borders, and also pertain to militarization policies inside our countries. We would like to do this also together with women from east Europe and with ZuC (Women in Black) Belgrade.

We are thinking of a process that is independent from the Berlin Conference proposed by the ICC in October. However, we do not rule out participating in it if, in spite of lack of time and the likely difficulty in deepening our thinking, we have something specific to say - and if the ICC will acknowledge it.

[The ICC have offered us a five-minute slot in the programme of the Berlin meeting now scheduled for October 17/18. Do we want to take it up?]