

## RESEARCH PROJECT

### Short Description

## **Women Opposing War: Organization and Strategy in the International Movement of Women against Violence and Militarism**

### **The aims of the research:**

- 1) to 'map' the international network Women in Black, and related initiatives;
- 2) clarify the scope and interrelation of other organizations and networks comprising this movement;
- 3) update and deepen our analysis of violence, militarization and war;
- 4) clarify and make more effective the strategies of global feminist antimilitarism.

*Supporting action:* This is a project of action-research in which my intention, with an 'insider perspective' and responsibility to the Women in Black network itself and to allied groups opposing militarism and war, is to strengthen and inform the action.

*Research approach:* will be qualitative, within the field of political sociology, involve visits and observation, sharing in action, setting up group discussions and in-depth tape-recorded thematic interviews, in addition to library and Web research.

### **Women in Black against War:**

WiB is an international network of women, linked mainly by e-mail and personal contact. It is unstructured – not an organization, more a formula for action. The weekly silent vigil is typical of WiB, but other forms of non-violent action are also used. Beginning in Israel in 1988 in protest against the Occupation, the concept was carried to Europe by Italian women, to Belgrade during the Balkan wars – and thence to India, Nepal, Colombia, Mexico, the USA, Australia etc. etc. WiB activists often are or have been active also under other names and networks. Small groups organize continuously under a WiB identity, but thousands attend big WiB events. Many new groups sprang up in the wake of Sept 11 2001. The annual WiB encounter in the summer of 2003 in Italy was attended by 400 women from as far afield as Congo and Japan.

WiB's rapid worldwide growth is significant, clearly symptomatic of the turn in world politics with the end of the Cold War. The global reach of corporate capital under neo-liberal regimes, bringing changes in methods of production, exploitation of labour and expansion of product markets, is being underwritten

by the projection of US (and allied) military power worldwide. Since 1989 we have seen an increasing readiness to use force to enact this new imperialism. Many countries, destabilized by mandatory structural adjustment and impoverished by unequal trade relations, have experienced outbreaks of ethnicized conflict on a huge scale. The working class capacity for self-organization has been eroded. For analysis, resistance and the imagining of alternative futures much depends today on new social actors mobilizing on a global scale (with the help of new communication technologies) around issues of social justice, environmental policy and militarism/militarization. One such collective actor is women, many of whom have chosen to make violence and war the focus of sustained, gender-conscious protest.

But growth of the Women in Black network, and related expressions of women's antiwar and antimilitarist activism, is outstripping self-knowledge. We do not know who exactly we are, where we exist, who our natural allies and partners are, or to what extent there is agreement and coherence, within and between Women in Black groups, or with and among our neighbouring organizations and networks.

### **The project:**

This is a project of action-research in which my aim, with an 'insider perspective' and responsibility to the WiB network and allies, is to strengthen and inform the action. The purposes are:

*1 To gain a full understanding of WiB as a network* - its history, its size and extent, what are its communication and organizational needs.

*2 To clarify the composition and nature of the wider women's anti-war movement..* The research, while centred on WiB, will not be limited in scope to groups of this name, but extend to the many other organizations and networks with related aims that I encounter in the WiB environment, in order to learn their different characters and the relationship between them. It will also be important to see women's antimilitarist movements as part of international women's movements, the peace movement, and the movement against global capitalism worldwide.

*3 To gain a fuller understanding of the thinking* that motivates and is expressed in women's active opposition to militarism and war – particularly but not only in the WiB network. How do we conceptualise and explain violence and war? What are our diverse themes, motivations and tensions? A 'women's case' against war and 'feminist antimilitarism' are not the same thing, and both have expression in WiB. Some groups focus on male violence, others on war. Some women prioritize 'peace', others 'justice'. Some focus on particular wars, others on the structures of militarism. Some are located in powerful, war-delivering societies, others in countries that suffer the impact of war at first hand. Some are more concerned with causes of war (challenging governments), others with effects (supporting asylum seekers). Anti-racist and cross-cultural work is more significant in some groups than others.

4 *To clarify present and forward strategies* that can strengthen the movement and make us more effective in our work for peace with justice. As women, differently situated, in a variety of countries and regions, facing different and changing expressions of violence, how do we devise strategies and choose between them? How do we believe we can best gain an impact? What succeeds and what fails?

**Research approach:**

*In terms of research*, this will be qualitative research within the field of political sociology, involving visits and observation, sharing in action, setting up group discussions and in-depth tape-recorded thematic interviews. I shall necessarily use the Web extensively. For theoretical work I have access to City University and the British Library. I shall write a book from the project, not only for an academic, but more generally for a politically informed, reader and will seek translation into several languages. Zed Books have already expressed keen interest in publishing it. I shall also write articles for academic, political and popular periodicals, and seek coverage of the material on radio and TV, in this country and elsewhere. I also take up frequent opportunities to speak at seminars and conferences.

*In terms of action*, the long term aim of the project is to strengthen local and international expressions of women's organized work for peace, justice and non-violence. So I shall quickly make available what I learn to WiB and other networks, through our e-channels, through face-to-face contact and at international meetings and events. The interim 'profiles' and analyses I write will be put up on the WiB international website. I shall use the many speaking opportunities I am offered to present the work to a wide range of non-academic audiences – for instance I hope to do this at a world gathering of women anti-war activists in Bogota, Colombia, in August, and at the European Social Forum in London in October.

**Ethical questions:**

Ethical considerations will be primary. This will be 'research from within', so, if there's ever any conflict of interest, I shall always put the interests of WiB and other feminist groups and networks before those of my research. Most importantly perhaps, I start from the idea that complexity and diversity in the movement should be valued and respected. I will fully inform all involved about what I am doing and why. I shall carefully negotiate the material that informants may wish to provide me with, or to withhold. I shall make arrangements to feed back to each group and person what I learn from them, amend it in the light of their comments, and discuss with them what use they would like me to make of it. I will acknowledge and respect my sources, and in particular, I shall always get specific prior agreement from anyone I want to quote in published work.

**For my CV and Publications please see elsewhere on this website.**