

# State University of New York / College at Old Westbury

Old Westbury  
Long Island, New York 11568  
Telephone (516) 876-3000

6/27/86

Malinka Mhjid  
131-17 135th St.  
S. Ozone Park, Queens, N.Y. 11420

Dear Malinka;

Enclosed is a copy of our book proposal. Both Gilda and I will be in and out of town until @ July 9 or 10, and will call you soon after we return. We feel this work is potentially very significant, and hope that you will be able to participate. Looking forward to talking -- and hopefully meeting -- you soon.



Gil Gardner  
Gilda Zwerman

## Research Proposal

In the absence of a stable, legitimate leftist movement in the United States, the image of women who engage in political violence is imbued with extraordinary levels of fantasy. The myths that surround these women might best be described in terms of exaggerated levels of potency and impotency. On the one hand, the conservative ideologues -- particularly those affiliated with the media and the courts -- have projected the image of these women as fire-breathing amazons, who pose a volatile threat to the social order. In a recent interview in Off Our Backs, Judith Clark, convicted on charges of felony murder for her participation in the "Brinks action" in 1981, describes how the courts ruled to have her placed in involuntary protective custody, segregated from the general prison population; "They said my presence was disruptive and that other women feared for their safety. And they did create an atmosphere of hysteria, the same way the media did, referring to me as a dangerous violent, crazed maniac." On the other hand, representatives of the liberal ideological establishment -- left-wing and feminist intellectuals, and writers -- have trivialized the status of these women, emphasizing the isolation and insignificance of their political thought and actions in contrast to more tempered efforts to bring about social change.

Significantly, the conservative and liberal ideological apparatus have had a unified effect: to deny the complexity of

the lives, motivations, and actions of these women. Moreover, the collaboration of liberal and conservative tendencies in reifying the images of a woman engaged in political violence concedes perpetual power to the state to criminalize her thoughts and actions, and to drain the charges, trials and sentences of any political content whatsoever.

In an essay on "The Psychology of Political Violence", Emma Goldman observes:

"To analyze the psychology of political violence is not only extremely difficult, but also very dangerous. If such acts are treated with understanding, one is immediately accused of eulogizing them. If, on the other hand, human sympathy is expressed with the revolutionist committing the act of violence, one risks being considered a possible accomplice."

This research focuses on the experiences of women -- many of whom currently reside in federal and state correctional facilities -- who have faced criminal charges because of their direct or indirect participation in acts of political violence. These women have publicly identified themselves as "Puerto Rican and New Afrikan Prisoners of War", "North American Political Prisoners", members of the "Ohio 7", and "New York 8+". Many have political roots in the Civil Rights, New Left and Women's Movement of the 1960's and 70's, as well as in contemporary National Liberation Movements.

In their own voices and words, these women will describe and reflect upon the various contexts in which they have lived-- their ties to family and community, their cultural background, their participation in the broader left and women's movement, their personal joys, doubts, and tragedies, their efforts to defy the system, and their response to imprisonment. The text will

make the individual as well the collective voice of these women human and intelligible. It will provide a necessary challenge to the myths, fantasies, and the one-dimensional properties of the "spectacles" which both liberals and conservatives have imposed upon them.

Interviews will be edited with the purpose of revealing the significant personal characteristics and concerns of individuals and exploring themes that are common to these women. This text will be prefaced by an introduction and a discussion of historical instances in which women on the Left have initiated or participated in political struggles that involved acts of violence, including the Female Anti-Slavery Societies, women in the early Socialist, Communist and Anarchist Movements, and women in North American-based and Third World-based National Liberation Movements. Following the interviews, the authors will develop their analysis of the interview material. The research will conclude with the women's response to the authors' analysis.