

this research and therefore how comprehensive the author's scope and brief is. Although Wedad Zenie-Ziegler has the honesty at the end of her book to partially question her own motives in undertaking this

task and the possible presumptuousness of her approach, her analysis remains one which offers no hope for progress through change.

**Lilian Landor**

## LIP Pamphlets

### **The Right to Choose – Questions of Feminist Morality**

by Ruth Riddick

£2.50, ISBN 094621 85X

### **Ancient Wars – Sexuality and Oppression**

by Ethna Viney

£2.50, ISBN 0946211 833

### **The Politics of Seduction**

by Trudy Hayes

£2.50, ISBN 094621 949

### **A Kind of Scar – The Woman Poet in a National Tradition**

by Evan Boland

£2.50, ISBN 0946211 795

### **From Cathleen to Anorexia – the breakdown of Ireland**

by Edna Langley

£2.50, ISBN 0946211 99X

### **Ireland Between the First and Third Worlds**

by Carol Coulter

£2.50, ISBN 0946211 930

### **Has The Red Flag Fallen? the Fate of Socialism in the 1990s**

by Helena Sheehan

£2.50, ISBN 0946211 779

Attic Press: Dublin, 1990

'LIP' is the overall title of seven pamphlets published by Attic Press, the Dublin-based women's publisher. These pamphlets represent an innovative approach to publishing. They are all short, provocative, polemical pamphlets on contemporary issues and controversies by Irish women writers, thinkers and activists – Attic's own description. Writers have the opportunity to explore serious issues without having to conform to the academic rigours often required by journals and to deal with political issues in a way that might not be acceptable to political publications. They are stylishly produced in an easily recognizable standard format and are lively and refreshingly unacademic. They cover a range of topics: sexuality and reproductive rights, nationalism and women's relation to national culture, and socialism.

For the purpose of this review I will group them thematically, dealing first with those on sexual politics, briefly looking at the one on socialism and finally those on nationalism. The latter in my view are the more interesting.

*The Politics of Seduction*, by Trudy Hayes, explores 'male sexual dominance and female sexual passivity' which she sees as being a major aspect of male power. She draws on a range of disciplines to substantiate her argument: feminist theory, including the politics of rape and pornography; twentieth-century sexologists; Judaeo-Christian teachings; and literature. It is almost always taken for granted that the protagonist is male. There is one positive reference to lesbian seduction, other-

wise the focus is heterosexual, hardly surprising given that the bias of the analysis is male hatred of women. Although the theme is specific, her analysis is too wide-ranging, and it has little reference to the specific situation faced by women in Ireland, because she fails to focus on the nature of oppression faced by women living there.

*Ancient Wars – Sexuality and Oppression*, by Ethna Viney, looks at sex and sexuality within the context of women's position in society. She looks to the history of misogyny as an explanation for this. Again there is little that is particularly Irish in her analysis, though she does mention that Ireland is a society which is 'deeply ambivalent about sexuality'. There is very little discussion of sexuality, either in feminist circles or in the public arena, the 'Contraception Debate and Abortion Referendum' are the nearest the country has had to a discussion on sexuality'. This would have been an interesting issue to explore. Why the silence? Is it just misogyny? She is critical of narrow definitions which equate sexuality with clitoral and vaginal orgasms. For her, giving birth is the climax of female sexuality, a pleasure denied women due to the medicalization of birth, an even narrower definition than those she seeks to refute. There is also a résumé of the struggle around sexuality issues in the women's movement. Indeed, a very simplistic analysis of splits in the English women's movement and the demise of the Irish feminist movement is explained in terms of internal tensions and personality differences. If I didn't know different I might be left thinking that there are no feminist activists in Ireland today. The solution posed: men need to become more caring and nurturing. How is this to come about?

*The Right to Choose – Questions of Feminist Morality*, by Ruth Riddick, argues that equality for women hangs on women being moral agents, that is, 'the first right we must assert

for ourselves is the identity of personhood not simply in spurious equality with men but as having an elemental involvement in the world of morality and decision-making'. The degree of moral autonomy accorded to women is dependent on whether they are considered as 'persons' or 'relatives'. Women are assigned only relative status by the Irish Constitution. They are 'mothers' and 'wives' with 'duties in the home'. In Ireland, women's lack of control over their fertility clearly shows that women aren't regarded as moral agents. A woman's right to decide whether to have an abortion is a fundamental moral right and therefore a central feminist demand. A woman's right to choose is no longer on the agenda in Ireland; the focus has shifted to women's freedom of access to information. One of the effects of the abortion referendum is that it is now illegal to give information which may help women to procure an abortion. Ruth Riddick's approach to the subject is interesting, although limited, given her years of active involvement around the issues. She neglected to look in any detail at the role of Catholicism as a dominant ideology, and the kind of moral schizophrenia which it condones. She does mention the 'conservative Catholic morality mitigated by pragmatic compassion'. What is the effect of this kind of hypocrisy on women?

I was surprised that the analysis and main references in these three pamphlets were exclusively drawn from the writings of North American white radical feminists. Where is the socialist-feminist analysis? Ireland, too, has its socialist-feminist activists. There may be more similarities between the position of women in Ireland and other countries who've had a colonial past than between Ireland and the USA. I also expected more of a focus on the peculiarities of the Irish situation. Apart from Ruth Riddick's pamphlet, this is sadly lacking.

The three pamphlets on

nationalism approach their subject matter from different perspectives, though sharing an approach which is critical. *A Kind of Scar – The Woman Poet in a National Tradition*, by Evan Boland, is a personal, political exploration of her struggle to establish herself as a national poet. 'Women have moved in a relatively short time from being the subjects and objects of poetry to being the authors of it.' For her there were no role models – male poets depicted women as passive, decorative and 'raised to emblematic status'. This was especially the case when women and nation were fused. This technique was even used by many poets who had no nationalist loyalties. This is a distortion of women's reality while at the same time women are not, according to Boland, 'especially visible in Ireland'. While she is critical of the kind of nationalism presented through poetry and song, the glorification of the struggle and the failure to acknowledge that women, too, had a part in that struggle and grief, there is no real questioning of nationalism as an ideology. Her task is to claim a space for herself within it where she can tell the truth and express the experience of women in its complexity. Edna Longley in *From Cathleen to Anorexia – the Breakdown of Ireland* is bluntly critical about nationalism informed by Unionism or Catholicism as a 'failed conceptual entity'. Unionism, she argues, is a reactive philosophy composed of a coalition of sects, interests, loyalties and incoherent hate; southern nationalism is preoccupied by Church and State and Sinn Fein offers nothing progressive. These ideologies simply widen the polarities. She cites several examples from literature to illustrate the ways in which the separation is maintained – for example, Protestant artists and writers get little acknowledgement for their work, whatever their political allegiances. Women are also affected by this. Nationalism has 'residual power over the images and

self-images of women'. It effects the way they lead their lives and the way their struggle is portrayed. Social change will never be achieved while Ireland hangs on to these defunct ideologies. But her own solution is also inadequate as it fails to deal with fundamental issues of power and powerlessness. Unionists are in control, in terms of numbers and ownership of wealth in Northern Ireland. The nationalists are the oppressed minority. She fails to address this reality. Despite the shortcomings, this is a provocative and creative piece of writing which dares to question a number of 'holy cows'. I was sometimes lost when she referred to current debates in Ireland. Perhaps this is because the pamphlet is based on an article published in *The Irish Times* (Southern Ireland's leading liberal newspaper).

*Ireland, Between the First and Third Worlds*, by Carol Coulter, on the other hand, argues that nationalism has revolutionary potential, but it needs to be 'freed from the pseudo-nationalism created by the southern state'. She outlines how Ireland's colonial history has been reinterpreted 'to present successive nationalist movements as expressions of an uninterrupted fight for the Catholic faith'. She emphasizes the need to understand and recognize our colonial past and says that Ireland would do better to make allegiance with other colonial countries rather than its current preoccupation with being European. Her prescription for change – Ireland, north and south, needs to develop a radical nationalism. But here lies the weakness as she fails to define what she means by nationalism. She refers positively to some of the radical strands which existed within old Sinn Fein, but they were always marginal. This is also the case today. Sinn Fein is known not to hold radical views on women's issues. The pamphlet is a good read, particularly in its analysis of the conservative nature of Ireland's post-colonial power structures, but it fails to ques-

tion or clarify its understanding of nationalist philosophy.

*Has the Red Flag Fallen? the Fate of Socialism in the 1990s*, by Helena Sheehan, asserts the importance of developing socialist politics in a world where internationalist capitalism has a stranglehold. It gives a clear definition of capitalism and socialism. It is a useful introduction and is written without jargon, but it doesn't say anything new.

Finally, the pamphlets on nationalism are thought-provoking. I haven't read much on this issue

which approaches it from such different perspectives. They are challenging and a worthwhile read. I was, overall, disappointed by those on sexual politics and am left to wonder how much their content actually reflects current feminist debate in Ireland. Whatever the limitations I look forward to reading similar productions from Attic.

**Joan Neary**

(Thanks to Clara Connolly for the late-night discussion and support.)

### **'We Were Making History'. Women and the Telangana Uprising**

Stree Shakti Sanghatana (Lalita K., Vasantha Kannabiran, Rama Melkote, Uma Maheshwari, Susie Tharu, Veena Shatrugna)

*Zed: London 1989, £8.95 Pbk,  
ISBN 0862 32679 6, £32.95 Hbk,  
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When thugs paid by the feudal 'Nizam', ruler of Hyderabad, tried to take away Chakali Ailamma's standing crops, hundreds of peasants, women as well as men, helped her to gather them and defended them with slings, stones, chilli powder and pounding sticks. It was the beginning of a communist-led uprising which, between 1945 and 1951 was to involve three million people and three thousand villages.

After Independence from the British the Nizam fell. The army forced the resistance movement into the forest. The Communist Party in India split between those who were pro-Soviet and those who were pro-Chinese. Amidst heavy losses the Communist Party called off the struggle.

The militant peasant movement was broken and defeated. Its participants were abandoned to negotiate with everyday life and the incomprehension of their children. The forces

which had decided their destiny were remote from Telangana.

When the women's group, Stree Shakti Sanghatana, arrived to record the life-stories of women who had taken part in the Telangana people's struggle, they found that they were partly recording testimonies about how memory endures many years of defeat.

Dudala Salamma asked, 'why did you all come this far?' She had grown old in the intervening years, given everything away and now could only walk with a stick. But she retained her memories: 'There is so much to tell – my story: a house, courtyard and all they looted – looted it all. I had a cot with headboard, woven with cloth tape and a large bed on it. It was a nice decent house. I fed the communists and they said "you fed them, tell us where they are", and tortured me. They hung me with ropes under my arms, sprinkled water on the ropes and put a spiked board full of nails under me. My feet were split into bits (crying). I was in bad shape. They tortured me so much.'

Skree Shakti Sanghatana reflect: 'When Dudala Salamma returns with the urgency of a clock that must strike the hour to the pension that never came, she speaks not only of money, but also of a life that was given and a vision that was betrayed.'