

Women in the Kibbutz by Lionel Tiger and Joseph Shepher

(Harcourt Brace Jovanovich; 334 pp.; \$10.95)

Brigitte Berger

Appropriately, this book appeared at exactly the moment that the long-fought-for Title 9 of the Education Amendment bill of 1972 went into effect. The various factions of the women's movement feel that Title 9 is a significant victory, since it attacks sexism at its core distortion of reality. No longer is it to be assumed that boys will be educated to be boys or girls educated to be girls.

Fighters for women's rights have long maintained that, if certain basic circumstances in women's lives are changed, the broad differences between men and women resulting in sexual inequality (according to some, *the* most significant inequality in America today) will change too. It is said that legal changes providing women with equal rights and equal opportunities are not enough. The problem is on a much more fundamental level and precedes that of inequality in the public sphere. The most pervasive discrimination affecting the life and status of women in modern society is that of sex-role stereotyping. Such stereotyping begins at infancy, continues and intensifies through the educational institutions, and culminates in its vicious effects upon the rigid status of women in economic and political life. Thus war is declared against the big lie that "boys will be boys, and girls will be girls." The implementation of Title 9 is an important battle in that war: "No person...shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under an education program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance."

Tiger and Shepher's book is imperative reading for everyone concerned with sex roles and social policy. *Women in the Kibbutz* is much more than just another treatise (by now there are close

to 1,300) on the kibbutz. To be sure, it is an important addition to literature on the kibbutz; it cannot be read without coming under the spell of this movement of deep ideological commitment to the equality of all human beings. It is a truly revolutionary movement, for at its heart is the dream of creating through novel social organization the ideals of pure equality, nonexploitativeness, and the cohesion of social practice and morality. The dream has become a successful experiment; today close to 100,000 people live in some 240 kibbutzim. Its success is in the institutionalization of new social patterns that are at the heart of all kibbutzim, regardless of the ideological and practical differences among them. There is far-reaching collectivization of production and consumption; socioeconomic rewards are equal to all members regardless of the economic and political functions performed; education is collective; and the political system continues to be a direct democracy. The kibbutz system, as it emerges through Tiger and Shepher's account, is one of the very few continuously successful challenges to the major social patterns of capitalism.

The more astounding, therefore, is the encounter with the one area in which the reality so sharply differs from the dream: the role of women in the kibbutz. Despite continuing attempts to restructure family life radically so as to remove those basic conditions that have traditionally stood in the way of female liberation, the distinctive female roles have reappeared again and again. Even more astounding is that after three generations these female roles are today more pronounced than before.

American women liberationists insist that "it is crucial to the organization of women for their liberation to understand that it is the monogamous family as an

economic unit, at the heart of class society, that is basic to the subjugation of women." With this claim in mind one considers the salient features of family and female life in the kibbutzim as described in detail and investigated from all angles by Tiger and Shepher. All major household services are collectivized; in principle women are required no more than men to cook, serve, wash dishes, do laundry, mending, or tailoring; health services are carried out by professionals; there is far-reaching collective consumption; children of 90 per cent of the kibbutzim who are younger than fourteen live in dormitories, starting at the age of two to six weeks; they are cared for by trained nurses and teachers. (The other 10 per cent sleep in their parents' apartments, but are taken care of in a special children's center during the day.) In addition, men and women, husbands and wives, are economically independent of each other—no one receives direct payment for labor; all receive the same communally determined economic rewards, which are independent of both the prestige accorded various tasks and the quality of job performance; social status is independent of marital, legal, and economic status; all status derives from the membership in the collective. Finally, the political system is direct democracy; there are no impediments to male or female participation in politics. In sum, the kibbutz system approaches absolute equality in the economic, political, social, and private spheres. The root cause of female subjugation has been unequivocally removed, and sexual equality must now follow.

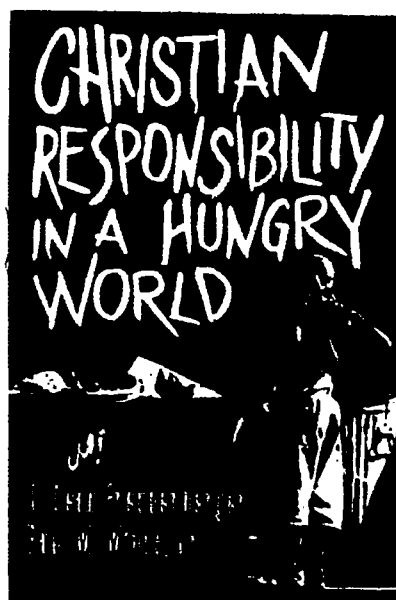
But it does not. And that is the important central theme of the book. After three generations of kibbutz life, there is today about an 80 per cent sexual division of labor in the various kibbutzim; that is, women are again holding typically female occupations centering around children, housekeeping, nursing, and general services. Significantly, this sexual division of labor is more pronounced among younger members. In politics women are underrepresented in committees dealing with economy, work, security, and general policymaking; they are somewhat overrepresented in committees dealing with social, educational, and cultural problems. "The higher the authority of an office or committee, the lower the percentage of women in it."

Women themselves tend to prefer to work in mixed sex groups or under male leadership. Despite women being better off in the numbers of years of education attained than their male counterparts, they nonetheless follow the educational road leading to kindergarten and elementary school teaching and medical nursing. Men, on the other hand, are overrepresented in the educational tracks leading to jobs in agriculture, engineering, economics, and management. As recent American data demonstrate, so also the kibbutz educational system—women consistently fall below men in scholarly achievement after the ninth grade. Tiger and Shepherd even claim that “this discrepancy between the sexes seems to be wider here than in comparable modern societies.” In military service (women are subject to the draft) kibbutz girls, like other Israeli girls, do secretarial, service, and other noncombatant jobs. Most important, the authors confirm the findings of previous studies that the family in the kibbutz has risen from a subordinate position to a salient one. It may come as a shock to some and as a comfort to others that in the course of time the family has reemerged as a basic and central unit of kibbutz life. It cannot be emphasized enough—and the authors neglect no opportunity to do so—that *women themselves, often against the strong opposition of the men, have been the main instigators of this familization.*

Thus, after three generations of enthusiastic experience in the radically different organization of life in the kibbutz, and after the kibbutz movement has demonstrated that utopian communities can successfully structure new social realities, *the one great exception* not amenable to radical change is apparent: the sex-role-permeated life of women and their very own world, the family.

In terms of research and methodology, Tiger and Shepherd are above reproach. They study the transformational process of the family and the women in the kibbutzim by making use of census as well as newly collected data, and subject these to a combination of well-established statistical methods. Aided by research consultants both in Israel and the United States, they produce a wealth of tables and charts, as well as an impressive research appendix. The book takes on a scholarly, almost too academic, quality at times, but this is

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amply offset by an extremely readable main text. The general reader might be tempted to ignore the scholarly apparatus. I urge him, and particularly her, not to do so, for it is only through such a careful study of the detail that one can approach the complex question of the biological bases of sex-differentiated behavior. And that is the key to the book.

Women in the Kibbutz is not just another book on the kibbutz movement, but it is an admirably well-chosen case study in a larger and more fundamental investigation into the biological foundations of human behavior. In another much-discussed book Tiger wrote with Robin Fox (*The Imperial Animal*) the term "biogrammar" is used for this bedrock basis of behavior. Except for some brief remarks in the "Conclusions," there is little mention of this "biogrammar" in *Women of the Kibbutz*. Yet, in a very important sense, the book is precisely about genetically programmed behavioral propensities that are biologically different in the genders. Readers familiar with *The Imperial Animal*—and those who are not will, I hope, now be motivated to pick it up—will find in the case of the women of the kibbutz convincing empirical evidence of the existence of a sexually differentiated programmed biogrammar. Such evidence may go very much against our most firmly held beliefs and hopes. I personally have a general suspicion, even a loathing, of biological-evolutionary determinism. We cannot, however, ignore the kind of serious research findings established by Tiger and Shepher.

Whereas in the earlier book the arguments made by Tiger and Fox were much too tenuous and, at least to my mind, too intuitively derived, the present study, much narrower in scope, does stand up. In almost three hundred pages of well-constructed argument they offer convincing demonstration of their summary: "We have evidence that sex differences in political and economic activity are universal, that the care of young children is virtually everywhere a female monopoly, and that some widely argued explanations for this universality are weak, improbable, or partial. Our data show...that the overwhelming majority [of kibbutz women] not only accept their situations but have sought them. *They have acted*

against the principles of their socialization and ideology, against the wishes of the men of their communities, against the economic interest of the kibbutzim, in order to be able to devote more time and energy to private maternal activities rather than to economic and public ones..." (italics added).

For the kibbutz women liberation means to be with their children, to take care of them, and to pursue traditional female roles. Liberation means to be liberated from nonbiogrammatically directed patterns of behavior. Tiger and Shepher present a strong case for the species-wide attraction between mothers and their young. Against all obstacles these women of the kibbutz have made their "natural" decision. Under the forces of the sex-specific biogrammar they have liberated themselves from externally constructed sociopolitical pseudoliberation. *Their* liberation, no doubt, will present a serious challenge to everyone who claims that women who devote themselves to bearing and nurturing children or to other typically female-caring functions are victims of sexual stereotyping. Tiger and Shepher present us with the paradox that what for the modern American feminist is the slavery to be opposed is for the kibbutz woman her freely chosen and at long last realized liberation.

The most likely reaction to these unfashionable findings—aside from ignoring them—will be to search for other explanations. The authors themselves explore alternative interpretations, ranging from arguments of insufficient revolution, defective socialization, male conspiracy, and retreat to external influences. Inasmuch as the kibbutz is an "open society," the external influence argument suggests itself as the chief counterinterpretation to that offered by Tiger and Shepher. Israeli society, it will be maintained, was in its early years more similar to that of the kibbutzim, in particular as far as the sexual division of labor is concerned. With ongoing changes in the wider society, traditional forces increasingly reappeared and exercised external pressures upon the kibbutzim. But it will be difficult to explain why the kibbutz system failed only in this one area of reorganizing life, whereas it succeeded so conspicuously in repelling these same external influences in other areas. Most strikingly, the kibbutzim persisted in their opposition to private property.

Then, too, there is the curious situation that the sexual division of labor within the rest of Israel is much lower than it is in the kibbutzim, where there have been continuous and conscious efforts to eliminate such differences. Other possible counterinterpretations seem equally flawed. Wherever we turn, we encounter the remarkable fact that it was the women themselves who chose traditional female roles centering around their children. Again and again the records show that men insisted that women have an equal share in the traditional male world. One is tempted to see sexual egalitarianism in the kibbutz as a male chauvinist hang-up.

The book raises additional and fascinating questions that deserve further study. For example, Tiger and Shepher show that the academic and sports performances, as well as general interests, of girls in the kibbutz schools change sharply at about the onset of puberty. Similar findings are available from other countries, including the United States. Tiger and Shepher furthermore indicate that where kibbutz women do enter occupations and activities that have been traditionally male (such as politics), they do so most frequently *after* the child-raising period is over. (Golda Meir's career comes readily to mind.) There are no systematic data about this age factor, either from Israel or from other countries, but, impressionistically, one suspects the kibbutz women are not atypical in this respect either. If this suspicion is correct, a rather daring hypothesis suggests itself: *the biogrammatical differences between men and women are strongest during the child-bearing and child-rearing period and recede afterward*. Obviously, much more research on a crosscultural basis would be necessary to validate this hypothesis.

If the hypothesis is to be entertained seriously, the implications are not at all antagonistic to the feminist insistence on equal rights. On the contrary, it would become even more important to guarantee equal rights to women who wish to enter the traditionally male sectors of the labor market at a later age. The fact that many women, precisely because of their children, are handicapped in the earlier years of their careers makes it imperative that they not be burdened with the additional handicap of sex discrimination during that time and in later years. The hypothesis would

further suggest that women will have to come to terms consciously and intelligently with the biological forces influencing them. Education *before* and career maintenance *during* the child-dominated period would have to be viewed from a more realistic perspective than is the case now. If the biological factor is indeed a basic force influencing and restricting behavior—as I am inclined to agree with the authors it is—and if we furthermore supplement that crucial factor with the age factor—

as the authors have not done—I have a strong suspicion that startling findings will emerge. Pursuing that course, I believe women's genuine concerns and the chance for removing the obstacles that nature and society have inflicted upon them may be much more realistically addressed. No doubt we would then be in for lively and quite new discussions; which is a happy prospect indeed, the old discussions having grown tiresome and stale beyond description.

saically and ingloriously. The mood is caught in Hemingway's Lieutenant Henry in *A Farewell to Arms* (1929): "I was blown up while we were eating cheese," he says.

The pointlessness of the experience in the trenches led men to despair and to an ironic perception of events. Aichinger notes this mode, but does not handle it with the brilliance and convincing detail found in Fussell's recent *The Great War and Modern Memory* (1975). Nonetheless, their common conclusion is that of Hemingway: "Abstract words such as glory, honor, courage, or hallow were obscene."

As might have been expected, the interwar period was marked by a series of starkly realistic war novels. Yet most of them, particularly the work of such actual combatants as Laurence Stallings, William March, James Stevens, and Thomas Boyd, left no lasting impression. When the postwar preoccupation with horrifying details and bitter remorse had been exhausted, these writers and their works fell into permanent neglect.

More lasting and influential were those authors who took the war as a metaphor to express the wider disillusionment of a formerly idealistic and optimistic generation. They saw themselves as looking on, helpless and appalled, at the antics of the men who appeared to have done very well out of the war. The Treaty of Versailles, the Red scares, Harding normalcy, and the rampant materialism of the period disgusted such writers as E.E. Cummings, Ernest Hemingway, John Dos Passos, and William Faulkner. They all turned to the 1914-18 war (in which none of them had actually fought) as a means of making apt and penetrating comments about their own time.

With such a background it is understandable that the men who went to war in 1941 were more sophisticated and less expectant about the experience than their fathers had been. Indeed, as Aichinger notes, "The characteristics shared by the protagonists of the World War II novels is a total lack of the crusading spirit." Fictional protagonists who fight for a cause (except for the likes of Noah Ackerman in Irwin Shaw's 1948 novel *The Young Lions*) are virtually nonexistent. Instead, men fought well in order to return home more quickly; the end of the war was the only means to escape from the military and

The American Soldier in Fiction, 1880-1963: A History of Attitudes Toward Warfare and the Military Establishment

by Peter Aichinger

(Iowa State University Press; 145 pp.; \$7.50)

Jeffrey L. Lant

As social history has increased in importance in recent years, scholars make use of a much wider range of materials to determine what are thought to be characteristic mental attitudes. In trying to approach a more nearly complete understanding of the total past the historian's attention must now go far beyond the standard documentary sources.

In the process new subdisciplines of the subject field have arisen, one of the most fruitful of which is history and literature. Practitioners of this subdiscipline use literature—not merely the classics that transcend periods, but mediocre poems utterly time-bound, popular but fast-fading novels, ephemeral street ballads and music hall songs—to study an era. As a mine for social historians such productions, no matter how grossly they fail as "art," are invaluable.

Professor Peter Aichinger, Chairman of the Department of English, Collège Militaire Royal de Saint-Jean in Quebec, has written a book that seeks to indicate "some of the ways in which the American war novels have reflected the attitude of the American people toward warfare and the military establishment." To do so, he has examined some eighty novels.

Aichinger's essay, for that is what it

is, divides these works into four major periods: 1880-1917, 1917-1939, 1939-1952, and 1953-1963. These, he feels, correspond to the major epochs in the American experience in warfare.

The men of the first period were bred in the heady days of American high Victorianism, when imperial and expansionist attitudes were rife and acceptable. They constituted a generation of happy warriors. They believed war had a salutary and rational purpose; it was the anvil upon which nations strengthened themselves. As the frontier was closed by the incursions of a more civil society, men looked expectantly to war as a splendid alternative. If wars did not occur naturally, it was entirely proper to force them upon the reluctant.

Jingoists spoke often of such virtues as patriotism, loyalty, comradeship, and bravery—emphatically and in capital letters. Thus they went joyously to their crusade in France, where such virtues would surely be realized. As one of the characters in Willa Cather's pro-war *One Of Ours* (1922) says, "Well, we can't arrive any too soon for us, boys."

Naive and hopelessly earnest young men were blown to bits in Flanders fields, not in heroic victories, but pro-