INTRODUCTION

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The four papers in this collection provide a feast of rich ethnographies of immigrant working women. This in itself is extremely welcome, as in-depth studies on this subject are rare, and give special insight to the *process* of adaptation to new roles in a new culture. Beyond this, as a group these papers provide detailed material on immigrants from several different societies of origin. The material in this volume is of a quality that permits powerful systematic comparisons. Since some of the studies cover the same or related populations, there is also a particularly valuable element of replication. There are data on women from several Eastern European groups (Gannagé), on several Southern European groups (Gannagé; Meintel et al.), on Haitians and Colombians (Meintel et al.; Stafford), and on Jewish women from Eastern Europe (Gannagé) and in the Yemen (Gilad).

In this brief introduction, it is only possible to discuss a few of the many themes in the four studies which are potentially relevant to social policy and social theory. The quality and depth of the material in the four studies allows unusual cross-referencing among the several factors in the complex equation that expresses immigrant women's situation at home and at work. The complexity of the ultimate equation derives from its overlapping domains. The authors are concerned with the long unfolding of the immigration process; with the international labor market and the position of women within it; and with the dynamics of conjugal roles and the response of these dynamics to changing access to resources for both husbands and wives.

All of the authors explicitly or implicitly question why, when immigrant women contribute substantially to the support of the household through their wages, they do not have greater equality with their husbands. According to the "resources" theory of conjugal power, women who make substantial contributions to the resources needed to maintain domestic groups tend to have a greater say in decisions, and their husbands tend to share more in domestic tasks (Blood and Wolf 1965). The women described here work outside the home, but they also have major responsibilities for the daily functioning of their households and the care of their children. Yet their double contribution does not seem to change subordination to husbands in such key areas as freedom of movement outside the home, equal priority for educational or leisure needs on a par with those of their husbands, or the sharing of domestic tasks.

By looking specifically at immigrant women, the studies in this volume allow us to frame this important question in two significant ways: (a) in relation to models of conjugal roles in

the various societies of origin; and (b) in relation to change through time. These women share with Canadian and American women the experience of managing two jobs—a double working day. The constraints, and advantages (especially the advantage of an independent wage), of their two jobs are common to all working mothers. But immigrant women bring with them models of how men and women should manage their responsibilities and relationships. These models were generated in the cultures and ecological constraints of their home societies, and they differ accordingly from each other, and from models of male-female responsibilities and relationships in their new home. By comparing and contrasting the original models of their home countries, and how these are adapted, we can see how the models themselves give different meanings to a situation which is objectively the same for all of the women described. Furthermore, the elements common to these various models suggest underlying features which are not dependent on specific cultural or ecological constraints.

Importantly, the studies in this volume catch the moment in time when, as a result of immigration, old models are engaged in new situations. Where the lack of fit is extreme, as in the Yemeni case (Gilad), this throws into relief the relationship between the traditional model of male-female relationships and the enabling conditions in which the model functions or fails to function. But this is only for a moment, because the next generation will have its own models, blending those of the new country and the old. Understanding these models is yet another enterprise for which studies like these provide a necessary baseline.

The papers in this volume allow us to begin taking account of ethnic differences in adapting to the constraints of the following domains: immigration, the labor market, women's domestic roles, and access to resources. This raises the question of what is meant by "ethnic differences." We can see this by grouping immigrant communities by regional origin. The present collection provides sets for the Caribbean, for Southern Europe, for Eastern Europe (largely Catholic), and for the Yemeni Jews of Israel.

With this perspective, we can see certain common patterns in the traditional definitions of conjugal roles, as well as clear differences. The groups from the Caribbean area (Haitians and Colombians) are characterized by strong male dominance in husband/wife relations (Meintel et al.; Stafford), as are the Southern- and Eastern-European groups (Gannagé; Meintel et al.), and the traditional Yemeni Jews (Gilad). Interestingly, among both Haitians and Colombians, there is a marked reluctance by some men to commit themselves to the husband/father role. Although a husband expects to be recognized as head of the family, he may withdraw from the husband/father roles altogether if he feels threatened by the obligations they entail. Thus, both Meintel et al. and Stafford report that Caribbean women emigrate

to provide better for their dependents in the absence of male support. Meintel et al. (p. 29) cite the case of a Colombian woman whose husband left her after the birth of each of their three sons, the last time permanently.

In all of the societies of origin cited in this volume, the male roles of husband and father are identified with the responsibilities of provider and family head. These constitute core roles for men and are expected of men of a given age as a mark of adult status. They are especially valued by individuals, and serve as goals and measures of worth. Indeed, a distinguishing feature of core roles is that people care desperately about successfully filling them. For a given type of actor, core roles represent the most complete possible fulfillment of what they understand to be their potential and their rights. There is also a strong responsibility to fill a core role successfully. The sanctions supporting core roles are both internal and external, as well as subjective and objectified by the allocation of resources, respect, and other valued roles (see Note 1).

Despite the wide range of ethnic origins among the immigrant women described in these papers, all of the women share a deep commitment to the core role of mother. They describe their decisions to work (or to temporarily leave work), the organization of household tasks and their own leisure, the foregoing of educational opportunities, and their efforts to save for the future or to find a better job, in terms of their responsibilities as mothers. This is partly a matter of obligation to contribute to household subsistence—to feed and clothe their families (Gannagé; Gilad; Meintel et al.; Stafford). But in addition, the women's own aspirations are defined in terms of their children's eventual success, for which they consider themselves responsible.

The several populations described in this volume show much more variation in the core role of wife than in the core role of mother. This is clear in the data on marital status for the four populations studied by Meintel et al. Although nearly all of the women in the European groups in that study were currently in a conjugal union (83 percent), markedly fewer Haitian and Colombian women were living with a spouse. Clearly, women's roles cannot be understood apart from the main roles with which they mesh. Where men are reluctant to commit themselves to the family head/provider responsibilities of the husband and father roles, women must take these on. In the Caribbean, women tend to do this as mothers, and the matrifocal family is one expression of this (see R. T. Smith 1956; 1973). The "macho" male role is an alternative core role for men in the Caribbean. It is defined as predatory on other families' women (Stafford).

Immigrants carry with them from home the definitions of core roles through which they understand the world. These roles organize behavior by determining goals and priorities, and by setting

constraints to adaptive responses to problems of the immigrant situation. Where life in the new country no longer permits the traditional core male and female roles, major conflicts and redefinitions of roles are likely to occur. This is the situation described by Gilad for Yemeni men in Israel. Their old roles as family heads and providers, and as gatekeepers for women's access to the outside world, were impossible in Israel. There, the occupational structure did not permit men to support their families without their wives' assistance. The schools educated their children outside the sphere of paternal authority, and the army gave their daughters a freedom in late adolescence inconceivable in Yemen. The new authority of Yemeni women cannot be understood apart from Israeli society's simultaneous restriction on their husbands in successfully filling their traditional core roles. This is not a result of the immigration situation per se, nor strictly of male/female conjugal interaction. In this case, immigration provided very limited status and occupational options for men. This, in turn, created strong pressures towards women's participation in the labor force, in education, and in the army. An entirely new role has been created: that of adult, unmarried daughter (Gilad n.d.). This new role is a function of the internal dynamics of the Yemeni immigrant family interacting with the options provided by the political economy of Israel.

As core roles change, so does the balance between family members seeking to live these roles. However, at any given time, the definition of core roles structures the meanings attributed to what people do. With astonishing regularity across the wide socio-cultural span described in the papers in this volume, women's work outside the house is defined as "helping" the husband to support the family in his core role as "provider." A woman is not seen to have an occupational role in her own right. Alternatively, and often simultaneously, a woman's outside work is seen as an extension of her core roles as "wife" and "mother." Authors in this volume report that women are careful not to threaten their husband's sense of competence in the core "provider" role by seeming to assume this role themselves if the man is unemployed, or can only get poorly paid or irregular work. Instead, the wife asserts that she is only doing what is necessary to care for her family as a wife/mother should; that her paid work is really "just helping" her husband. Whatever the effects for women of increased resource control and increased total work load, paid work outside the home has not itself affected the definitions of core roles in these samples.

A classic discussion of the "helping syndrome" appears in Epstein's account of husband/wife law partnerships (1971). Epstein reports that professionally qualified women lawyers in joint practice with their husbands describe themselves as "helping" their husbands. She relates this pattern to three major dynamics:

1. The nature of the requirements for success in the legal profession, a particularly competitive orientation, and concern with avoiding conflicts caused by competition between husband and wife;

2. The women's priority concern for the welfare of their children, and also for their responsibilities as wives for their husbands' comfort;

3. The constraints of husbands' possible sexual jealousy of the wives' professional autonomy.

In these "purpose-built" professional partnerships, the wives gave priority to their roles as wives by avoiding competition with their husbands and by avoiding situations which might arouse sexual jealousy. In addition, they gave priority to their roles as mothers through strategies that allowed them to retain responsibility for early socialization. They were concerned about being "good mothers," and guilt about this even led one woman to curtail her legal work.

> Although many (lawyer-wives) had aspirations in law careers, they also aspired to become mothers and wives. Many would have completely forsaken their career ambitions to pursue the normal feminine roles if that had to be the choice. (Epstein 1971:559)

Significantly, although the husband/father in these law partnerships sometimes "helped" his wife with domestic tasks, "The wives assumed primary responsibility for management of the home and care of the children" (ibid.).

There are obvious differences between these highly qualified professional women who are acting in formal partnership with their husbands, and the immigrant women in these studies who work in menial or at best semiskilled jobs, separate from their husbands. Yet the "helping syndrome" appears in all these cases. The extreme instance is shown by Yemeni immigrant men, who plummeted from traditionally secure positions of religious and economic heads of households within which women were effectively secluded, to being marginalized in both work and domestic roles. Even there, wives reported that their often better-paid jobs were "helping" their husbands. Gilad's study in this volume notes that "mothering is the most valued of all their activities," and that "husbands continually reinforce this notion." Women in Gilad's study commented that whatever the actual authority situation within the home, ". . . men have to be humored because they naturally must feel superior." The same tendency to define the efforts of each spouse in relation to the core role of the other is reported in the study of Haitian immigrants in New York (Stafford), in the study of mainly Eastern and Southern European garment workers in Toronto (Gannagé), and in the study of women

from Eastern and Southern Europe and from the Caribbean area (Haiti and Colombia) working in Montréal (Meintel et al.).

Another indication of resistance to change on the part of core conjugal roles is their resilience in relation to the constraints of the developmental cycle. The papers here note cases where the husband was caring for the children or helping with household tasks while a child was ill, or when the children were young. Later, with the crisis past, the husband withdrew from these domestic tasks (Gannagé; Gilad; Meintel et al.; Stafford; see also Goody and Grootheus 1979). Indeed, Gannagé reports instances where men who normally helped their wives ceased a domestic task when another woman was present. Thus, even where men share in "women's tasks," it is on a highly *contingent* basis: during a crisis, to make it possible for their wives to continue with financially necessary jobs, or when not observed by women other than their wives.

There is, of course, a lack of symmetry in spousal "helping" in male and female core conjugal roles. For men, "helping" is potentially demeaning; for women it is a matter of increased self-respect as well as a source of income. Thus, there is a built-in tendency for men to withdraw from the sharing of tasks which fall within women's core roles. But there is also a tendency for women to continue helping with male "provider" roles despite the absence of reciprocal help with domestic tasks from their husbands. Indeed, the pattern of two jobs for women (wage-earning and domestic), which is repeatedly found in all of the studies reported here, precisely reflects this imbalance. All the *sets* of women described here have taken on an outside job (or even, as in the case of lawyers, a profession), yet continue to have primary responsibilities for their homes and children. Furthermore, the major commitment of these women is to the core roles of wife and mother. This may be a strategem for managing the conflicts which are inevitable when two jobs are carried simultaneously (see especially Gannagé; see also Note 2). If priorities between two jobs were not clear, each conflict between the demands of the jobs would create a decision-making problem, as well as problems in dealing with the demands themselves.

Role definitions are social products, not the creations of individual women. As the "helping" phenomenon shows, core roles are shaped by the role sets into which they lock. It is here that the four papers on *immigrant* women make a special contribution. By looking at the cultural and economic constraints on conjugal roles in the societies where these women originated, we can see how traditional definitions of core roles emerged in those societies. Women from Southern and Eastern Europe have descended mainly from peasant families in which the labor of both husband and wife is seen as interdependent. In those cases, the distinction between domestic and external economic domains (Fortes 1958; Rosaldo 1974; Sanday 1974) is probably not as helpful in provid-

ing an explanation of core roles as the power dimension, thoughtfully considered by Meintel et al., and by Gannagé. Women from Southern and Eastern Europe are central to subsistence production, a situation that transfers easily to factory work. However, these women take care not to challenge the authority of their husbands, even while privately considering their own contribution to the domestic economy as equal or greater. Rogers (1975) has suggested that this "myth of male dominance" may permit women in peasant societies to retain control at the level of household subsistence and management by supporting men's claims to political superiority in community affairs.

The Yemeni Jewish women described by Gilad had no specifically economic role in their traditional society, but were responsible for the management of the household and the care of children. They were effectively secluded, as were the Muslim women of the Yemen. The traditional role of Yemeni men was a relatively high-status combination of religious scholar and skilled craftsman. As a group, the men constituted the political and religious authority of their community. The subordination of women was reinforced by a strict pollution observance. Yemeni women were not educated, and were excluded from both the Jewish literate community and the wider world.

Finally, in the Caribbean area societies of origin (Haiti and Colombia) described in this volume, women were often either engaged in unstable conjugal (or quasi-conjugal) relationships, or were themselves supporting their children or younger siblings. Where both husband and wife were working, they tended to keep their money separate and to have different views of their responsibilities for family support. Men saw themselves as partially responsible for supporting children. Women saw themselves as bearing the ultimate responsibility for their own and their children's support, and perpetually struggled to secure some contribution from their children's fathers. In many cases, this was made more difficult by men's commitment to more than one household, and by their courting activities. Thus, the economic endeavors of these Colombian and Haitian spouses lacked a common objective. Their economic endeavors were not interdependent in the close-meshed manner of the ex-peasant couples from Europe, nor in the segregated and parallel fashion of the Yemeni families. Instead, the economic activities of Caribbean area couples were clearly segregated and independent, or even antagonistic in their goals.

These different sets of immigrants provide contrasting patterns of conjugal-role alteration in the immigration process. Originally, couples from Eastern and Southern Europe had closely interdependent economic roles, with a clear recognition (albeit myth) of male dominance. After immigration, the economic roles of these couples remained closely linked, and their pattern of male dominance did not seem to alter. Despite major contributions

which these immigrant women still make to their household economies, they remain strictly subordinate to their husbands.

In Yemen, spouses had quite separate and segregated economic roles. Men held relatively high status in the wider society and *vis-à-vis* their women. As immigrants to Israel, Yemeni women became economically active outside the home, while their husbands were marginalized, both economically and in terms of status in the community. In Israel, Yemeni husbands and wives continue to see the welfare of their family as a joint concern, but the authority of the husbands is severely curtailed. Instead of this leading to a redefinition of conjugal roles based on the sharing of domestic tasks and the "provider" role, both spouses continue to define the husband as "provider" and the wife as primarily a "wife" and "mother" (Gilad). Although the addition of wives' vital wages has changed the contribution of resources to their families, while at the same time husbands' loss of status in their new community has further undermined male domestic authority, this has not altered the definition of core conjugal roles.

The Haitian and Colombian couples described in this volume show a shift in conjugal power and authority after immigration which is exactly the opposite. In North America, the economic roles of Haitian and Colombian men and women seem to have become more interdependent than they were in the country of origin. If anything, men have moved up in status with the possibility of steady jobs at relatively substantial wages. There is some suggestion (Stafford) that Haitian men are better able to control the activities of their wives' outside work than they were in the home country. However, where male immigrants from Colombia and Haiti are unable to find work, their dependence on wives is experienced as threatening. Meanwhile, immigrant women in these groups continue to see their core roles as those of wife, and especially mother. They see their jobs as contributing to the responsibilities these roles entail. Where their own abilities to provide are insecure, the husbands resent their wives' jobs. This suggests that for husbands, the "provider" role remains central.

A schematic comparison of the different sets of immigrants described in this volume suggests that domestic authority is not directly affected by whether or not spousal economic roles are joint (in the sense of carrying out interdependent tasks in the same enterprise), parallel and segregated, or independent. In all of the cases described here, wives acknowledge the legitimacy, or at least the inevitability, of male dominance. On the other hand, effective male authority within the household appears to be related to the role of the male in external economic and status systems. Although the data presented here are not systematic on this point, there is evidence that where a man's external position is weak, his wife, children, and the man himself may question his authority. Only under these conditions is there a significant change in the task-sharing and decision-making

patterns of the conjugal dyad. Gilad notes that where Yemeni men have failed to obtain work that conveys a position of respect in the immigrant community, they lose authority within the family while their wives' contributions become a significant factor in domestic role dynamics. Haitian women who were originally responsible for bringing their men to New York continue to have a relatively dominant position in the relationship. Indeed, Stafford comments that this is a source of friction. Among the European immigrant couples studied by Meintel et al., task and decision sharing occurred only when a man had withdrawn entirely from the "provider" role through unemployment or incapacitation.

The studies in this volume suggest that the resources a wife brings into the household do not determine the balance of dominance between husband and wife (and indirectly, the pattern of task sharing and decision making). Rather, the determinant is the relative lack of resources provided by the husband when the core male roles are those of "provider" and household head. Nor is this a matter of weighing the contribution by each spouse. Only when the husband's contribution can no longer be defined as "providing" for his family, and as being responsible for the family's economic support and status in the community, is his position in relation to his wife and children substantially altered. This explains the caution wives show in insisting they are only "helping" their husbands to support the family.

Paradoxically, although their new life differs radically from the old, immigrant couples may have less flexibility to renegotiate conjugal tasks and decision making than second-generation and indigenous couples. This is because immigrant couples bring with them definitions of "mother," "wife," and "provider" which were forged in traditional societies and which stress the responsibilities and deference of young adults to the senior generation. These obligations tend to be framed in terms of the hallowed importance of traditional core roles. This is a social dynamic which is anchored in the senior generation's control of resources such as land, capital, and houses, and their need to retain access to the labor of young adults. In the New World, education and the vicissitudes of the labor market are the chief determinants of adult status. Here, resources tend to be built up anew by each generation through its own labor. This is evident in cases reported both in the Canadian samples and in the Yemen, where the children of immigrant parents employed in working-class jobs have moved into middle-class or professional occupations. Where this happens, there are new middle-class definitions of core roles to be assimilated, as well as those of the new society's culture. There is no doubt that the cultural forms of core roles, and probably also the pattern of interdependence, will change for this second generation. But it is not yet clear whether these changes will cause fundamental changes in the primacy given to wife/mother roles by women, and to provider/household-head roles by men. Such changes may (or may not) modify

the dynamics by which financial need propels women into jobs, which in turn further threatens the male provider role and leads men to avoid any basic redefinition of core roles that associates them with low-status women's tasks. Indeed, it was in the professional upper-middle class, in "partnerships" of married lawyers, that Epstein first described the "helping" syndrome and women's struggles with their two jobs (1971). Despite socio-economic and cultural variations, core conjugal roles appear highly resistant to change.

NOTES

1. Core roles are those which are especially valued in a society for people in a given position. Since the social construction of sex and reproduction are central in every society, core roles include conjugal roles. However, core roles are not restricted to sex and reproduction. For instance, in southern Africa, the Ngoni peoples allotted the warrior role to young men. For a young Ngoni man, the warrior role was an especially valued core role because through it, each individual male proved his virility and stated his claim to resources, cattle, and a wife. The core role of warrior also allowed a man access to adult roles such as household head and elder. In addition to being a formal requirement before a man could be a household head or elder, the role of warrior was a matter of pride which was basic to male identity. Thus, warrior was a core role because it was central to the role structure of Ngoni societies.

   The most powerful core roles are probably those which link sex and age capacities to socially-defined roles. For women, virtually every society defines sexuality and maternity as core roles—though the cultural form of these roles varies widely. Among the Kanuri of Bornu in northeastern Nigeria, there are the roles of wife/mother and of *zower*, a divorced woman. A wife/mother is chaste, secluded within the home, and devoted to rearing infants and children. By contrast, a *zower* is free to manage her own sexuality and to move about the city and countryside. Ronald Cohen has argued that the extremely high divorce rate among the Kanuri is partly a reaction to the contradiction between these two women's roles: men fear their wives' *zower*-like behavior, and women resent their husbands' insistence on the rigid seclusion that defines the "wife" role. Both core-role models are available to Kanuri women, and they seem to want elements of both (R. Cohen 1971). I suspect that this is because it is difficult for a *zower* to be a mother. Indeed, Abner Cohen reports that among the politically and culturally similar Ibadan Hausa, divorced women were not allowed to have children with them. In that culture, the role of a free, di-

vorced woman was defined as antithetical to that of a mother (A. Cohen 1969).

2. Such strategies are not necessarily conscious, or socially enforced. They may represent the best practical alternative to a problem which is repeatedly encountered by those in a given role (see E. N. Goody 1978).

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