THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE CONJUGAL POWER BASE: YEMENI JEWISH COUPLES IN AN ISRAELI TOWN

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Cette dissertation analyse les changements dans les relations conjugales des immigrés juifs yéménites depuis leur émigration du Yémen pré-industrialisé jusqu'à leur enracinement dans l'Israël contemporain. Les écrivaines féministes prétendent souvent que, sous le capitalisme industrialisé, "le foyer" devient un domaine "privé" et l'empire des femmes, tandis que le domaine "politico-juridique" devient "publique" et exclut les femmes. Cette dissertation montre que c'est plutôt le contraire qui est arrivé aux femmes qui ont fait l'objet de nos recherches. C'est en Israël où les femmes ont réussi à s'imposer dans la vie publique—sur le marché du travail, dans les activités communautaires, dans l'éducation permanente, etc.—et leur participation dans des activités en dehors du foyer leur a permis de gagner plus de pouvoir et d'autorité à la maison que ce qui a été le cas des femmes au Yémen. Je soutiens également qu'il est impossible d'analyser la place des femmes immigrées dans la société israélienne sans comprendre les expériences de leur époux dans le domaine économique de la société intégrale.

This essay analyzes changes in the conjugal relationships of Yemeni Jewish immigrants from the time of their migration from pre-industrial Yemen to their entrenchment in contemporary Israel. Feminist writers often contend that under industrialized capitalism, the "domestic" domain becomes both "private" and the dominion of women, while the "politico-jural" domain becomes "public" and excludes women. The opposite happens to women in this study. In Israel, Yemeni Jewish women have achieved a public life for themselves in many areas, including paid labor, community activities, adult education, and so on. Their participation in extra-domestic activities has enabled them to gain more power and authority in the home than was experienced by women in Yemen. It is also argued that the place of immigrant women in Israeli society cannot be analyzed without understanding the experiences of their spouses in the economic domain of the wider society.

The Jews of Yemen are one of the immigrant groups in the mosaic of contemporary Israel. To some extent, all 75,000 Yemeni

Jewish immigrants to Israel have endured radical changes as a result of experiences in Israeli society. For example, among Jewish women in Yemen, women's status as integral members of natal, conjugal, and extended families is the primary determinant of women's activities. In Israeli society, women's position is also determined by activities in other spheres such as the work-place, working and religious women's associations, and adult education courses. The Israeli world of women is considerably more complex than the life-style of women in Yemen.

This essay analyzes the restructuring of conjugal relations among Yemeni Jews in an Israeli town. It focuses on how wives' participation in extra-domestic activities, particularly in paid employment, have helped to precipitate considerable changes in relationships with their husbands. The ethnography begins in Yemen, where all husbands and wives in this study lived from five to thirty years before immigration to Israel between 1948-1951. I will then describe the early marriage careers of these couples, why women entered the paid labor force in Israel, and how the experiences of spouses in Israeli society have helped to transform the conjugal power base.

To analyze institutional shifts in wives' and husbands' activities, I have juxtaposed life in Yemen and Israel through the distinction between domestic and public. Since this analytical device has become the source of considerable debate in recent years, I will clarify my use of the concepts domestic and public incorporating Yemeni Jewish definitions (see Bujra 1982; Imray and Middleton 1983; Reiter 1975; Rosaldo 1974, 1980; Sacks 1975; Sciama 1981).

Domestic (*bayti*) refers to the residential unit, to almost all activities that take place in the home, including food processing, child rearing, and housework, as well as to kin-based relationships which are usually located outside of the household or kin group (see Note 1). Public (*tzibori*) refers to activities and social relationships that are usually located outside of the household or kin group. Thus, work in paid employment belongs to the public domain, as do activities in the synagogue, adult education, and local politics. In some instances, domestic and public are not characterized by spatial references. For example, Yemenis consider marketing for household goods as a domestic activity, but when information not pertaining to household maintenance is exchanged with the merchant, marketing is a public activity. When a political meeting takes place in the household, the residential unit is no longer solely domestic, but concurrently a public place. Thus, the terms domestic and public refer not only to the residential unit and what lies outside of it, but to any activity or social relationship, regardless of the usual definition of the space in which they occur. Bujra (1982:22) states that if locating gender-based activities in domestic and public realms is to have any explanatory value, "what must be

investigated is the *relationship*, the character of articulation, between domestic and nondomestic spheres of action." I agree with Bujra, and will attempt such an analysis in this paper.

My data challenge some aspects of the domestic/public distinction that feminist debate has proposed for analyzing the lives of women in capitalist societies. One aspect of the debate claims that women are almost universally confined to domestic spheres, while the public domain belongs to men (Imray and Middleton 1983; Reiter 1975:281; Sciama 1981:90). Another aspect of the debate states that the privatization of domestic labor in capitalist societies physically isolates housewives from each other, thus encouraging women's alienation and inability to organize themselves (Bujra 1982:25). As will be illustrated, Yemeni Jewish wives in contemporary Israel are not confined to domestic spheres. In fact, the opposite has occurred. The women in this study appreciated the privatization of domestic labor as a significant improvement over entrenchment in the mother-in-law-dominated households which they endured in Yemen. Too often, feminist interpretation claims to speak for all women in all capitalist societies. Thus, the ideological underpinnings of feminist interpretation often preclude cross-cultural variation.

In macro-economic terms, women's subordination and exploitation in industrial production may be universal. Nevertheless, no matter how limited their power in the industrial arena, women in many developing and industrial societies who work in paid employment have great power and authority in the domestic domain (Cohen 1961:52-54; Lewenhak 1980:244; Makhlouf and Obermeyer 1978:339; Salaff 1981; Salaff and Wong 1982; Tilly and Scott 1978:116; Touba 1980:59). Moreover, women's participation in production is not simply a reflection of their domestic roles, as some writers have suggested (Wajcman 1981:15). A major conclusion of a recent Wenner-Gren conference on the sexual division of labor was summed up by Kelly (1981:272):

> The discussion . . . during the conference led to the conclusion that the division of labor by gender had different meanings depending on its cultural and social contexts. In addition, the activities that women perform are variously defined in terms of the content and the social values attached to them. It cannot be said that women's labor is intrinsically inferior to that of men or that it is universally judged to be so. What confers a differential value upon gender specific labor is the socially sanctioned rewards bestowed on or denied to groups of men and women.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Although accounts of the origin of Jewish settlement in Yemen on the southern tip of Saudi Arabia vary considerably, all historians agree that it is of some antiquity. By the fifth century, Jews were an established segment of the Himyar Kingdom of Southern Arabia. With the victory of Islam in this area (*circa* 628 C.E.), the Jews became a subjugated people and later a persecuted minority under the legal status of *d'himmi* (protected foreigner). Although other Jewish communities in the Arabian peninsula disappeared, the Yemeni diaspora population was distinguished by its tenacious existence in spite of the impact of plagues, economic adversity, persecution, and forced conversions to Islam until its return to Israel *en masse* in 1948 (Ahroni 1986). Under these circumstances, combined with a constant vision of return from exile to the Land of Israel, it is not surprising that when the opportunity to migrate became more feasible, Yemeni Jews did so in great numbers.

The immigration of Yemeni Jews to Israel began as early as 1882. Most of the original Yemeni Jewish population (50,000 people) arrived in Israel between 1948-1951, when the ruler of Yemen, Imam Achmed, granted permission for Jews to emigrate from Yemen. Today, Yemeni Jews comprise approximately four percent of the Jewish population in Israel (164,000 out of a population of about 3,700,000 people). Yemeni Jews live in largely homogeneous settlements such as *moshavim* (co-operative farms), and in the new towns and neighborhoods of large urban centers dispersed throughout the country. Jewish men in both pre-industrial and contemporary Yemen were and still are merchants, artisans, and craftsmen such as goldsmiths, weavers, tailors, and carpenters. Since there was no need for these occupations in the "modern" technological society of post-independence Israel, Yemeni Jewish men usually entered labor positions, particularly in construction, road building and maintenance, and gardening (see Note 2). The first generation of Western-educated, Israeli-born males now works largely in skilled labor and in professions such as law, accounting, and teaching. Middle-aged and older immigrant women often work as domestics and child minders (see Note 3). Younger, educated women work primarily in service occupations such as teaching and office work. Yemeni Jews of the immigrant generation are now an established segment of Israel's working class, and are lauded for their industrious attitudes. Although they are not politically organized on the basis of ethnic identity, they maintain cultural associations and often marry among themselves.

This study is based on extensive research in primary and secondary source materials. It focuses on information gathered from formal interviews of thirty-five women, aged thirty-five to fifty-five, and their husbands. Twenty of these women were the subject of intensive case studies. The women live in Gadot, a successful, new, "working class" town in the metropolitan Tel

Aviv area (see Note 4), where Jews of Yemeni origin or descent represent the second-largest ethnic category after Turks. In 1981, at the time of the research, there were 1,500 Yemenis out of a total of 12,000 residents in Gadot. The Yemenis are not residentially segregated, but are mixed with Jews from seventy countries of origin. Yemenis in Gadot differ significantly from those in homogeneous settlements in that they have non-Yemeni friends and neighbors. Thus, they have greater opportunities to incorporate or discard alien cultural attributes and norms.

CONJUGAL ROLES IN YEMEN

Yanagisako (1979:193) suggests: "One way to move towards a more refined analysis of change in family and kinship is to examine the relationships between change in ideology of family and kinship and change in actual institutional arrangements." Since this study revealed inconsistencies between formally-expressed ideologies and the actual institutional arrangements of Jewish couples in Yemen, I have followed Yanagisako's suggestion (1979). Thus, data collected during 1980-1981 must be placed in historical perspective. Although the oral histories that I collected often had inconsistencies, they presented a relatively consistent picture of conjugal roles (cf. Katzir 1976:40-61).

I will begin with an analysis of institutional dimensions of domestic and public domains in Yemen. Note that in Yemen, Jews lived in patrilocal, multiple-family residences. The following chart illustrates their gender-related activities (see Note 5):

THE DOMESTIC DOMAIN IN YEMEN

Women	Men
Socialization of Children	
Women were responsible for the primary socialization of girls until they married, and of boys until the age of three when they went to school and spent more time with their fathers.	Men did not participate in basic child rearing, although they had ultimate authority over their children. They were the primary teachers of their sons in matters of ritual and occupation.
Household Chores	
Women were responsible for all domestic labor.	Men did not participate in food processing or housekeeping.

Economic Roles (see Note 6)

Women were active in some food production, including limited agricultural production outside of the household. They were responsible for the care of the family livestock which were tended solely for domestic use.	Men did not participate in food production, except for the ritual slaughterer. They did not participate in agriculture or animal husbandry.
Women engaged in craft production when time permitted. Income from this labor was controlled by men.	Craft workshops were usually located in the household.

Leisure

Leisure time was spent with other women in the household or in ritual baths where women congregated.	Leisure time was spent with other men either in the household or in coffee houses.

THE PUBLIC DOMAIN IN YEMEN

Women	Men

Economic Roles

Women had no public economic roles.	Some men were merchants or long-distance traders.
Women were forbidden to go to the market.	Men engaged in the marketing and trading of goods.

Religious Roles

Women were denied participation in organized prayer, but attended the synagogue on the Sabbath and on holidays.	Men attended the synagogue three times daily for prayer.

Political Roles

Women were excluded from representation in courts and	Men represented the family and the patronymic group in courts

could not enter government offices.

and government offices. Interfamily disputes were settled in the household.

The Jewish code of practice provided the primary jural norms governing Jewish relations. Contact with non-Jews was controlled by Muslim governors or *shaykhs*. The state defined the mobility of Jews and the spatial dimensions of their communities.

This classification suggests that Yemeni Jewish women and men were identified with, and participated in, largely separate social worlds. Several men were responsible for the economic maintenance of the multiple-family household, while women managed these households and produced some foodstuffs. Older informants reported that women spent their days in the company of other women. A woman in an unhappy marriage could easily divorce (or be divorced) and return to her natal family. Under these conditions, the conjugal relationship did not have the exclusivity that it now has in Israel.

While reminiscing about the ideological position of women, several men in my research set said that in Yemen, a woman was respected as a precious candle that was the light of the home. Women were secluded in the home because like precious candles, they had to be protected. Jewish religious texts provided the basis for the separation of female and male activities. In Yemen, only men were literate. Thus, they could relegate women solely to the domestic domain on the pretext that only men knew and could interpret religious law. This gender dichotomy was also found in the wider Muslim society.

In Israel, women regard their past in Yemen with ambivalence. Although they lament the lack of simplicity in their present life-style in Israel, they also believe that in Yemen they were "slaves" and lacked "cultured" learning.

In Yemen, Jewish women had more informal power than the picture of female servitude generally assumes, as demonstrated in many studies of Middle Eastern women (Dwyer 1978; Fernea 1969, 1976; Katzir 1976; Lancaster 1981; Maher 1974; Makhlouf 1979; Mernissi 1975; Nelson 1974; Wikan 1980). However, I agree with Palgi's (1975:2) conclusions:

> To sum up the situation, her correct sexual behaviour was controlled through family structure, sanctified by religious legal code and reinforced by fear of super-

natural powers, such as evil spirits, ghosts, and the evil eye. In Yemen there was no difficulty in perpetuating this family structure and rigid relationships. While the Jews suffered serious disabilities as a minority group, in this area there was complete harmony between them and the ruling community.

CONJUGAL RELATIONS IN ISRAEL

The Early Years of Marriage

Yemeni Jewish women's memories of their early years of marriage will now be described so that the eventual restructuring of their roles and self-images in Israeli society will be put into perspective. For many of the women with whom I worked, the road to self-esteem and contentment was marked by pitfalls and setbacks. As immigrants in Israel, they had few ways of coping with the expectations and responsibilities of what they term "modern" marriages. In Yemen, the most common complaints about marriage involved domineering mothers- and sisters-in-law in the patrilocal households into which young brides moved. In contemporary Israel, the mother-in-law has lost her power and ability to torment. Instead, the young bride must build a life alone with her husband. There are several definitive criteria of "modern" marriages: they are contracted by "free choice," and the emphasis on the conjugal bond is strong. The conjugal unit becomes the residential and economic unit, with wives having crucial economic roles outside the household. In Israel, there is also less adherence to rules of sexual and reproductive purity.

Five of the thirty-five women in this study underwent arranged marriages in Yemen between the ages of seven and fifteen according to traditional Yemeni Jewish practice. The remainder of the women married in Israel between 1948 and 1962 by "free choice" with one exception—the local rabbi's wife who married through the negotiation of a hired matchmaker. Nine of the "free choice" women married close relatives, while the other twenty married nonrelatives who were all Yemeni by origin. Women of the "free choice" generation adhered to the rule of ethnic endogamy and felt that they had contracted "modern" marriages.

Once she was of age, a Yemeni woman in Israel searched for a spouse whenever possible, particularly at weddings or parties. She was often prepared to marry the first man who seemed appropriate. Marriage was the only honorable way to leave the parental home, and many women expressed the desire to escape the control of their father and brothers. Many women claimed that they were "subordinated" (their term) by their natal families. They resented the pressure on them to work during or after elementary or secondary school, rather than continuing to study. If they

worked, they felt that they might as well have been working to educate their own children, rather than contributing their hard-earned wages to their brothers' educations. The early "emancipation" of women, indicated by their movement into the Israeli labor market, was really exploitation by the traditional family structure. This structure denied women further education by putting them to work as wage earners for their brothers' educations.

Courtship seems to have been brief, and "love" seems to have been based on physical attraction rather than a deeper assessment of personality or common interests. Several women blamed their subsequent marital difficulties on such attitudes. One woman in a particularly strained marriage said that she and her husband curse the distant town where they met. She believed that an evil spirit must have entered her head, making her blind to the animal behind her husband's handsome face. A minority of seven women expressed concern that a prospective spouse should come from a respected family. Although these women all enjoy good marriages, they stress that if they had not been physically attracted to their husbands, they would not have married merely because of family background.

New wives generally face a difficult period of adaptation to marriage. The women in this study confronted circumstances quite different from those their mothers faced in Yemen. These changes are evidenced by the songs and stories comprising an important element in the *ḥinna* (henna) ceremony. This is the lengthy ritual that, in Yemen, marked the separation of the bride from her natal family. In *ḥinna* songs and stories, the values and expected behavior of the young bride are presented in dramatic form (see Note 7). Although in Yemen these tales seem to reflect the most important areas of female concern, the songs and tales of the *ḥinna* have lost their significance in Israel.

In Yemen, women typically moved into the house of their husbands' extended families upon marriage. During the *ḥinna*, a bride was instructed primarily in how to cooperate with her mother-in-law, who was expected to exercise authority over her during her married life. Young brides, typically between the ages of seven and fifteen, only gradually took on the domestic responsibility of household chores. In Yemen, most homes were detached houses onto which rooms could be added. After immigration to Israel, most of the women in this study moved directly to Gadot or other urban areas. There, available housing was in apartment buildings and not in detached houses onto which rooms could be added. Immediately upon immigration, the multiple-family residential group broke up and was replaced by the nuclear-family household. Families who moved into detached housing units after immigration often had to plant vegetable gardens in their yards to supplement household incomes. Since parents did not have money to build on extra rooms for married children and their potential

families, newly-married couples were forced to find their own lodgings. Most new couples set up housekeeping in one-room flats, and brides were expected to manage their households. Even if new couples wished to settle near relatives, the choice of housing depended on the availability and location of cheap flats or proximity to employment. Contrary to most norms of "modern" marriage, separation from families was remembered as a great hardship (see Note 8). However, once women became experienced housekeepers, they realized how fortunate they were in not having to cope with mothers- or sisters-in-law, as was the case in Yemen.

During the *ḥinna*, the bride was instructed primarily about relationships with her husband's female relatives rather than with her husband. However, in Israel, a woman's relationship with her husband is much more important than affinal ties with women. Upon setting up independent households in Israel, sons stopped contributing to their fathers' household incomes because they needed all their earnings to support their own families. Women said that their fathers-in-law were not upset at losing their sons' incomes because they understood that new couples must be self-supporting. However, sons are still expected to support parents in their old age.

In the *ḥinna*, the bride was instructed that housework, procreation, and child rearing were women's primary duties. By contrast, in Israel, wives must take on women's "double burden" by working in paid employment to help support their families in addition to doing most of the housework. Women in this research set worked for wages until the birth of their first child and returned to work after the child was weaned. A similar pattern was followed for all children. In most cases, mothers or mothers-in-law who had not entered the Israeli labor force looked after small children while younger married women worked. By 1952, some day-care facilities were available in Gadot and were used whenever possible (see Note 9). Young women's wages were often equal or superior to those of their husbands. Many women say that this caused their husbands considerable embarrassment, but the second income was too important to permit women to stop working. Ideologically, the wife's income was regarded as supplementary. The implications of women's work are discussed in detail below.

During the week of the *ḥinna*, the new bride was also instructed in family purity rituals during and immediately following menstruation. These rituals require husband and wife to be separated for fifteen days. They must not sleep together, the wife must not feed her husband, and she may not wash his clothes until she is purified in the ritual baths. Although these rules were strictly followed in Yemen, they are often considered inconvenient and time-consuming in Israel. Since an older, more religious woman is not on the scene to enforce these rules, they are not as strictly followed in Israel.

Not surprisingly, many older Yemeni women remember their early years of marriage as a period of great suffering. On the other hand, women who were married in Yemen recalled fewer difficulties in Israel because they were already adjusted to life with a spouse and had experience in housekeeping. These women were thankful to be free of their mothers-in-law and, after initial adjustments, enjoyed their new-found independence in Israel. In spite of apparently insurmountable obstacles—particularly poverty—in creating a secure family life, women's contributions to the ability of their families to function through entry into the labor force gave them more domestic power than their mothers had enjoyed in Yemen. Increased power and autonomy was also related to such factors as residential isolation of the conjugal pair. However, although women's self-esteem increased, their husbands lost status and prestige after immigration to Israel.

REPERCUSSIONS OF MOVING TO ISRAEL: THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE CONJUGAL POWER BASE

In Yemen, Jewish men provided economic maintenance for the household and women were mostly engaged in consumption and domestic labor. However, defining all tasks performed by women as domestic is an ideological statement about gender assignments. Women simply were not seen to have any economic function. For example, when women contributed to the family income by working in craft production during their spare time, husbands marketed these goods and controlled the disposal of all income. A man's greatest shame was having his wife work for others for wages. Older informants remember that many families would suffer extreme poverty rather than allow women to work for pay.

As previously indicated, in Yemen most Jewish men worked in household and kin-based craft production and artisan enterprises. Despite the low legal status of Jews in Yemen, their economic functions were keenly appreciated by the Muslim majority, which was composed almost entirely of farmers, soldiers, rulers, and spiritual leaders. Some occupations held by Jews, such as goldsmithery, silversmithery, and money lending, were considered acts of usury and forbidden under Islam. Thus, the Muslims relied heavily on the Jews, who occupied the entire artisan class and most of the merchant classes. When the vast majority of Jews left Yemen between 1948-1951, the country suffered serious economic setbacks. In fact, the few thousand Jews who remained in North Yemen were reportedly forced to do so by the state because their economic services were deemed irreplaceable.

In Israel, there was little need for the "backward" technology employed by craftspeople. Only a small portion of Yemeni immigrants, most of them jewelsmiths, were able to continue their traditional occupations. A national oversupply of rabbis and

teachers meant that there was only a limited need for these occupations as well in Israel. The Yemenis were at a further disadvantage because of pronounced differences between the religious educational system in Yemen and the secular and religious educational system in Israel. Although Jewish men in the Muslim community in Yemen had enjoyed high prestige for achieving basic literacy, in Israel they were illiterate in modern Hebrew and had virtually no knowledge of how to compete in a modern capitalist economy. They were thus compelled to enter the unskilled labor market and help fill the new state's needs for manual labor. As Yemeni men lost control over the power of their labor, their self-esteem was radically altered by having to sell their labor in the marketplace. Initially, their roles in construction and road building were greatly appreciated by the wider society. However, soon after the formation of the state of Israel, the crystallization of classes and the re-emergence of bourgeois attitudes meant that physical "nation-building" lost much of its original prestige. Thus, Yemeni men no longer enjoyed their former high status.

In Gadot, there are notable exceptions to this pattern. After immigration to Israel, some older Yemeni men attended high school or university and subsequently became skilled laborers or managers, particularly in banking and administration. Several important public officials in Gadot are Yemeni, including the heads of the religion and workers' councils, and the mayor, who has held office since 1951.

More typically, just as Yemeni men found their occupational status altered in Israel, they also found that their position within the family had changed. In Israel, men no longer controlled the productive labor of their sons, who entered the labor market as independent agents. Thus, an important aspect of patriarchal authority was undermined. Evidence suggests that loss of authority and other changes had a profound and lasting effect on many men of the immigrant generation. The prevalence of pathological responses to resettlement in Israel—such as alcoholism, extreme apathy, depression, and crime—has been associated predominantly with Middle-Eastern Jewish men (Amir 1973; Miller 1971; Shoham 1970, 1971, 1973, 1976). Although Israeli popular opinion states that the industrious Yemenis are exempt from difficult adjustments to Israeli society, some of my observations indicated the opposite. At least six of the middle-aged fathers with whom I worked are alcoholics, and many more are extremely apathetic about family functioning. This may be related to the alienation of their labor and their loss of patriarchal authority.

After moving to Israel, Yemeni women also began to enter the labor force (see Note 10). Daughters, who were often as young as ten years old, were initially sent to work to help support the family. Women recall that their fathers were ashamed to send

their daughters out to work because this confirmed that their own incomes were insufficient for their families' needs. At the same time, family prestige was associated with the formal education of sons, as in Yemen. In Israel, many years of formal, Western-style education were (and are) necessary for entering upwardly-mobile occupations. Thus, sons reared in Israel would not repeat their fathers' life careers. Once sons were successful, their fathers' prestige would be redeemed to a certain extent. With some bitterness, the women in this research set remember that their contributions to their brothers' achievements were not appreciated, and that fathers and brothers would not provide them with economic aid upon their marriages or throughout their married lives. In all, twenty-nine of the thirty-five women in this study worked in paid employment as domestics, agricultural laborers, and factory workers before their marriages (see Note 11). All of these women handed their incomes over to the heads of their households, whether these were fathers or brothers, and had no control over their earnings.

Most of these same women insisted on continuing to work after marriage because of stringent economic circumstances. Moreover, they wanted to ensure a good education for their daughters and sons. In addition to helping provide basic household items, women remained in the labor force because their husbands' earnings could not provide for their children's education (until 1978, Israeli parents had to pay high school tuition). The major source of prestige in traditional Yemeni Jewish culture is formal education. In Israel, education was accessible to women and these women valued it tremendously. Through their children's successes, they would achieve high social status.

Since the women in this study are illiterate, or at best poorly-educated, they find jobs in the ever-growing market for domestics, child minders, and office cleaners. Although on a bourgeois scale of measurement the status of these working women is low, the women themselves usually do not regard the low status of their work as important. On the other hand, many of their husbands felt that being relegated to unskilled or semi-skilled labor indicated their inferiority to more educated sections of the country. The women, however, viewed entering the labor market as a rise in status and individual freedom compared to their seclusion in the domestic realm in Yemen where they had lived, in their words, as "ignorant slaves." They feel that they are "liberated" (their term) compared to many other Middle-Eastern Jewish and non-Jewish women in Israel who do not work for pay.

Although women's earnings are vital to their families' well-being, women in this study do not view themselves as primary economic supporters of their households. They work to help their husbands provide. As one woman told me, "I work because it helps him, and if I help him, he will help me. I do not work because I

enjoy it." There is an expressed ambivalence in their attitudes towards work. In an ideal world, they would prefer to be full-time housewives and have their husbands support them, as in Yemen, because they dislike the drudgery which their work entails. However, they do not want the whole Yemeni package because they want formal education and freedom to leave the house, and they certainly do not wish to return to a pre-industrial technology. They also do not want their daughters to repeat their own life careers. Virtually all the women want their daughters to be well-educated and have short careers, but they hope that once the daughters marry, they will not have to earn money and can concentrate on their duties as mothers and housewives (see Note 12). In fact, on an ideological level these women view domestic activities such as mothering and housekeeping as the most valued female activities. If they withdrew from paid employment, an important aspect of good mothering—providing their children with secondary and post-secondary education—would be undermined.

Only four women in the research set view themselves as primary supporters of their families. All of the women are in different circumstances. One woman, a secretary in the local high school, has a chronically unemployed husband. The second is a very successful cosmetician whose husband works as a poorly-paid bellboy in the local hotel. The third woman holds down two cleaning jobs to finance her daughters' university fees; she would prefer that her husband "moonlight," but says he is too lazy. The fourth woman wanted to be a full-time housewife, but her husband simply did not earn enough money in road maintenance to enable her to stop working. She owns and manages a restaurant which provides a good income. Six months after I left the field her husband died; when I went to visit her, she told me that she thanked God she had always been self-reliant.

Husbands' attitudes towards their wives working in paid employment are also ambivalent. Although almost all husbands are ashamed that they are unable to provide a "middle-class" standard of living on their incomes alone, they appreciate their wives' economic contributions and their double burden of working inside and outside of the home. Women usually recognize their husbands' feelings of inadequacy, and as a result, often try to play down their financial contributions to the household. They also do not push husbands to help more in the house because they do not wish to threaten their feelings of masculinity. Several women said that when a wife complains about having to work, she sticks a knife into her husband's back and reinforces his feelings of inferiority. This encourages him to drink and become an alcoholic. Only in strained marriages did I hear wives complain about working outside of the home. Most women complain about their general state of exhaustion, but not about their double work day.

In many cases, women's relationships with their husbands and children in Israel have taken on a new structure unknown to women in Yemen. For example, at least twenty of the thirty-five men in the research set who had not been able to earn decent wages disliked their jobs and had not achieved positions of prestige in local religious or political spheres. These men eventually lose interest in trying to exert authority over their children, and both unmarried and married children often disrespect their wishes. When husbands can no longer successfully discipline their children and wives, this causes women to define their husbands as dismal failures. In that case, women often become the sole true authority over their children. Thus, women's new position in the family, and their power in the conjugal relationship, is partly the result of their husbands' failures to achieve respect or economic success in the wider Israeli society.

Another important aspect of women's increasing power in the family is their economic contribution to the maintenance and upward mobility of their families. Most women in the research set are no longer dependent on their husbands' incomes for household maintenance costs, as they would have been in Yemen. Most of these women do not hand over their incomes to their husbands. Instead, they bank the money, either individually or in joint bank accounts, and then spend it through individual or joint decisions made with their husbands. After leaving home to work and being influenced by "independent" Ashkenazi (Euro-American) female employers, many women have become more assertive about their personal needs than they remember was characteristic of their mothers. While women believe that they "help" their husbands because they work in wage labor, they are also aware that their ability to control and contribute income has enabled them to achieve more power in their homes than was the case in Yemen.

At the same time, women regard mothering as the most valued of all female activities, and husbands continually reinforce this notion. Though I often heard men praise their wives for being wonderful mothers, women were rarely praised for being wonderful workers. However, this praise may be due to women working in paid employment as well as in the home. Both husbands and wives regard the idea of mothers finding equal satisfaction in work and in family roles as extremely strange and unwomanly. Women do not want to be *feministi* in this way; nor do their husbands want them to be. These attitudes are reflected in the division of labor in the home. Women feel that they are responsible for household chores and child rearing, and they look to their adolescent daughters for help. Husbands of the immigrant generation helped with such tasks only when children were small. Men help to a limited extent in heavy chores and in marketing (shopping), which was a traditional male activity in Yemen. Thus, although women in this study work in paid employment to help their husbands and children, the side effects of greater mobility and independence for women were largely unanticipated (cf. Boone 1980).

Yemeni Jews, like most Israelis, view the concept of role (*tafkid*) in terms of broad distinctions between men's and women's responsibilities. Role also refers to more narrowly-defined prescriptions of who should do what in the domestic domain. When questioned about the division of roles in the home, twenty-one of the thirty-five wives responded that there was no division of roles by gender. Seventeen of these twenty-one women work outside of the home and eighteen enjoy relatively good relationships with their husbands. My observations of these couples indicated a marked correspondence between gender and roles, with husbands performing few household chores. Clearly, there is a positive correlation between outside employment and the belief that either husbands participate in housework or that both parties make equal contributions to family functioning.

Thus, my data suggest that women in the labor force who enjoy a relatively compatible relationship with their husbands deny a division of roles in the home. It is difficult to reconcile this denial with the fact that their husbands are not expected to perform household chores. These women apparently have begun to formulate an ideology of mutual help between spouses which has minimal institutional support. The following discussion with a husband and wife illustrates this point:

L. G. (to the wife): How do you see the role of women in Judaism?

Wife: There are many differences between men and women—the Bible will tell you why. The woman is the woman and she cannot change her role. But if the husband and wife are compatible, one helps the other and so there is mutual understanding. . . .

L. G. (to the husband): Do you help your wife with the housework?

Husband: Why not, why not? I try to help as much as I can. There are couples where the wife is subordinated. But in our family, thank God, all is common between us. What she says is holy and what I say is holy. Why wouldn't I help her? I am considerate of her. She works harder than a man. If she did not work outside the house maybe I would not help her, but we both work outside. If a child needs changing or washing or something to drink, I help him. What, not watch over one's family? I wish that all Jews would do what I do.

The wife did not disagree with her husband's statement. Whenever I visited this family, the husband was always working in the yard, and I saw him several times on the bus with parcels from the Tel Aviv market. However, he thought that in an ideal world, it would not be his role to help his wife, anymore than it would be her role to work for income. Since this couple cannot afford to have the wife stop working, she works outside the home and her husband helps with household chores.

This ideology of mutual help is indicated in women's responses to an interview question about their feelings of "equality" in the division of roles between husband and wife. Twenty-eight, or eighty percent of the thirty-five women in the research set, replied that husbands and wives made equal contributions to household functioning. Seven of the eight housewives in the study claimed that they made equal contributions to family functioning through housework and child-rearing activities. By contrast, six women reported that they contributed *more* than their husbands to family functioning because of their work in paid employment. These six women clearly felt that they carried too many burdens. However, their responses were in the minority since most women believed there was equality in the division of roles.

Women's general feeling of equality is reinforced by their belief that husbands and wives share most aspects of decision making. Half of the families surveyed reported that the couple decided together on all issues. Five women reported that they knew how to manipulate their husbands during the decision-making process. These wives put on a guise of deference to husbands, even though in effect, wives made the decisions. In interviews and informal discussions, many women claimed that men must be humored because they must feel superior. However, this does not mean that men *are* superior in the women's eyes. Hence, wives can feel equality in the division of roles whether or not their husbands do.

During informal discussions, a minority of seven women reported that in situations of conflict, they must compromise and give in to their husbands (see Note 13). These women feel that this is part of their inferior status as women. They feel that if they do not compromise, their husbands might refuse to do the marketing, spread rumors about them, or abuse the children. Rarely are women prepared to engage in similar strategies of punishment because most believe that if they attempted to do so, the whole family would suffer. Thus, men seem to have more leverage in arguments, while women have a powerful voice in running the daily affairs of the household.

Finally, husbands do not necessarily view their wives as equals. The men with whom I worked often expressed the following opinions and demonstrated these opinions by their behavior: that their wives are meant to serve them; that the husband should curb his wife's mobility outside of the home; that men are clearly superior to women in matters of religion and ritual; and that *as males* they are inevitably more intelligent than females. However, most wives will tell their husbands to serve themselves if they are tired. They also invariably engage in outside public activities whenever they wish, and view themselves as equally intelligent as men. Most women are prepared to defer to their husbands' authority only in matters of religion and ritual, and such deference is seen as divinely inspired. Thus, husbands seem to

rely on a Yemeni model of conjugal relations, while wives enjoy their Israeli reality.

DOMESTIC AND PUBLIC DOMAINS IN GADOT, ISRAEL

The current domestic and public activities of Yemeni Jewish men and women in the research set depart from the contention that, in a capitalist society, the domestic domain is primarily delegated to women while the public domain becomes exclusively male. This departure is illustrated below.

THE DOMESTIC DOMAIN IN GADOT, ISRAEL

Women	Men
Socialization of Children	
Women are responsible for most child rearing.	When children are small and wives are in the labor force, husbands help with child rearing.
Women are authority figures for their children.	Men who have achieved prestigious economic, political, or religious roles are authority figures for their children, while men who have lost their self-esteem usually fail to be authority figures.
Household Chores	
Women are responsible for general housework.	Men are responsible for heavy household tasks such as painting and moving furniture.
Leisure	
Leisure time is often spent with other women and men in the household, but primarily with women.	Leisure time is often spent with other men and women in the household, but primarily with other men.
Women do homework for adult education courses in the home.	Men study religious texts in the home.

THE PUBLIC DOMAIN IN GADOT, ISRAEL

Women	Men
Economic Roles	
Most women work in paid employment, usually in domestic labor, child-minding, and factory work.	Men work in unskilled, semi-skilled, or skilled labor.
Women purchase goods in the market; a minority trade eggs from chickens raised in the yard.	Men purchase goods in the market.
Women usually attend to their own bank accounts, and in some cases tend the family's bank account.	Men attend to their own, and in some cases, to the family's bank account.
Community Activities	
Women attend parents' meetings at school, and the Parent-Teachers' Association (PTA).	Men attend parents' meetings at school, but less so than women.
Women are involved in the working women's association, the religious women's movement, adult education, psychology lectures, exercise classes, sewing and ceramics courses, choir, and other activities.	A minority of men attend adult education classes.
Religious Roles	
Women attend the synagogue on holidays and for major rites of passage, but do not lead in formal prayer. Most women attend a lecture on the Portion of the Week led by the rabbi's wife.	Men go to the synagogue several times a week, and some attend daily. Men are also involved in religious study groups after work.

Political Roles

Women vote, and have a variety of jural rights in the state. They often attend political meetings, and some even go on the campaign trail.	Men vote and have a variety of jural rights in the state. Some men are active in political parties and in workers' committees.

As indicated earlier, women in Yemen did not go to the market. They also did not work in paid employment, and although they may have supplemented family incomes through craft production, they did not control their earnings. They also had no political rights and were not formally educated. Ideologically, women's activities were viewed as belonging exclusively to the domestic realm. By contrast, women of the immigrant generation in Israel, and even more so their daughters (see Gilad 1982, 1983) are not exclusively relegated to the domestic domain. On the contrary, women in Israel are quite active outside of their homes. Some of their activities are shared with husbands, while others are not.

CONCLUSIONS

The immigrant women in this study in the particular capitalist society of Israel have not been relegated primarily to the domestic domain. At the same time, these women view the domestic world as integral to their responsibilities as mothers and wives. In Yemen, where the population in this study originated, mothers-in-law exercised authority over the women in their households and husbands had ultimate authority over children. Yemeni women who have moved to Gadot in Israel maintain an interdependent relationship with their husbands and, in most cases, have more authority over children than their husbands. During their early years of marriage, new wives in Gadot often suffered from a lack of practical instruction on housekeeping. Eventually, their experience in privatized domestic labor in Israel was seen as an improvement over subservience to mothers-in-law and senior sisters-in-law in Yemen.

Life in a nuclear household does not mean separation from other women. The women in this study spend much of their spare time with female friends—not only in drinking coffee, but in formal associations and classes oriented to their specific needs and preferences.

The women in this study are involved in labor outside of their homes that is similar to the labor they perform inside their homes. Because they are also primarily responsible for housework and child care, they carry women's "double burden." Although feminists might argue that this is not liberation,

Yemeni Jewish women believe that they are liberated from their immediate pasts, and do not hesitate to say so. Most older women are now literate, and are active in community activities and organizations. There are even some Yemeni women politicians and entertainers elsewhere in Israel. One of these, Shoshana Damari, is a national symbol of the successful immigrant. Thus, Yemeni women in Israel have a public role outside of their homes, and through these activities participate in a world they define as their own. Among themselves, they compete for power and prestige. Furthermore, they explicitly do not wish to engage in formal town politics because this domain is viewed as both "corrupt" and as a male world in which they feel they have no place and want no part. However, they are active in expressing their opinions about political parties, school levies, and the provision of day-care centers.

Compared to life in Yemen, the women in this study enjoy a great deal of freedom. They accept the technological innovations of modernization as miraculous and helpful. Although they lament the loss of collective responsibility that was characteristic of life in Yemen, they have no desire to return there. For them, Yemen is remembered as a world of female servitude and seclusion in the domestic domain, and as a place of Jewish suffering in a Muslim nation.

Only Yemeni men of low status in Israel sometimes remark that they would like to return to Yemen, even though they appreciate their freedom as Jews in Israel compared to the restrictions on Jews in Yemen. While ultimately subjected to Muslim control, Jewish men in Yemen had considerable power to direct their extended families and engage in meaningful work. In reality, the separation of production from the domestic domain in the capitalist society of Israel has inevitably meant the alienation of these men from their labor, with considerable repercussions for many of them. Whereas some contemporary feminists claim that the privatization of domestic life in capitalist society is detrimental to women (Reiter 1975:281; Wajcman 1981), in this situation it has been more detrimental to *men*. Since moving to Israel, Yemeni women have gained in wealth, power, and privileges both inside and outside of their homes.

It is impossible to discuss the status of immigrant women in this study in both their families and their community without analyzing what has happened to their husbands as immigrants to Israel. Yemeni Jewish couples in this study have undergone a transformation of the conjugal power base through a combination of lower status for husbands in Israeli society, the ability of wives to make economic contributions to their households and to control their own incomes, and an increase in women's self-esteem as a result of extensive participation in public life outside of their homes.

NOTES

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1. Conventional anthropology states that the domestic domain encompasses two sets of functional activities: (a) food production and consumption; and (b) sexual reproduction and child rearing. The politico-jural (public) domain encompasses sets of activities where jural norms are guaranteed by "external" and "public" sanctions which may also entail force (Yanagisako 1979:166).

2. Of the thirty-five husbands in the research set, twenty worked in unskilled labor (construction, maintenance, security guard, gardening, factory work, trucking, bell-boy, and house painting); eight worked in skilled labor (electrician, mechanic, welder, carpenter, and butcher); and five worked in white-collar jobs (civil service, construction foreman, rabbi, and teacher). One man was unemployed, and another died during the course of research.

3. Of the thirty-five wives in the research set, twenty-one worked in unskilled labor (domestic labor, child minding, factory work, maintenance, and waitressing); two worked in skilled labor (hairdressing, cosmetician); three in white-collar jobs (teacher, secretary, and public health counselor); one owned a restaurant; and eight were housewives. Several of the housewives cared for grandchildren, and all had worked in unskilled labor at some point during their marriage careers.

4. Gadot is a pseudonym. Field research also included interviews with fifty younger couples, aged twenty to thirty-five, who had been born in Israel to Yemeni parents, as well as case studies of thirty-three unmarried women, aged eighteen to thirty-two, who were born in Israel. In most cases, the unmarried women are the daughters of women discussed in this essay.

5. I write about Jewish life in Yemen in the past tense because I am concerned with my informants' memories of Yemen. It

should be noted that a Jewish community of approximately 5,000 persons remains in North Yemen.

6. Economic activities are included in the domestic sphere because in Yemen, Jews considered household-based production to be a domestic activity. Exceptions to this were occupations which took men out of the home, such as merchants and long-distance traders. By contrast, all economic activity in Israel is considered to belong to the public domain because production is located outside of the household. The implications of this change are discussed in this essay.

7. See Spector (1960:255-289) on the bridal songs.

8. Married children of these older women also feel that they have "modern" marriages. However, whenever possible they build homes in the backyards or on plots adjoining those of parents with detached houses. This provides companionship and access to grandmothers, who act as child minders. It is also more prestigious to live in a detached house. In some cases, two or three related families living side-by-side form a domestic group which shares all domestic labor and meals, but maintains separate bank accounts. Thus, when parents and their children are financially able to do so in Israel, they tend to rebuild some attributes of the multiple-family household that were characteristic of Jewish life in Yemen.

9. Day care is now available to all who need it. This is part of the reason why seventy percent of all married women in Gadot work in paid employment. Many women turn to mothers and mothers-in-law for the care of young children while working, and some grandmothers leave the labor force to look after grandchildren. While they enjoy child minding, these women also hope that their children will look after them in old age.

10. Between 1882 and 1948, immigrant Yemeni Jewish women entered the labor force in large numbers, particularly as domestic laborers for European women who worked outside their homes. Women's economic contributions helped consolidate the pre-state Yemeni community in Israel, which eventually aided immigrants during the 1948-1951 migration by finding them homes and jobs upon their arrival. New immigrants, including those with whom I worked, learned from more experienced cousins who had arrived much earlier that women could leave their homes to work without causing disintegration of their families.

11. Six of these twenty-nine women received no formal schooling, nineteen had attended elementary school for eight years or

less, and four women began but did not complete secondary school. The majority now attend adult education courses.

12. Most of these women's daughters completed either high school or university. Of the fifty younger married women, aged twenty to thirty-four, who were interviewed (and whose mothers were about the same age as the older women discussed in this paper), twenty-three were in the labor force because their income was necessary for upward mobility. The majority saw outside work as intrinsically valuable. Most of the housewives in this study looked forward to entering the labor force as soon as their children were all in day care or elementary school.

13. None of the fifty younger married women who were interviewed said that they had to compromise their own wishes when making decisions with their husbands.

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