CONCLUSIONS

Judith Nagata
York University

INTRODUCTION

Although all the ethnographies in this volume were researched and reported independently, and cover women and their partners from more than half a dozen different cultural backgrounds in three new host countries, the convergence of topics and themes is striking. All of the ethnographies are concerned with immigrants, and many similar problems attendant on the migration process arise in each case. Among these, the problems of accommodation to the host society and culture loom large, ranging from the demands and customs of employment to family and kinship behavior. In all of the essays, the relationship receiving the most attention is that of spouse (or other partner), invariably in the context of economic and employment opportunities and constraints.

These studies appear to proceed from an assumption that most conjugal problems—e.g., balance of domestic power and authority, personal conflict in managing these roles, and relations to other kin—stem directly from an economic base. All the accounts, however, make possible a deeper and more subtle analysis beyond this. Even more basic may be certain cultural norms and perceptions regarding (ideal) conjugal role behavior. To some extent, these cultural norms and perceptions change independently of (or at a different rate from) economic behavior. One of the most valuable collective contributions of this material is the light it sheds on the often subtle relationship, and even disjunction, between culturally-defined conjugal role behavior and economic behavior.

PERCEPTIONS AND CONCEPTIONS

The wedding of Marxist ideas with anthropology has led to many (unresolved) debates as to how far concepts developed in one setting may be generalized to totally different societies and populations (cf. Terray 1969). Some of the fiercest debates surrounding Marxist analysis have been waged over the universality of the "class" label, particularly in highly-structured and hierarchical kinship systems characterized by strong economic power and seemingly autocratic control (usually by older males). If we construe this as an incipient form of class dominance and exploitation, does this add to our understanding of the system, or bring us closer to the reality and sentiment of the people involved? In recognizing the objective inequality between different family roles and members, Godelier's position (1978) is that the most important aspect of a relationship lies in its

personal meaning for the kin involved (e.g., "I support my husband *because* he is my husband, not because I am coerced into a role of support for what is then labelled a 'husband' role"). In the emic view, the symbolic, personal, and nurturant elements generated by participation in kin groups largely override the divisive effects of unequal access to resources, power, or authority. Kinship functions simultaneously as infrastructure and superstructure; it both structures and provides meaning to the relations of production. Even under an unequal division of labor, and even at the risk of a certain loss of individualism, commitment to the ethos of family unity and solidarity is a reward in itself.

We can now focus on male-female inequalities, and pose similar questions concerning the actors' perceptions of these on a scale of exploitation and alienation. Despite empirical evidence of men's domination over women, and male control of labor power and resources, the women described in this volume do not necessarily see this as their reality. Whether or not this is an example of false consciousness, the parallel with the class argument is striking.

The question of consciousness, false or otherwise, is central to the issue of gender relations. This emerges clearly from all the contributions and from Goody's introduction. Goody makes a crucial point in discussing the importance of the symbolic meanings attached to "core" roles in any society. She argues that symbolic meanings can resist substantial rearrangement in both content and balance of the elements of power and authority, and still retain their original meaning—even at the expense of apparent inconsistency. Most examples in this volume strongly support this assertion. The immigrant families described here provide ample evidence that women's increased access to material resources and economic control does not automatically redefine their roles *vis-à-vis* husbands/males. The ideals of the core roles prove remarkably immune to such changes, allowing old fictions and myths to be maintained intact. Thus the Yemeni, Portuguese, and other Southern European women who have gained in economic status seem reluctant to claim any special considerations, or even control over their own wages. Rather, they continue paying lip service to the superiority of their menfolk, and to the latter's rights to the traditional male prerogatives of decision making, control of finances, and special recreational "needs." In their publicly-displayed consciousness, the women acquiesce in their continued acceptance of male dominance where this was part of the traditional conjugal role relationship. Thus, the anthropologist's quest for evidence that participants perceive control or exploitation by one sex over another as a form of "class" conflict often proves frustratingly inconclusive or contradictory.

All accounts in this volume indicate that most of the immigrant couples described here are at a turning point in their lives and relationships. For many, this represents a break with the old, without a clear path charted for the future. The observer may expect that eventually new ideals will crystallize and gradually move closer to the realities of the new situation. This was found, for example, in the growing class consciousness among some Turkish women workers in West Germany (Kosack 1976). However, not all women moving from more to less traditional societies will necessarily embrace the blatant forms of feminism held by some Western females. Indeed, some Yemeni women explicitly reject the prospect of such involvement.

PUBLIC AND DOMESTIC DOMAINS

To their credit, the contributors to this volume (especially Gilad) have not belabored the old (and not particularly productive) opposition between "public" and "domestic" domains. In fact, these essays reveal the extent to which these two domains constantly overlap. Many circumstances arising out of the "public" sector—such as conditions of employment (the Toronto garment workers), and the input of the state in redefining gender roles (Yemeni male religious dominance)—continually impinge upon the private or domestic scene, creating new forms for old relationships. Far from encapsulating women in the domestic domain or marginalizing them, increasing participation in the international, capitalist economic order blurs that boundary. In the process, considerable conflict can be generated in domestic relations. Such conflicts are not confined to the domestic dwelling, any more than "public" activities—such as union or religious meetings—are excluded from the household.

Further limitations of the public-domestic distinction are exposed by examining the issue of child care. Frequently, the circumstances of migration, and the increasing involvement of many women in work outside the home, push other women (including female kin and affines) into complementary roles of child minding. For this, they are usually remunerated in cash. While these duties are normally performed in a domestic environment, they only exist as a consequence of other women's employment in an "outside" market. Thus, the baby-sitters are drawn into the capitalist economic orbit by the cash or commodity value placed on their labor.

In none of the above situations can women be relegated to a position of "supplementary" or marginal wage earners. Economically, they are essential to the reproduction of a segment of the labor force and, at the same time, to the continuity of the family. Women are central to both, and one could not survive without the other because the family is dependent upon external wages and children are the future workers. This again obscures

the boundary between the public and domestic domains. Finally, no participation in the labor force would be possible without the support of the "free" domestic labor performed by women. This "free" labor liberates men to concentrate on wage employment and provides the "infrastructure" for women's own wage labor, albeit at the cost of a double workload, as so many anecdotes poignantly illustrate.

CONJUGAL ROLES AND SOCIAL NETWORKS

The studies in this volume cast some fresh light on the relationship between conjugal roles and the wider social network. The mechanistic conjugal response to structural changes in the wider social network or to mobility which was originally postulated by Bott (1968), does not occur in every case described here. In the situations portrayed in this volume, the involved variables may be more numerous and complex than Bott allowed for. A key variable discussed here, but which received little attention in Bott's scheme, is the cultural definition of husband-wife roles.

In Bott's original material, there is also a problem of clarification. Her precise concept of the "joint" conjugal role was never very explicit. This becomes apparent in analyzing the examples of Yemeni and Portuguese husbands "helping" their wives by performing "female" domestic tasks in the home (including baby-sitting), but usually only under duress or in emergencies. These could be construed as formal examples of "joint" roles, although the partners involved would not regard them as natural and desirable. Rather, these examples represent last-resort solutions to exceptional and undesirable conditions. Moreover, the "joint" label often obscures the complexity of the full conjugal role set. This role set encompasses not only the allocation of household tasks between male and female partners, but also the exercise of authority over children, economic decisions, and so on. Thus, Yemeni husbands and wives may engage in more "mutual help," but the husbands still retain power by disciplining the children or threatening to withhold their income. The wives cannot bring themselves to do this.

Of all the contributions, Gilad's is the most sensitive and explicit on the question of conjugal roles in connection with a wider network, although the character of that network is not always clear. What does emerge, however, is that most of the couples in these studies came originally from societies where the segregation of conjugal roles in the household was the norm. In fact, the Israelis have a cultural concept, *tafkid*, emphasizing an elemental feature of these segregated core roles. However, the size and composition of the networks encompassing core conjugal roles varies considerably from case to case throughout the studies presented here. The population with probably the smallest

networks in the pre-immigrant situation was from Haiti. There, as in other Caribbean societies, a traditional premium on female initiative and independence was associated with cooperation with other female kin, and a brittleness in husband-wife relationships. Conjugal role segregation was particularly pronounced in most of the other countries of origin described here. Especially after marriage, few women in these studies engaged in paid employment outside the home. Where they had employment, it usually permitted flexibility of time and location, and was often irregular, resulting in less household disruption, reorganization, or role conflict.

The character of the conjugal relationship changes in several critical ways for working immigrant wives in Canada, the United States, or Israel. Now that women are working both inside and outside the household, their roles are in a sense *doubly* segregated from those of their husbands. Husbands and wives go about their respective tasks, both public and domestic, largely unaided by the other. Typically, as all accounts in this volume make clear, the women now labor in two segregated sectors ("she works in two factories," as one New York Haitian woman described by Stafford pungently puts it), whereas men remain committed to a single, external work role. Even this external work role may be weakened or undermined in the immigrant situation—as the ritual and economic demotion of Yemeni males, and the relative advantages enjoyed by some New York Haitian females in matters of employment and sponsorship, demonstrate. Generally, as accounts from European immigrants in Toronto and Montréal attest, where males are forced to provide support by sharing in domestic tasks in the home, they do so only under duress and where such support is indispensable to the economic viability of the combined household.

This segregation of husbands and wives can be stretched even further under conditions of migration. It may occur when women migrate first, as do some New York Haitians described by Stafford, so that they are forced into positions requiring independence, decision making, and initiative. This situation may permanently alter the tenor of the relationship with male partners upon their subsequent reunion, particularly if a woman is also a man's sponsor. Thereafter, many Haitian women resolve to retain enough financial independence to support their children and dependent kin back home in Haiti. Thus, the position of the male is even further marginalized, segregation is enhanced, and a form of matrifocality may even set in. To a limited extent, the Colombian women in Montréal described by Meintel et al. develop this kind of independence, which is reinforced by the high incidence of divorce and separation in that community.

Finally, children may play an important role which is largely unacknowledged in the present set of studies. Where children are absent, pressures on the wife are lower, and greater

jointness may occur (Meintel et al.). Where children are present, particularly if they are older and more fluent in the host society's language, they may take over some tasks in dealing with external agencies that are normally the responsibility of parents. The presence of children may also enhance the commitment of both parents to the conjugal household as a unit, independent of their formal participation in household tasks or in joint domestic roles (cf. Münscher 1984).

Few of the working immigrant couples described in this volume appear significantly to increase task sharing or jointness of domestic roles in the new environment. Nonetheless, some of the couples claim to engage in joint recreational activities (the Portuguese in Montréal, some Haitians in New York, and the Yemeni couples in Israel). However, the extent to which joint visiting of relatives or attendance at church by spouses truly represents "jointness" in the sense intended by Bott is debatable. During such visits, men and women usually sit and converse separately rather than as couples or as a group, and females customarily wait on the men. On religious and ritual occasions, women also perform their "appropriate" (segregated) roles in rites of passage and so on.

The above accounts indicate that jointness in decision making may precede jointness in the realm of actual task sharing or recreational interaction, as Meintel et al. note. Within the confines of the household, some women (e.g., the Yemenis) have gained considerable leverage in matters relating to finances and children's education. Here, the women can exercise some influence over their husbands.

In Bott's original hypothesis (1968), the structure of the network—that is, its loose- or close-knittedness—had a direct bearing on conjugal role playing. Spouses who tend to continue this dependence remain socially embedded in pre-marriage networks with a strong dependence on other kin and friends, usually of the same gender. In the domestic domain, this manifests itself in the form of role segregation following marriage. Bott suggests that joint roles are more common following geographic or upward social mobility, or both, when the network is often dislocated. Obviously, the networks of the couples discussed in this volume have been subject to the vagaries and hazards of migration. Some immigrants, such as the Toronto garment workers and some New York Haitians, have few kin to fall back on. Other immigrants, such as the Israeli Yemenis and the Portuguese in Montréal, have virtually reconstituted whole segments of an ethnic community through chain migration. The Montréal Portuguese represent the most classic case of the situation portrayed by Bott. In it, there is a high correlation between segregated conjugal roles and fairly strong, close-knit kinship networks, now reassembled in Canada. By a form of "community surveillance," such kinship networks also

help maintain conformity to traditional standards of behavior by working women.

All cases where immigrant working wives are regularly assisted with child care and related tasks by other female kin, such as the Yemeni mothers-in-law and some Montréal women, provide examples of Bott's principle. In it, close-knit kin relationships perpetuate the segregation of husband-wife roles, and slow down any trend towards jointness.

On their own, however, neither the formal structure of the network, the mobility of the migrants, nor the convergence of male and female employment in the "public" sector, are sufficient to predict the degree of role jointness or segregation. Nor do these variables appear to be directly involved in changing the "balance of power" and authority between spouses, or the fiction of male superiority and dominance. The missing factor may be the intangible, culturally-defined domain of attitudes and norms, carried over from the pre-migration society, where perceptions play a determining role. However, no reference appears in the above accounts to the relationship between joint conjugal roles and social mobility. Given the recency of the migration in most cases, such developments will probably only appear in future, longitudinal studies.

In measuring the content and effectiveness of the immigrant couples' networks, the nuclearization of the family following migration and urbanization may have been overestimated in the past. As both Gilad and Meintel et al. observe, despite separate residences (or census nuclearity), close kin living in separate households in the vicinity may fulfill supportive functions as if they occupied the same residence. Thus, the assumption that joint conjugal roles should develop following migration and the "break-up" of extended families, seen here as a loosening of the social network, may have been exaggerated. By this token, the "freedom" from mother-in-law interference claimed for the Yemeni women in Israel may not be so complete after all.

PERCEPTIONS AND POWER

As Bott noted long ago (1968:88; see also Note 1), considerable divergence can occur between women's objective condition and their perceptions thereof. This is borne out by most of the above studies, and Gilad and Meintel et al. comment explicitly on it. The reality of working women's power and economic autonomy *vis-à-vis* their menfolk is frequently out of kilter with the symbolic representations or rationalizations of the husband-wife relationship. Some of this "false consciousness" is created by the disruptive effects of the migration process and may or may not eventually undergo self-correction. The above accounts show a lack of synchronization in a number of ways. In the most blatant

examples, as recorded by Gilad and by Meintel et al., the Yemeni and Portuguese women are "proud" to help their husbands. They dutifully hand over their unopened wage packets, justifying the husband's control on the basis of inherent or natural male superiority. They add that men need extra material indulgences to maintain their status and image in male company. Thus, the traditional ideology of male prerogative is not seriously challenged, even though economic and personal necessity point in the opposite direction. By a more subtle twist, however, statements from some Yemeni women suggest that this apparently compliant behavior may not be totally naïve. Women with strong, close relationships with their husbands verbally maintain the myth of female subordination and docility. This strategy of supporting their husbands' sagging morale in the new Israeli environment includes false claims of joint roles. On the other hand, wives who need a weapon in marital conflict do not hesitate to point out the husband's lack of domestic cooperation, the latter's claims notwithstanding. In other words, role "perceptions" may not represent uncomprehending and naïve traditionalism. Instead, they may be partly a creative attempt to accommodate unprecedented conditions over which there is little control.

WOMEN AND PROPERTY

Surprisingly, one area that is consistently ignored in all of the above studies, aside from wages, is control over property. Without further information, the reader might assume that houses, chattels, and other material resources are under male control. But this may not be plausible, given the relatively high separation and divorce rates among Montréal Colombians and Haitians. The whole institution of dowry is never mentioned in these studies. For most Southern Europeans at least, dowries are an important question in arranging and sustaining marriages (cf. Friedl 1971). Can Greek and Portuguese immigrant women contract a marriage without a dowry in Canada (cf. Piña-Cabral 1984)? In the Montréal sample of Greeks, Meintel et al. mention the role of fathers and brothers in the disposition of female kin in marriage, both in the homeland and in Canada, but actual property settlements receive little attention. During my own research among Greeks in Toronto in the late 1960s (Nagata 1969), I discovered that in their own view of things, the women's labor could be an acceptable equivalent of the dowry or *priká*. Croll (1984) also reports that in post-revolutionary China, recognition of women's labor contributions has led to an increase in the value of the customary betrothal gift, and labor is accorded a measurable material value. Whether comparable mental calculations occur on a significant scale in other cultural groups remains a tantalizingly open question.

We might also ask whether women are being increasingly commoditized under immigration, urbanization, and capitalism.

Once again, we need to examine the superstructure. All of the contributors to this volume would probably agree that most partners in the domestic relationships they describe retain their integrity as spouses and as parents with common interests. The tone and character of the family may appear to be primarily that of an economic enterprise. However, this should not be construed as an end in itself. Instead, following Godelier (1978), it should be construed as a means to an end, with a meaning and momentum of its own. As long as women retain an identity within the family unit, however unequal their position may appear on the surface, they can hardly be relegated to the level of commodity (cf. Hirschon, ed. 1984; Strathern 1984).

CONCLUSION

Any conclusions proposed here must be as tentative as the data base from which they are drawn. In the absence of strong quantitative material, clear directions or dominant trends are hard to discern with any confidence or credibility, and speculations must often suffice. This does not detract from the value of the studies. In the best anthropological tradition, the studies in this volume provide a revealing and realistic sense of the subtlety, richness, and (often contradictory) complexity of life in these immigrant communities, of a kind and sensitivity that is usually missed by mere statistical surveys. While anthropologists must acknowledge their limitations, they can also confidently draw attention to their very real contributions. In this vein, the papers in this volume, without exception, add to the rich and growing annals of immigrant family life, gender relations, and cultural adaptation in three important countries of the modern world.

NOTES

1. Even in her later "Reconsiderations" (1971:264), Bott still seems convinced that the ideology and structure of a role set must be congruent. There, her example was a "reverse" case of middle-class West African couples attempting to emulate their European peers by cultivating joint conjugal roles. The couples were unable to sustain the ideal because of network obligations arising from lineage membership. Thus, although the ideology changed, it proved unable to transcend structural limitations.

REFERENCES CITED

Bott, Elizabeth
1968 Family and Social Network: Roles, Norms and External Relationships in Ordinary Urban Families. Third Edition. London: Tavistock Publications.
1971 Family and Social Network: Reconsiderations. Second Edition. New York: Free Press.

Croll, Elisabeth
1984 The Exchange of Women and Property: Marriage in Post-Revolutionary China. *In* Women and Property—Women as Property. R. Hirschon, ed. pp. 44-61. London: Croom Helm.

Godelier, Maurice
1978 Infrastructures, Societies, and History. Current Anthropology 19:763-771.

Friedl, Ernestine
1971 Dowry, Inheritance and Land Tenure. *In* Kinship. Jack Goody, ed. pp. 134-139. Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England: Penguin Books.

Hirschon, Renée, ed.
1984 Women and Property—Women as Property. London: Croom Helm.

Kosack, G.
1976 Migrant Women: The Move to Western Europe—A Step Towards Emancipation? Race and Class 17:369-379.

Münscher, Alice
1984 The Workday Routines of Turkish Women in the Federal Republic of Germany: Results of a Pilot Study. International Migration Review 18:1230-1246.

Nagata, Judith
1969 The Adaptation and Integration of Working Class Greeks in the City of Toronto: A Situational Approach. International Migration Review 4:44-69.

Piña-Cabral, Joao de
1984 Female Power and the Inequality of Wealth and Motherhood in North-Western Portugal. *In* Women and Property—Women as Property. R. Hirschon, ed. pp. 75-91. London: Croom Helm.

Strathern, Marilyn
1984 Subject or Object? Women and the Circulation of Valuables in the Highlands of New Guinea. *In* Women and Property—Women as Property. R. Hirschon, ed. pp. 158-175. London: Croom Helm.

Terray, E.
1969 Le Marxisme devant les Sociétés Primitives. Paris: Maspero.