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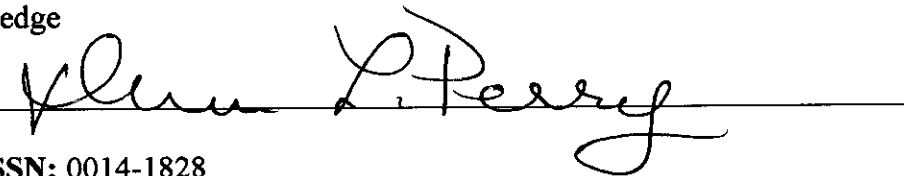
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Is the Female Husband a Man? Woman/Woman Marriage Among the Nandi of Kenya

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"No, I don't (carry things on my head). That is a woman's duty and nothing to do with me. I became a man and I am a man and that is all. Why should I assume women's work anymore?"

—Tapuwei, a Nandi female husband

The institution of woman/woman marriage as practiced by the Nandi of western Kenya presents an example of how one society deals with a problem of sexual classification. In a cultural system in which certain important attributes of the category "man" versus the category "woman" are well defined, a woman who functions in certain ways as only a man can (e.g., exchanging cattle for a wife, transmitting property to heirs) represents an anomaly. In the Nandi case, the anomaly is resolved by the frequently reiterated public dogma that the female husband is a man. I will show that in specified sociocultural domains it is crucial that the female husband adopt male gender. Within these domains, she makes every attempt to conform to male role behavior and informants go out of their way to rationalize any deviation therefrom by a female husband. Within other sociocultural domains, the assertion that the female husband is a man masks the fact that the role adopted by the female husband is sexually ambiguous and occupies an intermediate position between male and female roles.

A female husband is a woman who pays bridewealth for, and thus marries (but does not have sexual intercourse with) another woman. By so doing, she becomes the social and legal father of her wife's children. The basic institution of woman/woman marriage is widespread in African patrilineal societies, although the way it functions varies from society to society. In Nandi, a female husband should always be a woman of advanced age who has failed to bear a son. The purpose of the union is to provide a male heir.

The argument presented here is that the key to the question of the female husband's gender lies in her relationship to the property that is transmitted through her to the sons of her wife.¹ The exact status of this property will be discussed in greater detail below. For now, let it be said that it is an extremely important canon of Nandi ideology that the most significant property and primary means of production—livestock and, in the modern setting, land—should be held and managed exclusively by men. I will argue that the strength of the female husband's identification as a male is dependent on the social context in which the identification is made. In contexts which directly implicate the issues of property and heirship, Nandi informants are unanimous in considering it of the utmost importance to insist that the female husband is a man and behaves in exact accordance with the ideal model of the male role. Such areas are the management of family property, legitimate authority over the wife and children and the responsibility to provide for the wife and children in a material sense. The further one moves away from these issues into other aspects of the cultural definition of the male role the weaker become both the female husband's own attempts to conform to male role behavior and informants' dogmatic insistence that they in fact do so. To say that a female husband is a man in certain contexts but not in others lends a degree of clarity to the situation which is not present in fact.

The cultural definition of the category "man" is not limited to the relation to property. Once the ideological statement that the female husband is a man has been made, Nandi informants feel that they have to carry through on this idea in terms of the total cultural definition of this category. This leads them to make assertions about female husbands' behavior that observation shows to be untrue: that female husbands completely adopt the male role in the sexual division of labor, that they participate in public political discussions, that they do not carry things on their heads, and that they attend men's circumcision rites as a result of their male status. In fact, most female husbands do attend male initiation, but not because they are now considered to be men. The situation is one of rationalization and selective perception such as is typical of defensive strategies attempting to maintain important but precarious dogmas.

WOMAN/WOMAN MARRIAGE IN AFRICA

The question of the gender of the female husband has been raised, but hardly resolved, in recent publications.² Its resolution bears on the problem of the conditions under which sex role barriers may be transcended, and a cross-culturally valid definition of marriage. Is the role of female husband an instance of some individuals crossing sex role boundaries and, as it were, changing sex? Or is the cultural role "man" not an inevitable concomitant of the husband role, in which case marriage cannot be defined as a transaction between the cat-

gories male and female? Riviere (1971) asserts that female husbands are invariably culturally recorded as male and take on other aspects of the male role; husband is a sub-category of male, and marriages in all societies must be viewed as transactions between the male and female cultural categories. Krige (1974) rejects this view, at least for the Lovedu, and argues that the husband role in Lovedu society may be either male or female. Moreover, she maintains, Riviere's formulation reflects a misunderstanding of the nature of African marriage, in which relationships created by a marital union other than those of husband and wife may be of paramount importance. According to Krige, it is the intrinsic right of a woman (the mother of the "female husband") to the services of a daughter-in-law that is the basis of Lovedu woman marriage. O'Brien (1977) has examined accounts of woman marriage in southern Bantu societies and concluded that where female husbands may also be political leaders they are regarded as social males. The Nandi female husband is clearly culturally recorded as a man, though it is by no means clear that this is the case in all African societies (Huber 1969). Her assignment to the male gender does not mean that she easily and automatically assumes male role behavior in all spheres, however. Her position, as will be shown, is far from unambiguous and unproblematic.

The data reported here result from a study of nine woman/woman marriages in one Nandi community.³ Nine of ten known cases of female husbands living in the community, and wherever possible their wives, were interviewed extensively. A few female husbands and wives from other communities were also interviewed with varying degrees of thoroughness. Information was also obtained through observation, and a large number of informants who were not participants in woman/woman marriages were interviewed on the subject.

THE ETHNOGRAPHIC SETTING

The Nandi are a section of Kenya's Kalenjin-speaking peoples, whom Sutton (1970) calls Highland Nilotes. Huntingford (1953) classifies them as a pastoral people. They are well known for their military organization and aggressive cattle raiding practices and their culture during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was marked by a pastoral ideology. Cultivation, however, has always played a major role in their economy (Gold 1977). The Nandi at present are prosperous mixed-economy farmers producing maize, milk, tea, and a variety of vegetables for the national market as well as for home consumption. Maize is the staple subsistence crop.

The research community is located in the north-central part of Nandi District, where elevation varies between 6,200 and 6,800 feet and rainfall, distributed over the entire year, averages between 60 and 75 inches annually. Selected for its typicality, the community is neither the most traditional nor the most modernized in Nandi District. The average household (based on a random sample community

census)⁴ contains 8.1 people and 9.1 adult cattle and holds 20.6 acres of land; 76.4 per cent of households grow tea, and 61.9 per cent hire a tractor for at least part of their annual plowing. Over 60 per cent of household heads are at least nominal Christians; most of them adherents of the Africa Inland Church, a fundamentalist body. Almost 51 per cent have had some primary education, 33.9 per cent perform some sort of part-time cash-gaining activity, and 16.8 per cent of ever-married male household heads are polygynous.

Traditional Nandi social organization was crosscut by a system of seven rotating age-sets (*ibhinek*) for men, localized military units (*porosiek*), patrilineal clans (but not corporate patrilineages), and patrilineal extended families. While land was plentiful, every Nandi man was entitled to move with his family and herds to reside effectively wherever he wished. The most important unit was the local community (*kakwet*). It was the unit within which ceremonies were performed and disputes settled in most cases and within which day-to-day interaction took place. Today these functions take place at the level of the sublocation, an administrative unit made up of several traditional local communities and presided over by a government-appointed chief. It is the locus of political interaction. At its center is a group of shops, businesses, public buildings, and a community gathering place (the settlement pattern is otherwise one of scattered homesteads). The sublocation is overwhelmingly endogamous, whereas the *kakwet* is not. Patrilineal extended families are still important in today's social organization. Married couples reside patrilocally unless the husband buys a farm away from his father's homestead. The sole (but weak) function of patrilineal clans is the regulation of marriage.

THE PROPERTY SYSTEM AND WOMAN/WOMAN MARRIAGE

In Nandi ideology, women's rights in land and cattle are very limited. A girl may be given a heifer by her father if she is a virgin at her initiation and a woman may keep one cow as bridewealth for each of her daughters. Animals held by either spouse form the family estate but the bulk of the herd consists of animals a man receives from his father through inheritance or as gifts. This is augmented by cattle the family acquires through proceeds from their cash crops, as bridewealth for their daughters, etc. Husband and wife should jointly control those cattle in which the wife's rights predominate, though the husband has the right to control independently those cattle in which his rights predominate. If a woman leaves her husband, she has no right to take any animals with her. Many informants say that it is also better that she take no property with her to her husband so that this can never be a bone of contention between them.

Management of land and cattle is a male prerogative, although informants will admit that when the husband is incapable of administering the family estate it would not be wrong for the wife to assume responsibility. The exception to the rule that women do not manage

property is the case of widows. Widows can hold property in their own right and make decisions regarding the property which they hold in trust for their minor sons. The lack of congruence with public ideology that this fact presents is dealt with by the typical male claim (contrary to observable events) that effective control of the family estate is held not by the widow but by the deceased man's brother. This man may or may not be the woman's levirate husband.

Women—wives and mothers—though supposedly barred from administering the family estate are critical in its transmission. A woman's "house" (patrilineal descendants) is automatically endowed with a share of her husband's property at the time of her marriage. The system is that which Gluckman (1950) has called the house-property complex. All property held by a polygynous family is ideally divided evenly among sets of full siblings, each set receiving exactly the same share regardless of how many children the mother has. A man can marry only by using those of his father's cattle which were allotted to his mother's house, or those which came as bridewealth for his own full sisters; he should not use his half-sister's bridewealth cattle, nor may his father allot him cattle from the herd of one of his mother's co-wives. Although the effective share of the family estate to which each wife's house is entitled obviously changes as each additional wife is added to her husband's menage, the basic principle that her house is entitled to an equal share is never abrogated. Marriage is considered to be a once in a lifetime event for a Nandi woman. Though a traditional divorce proceeding existed, and while it is possible now to obtain a legal divorce through the courts, both these options are so rarely invoked that divorce may be said to be absent. Separation, however, does occur. A woman may leave her husband for a period of many years or even for life. She may live with a man in the meantime and have children by him. She may go to a town and become a prostitute. All this does not change her marriage and property rights. She remains the legal wife of the man who first married her, and her children remain his legal heirs. She can return, with children, after an absence of many years, and her husband will take her back. She can even return and take up her rights to her husband's property after his death. A woman retains throughout her life a right to live on the land of her father and brothers, but she can in no way transmit any rights to this land. A woman is incorporated into her husband's family at marriage, she takes his clan identity, and her children's only legitimate rights to filiate are with his family. Illegitimacy is a new phenomenon in Nandi, and though it would seem that there must be cases on record of children affiliating matrilineally in exceptional circumstances, I found none in the course of the research. It is possible, however, for women to transmit to their sons property which they themselves have acquired.

Traditionally, the property of a woman's house could only be transmitted to male heirs. As it was inappropriate for a woman to hold property, it could not be passed to daughters. If an heir was

completely lacking, the property would have to revert to a man's sons by other wives or to his brothers, but it was considered wrong and very unfortunate if this should happen. The demographic reality is that not every woman gives birth to a son. Woman/woman marriage is one solution to this problem. The intention is that the wife of a female husband should bear sons who will become their female father's house's male heirs in the property system.

A woman who has taken a wife is said to become a man. It is said that she has been promoted to male status (*kagotogosta kemostab murre-nik*). She can no longer have sexual intercourse with a man (nor with a woman). She has all the nonsexual prerogatives of a male husband with regard to her wife, and is supposed to abandon all women's work. She theoretically acquires certain public prerogatives of men; for example, the right to speak in public meetings. In the past, she would also be expected to adopt to some extent male dress and adornment. She normally stops attending female initiation and in most cases will already have been admitted to male initiation in hopes of curing her infertility or inability to bear a son. (In Nandi, an infertile person of either sex is admitted to the opposite sex's initiation rituals in the hope that the infertility will thereby be cured.) Female husbands, like their male counterparts, are required to observe procedures for avoiding contamination by ritual pollution with regard to their wives and children.

Although property is the crux of the institution of woman/woman marriage, and although informants cite the advantages of being married to a wealthy woman rather than a poor man, female husbands are not exceptionally rich. In fact, those on whom data are available are not as wealthy as the community average, with average land holdings of 15.8 (versus 20.6) acres and herds of 7 (versus 9.1) adult cattle.

MOTIVATIONS OF THE PRINCIPALS IN WOMAN/WOMAN MARRIAGES

The motivation of a woman who becomes a female husband is fairly clear-cut; it is the acquisition of a male heir for her property. But why does she choose this means to her end rather than another?

There are two options other than woman/woman marriage available to a woman whose house has no heir. First, she may adopt or "buy" a male child by the payment of a large sum (these days, normally, money) to the parents of the child, who relinquish all ties to him. The children bought by Nandi women usually come from the neighboring Abaluhya. It is difficult to find any child, particularly a Nandi child, available for sale. In the past, children born to unwed mothers were killed unless requested for adoption by a barren woman who happened to be present at the birth. Thus it was easier to adopt a child in the past than presently, as barren women would be sure to know of the approaching confinement of any pregnant girl.

Today, although infanticide has been eliminated, unwed mothers usually raise their own children. Moreover, by the time a woman resigns herself to the fact that she will not bear a son, she is often too old for adoption to be a realistic option. Thus, adoption is relatively rare.

Another option is the institution known as "marrying the house" or "marrying the center post" (*tanisiet ab got, kinunis lolotta*). In this form of marriage, the sonless woman's youngest daughter is retained at home and her "husband" is said to be the house or its center post. This daughter will have children by self-selected sexual partners and her sons will inherit the house's property. The custom is said to be a recent innovation but has not gained much popularity relative to woman/woman marriage.

It seems that woman/woman marriage is the most commonly adopted of these options in the case of lack of a male heir but only a minority of women who are eligible to become female husbands actually do so. From a large-scale survey of marital and fertility histories it was found that among women over 40 years of age, only 4.3 per cent of those ever married and 24.5 per cent of those who bore no sons ultimately became female husbands. This includes women of the youngest age cohort over 40, among whom many who are candidates to be female husbands have not yet made the decision to marry. For the older two age cohorts, 39 per cent and 27 per cent, respectively, of women with no male heir married; 6.8 per cent and 6 per cent, respectively, of ever-married women ultimately became female husbands. In the community intensively studied, at least ten out of a total of 286 households were headed by female husbands. The rate for female husbands as household heads, then, is just under 3 per cent.⁵

Several factors may prevent a sonless woman from becoming a female husband. First, her house's property may not be large enough to warrant an heir, especially if her house lacks enough bridewealth cattle to acquire a wife. Second, a woman who is prepared to take a wife may have difficulty in finding one. This was the reason most commonly given by women who were prime candidates for becoming female husbands. They point out that they will not marry anyone and maintain that they will marry as soon as they find willing girls who are hard-working, well-mannered, and from good families. Occasionally sonless old women who have not become female husbands cite personal reasons for their failure to marry; e.g., the difficulty of adjusting to another person in the household. It has been suggested to me that some women may resist becoming female husbands because of the prohibition on sexual intercourse which the role entails.

Why should a woman choose to marry a wife in favor of other options? Two female husbands said that they would have adopted sons but could find no available male children. Two did adopt sons but both children were sickly. One died in infancy and the other

turned out to be simple-minded and thus not a suitable heir to the property. Another female husband explained that it is bad economics to pay money equivalent to a bridewealth payment for just one infant son who might not even survive to reproductive age when, for the same amount, one can acquire a grown woman who will reproduce herself several times over in a few years. Three female husbands have daughters who wished to marry their boyfriends and refused to "marry the house." Still others provided various personal and idiosyncratic reasons for choosing woman/woman marriage. Over and above all these explanations, there is the general reason that woman/woman marriage entails a rise in status for the female husband.

Why do women become wives of female husbands? They are usually girls who for one reason or another—for example, a physical or mental defect—fail to attract a male husband. These days, the most common reason why a girl is considered unmarriageable by men is that she already has a child or is pregnant by a man who refuses to marry her. Such girls quite often become the wives of female husbands.

Some informants maintain that a girl will always prefer marriage to a man if it is possible, while others claim that there are many girls who choose to be married by female husbands as a matter of preference. The wives of female husbands are themselves divided on this score. Several said that they had received offers of marriage from men but they and their families preferred to accept an offer for woman/woman marriage. Most informants agree that it is better to be married by a wealthy woman than by a poor man. As one informant put it, "When you actually live with a man the love may fade, but the property will always be there." Second, informants cite greater sexual and social freedom for the wife as a reason to prefer woman/woman marriage. Female husbands are said to be less likely to question their wives' comings and goings. Third, informants say that female husbands are less likely than men to quarrel with their wives and beat them. Another possible motivating factor is the slight tendency of female suitors, being very anxious to marry, to give bride-wealth of higher value than that given by men. Males in my sample who married between 1970 and 1977 gave bridewealth ranging between four and six adult cattle, one sheep or goat, and money ranging between none and 500 shillings. During the same period, out of seven cases of woman/woman marriage, the amounts given in five cases fell within the range of the amounts given by the men, but one female husband gave seven cattle and 500 shillings, and another gave seven cattle, 600 shillings and three sheep; an extremely high amount for Nandi bridewealth.

DOMESTIC RELATIONS IN FEMALE HUSBAND-HEADED HOUSEHOLDS

Female husbands, their wives and children are real people living together in actual household situations. What, then, are the typical

patterns of interaction in these female husband-headed households? Besides the husband, wife and children, other parties—such as the female husband's male husband, her co-wives and their children—are frequently significant in these interactions. Another significant party is the wife's consort, who may or may not be a regular visitor in the compound.

The wife and her children ideally occupy a separate dwelling from that of the female husband to facilitate the wife's relationship with her consort.⁶ The dwellings of the female husband and wife should, however, be within the same compound and in close proximity. I know of at least one case in which both a barren woman and her husband married young wives at the same time, divided their plot, and lived side by side with their new families as brothers might. In several cases, female husbands and their wives are found living together in a common dwelling. The female husband, in these cases, maintained that she had not yet had an opportunity to provide separate housing arrangements for the wife but would do so soon.

The division of labor is said by informants to be much the same as in male husband-headed households. Cooking, washing utensils, carrying water and collecting firewood, sweeping, plastering the house, and washing clothes are supposed to be exclusively female chores. Jobs technically reserved for men include plowing, inoculating cattle, clearing bush, digging drainage ditches, fencing, house-frame building, thatching, and slaughtering. Both sexes engage in herding, cultivation, and milking (see Oboler 1977 for a detailed description of the division of labor by sex). In the man, female husbands avoid female tasks, although with less rigidity than do men. Because of their advanced age, they are not often observed doing heavy work reserved for men but employ men to do such work for their households. Most female husbands take an active role in tasks which are not sexually coded.

Informants maintain that, except for the absence of the sex act, the relationship between a female husband and her wife should be no different from that between a male husband and his wife. They should go to the fields together in the morning, like any other married pair, and in the afternoon the female husband is free to "go for a walk" while the wife takes care of household chores. Female husbands do typically behave as men in reserving most of their afternoons for socializing but they differ little from other old women in this respect. Female husbands and their wives also behave exactly as male husbands and their wives when entertaining visitors. As one informant put it, "When a visitor comes, I sit with him outside and converse with him. My wife brings out maize-porridge, vegetables, and milk. When we have finished eating I say, 'Wife, come and take the dishes.' Then I go for a walk with the visitor." Observation confirms this description.

The wife of a female husband probably has more opportunity than the wife of a male husband to be relieved of her domestic responsi-

bilities such as in the case of illness or a family crisis which causes her to return temporarily to her parents' home. The female husband is more able and willing to fend for herself in the domestic domain than is the typical male husband. If the two women are on good terms, the female husband will usually sympathize with the problems of her wife, having been a wife herself. Women often cited the tendency of female husbands to be less harsh and demanding as one of the advantages of woman/woman marriage.

In terms of informal interaction, it seems that female husbands and their wives enjoy more casual companionship than do ordinary couples. More opportunities for friendly and companionable conversation between female husband and wife arise since the female husband spends more time in her compound than a male husband. This is partly the result of preference and partly the result of habit. Female husbands are supposed to spend most of their time socializing with men and most of them claim that they do, but observation does not support this claim. One informant confided what is probably true for many other female husbands as well, "Men like fighting, and I don't like being with them most of the time."

No female husband would admit that she is not totally in charge of important household decisions (e.g., farm management and money allocation) but several women stated that another advantage of marriage to a female husband is the opportunity to participate more equally in household decisions.

The female husband is technically in the same position of authority over her wife as a male husband. All wives agreed that they must ask permission from their female husbands to go away from the compound, except for local, short-term activities such as marketing and visiting neighbors. The husband supervises the wife's behavior and has the right to beat her if she errs. It is agreed, however, that female husbands rarely invoke this right. This is not to say that female husbands never beat their wives, but on the whole wives of female husbands see their domestic situations as atypically harmonious. "A man who finds a mistake with his wife only wants to beat her. A woman just scolds and that is enough."

Traditionally, the female husband appointed a man to act as consort to her wife. This man would most likely be a younger clan-mate of the female husband's husband—possibly his younger brother, his brother's son, or the son of one of his other wives. It could never be the female husband's husband himself nor could it be any of her own patrilineal kin.⁷ These days, however, wives are insistent on choosing their own consorts, and usually make sure that the female husband agrees in advance to this arrangement before consenting to the marriage. Where the female husband tries to appoint a consort for her wife against the wife's will, the latter remains adamant. The wife sees her sexual autonomy as one of the chief advantages to her of woman/woman marriage and will not surrender it lightly.

Nevertheless, the wives of female husbands and other observers confirm, that they are not promiscuous, but have one long-standing relationship with a male friend (*yander*). This man visits the wife in her house on a more or less regular basis. His responsibility is to give her children and nothing else. He may occasionally give her a gift of friendship, but he is not obligated to do so. The consort may or may not be acquainted with the rest of the household, including the female husband. Some informants implied that it would be bad form for the latter to acknowledge him, while others said that he could visit the compound openly and be treated as a friend of the family. The consort has no rights of any kind in the wife or her children. He cannot demand her sexual fidelity or any wifely services, although she usually cooks for him when he visits her. He has no right to beat her if she displeases him. If he should do so, she can have him fined by the village elders. Most female husbands vigorously denied that they would ever request money or services from the wife's consort in times of difficulty. Agreement is complete that pollution connected with the wife's child cannot harm her consort, the biological father, because he is not the legal father.

Female husbands assume the formal role of father to their wives' children. The relationship between fathers and their young children is normally reserved and distant and the relationship between female fathers and their children is no different.⁸ Female husbands believe that they can be harmed by pollution connected with the wife's children and treat them with the same cool aloofness displayed by male fathers. In relation to their other kin, for example, their daughters' children, they maintain the same kinship role behavior as before. It is quite remarkable to watch a female husband treat her daughter's child in the warm affective style of a grandmother at one moment and her wife's child with the reserve of a father at the next.

Female fathers, like male fathers, are responsible for the discipline of their wives' children and children reportedly respect and fear female fathers as much as they would male fathers. One of the most important areas of significance of the father role is the father's responsibility to care for the wife's children materially. That they meet this requirement was constantly stressed by female husbands.⁹

Cases of separation and estrangement occur between female husbands and their wives, just as they occur in ordinary marriages. In the beginning of my inquiries on this subject, some highly acculturated informants told me that girls do not want to be married by women and usually run away if such a marriage is arranged for them. Subsequent contacts and interviews with the principals in woman/woman marriages have convinced me that this is not the case. The usual pattern in woman/woman marriage is one of harmony and mutual respect between husband and wife which, as in ordinary marriages, often develops into real affection. As one wife said, "I respect Kogoo as I would have respected a man if he had married me."

Both the female husband and her wife gain status in the community through a stable marriage. The female husband gains descendants and promotion to male status, after spending years in the unenviable status of a barren or sonless wife. The wife is likely to be a girl for whom getting married has been difficult. If she already has children, she gains inheritance and clan status for them. Otherwise, she is licensed to bear legitimate children. If she has made the mistake of premarital pregnancy and thus lost face in the community and the chance to make a good marriage with a man, she is able to recoup her position through marriage with a woman. Most wives of female husbands believe that their situation compares favorably with that of ordinary wives in many respects.

WOMAN/WOMAN MARRIAGE AND KINSHIP TERMINOLOGY

All Nandi informants strongly insist that a woman who takes a wife becomes a man and (except for the absence of sexual intercourse with her wife) behaves in all social contexts exactly as would any ordinary man. Aspects of the kinship terminology belie this assumption, however. No informant gave the kinship terms to be used by a female husband and her wife towards each other's various relatives as exactly the same as those used by a two-sex couple. Therefore, consideration of the degree to which kinship terms used between female husbands and their wives and other relatives conform to terminological usages in cases where the husband is a man is relevant to the issue of the female husband's gender. To what extent are kin terms used in kinship dyads involving female husbands the same as those used in dyads involving male husbands? Is the female husband a man with regard to the use of kinship terms?

Informant accounts of the correct usage of kin terms by parties related through woman/woman marriages are far from consistent. Consistency is greatest in the case of those terms which relate directly to the roles of the people concerned in the management and transmission of the family estate. In some cases, the responses are not those which we would expect if we view the female husband as a man. This seeming paradox is resolved, however, when it is understood that many of these terms encode relationships between patrilineal extended families and do not really relate to the female husband as an individual. Agreement about correct usage is greatest where the terms in question encode marriage and property exchange relations between patrilineal extended families, and relationships significant to the transmission of property within patrilineal extended families.

The ideology that the female husband is a man, however, is so strong that even where agreement that the correct term is other than what would be expected if the female husband were considered the same as a man is effectively complete, some informants will deviate in the attempt to make their position logically coherent. A female

husband will say, for example, "Really the children should call me *habba*, because I am their father." Still, there is complete agreement that this is not the appropriate term for children to use for female fathers.

In some other parts of western Kenya, e.g., Huber (1969) on the Sumbit, a Gusii or Kuria sub-group, the role which a woman who marries assumes toward her bride is that of mother-in-law and the kinship terminology adjusts itself to make sense with the insertion of a fictitious husband/son between the two women. Terminology appropriate to this model of the female husband's role accounts for many of the inconsistencies in the Nandi kin term data. There is evidence for the general diffusion northward of the institution of woman/woman marriage among the Kalenjin (Kipsigis → Nandi → Keiyo) and it is very likely that it originally diffused to Kipsigis from the neighboring Gusii. Thus the contradiction in the Nandi terminology may reflect a continuing process of adapting the Gusii pattern to the Nandi cultural context. Some examples of the consistencies and inconsistencies in informants' accounts of the kin terms appropriate to woman/woman marriages will suffice to demonstrate these points.¹⁰

There is virtual informant unanimity about the terms appropriately used between the female husband and her wife, and the wife's children. The female husband refers to them as "my wife" and "my children" but they do not reciprocate with the terms they would use for a male husband/father and instead call the female husband *kogo*, "grandmother." From the standpoint of the children, this usage is consistent with the Gusii-type terminological model but it is not clear why the wife should call her husband "grandmother." Since *kogo* is a term of extremely broad application which can be used for any old woman, one possibility is that its use by the wife to her female husband is a way of avoiding the issue of what kin term is appropriate for the latter and reflects the ambiguity of her position.

Informants are equally divided on whether the female husband's wife and daughter should call each other by terms appropriate to a female-husband-as-man model ("mother" and "child," the terms that would be used between a man's younger wife and his children by an older co-wife) or a female-husband-as-mother-in-law model ("husband's sister"/"brother's wife"). Likewise, there is lack of agreement on whether the wife's children should call the female husband's siblings by the terms for father's brother and father's sister, as they would if she were a male father, or by the terms for grandmother and grandfather, which they would use by extension if it were the female husband's son who was their male father.

One of the points of greatest informant agreement, however, is the use of the term *banira*. Ordinarily this term means "husband's brother/sister's husband" (woman speaking). Informants declare that the wife of a female husband should never call the female husband's

own brother *bamuru*. This is because the term *bamuru* has to do with the relationship between families allied by marriage—it is reserved for men of a woman's own generation of a family related to her natal family as wife-takers. It is the estate of the family of a female husband's male husband which provides bridewealth for her wife and it is this family that is allied to the wife's family by the marriage. This also explains why most informants agree that a female husband's wife should use the term *bamuru* for the female husband's co-wife's son. Some informants say that the wife's sister should use the term *bamuru* to address the female husband, just as though the latter were a man. The wife's family as a whole calls the female husband by the same term they use for a male son/brother-in-law (*sandana*) and she uses the reciprocal term (*kapyngoi*) toward them. For the purposes of bridewealth exchange and marriage alliance, the female husband has already been fully incorporated into the patrilineal family of her husband. Further, it makes sense that her wife's family should not distinguish her from a male son-in-law terminologically because the essence of her relationship to them—cattle-exchanging wife-taker—is highly anomalous for a woman.

The female husband's wife calls her husband's co-wife's son *bamuru* because of his status as heir to a part of the estate that has provided her bridewealth. She cannot use this term for the female husband's brother because he is a member of an entirely different patrilineal family. The property and alliance relationship in this case makes the assimilation of terms surrounding the female husband to the male husband model impossible. The wife's family calls the female husband *sandana* and she reciprocally calls them *kapyngoi* because she functions toward them as a cattle-giving wife-taker and is no different from a male son-in-law in this crucial respect. Since the property issue is the crux of the entire institution of woman/woman marriage, the areas where the terminology clearly encodes property relations are those where there is least confusion. Lack of unanimity among informants about terminology in cases that are more peripheral to matters of property leaves open the question of the female husband's gender status (male husband versus female mother-in-law) and allows for contextual shifts between the male and female roles.

The kin terms used between female husbands and their wives and the respective relatives of both show numerous deviations from the terms used in cases where the husband is a man. These deviations are not random but are patterned in the direction of the female-husband-as-mother-in-law model current among some Bantu peoples of western Kenya. Some confusion results because informants consciously maintain the ideology that, except for sexual relations, the female husband's position is exactly the same as that of a male husband, and try to bend kin terminological usage to support this assertion. Nandi terminology reflects an interplay between these two models for woman/woman marriage.

IS THE FEMALE HUSBAND A MAN?

Nandi informants know very well that the female husband is not a man in the sense that she has changed her physiological sex or all her sex typed behaviors. The impossibility of completely changing the habitual actions of a lifetime is recognized. Everyone is of course aware that the female husband is not really a man but it is a grave insult for anyone to call attention to this fact. What, then, is the claim that the female husband is a man intended to encode? What does the female husband have in common with a man that makes it essential for her to be defined as such? The oft reiterated statement of the female husband's masculine identity is a cultural dogma (Leach 1969). It is an ideological assertion which masks the fact that the female husband is an anomaly: she is a woman who of necessity behaves as no woman in her culture should. Her situation forces her to assume male behavior in certain areas that are crucial to the cultural definition of the differences between the sexes. These areas have to do with the management and transmission of the family estate.

Behaviors associated with men are not all equally important in the attempt to maintain the ideological fiction that the woman who has taken a wife is now a man. Some are essential, and the female husband insists that for these her behavior conforms to the masculine ideal. Others can be more or less ignored. Female husband is thus a category which, in some sense, occupies an intermediate position between male and female.

Unanimity about the norms to which the female husband's behavior must conform is greatest in those areas that are closest to her role in the management and transmission of the family estate: her role in the domestic division of labor, as husband to her wife and father to the wife's children, and the cessation of sexual intercourse. There is less agreement regarding other aspects of the male role such as conversing primarily with men, speaking in public meetings, attending men's initiation, refraining from carrying things on the head, and the manner of relating to children other than those of the wife and other women.

Female husbands tend to avoid such feminine chores as household maintenance, laundry, and wood and water carrying, although typically with less rigidity than do men. Several female husbands said that they can help with the milking, as many young men do nowadays. Cooking is the most indispensable domestic job and ideally should be done by the wife. Even informants who say that it is possible for a female husband to cook under unusual circumstances insist that she should never do so at her wife's hearth, which she may not approach for any purpose. This is an example of the contextuality of the female husband's gender status; in relation to female symbols connected with her wife she is quintessentially a man.

A female husband should not see her wife naked because in relation to her she is a husband and therefore a man, but she may see any

other woman naked. A female husband is never present during her wife's labor. It is generally believed that the female husband can be affected by feminine/child pollution (*kerék*) due to close contact with the wife's child. The effect is reportedly at least partly the result of magic performed during the traditional wedding ceremony. This explains why it is not felt by the genitor. Since *kerék* is believed to have a negative effect on those many qualities which insure success as a warrior, some informants say that this is naturally of little concern to a female husband and that she can therefore take these prohibitions less seriously than do men. Others assert that female husbands take *kerék* very seriously because it can induce rapid aging and skin disease.

If the male husband of a female husband is still alive, and does not have another wife living in the compound, the wife of the female husband may be responsible for providing nonsexual domestic services to both of them, or the female husband may continue to provide some or all of these to her male husband while herself being provided them by her wife. She will not wash her own clothes because in relation to her wife she is a man (husband); but she can still wash clothes for her male husband because in relation to him she is a wife and therefore a woman. In this situation it is perhaps easiest to see the ambiguity and contextuality of the female husband's gender position.

Female husbands are rarely observed doing work that is technically reserved for men. This they rationalize, when challenged, on the grounds that they are old and no longer able to engage in such strenuous activity. Female husbands are active in types of work appropriate to both sexes—cultivation and herding—but reinterpret it as male work in order to affirm their male status. Since female husbands were occasionally observed fencing, the claim that they do male tasks is not a complete fallacy. In general, however, this is a situation in which people now conceptually defined as men have never learned to perform certain aspects of the male role and it is now too late to change the behavior patterns of a lifetime. In spite of this, female husbands are considered to have assumed the male role in the division of labor. On the one hand, informants make it a point to argue that female husbands are doing the work of men when they are in fact doing work that is equally appropriate to men or women. On the other, their taking responsibility for having male tasks done is coded as the equivalent of personally doing them.

In extradomestic contexts it is less important that female husbands conform to male role behavior. Nevertheless, since female husbands are said to be men, many informants find it necessary for the sake of logical consistency to insist that they behave as men in areas important to the cultural definition of this category. This leads people to make claims that are sometimes contrary to observation. For example, female husbands say they typically converse with men rather

than women, but the observational evidence is to the contrary. All say they can participate in public meetings and political discussions but admit that they have never done so. All but one attend men's initiation. It was revealed, however, that in all cases this is due to the woman's barrenness or failure to bear a son and preceded her decision to marry a wife. Yet female husbands all implied that they attend male initiation as the result of their status as female husbands, therefore men. There is disagreement as to whether it is possible for female husbands to continue attending female initiation but it is agreed that it is at least not usual, since they are now regarded as men. Neither is there unanimity as to whether a female husband can carry things on her head, act as midwife to women other than her wife, or hold another woman's baby. Many informants say that there is nothing wrong in the latter two behaviors but some deny that a female husband should ever be present at a birth or hold any young baby because she is a man. Thus in many areas of action the female husband's gender position is ambiguous.

The female husband makes her greatest attempt to conform to male behavior, and informants rationalize any deviation from such behavior, in contexts that are closely connected with the management of the heirship to the family estate. Though issues such as avoidance of *kerék* and close physical contact with the wife's children are not immediately relevant to the management of property, they are relevant to the issue of heirship. They are the categories of thought and action through which the relationship between the property holder and heir is acted out. With regard to heirship, the insistence that the female husband abandon her sex life is also noteworthy. Though she is presumed to be unable to conceive, there is still the danger that the impossible will somehow occur. If she should conceive, both the issue of inheritance and the dogma that she is a man would be too thoroughly confounded to be withstood.

The issue of heirship and property is also relevant to the strength with which informants maintain the ideology that the female husband is a man in the area of kinship terminology. It has been shown above that there is a great deal of ambiguity about the female husband's gender as encoded in the kinship terminology appropriately used between principals in woman/woman marriages and their respective relatives. Most uniformity exists in the areas where property transmission within patrilineal families and property exchange between patrilineal families are involved. Thus the major factor which distinguishes a female husband from a woman and makes her the same as a man is the legitimate right to hold and manage land and livestock and transmit them to heirs.

Particularly in contexts less immediately relevant to issues of property and heirship, female husband is an intermediate category between man and woman. While this is not made explicit in the cultural ideology, the recognition of this situation is often implicit. An old

man explained it this way: "It is just like getting a promotion. Always when you are promoted there is still that person who does the promoting, which means that you are still under somebody. So women who have married wives have limited prerogatives. They are more nearly equal to men than are other women, but men are always ahead of them."

CONCLUSION

Among the Nandi, only men can hold and manage land and livestock, the means of production, but these are transmitted through women and rights therein devolve to a woman's house at marriage and can never be revoked. The argument developed in the preceding pages is essentially that woman marriage is the outcome of this contradiction between men's and women's rights in the house-property complex. Moreover, some of the most important attributes of the category "man" in Nandi culture have to do with management of the family estate.

These two facts taken together explain why the female husband is culturally conceptualized as a man. She must manage property because of her special circumstances, but a female holder, manager and exchanger of property is an extremely anomalous being. Thus she is culturally recorded as a man to reduce the contradiction implicit in her role with regard to property. This explains why informants insist that the female husband is a man, and why her attempts to behave as a man are most pronounced in the areas of life that have most bearing upon the family estate and heirship to it. The degree to which the status, role and behavior of a female husband approximates that of an actual man in various areas of ideology and activity has been reviewed in an attempt to show that the closer one gets to issues of property and heirship the stronger is the dogma that the female husband is a man, the further the remove from these issues the more this dogma is diminished.

Once articulated, the ideology that the female husband is a man has an independent existence. Informants strive for logical consistency and thus extend this ideology, which is so important in the domain of property relations, into other domains. In some senses, the female husband becomes an intermediate category between male and female. In areas removed from the realm of property relations, thus not crucial to the female husband's male status but generally important to the cultural construct man, the ambiguity is greatest. It is in these areas (e.g., political participation, male initiation) that the dogma that the female husband is a man comes to be defended with an impressive edifice of evasion, rationalization, and selective perception.

NOTES

1. For assistance in arriving at this interpretation, I am indebted to Cathy Small, Lorraine Sexton, Denise O'Brien and Diane Freedman, although I remain solely

responsible for any errors of logic in its development. I am further indebted to Jennifer Jepjoo Kosut, who assisted in the collection of the data.

The term "woman marriage" is commonly used in the anthropological literature to denote the institution I am discussing. This term is somewhat confusing, since all marriages involve women. O'Brien (1977: 110) prefers to drop the term "woman marriage" in favor of "female husband." The Nandi institution clearly belongs in the context of the entire range of institutions found in African societies in which a woman can pay bridewealth to acquire predominant rights in a wife. In some of these societies, the relationship between the two women is not that of "husband and wife." Therefore, I choose to use "woman/woman marriage" as a general term for the institution, and "female husband" as the term for a woman who takes a wife and is considered to stand as "husband" to her according to the rules of their culture.

2. Although the existence of woman/woman marriage in a large number of African societies has been briefly noted in various ethnographic sources (summarized by O'Brien 1972), it has received very little detailed anthropological study. A handful of ethnographic accounts by Hershkovits (1937) on Dahomey; Krige and Krige (1943) and Krige (1974) on Lovedu; van Warmelo and Phophi (1948) on Venda; Evans-Pritchard (1951) on Nuer; Huber (1969) on Simbiri; and Obbo (1976) on Kamba contain more than passing references to woman/woman marriage. The most complete accounts are those of Krige (1974) and Huber (1969).

3. This study was funded by grants from the National Institute for Mental Health, the National Science Foundation, and the Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Foundation. It was carried out during my tenure as a Research Associate of the Institute for Development Studies, University of Nairobi, Kenya. To all of the above, I wish to express my appreciation for making the research possible.

4. The census included 116 households, or a 40 per cent sample of the approximately 286 households in Kapret sublocation. The list of 286 households from which the random sample was selected was compiled from lists provided by sublocation Chief Paulo arap Lelei and *kabwet* elders. This was the most accurate information available.

5. Woman/woman marriage is not declining in popularity at present, but several factors may ultimately work against it. For example, there are the opposition of Christians and the growing idea that daughters as well as sons should be eligible to inherit family property. Woman/woman marriage will probably continue as an option for completely childless women and girls with children who have not inherited property. The institution of woman/woman marriage is in the process of diffusing from the Nandi to other Kenyan societies.

6. In Nandi, dwelling structures are of two kinds, *got* and *isigritet*. The former is traditionally the dwelling of a family, with cooking hearth, overhead storage compartment, and a room for sheep and goats. The latter is usually a smaller one-room dwelling which traditionally served as sleeping quarters for warriors and their girlfriends and now houses adolescent boys and unmarried men or a man who wishes a place to sleep away from the family. The most significant distinction is that the fireplace of the *isigritet* is not generally used as a cooking hearth. The wife's house is consistently referred to as *got*, the female husband's fairly consistently as *isigritet*.

7. Langley (1979) says that the female husband "raised children either to her own or her husband's clan," that some of her informants believed that the wife's consort should belong to the female husband's own kin group and that the consort had to be approved by the female husband's own kin group as well as that of her male husband. All these points are vehemently and unanimously denied by the scores of informants I interviewed about woman/woman marriage in various areas of Nandi District and other areas of Nandi settlement.

8. The distance between father and child stems to a large degree from traditional pollution beliefs. *Keré* is the Nandi word for a polluting substance believed to emanate from newborn infants and from women due to their close association with babies. Its effect on a man, particularly the child's own father, is to weaken his *marraet*, or manly qualities. He loses his prowess in warfare and becomes stupid, weak and indecisive. At the birth of a child, a husband leaves his wife's house and is

not completely reincorporated into the household until the child is eight to twelve months old. Today, the period of avoidance has been shortened to about a month, in most cases, and most young people do not admit to believing in *kerék*.

9. Readers may wonder whether a male child raised in a female husband-headed household will not have a gender identity problem as the result of lacking a male role model. This concern is needless on two grounds. First, the father's relationship with the child is ordinarily distant. Second, some male adult relative is always living in or in close proximity to the female husband's compound and this man, be he the female husband's brother-in-law, the son of her co-wife, or whoever, serves as a male role model. The question of the absence of a male role model is specifically restricted to a nuclear family socialization context.

10. Space considerations make it impossible to provide an exhaustive analysis of the kin term material from which these conclusions are drawn. This analysis is the subject of a future article.

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Preference, Principle, and Precedent: Dispute Settlement and Changing Norms in Sidamo Associations¹

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The purpose of this paper is to examine what happens when the traditional balance of self-interest and affiliative obligations between generations must be adapted to fit institutional changes. On a more theoretical plane, it is the problem of relating individual preferences of what has been termed "physicalism" to group principles based on an integrated value system (Evens 1977:580-81). The situation to be considered is the unprecedented development of small self-help groups and co-operatives among the Sadama of southern Ethiopia. A brief theoretical discussion will be followed by a description of the people and the dispute settlement procedures by which conflicting individual preferences are negotiated in forming new behavioral norms and values.

Barth (1966:4) has suggested that new "overarching" values and behavioral norms are formed by a "transactional process which results where parties in the course of their interactions systematically try to assure that the value gained for them is greater or equal to the value lost." But he tends to assume that individuals bring only disparate values to the interaction situation which through the process of transactional negotiation become integrated into "overarching principles of evaluation" (Barth 1964:20). Evens (1977) questions the assumption of arbitrary values brought to the transactional situation, claiming instead that these forms of evaluation are in fact derived from integrated rules and standards.

It is our contention that individuals do bring concepts of rightness and wrongness, as well as behavioral expectations, to social situations. But, to use Moore's (1975) apt phraseology, some form of "situational adjustment" is required because of the "indeterminacy" of appropriate values and norms. The basis for making this adjust-