

for the choices women have made to be with their families and of the work entailed to keep a family going. O'Donnell sees their choices as "reasoned, realistic and well-tempered." Throughout the book she makes the point that priorities change throughout the life-course of individual women and that women in her study were in the mothering-as-central stage. She does not address the question of whether there are also parallel life-courses. As women in her sample are disdainful of those who seem to put careers first, so many "career" women see homemakers as oppressed. I would like to see the parallel study of mothers who continue their full-time employment careers to see whether there is a similar stage for them.

My criticisms of O'Donnell's book are few. The book is well written and well argued. For me it is an important book in that it forced me to reexamine my assumptions about women's preferred roles. Priorities in women's lives can and do change. My courses in family and individual development will henceforth include several models of women's life course.

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Women, Power, and Economic Change: The Nandi of Kenya. Regina Smith Oboler, *California: Stanford University Press, 1985. Pp. 348.*

Regina Oboler's *Women, Power, and Economic Change* examines the status of women among the Nandi peoples of Western Kenya. Oboler is particularly interested in the impact of socio-economic change on the sexual division of labour and sexual stratification. The Nandi are appropriate for this problematic as they adopted cash crop production on a large scale during the colonial period, and have become tightly integrated into Kenya's cash economy since independence. Originally a semi-pastoral patrilineal people, good soil and familiarity with agriculture made the Nandi particularly well-placed to adopt cash crop production during the colonial period. Gradually the Nandi economy developed around the three mainstays of today's prosperous semi-commercial agriculture: maize, dairy farming and tea. In the 1950s these activities expanded dramatically when Africans were finally permitted to own dairy cattle and to obtain private title to land. As in most of colonial Africa, by and large African men rather than women benefitted from these changes. Regina Oboler asks the question why.

In concordance with much of the recent literature on the status of African women (Hafkin and Bay, 1976), Oboler agrees that Western gender stereotypes of colonial officials buttressed the position of Nandi men. Colonial officials, especially agriculture experts, directed technical assistance to men and ignored women's contribution to agriculture. Men, as "heads" of households, were offered land ownership. As in the West, African women were expected to remain in the private domain; politics and money were a male concern. Not surprisingly, a precolonial institution permitting Nandi women to publicly humiliate a man (much like the Igbo tradition of "sitting on a man") withered away during the colonial period. Colonial officials disapproved of such "barbaric" practices. The missionaries also provided ammunition for Nandi men, who readily adopted the patriarchal paternalism of the church as the ideals of Christian family life and community property legitimated greater control over women and formerly female dominated activities.

Oboler does not simply blame Western gender stereotypes and the penetration of capitalism for the decline in Nandi women's status. She leaves no doubt that traditional patriarchal institutions among the Nandi were equally important factors. Long-standing Nandi traditions facilitated the growth of Nandi male power as well. Nandi society has always defined women's rights to property through men, whether a husband or father. Precolonial Nandi society gave women control over a few limited resources, such as the vegetable garden, chickens, and milk from the afternoon or evening milking, but refused them control over the primary means of production, (i.e. cattle). Even property assigned to women was supposed to be used for household consumption under the watchful eye of one's husband. Nandi ideology stated clearly that "men are considered superior to women physically, intellectually and morally" (p. 58).

Men are believed to be more intelligent than women. Women are thought particularly to be incapable of foresight and to lack the ability to make and carry through sensible and realistic plans. For this reason it is generally agreed that husbands should administer the family estate (p. 60).

This has become part of everyday knowledge today and "It is commonly claimed that if a woman tried to manage property, she would very likely make a mess of it" (p. 60). These sexual stereotypes have been reinforced by colonial gender stereotypes, but they existed in Nandi culture long before the advent of colonialism and certainly contributed to the growth of male control over property among the Nandi.

Despite patriarchal pressures from all sides, however, Oboler points out that Nandi women have not simply acquiesced to male domination. They have continually struggled to assert their interests, most dramatically in the increasingly popular institution of women-women marriage. This marriage form permits women without sons to gain control over property through marrying a woman and controlling her male progeny. Oboler believes it is no accident that this institution began to expand in the 1950s when the Swynnerton Plan gave men more access to land ownership, thus depriving women of traditional land use-rights. Oboler sees women-women marriage as a challenge to male dominance over property. She also discovered that women are becoming more vocal about their inheritance rights and it is becoming increasingly accepted that women have the right and duty to block the sale of land by their husbands if the women believe the sale is unwise. Nandi women frequently participate in family decisions over economic matters and in everyday encounters between the sexes, Oboler discovered a fair amount of give and take. Some Nandi women are even choosing to remain single as a way to avoid male domination. Gender struggles over property and power are thus an everyday occurrence.

Overall, Oboler still concludes that "the net effect of the many changes in the colonial and postcolonial Nandi economic system has been the erosion of the position of women with regard to property" (p. 12). Nandi women lost the one institution that let them openly censure men. Precolonial ideologies and institutions that buttressed male power have flourished, while social expectations of women continue to stress obedience and deference to male authority. Yet Oboler is emphatic that Nandi women "though less powerful than men, are not powerless" (p.324).

This more balanced assessment of gender roles and sexual stratification brings Oboler into conflict with those scholars who either assert the universality of patriarchy or those who argue that cross-culturally male dominance is rather rare (Mies, 1986; Sanday, 1981). Oboler disputes Sanday's contention that the existence of any female power disproves male dominance in a society. She also rejects Roger's (1978) argument that male and female power never conflict because they occur in separate spheres. Oboler calls for a more nuanced approach to gender stratification, one that recognizes the importance of gender struggles and the possibility that both sexes may have some power. She suggests focussing on points of conflict between the sexes, whether frequent or infrequent, as a way to discover both relative power (i.e. sexual stratification) and the opportunities and constraints available to each sex in a particular society. This seems a fruitful approach, one that overcomes the rather distorted notion that only one sex can win the "battle of the sexes." While the book would have benefitted from more discussion about single mothers, wage earning women and women's migration to the cities, and is sometimes tedious reading, it raises important points both about method and assessment of gender stratification in cross-cultural studies.

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