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Regulating Marriage, Social Relations, and Marital Transition: Semiotic Resources in Nandi Marriage Negotiations

Joyleen Chemis 

Moi University, Kenya

Author's email: chemisjoyleen@gmail.com

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Abstract

This study examines how semiotic resources regulate Nandi marriage negotiations, organise authority and participation, and communicate marital and inter-family transition. The study used a qualitative secondary-analysis design to re-examine marriage-related material from Chemis's 2020 research on Nandi social events and its subsequent journal publication with Ochieng and Achieng in 2020. The original data were generated through semi-structured interviews with twelve Nandi speakers, purposively selected men and women aged between 40 and 60, and through participant observation at social events in Megun Ward, Uasin Gishu County, Kenya. Twenty resources, selected because the original study records both a context of use and an attributed meaning for each, were re-analysed through social semiotics and multimodality, each being examined for its form, the participants involved, its point in the sequence, its documented meaning, and the social action its use performs. Three findings are reported. Culturally recognised resources regulate progression from the initial proposal, through the assessment of eligibility and the negotiation of bridewealth, to confirmation of the intended bride. Processional order, regulated access and spatial positioning organise participation and representative authority. Material and sensory resources make the resulting relationships recognisable and project expectations of married life. The significance of the study lies in showing that these resources operate as one coordinated system rather than as separate signs. The study recommends comparative research across Kalenjin communities in Kenya.

Key words: Marriage negotiations, multimodality, Nandi, semiotic resources, social semiotics.



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INTRODUCTION

Marriage as a Social and Communicative Process

A groom's delegation walks to the prospective bride's homestead in single file, the elders and the spokesman at the front. It stops outside and waits there until the bride's family invites it in. *Korosek*, sacred plants, are offered, and whether they are received settles whether a proposal will be entertained at all. Once the visitors are inside, the two families establish their clans before anything else is discussed; only then is the groom's spokesman invited to open the quiver, and the bridewealth is recited animal by animal, each number shown on the fingers as it is spoken. What each of these signs means has already been recorded (Chemis et al., 2020). What they accomplish has not; how the reception of a plant makes the opening of a quiver possible and how the sequence as a whole turns two unrelated families into affines.

Putting that problem requires a vocabulary, and three terms carry most of the weight. Social semiotics treats communication as the situated use of whatever resources a community has learned to communicate with and asks not what a form stands for in the abstract but what a person accomplishes by using it here, before these participants. A semiotic resource is accordingly any action, material or artefact that a community uses communicatively, together with the conventions governing its use; a definition that admits plants, livestock, seating, and bodily movement alongside speech and gesture. Multimodality is the observation that meaning is ordinarily made by several such resources at once, so that what an object signifies may depend on who introduces it, at what point, and alongside what else.

Marriage is a social institution and also a process of communication, it creates relationships and responsibilities for the spouses and at the same time reorganises the connections between their families and kin groups. In many African settings it is not made by a single private decision or a single ceremonial moment but develops through introductions, negotiations, presentations, and the recognition of relationships between the families concerned, with particular acts marking important points within that development (Green, 2021). Because it develops, its stages must be made recognisable to those taking part, and because speech is only one of the means available, the resources that mark eligibility, acceptance, the right to speak, and the establishment of a new relationship include objects, livestock, plants, food, bodily movement, and the arrangement of space.

Bridewealth illustrates the above, it is described as a transfer of property from the groom's family to the bride's. The practice is more varied than what is described. Marriage gifts are meant to establish union, create relations between kin groups, distribute obligations, and mark changes in the social position of the couple and their families. They may also reproduce gendered constraints (Akurugu et al., 2022). Among the Turkana of northwestern Kenya, the number of livestock is not fixed in advance but settled through extended face-to-face negotiation between the two families (Ohta, 2007). What such cases establish is that marriage gifts are at once economic, relational, communicative, and political and that their meanings cannot be generalised across African societies without reference to the system in which they operate. It is for that reason that the communicative organisation of a particular case has to be analysed rather than assumed.

Existing studies establish a few relevant points. African marriage is a process of negotiations, marriage gifts, family relations, and socially recognised transitions (Akurugu et al., 2022; Green, 2021). Thus, material objects and embodied actions might be involved in carrying out marriage-related actions rather than merely showing cultural beliefs (Kaunda, 2023; Mahmud, 2022; Ugwu & Ugwu, 2023). In traditional Nandi society, marriage was arranged through kinship classifications, family representatives, obligations of livestock, and negotiated relationships (Ng'etich, 2024; Oboler, 1985). Finally, the existing Nandi semiotic study documents a large repertoire of culturally meaningful signs related to marriage and other ceremonies (Chemis et al., 2020).

What remains to be sufficiently explored is the way the documented Nandi marriage resources function as a socially organised system of communication. Existing research has not identified how the resources regulate progression from eligibility to negotiation, or how they organise authority and participation, or communicate the creation of marital and interfamily relationships. Thus, there are three gaps.

First, the earlier analysis treated each sign on its own. It asked of every resource what it stood for and how the relation between the resource and its referent should be classified, and it answered both questions: the quiver was classed as indexical, on the ground that there is a direct link between a quiver and dowry, and the sacred plants as symbolic, on the ground that their significance rests on an agreed convention (Chemis et al., 2020). What it did not

ask is when each resource occurs, or what its occurrence does to the interaction. The classification of the quiver as indexical is compatible with the quiver being opened at any moment; in fact, it is opened only after the totems have established that the two clans may intermarry, and the instruction to open it is what moves the proceedings from the question of eligibility to the question of obligations. Which resource makes which subsequent resource possible is not a question a taxonomy of signs is designed to answer.

Second, there are limited studies on the spatial and embodied organisation of the negotiation. Elders leading a delegation, visitors waiting outside a homestead, families seated opposite one another, and spokesmen placed between them: these are recorded as details of setting, but they may be the resources through which authority, deference, group identity, and the right to speak are made visible. Whether they are doing that work, and how, is the second question this study puts.

Third, the relation between signification and social transformation remains to be drawn out. Butter, knotted couch grass and beer have recorded meanings: the joining of two families, the union of the couple, the sealing of the covenant; but a recorded meaning does not by itself show how the use of the resource establishes that the negotiation has been completed and that a new relationship exists between the couple and between their families. Knotted couch grass signifies union; what has to be shown is what the tying accomplishes, performed at that point, before those witnesses, once the bridewealth has been agreed upon.

This study addresses these gaps through a qualitative secondary analysis of the marriage material generated by the original research, read again through social semiotics, multimodality, and selected concepts from ritual theory. It does not claim to have discovered signs that were previously unknown, and it does not present the original material as new data. The corpus is the one already documented; what is new is what is asked of it.

The general objective of the study is to investigate how material objects, gestures, bodily movement, speech and spatial arrangements function as socially situated communicative resources in Nandi marriage negotiations. It has three specific objectives: to examine how semiotic resources regulate the progression of the negotiations; to analyse how bodily movement and spatial arrangements organise authority and participation during them; and to

investigate how material and embodied resources communicate marital and inter-family relationships and expectations of married life.

The study accordingly asks how semiotic resources regulate the progression of Nandi marriage negotiations, how bodily movement and spatial arrangements organise authority and participation during the negotiations, and how material and embodied resources communicate marital and inter-family relationships and expectations of married life.

The argument the study makes in answering them is that Nandi marriage negotiations operate as a coordinated multimodal process rather than as a ceremony accompanied by symbols. The resources regulate whether and how the proceedings advance, distribute authority among those present, and make a new marital and inter-family relationship recognisable to everyone in the room; and they do this in a determinate order, each resource depending on what the one before it has settled.

Establishing this makes three contributions. For scholarship on the Nandi it supplies a sequential account of marriage communication where an inventory of signs has so far been available. For the comparative study of African marriage, it adds a Southern Nilotic case to a literature drawn largely from Bantu and West African settings, and shows bridewealth negotiation being organised by resources other than the livestock under discussion. For social semiotics and multimodality, it shows that the regulation of space, sequence and speaking rights operates as a communicative resource in its own right rather than as the setting within which communication occurs.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Material, Embodied, and Spatial Marriage Communication

Communication in marriage negotiations is multimodal; it draws on speech and metaphor, as well as objects, gestures, body positioning, clothing, plants, food, drink, animals, and the arrangement of participants in space. These resources do not operate as separate channels of meaning; they work together within the unfolding event.

Ceremonies of this kind do social work beyond the occasion they mark, which is long established. Van Gennep (1960) showed that rites accompanying a change of social status proceed by separating a person from a former position, holding them for a period between

positions, and incorporating them into a new one, and that account has organised comparative work on marriage and other transitions ever since. Bell (1992) added that what distinguishes ritual action is less its content than its formalisation: acting in a prescribed way sets an activity apart from ordinary conduct and invests those who perform it with authority. The strength of this scholarship is that it identifies the general form of a transition and explains why ceremonial conduct carries authority. The limitation in the present purposes is that it operates at the level of the ceremony rather than of the acts composing it. It does not say which resource carries which phase, who is entitled to introduce it, or what one resource makes possible for the next.

Ugwu and Ugwu (2023) show that in the Nike kola-nut marriage ritual, verbal expressions, physical actions, symbolic objects, location and shared cultural knowledge operate together, and that the kola nut becomes part of the marriage contract when it is given and eaten rather than merely standing for marriage. The strength of that account is that it treats a consumed object as an act rather than as a symbol; its limitation is that it concentrates on one resource, so the relations between the kola nut and whatever precedes or follows it are not described. Mahmud (2022) is broader in exactly that respect, finding that movement between the stages of Yoruba marital transition is indexed by linguistic and non-linguistic resources together, which is the closest analogue in this literature to the sequential question put here. Even there, however, the analysis identifies the resources that mark each stage without asking how one stage licenses the next.

Kaunda (2023) demonstrated that an ordinary object may be consequential; in Bemba *imbusa* practice, beads serve as a resource for signalling sexual availability and negotiating marital intimacy, and their communicative force depends on shared knowledge of their colours, placement and conditions of use, which an outsider can not easily understand or grasp. However, the study is limited for present purposes as *imbusa* is instruction addressed to a bride rather than negotiation between two families. Hence, the resources analysed distribute knowledge rather than authority. The principle nevertheless carries over, and the present analysis extends it to a setting in which the parties are negotiating with one another.

Taken together, these studies converge on two points and leave a third open. They both agree that material and embodied resources perform social actions within

marriage rather than merely expressing cultural belief, and they agree that the meanings involved are culturally specific, arising from histories of use rather than from resemblance, so that they cannot be read off across communities. They differ in scope: Ugwu and Ugwu and Kaunda work outward from a single resource, while Mahmud works along a sequence of stages. What none of them establishes is how a whole repertoire operates as a system within a single negotiation; which resource opens which phase, who is entitled to introduce it, and what the ensemble accomplishes that no resource does alone.

Marriage negotiation in Kenya and Nandi kinship Organisation

Ohta (2007) describes Turkana bridewealth as settled through protracted face-to-face negotiation in which the two families propose quantities and work toward agreement, which establishes that the amount is an outcome of interaction rather than a fixed tariff. Kinuthia et al. (2015) show that Agikuyu bridewealth negotiations are conducted by appointed spokespeople rather than by the families in person, and that men and women perform differentiated communicative roles within them. Their joint contribution is to establish that a Kenyan bridewealth negotiation is a structured interaction with designated speakers and an outcome that is worked out rather than announced. Their common limitation is that both attend principally to what is said: the objects handled and the positions occupied while the talking is done fall outside the analysis. The Nandi case is well placed to take that up, since the resources involved have already been documented.

The Nandi are one of the bigger Kalenjin-speaking peoples of Kenya. The existing literature shows that Nandi marriage has been historically embedded in kinship, ownership of livestock, household organisation, and relations between families. In his ethnographic study of Nandi society, Oboler (1985) points out that marriage is a negotiation between kin groups, not an agreement between two individuals.

Clan identity is particularly important in controlling eligibility for marriage. Ng'etich (2024) notes that traditionally Nandi clans have been exogamous and totemic, with kinship classifications determining the rules governing permissible unions. The determination of the clans or totems of the prospective spouses is thus not an incidental exchange of biographical information. It places the proposed marriage in a system that draws a line between allowable and forbidden relationships.

Oboler (1985) notes that Nandi marriage negotiations could begin with questions about the identity of the party visiting and the clan of the potential groom. This might lead to an examination of the marriages of the clans and families concerned in the past. The process of marriage eligibility is shown to be socially assessed through kinship history and clan relations before other obligations are met.

The negotiation is also representative. Oboler (1985) records that the parents of the prospective spouses did not necessarily negotiate directly and that male representatives could speak for each party. Her account nevertheless warns against concluding that women or the couple had no part in the outcome: women belonged to the family groups between whom the negotiation was conducted, and a prospective bride was expected to see the suitor and to approve the marriage. Those who speak during a negotiation are therefore not necessarily the only people deciding whether it proceeds; a distinction that matters for the spatial analysis offered below, where the question is what a position communicates rather than who holds power.

Livestock has long been central to Nandi economic and marital organisation. Bridewealth obligations arise within a pastoral system in which cattle carry economic, social and cultural value (Ng'etich, 2024; Oboler, 1985), so livestock in marriage cannot be analysed as a monetary equivalent alone. The categories of animal, the family members responsible for providing them, and the manner in which quantities are arrived at may each communicate culturally differentiated obligations.

The Nandi marriage can, therefore, be approached as a systematic encounter comprising at least four related dimensions. First, the kinship identity rules the eligibility. Second, authorised representatives and elders negotiate on behalf of the family. Third, the use of livestock and other material resources reflects both obligations and agreements. Fourth, ceremonial actions signify the formation of a marriage bond and of relations between the families.

These dimensions make the negotiations of Nandi marriage a particularly productive site for social semiotic analysis. Yet the use of historical and cultural descriptions must be handled with care. Nandi marriage customs are not necessarily uniform, eternal, or practised in the same way by all families. Contemporary practice may be influenced by Christianity, formal education,

urbanisation, economic change, inter-community marriage and changing gender relations. The present article does not, therefore, pretend to describe all the marriages that are at present Nandi. This analysis only considers the marriage-related resources documented in the original qualitative data set.

Previous Semiotic Studies of Nandi Social Events

The most directly relevant study of semiotics was by Chemis et al. (2020). Their research examined the signs used at social events in Nandi, particularly at marriage and mourning ceremonies. Its aims were to identify the signs, to explain the meanings, and to describe the relationships between the signs and what they signified.

Saussurean and Peircean models were used in the study. It examined the relationship between signifier and signified and categorised signs based on iconic, indexical, and symbolic relationships. For example, the heifer was deemed iconic, the quiver indexical, and sacred plants, butter, couch grass and beer symbolic among its findings (Chemis et al., 2020).

That study made an important contribution by documenting culturally meaningful resources and establishing that their interpretation requires knowledge of Nandi cultural practices. It also indicates that communication in Nandi social events is not limited to spoken language.

Yet its wide range included more than one kind of social event, and its analytical focus was essentially descriptive and classificatory. Its aim was to find out which signs were used, what they referred to and whether the relation between sign and referent was iconic, indexical, or symbolic. It did not systematically examine how the marriage resources worked together as a sequence or how their usage ordered the relationships of participants during negotiation.

None of this makes the earlier study inadequate; it indicates a further level of analysis. A taxonomy answers the question it is built to answer. It establishes that a relation holds between a resource and a referent and specifies the kind of relation involved, and for a repertoire that had not previously been documented that was the necessary first task. What a taxonomy cannot supply is an account of use. It records that a resource means something without recording when it is introduced, who is entitled to introduce it, what has to have been settled before it can be, or what its introduction obliges the other party to do

next. Two resources may be classified identically and yet do quite different work in the proceedings.

The Gap Addressed by this Study

The general literature on ceremony establishes that a marriage is a transition accomplished in phases and that formalised conduct carries authority but works at the level of the ceremony rather than of the resources that compose it. The African and Kenyan literature establishes that material and embodied resources perform actions within marriage, that their meanings are culturally specific, and that negotiation proceeds through designated speakers toward a worked-out agreement; but it examines resources singly, or attends to speech and leaves the objects and positions aside. The Nandi literature supplies what neither of the others has, a documented repertoire, with the meanings participants attach to each resource, but stops at classification.

The gap is therefore precise. What has not been established is how the documented Nandi marriage resources operate together as a system of communication within a single negotiation: how they regulate its progression, how they distribute authority and participation among those present, and how they make a new marital and inter-family relationship recognisable. Answering that requires an account of meaning in which the use of a resource, rather than the resource itself, is the object of analysis, and an account of transition that specifies what a sequence of resources is doing to the parties moving through it.

Theoretical Framework

This study is primarily guided by social semiotics as developed by van Leeuwen (2005) and Kress (2010). Social semiotics is supported by Van Gennep's (1960) rites-of-passage model and Bell's (1992) concept of ritualisation. Social semiotics explains how culturally available resources are used to make meaning, while the supporting concepts assist in interpreting marital transition, ceremonial authority, and spatial organisation.

Social Semiotics

Social semiotics approaches meaning-making as a socially and culturally situated activity. It is concerned not only with what a sign represents but also with how people use available resources to communicate and accomplish particular social purposes. Meaning is therefore shaped by the cultural context, the participants involved, and the circumstances in which communication takes place.

Van Leeuwen (2005) defines semiotic resources as the actions, materials, and artefacts used for communicative purposes, together with the socially developed conventions governing their use. Semiotic resources may include speech, gestures, bodily movement, objects, and spatial arrangements. Their significance depends upon how they have historically been used and interpreted within a particular community.

This understanding is relevant to Nandi marriage negotiations because the documented signs are not meaningful in isolation. Their interpretation depends on culturally shared knowledge about who may use them, when they should be introduced, and what responses follow their use. A resource may therefore perform a social action in addition to representing a cultural meaning. For example, a resource associated with acceptance may permit negotiations to continue, while another may signal that a new stage of negotiation has begun.

Another important concept is meaning potential. A resource does not have one universal meaning that remains unchanged in every context. Its meaning potential derives from its material affordances, cultural associations, and history of social use (Van Leeuwen, 2005). The particular meaning realised in an interaction depends on how, when, and by whom it is used.

This concept prevents the analysis from assuming that similar objects have identical meanings across communities. A plant, animal, or household object may carry different meanings in different cultural settings. Its interpretation must therefore be grounded in the meanings reported by participants and in the interactional context in which it occurs.

The purchase these concepts give is that they make the use of a resource, rather than the resource itself, the object of analysis. What matters is not only that knotted couch grass signifies union, but that someone ties it, at a particular point in the proceedings, in front of particular witnesses, once particular things have already been agreed.

Multimodality

The study also draws on Kress's (2010) social-semiotic approach to multimodality. Multimodality recognises that communication is not restricted to spoken or written language. Meaning may be produced through the

interaction of several modes, including speech, gesture, bodily movement, material objects, and space.

Each mode provides particular possibilities for meaning-making. Speech can formulate a proposal or response; gestures can communicate quantities; objects can materialise an obligation; and spatial arrangements can distinguish participants and their roles. The meaning of an event may therefore emerge from the combination of these modes rather than from any one resource considered independently.

A multimodal ensemble refers to the combination of modes used within a communicative event (Kress, 2010). This concept is important to the present study because Nandi marriage negotiations involve sequences in which different resources operate together. A spoken expression may introduce an object, a gesture may clarify a quantity, and the position of the speaker may communicate the authority to propose.

The multimodal approach therefore enables the analysis to examine relationships among resources. Rather than treating the signs as a list of separate items, the study considers how they form communicative sequences through which negotiations progress.

Ritualisation, Authority, and Space

Bell's (1992) concept of ritualisation supports the analysis of ceremonial authority and spatial organisation. Ritualisation refers to ways of acting that distinguish particular activities from ordinary conduct. Through formalised movement, prescribed roles, and the organisation of space, participants recognise certain actions and people as possessing special significance or authority.

This concept is relevant to the organisation of Nandi marriage negotiations. Participants do not necessarily approach, enter, sit, or speak in arbitrary ways. Movement and spatial positioning may distinguish hosts from visitors, elders from junior participants, and authorised representatives from other family members.

Ritualisation makes it possible to analyse how authority is enacted rather than merely possessed. A participant's authority may be communicated through leading a delegation, occupying a central position, or speaking on behalf of a family. Similarly, waiting for permission to enter may communicate recognition of the host family's control over access to the negotiation space.

This study uses Bell's framework cautiously. The presence of formalised practices does not demonstrate that all participants possess equal authority or experience the negotiation in the same way. Neither does spatial distance necessarily prove complete exclusion from decision-making. The analysis remains limited to the participant roles and meanings supported by the original data.

How the Three Perspectives Work Together

The three perspectives do different work and are used for different parts of the problem. Social semiotics provides the principal account of how culturally available resources are used to make meaning, and, with it, the concept of meaning potential, which prevents the analysis from assuming that a substance or object carries the same significance wherever it appears. Multimodality supplies the account of how resources used together bear upon one another, so that a gesture and the words it accompanies are treated as one act rather than two. Ritualisation provides an account of formalised conduct, which makes it possible to say that processional order and seating do communicative work rather than merely reflect who happened to arrive first. Van Gennep's phases supply the frame within which a sequence of resources can be read as a transition rather than as a series of separate events.

This application distinguishes the present study from Chemis et al. (2020). Whereas the earlier study identified and interpreted signs and classified their relationships with their referents, the present study examines how marriage-related resources operate individually and collectively to organise social action. The framework therefore directs attention from what the signs mean towards how their use regulates negotiation, structures participant relationships, and communicates marital transition.

METHODOLOGY

The study is a qualitative secondary analysis. Heaton (2004) identifies three circumstances in which returning to existing qualitative material is warranted: where a question can be put that the original study did not pursue, where an aspect of the data was described but not analysed, and where a theoretical perspective that was not applied at the time can be brought to bear. All three hold here. The original study asked which signs are used in Nandi social events, what each means, and how the relation between a sign and its referent should be classified. It did not ask how the resources operate in

sequence, how they distribute authority among those present, or what their combined use accomplishes.

Answering those questions requires a body of material in which the resources, their contexts of use, and the meanings participants attach to them have already been systematically recorded. Such material exists. Generating a fresh corpus would reproduce it without improving on it. It would do so at disproportionate cost, since marriage negotiations of the kind documented are conducted by particular families on particular occasions and cannot be convened for research purposes. Secondary analysis is therefore not a fallback here but the design the question calls for.

The distinction between the two studies should be kept in view throughout what follows. Everything to do with the generation of data; the design, the sample, the setting, the interviews and the observation; belongs to the original study. The selection of material, the analytical procedure, and the interpretation reported are part of the present study. The original study's purpose was to document and classify; the present study's purpose is to analyse what the documented resources accomplish.

Provenance of the Material

The material analysed here is drawn from two documents. The primary source is Chemis (2020), an unpublished master's thesis submitted to The Catholic University of Eastern Africa, which contains the full descriptive record of the documented signs, the participant testimony supporting them, and the meanings attributed to them. The secondary source is Chemis, Ochieng and Achieng (2020), the published article summarising that thesis. Where the two differ in the level of detail they give, the thesis is followed, since it holds the fuller record.

The analysis was conducted using these two documents. Audio recordings, interview transcripts, and field notes from the original fieldwork were not available for re-examination, and no attempt was made to reconstruct them. What is analysed here is therefore documented material rather than raw data, and the analysis is correspondingly bounded: it can work with what the original study reported, including the participant testimony it reproduces, but not with anything participants said that the original study did not record. This limitation is taken up in the concluding section.

The Original Study, Its Sample, And Its Setting

The original study employed a descriptive qualitative design. Data were generated through semi-structured interviews and observations at social events in the study area to identify the signs used in Nandi social events, explaining their culturally recognised meanings, and classifying the relation between each sign and its referent using Saussurean and Peircean models.

The sample consisted of twelve Nandi speakers, men and women aged between 40 and 60, resident in Megun Ward, Kapseret Constituency, Uasin Gishu County. Selection was purposive and rested on demonstrated familiarity with Nandi cultural practice: a quarter were community members recognised locally as cultural experts and historians, and the remainder were community members otherwise well informed about the practices under investigation. That rationale bears directly on the present analysis. The resources examined here belong to a ceremony conducted by elders and appointed spokesmen rather than by the couple themselves. Hence, an account of what the resources mean, when they are introduced and who is entitled to use them resides with older members of the community who have taken part in negotiations as principals, delegates or hosts. Participants in that age band were positioned to give such an account.

This sample belongs to the original study. It was recruited for that study's purposes, and no part of it was approached or re-contacted for the present analysis. Two implications follow for the reuse. The number of participants is small, and the number of negotiations observed is not reported separately in the source, so the material establishes what the resources are understood to mean rather than how frequently or uniformly they are used. And because participants were selected for their cultural knowledge, the meanings recorded are those recognised by knowledgeable members of the community rather than the full range of understandings that might be found across it.

Megun Ward defines the study's contextual scope for a similar reason. It is where the original fieldwork was conducted and the only setting for which the corpus records both a practice and an explanation of it. Nandi marriage negotiation varies locally in which resources are used, in the ordering of the phases, and in how far civil and church marriage have displaced the sequence described here, so the ward bounds what the material can be made to support. What follows is an account of the

practice documented in Megun Ward, not of Nandi marriage negotiation everywhere.

Selection of the Marriage Material

The marriage subset of the original corpus was identified by reading the findings and discussion chapters in full and extracting every passage whose reported use belonged to the marriage sequence: the approach and reception of the groom's delegation, the establishment of eligibility, the discussion of bridewealth, the identification of the bride, the acts by which the union is sealed, and the gifts presented once agreement has been reached. Material documented as belonging exclusively to mourning was excluded and is analysed separately.

Relevance was determined by a single, uniformly applied criterion: whether the original study records both a context of use and a meaning attributed to the resource by participants. Resources named without one or without the other were not carried forward. This yielded twenty resources, set out in Table 1, six that regulate the progression of the negotiations, seven that organise authority, participation and space, and seven that establish the marital bond and project the character of married life.

A qualification of provenance applies to four of them. Couch grass, palm-tree strands, flavouring twigs and beer are recorded in the summarising chapters of the original study rather than in its findings chapters, which means that a culturally recognised meaning is stated for each, but the supporting testimony is not reproduced. They are retained because the meaning is stated explicitly and is consistent with the rest of the record, and the difference in provenance is marked at the points where they are discussed.

Analytical Procedure

Extracted passages were first sorted by resource and by the circumstances of use reported for each. Each resource was then put to five questions derived from the framework: what material, verbal, embodied or spatial form it takes; who introduces, performs, receives or interprets it; at what stage of the marriage process it occurs; what culturally recognised meaning the original study assigns to it; and what social action or relationship its use helps to communicate or establish. The order matters, and it was held to for every resource: from the resource, to its participants, to its interactional context, to the meaning documented for it, and only then to the social function proposed for it.

The theoretical perspectives were operationalised as follows. Van Leeuwen's (2005) concept of meaning potential was applied by asking, for each resource, what its material properties and its history of ordinary use make available, and which of those possibilities the marriage occasion actually realises: what a calabash is for in daily life, and what its presentation to a newly married couple selects from that. Kress's (2010) account of the multimodal ensemble was applied by asking which resources occur together and what each contributes that the others do not, as in the recitation of livestock and the accompanying finger gestures. Bell's (1992) ritualisation was applied to conduct that is formalised rather than incidental: the order of a procession, the side of a room a family occupies; by asking what the formalisation itself communicates about the standing of those involved. Van Gennep's (1960) phases were used to locate resources within the movement from unmarried to married status.

Resources performing related social functions were then grouped, yielding the three themes that organise the findings: resources that regulate whether and how negotiations proceed; resources that organise authority, participation, and space; and resources that create the marital bond and project expectations of married life. The themes correspond to the three research questions.

Two constraints governed the interpretive work. No reading was advanced that could not be traced to a resource and a meaning recorded in the original study, and no meaning was attributed to a resource that participants had not themselves reported. Where the record establishes what a resource means but not why it carries that meaning, the analysis says so rather than supplying a reason of its own.

Ethical Considerations

No one was recruited, interviewed or observed for this study. It works entirely with material already gathered and introduces no detail that could identify any participant, family, or household. The present analysis is also conducted by the researcher who generated the original material, so the reuse involved no transfer of data to a third party.

The reuse itself requires comment. The consent obtained for the original study covered the research for which the accounts were given, and the documentation does not record that participants were asked about subsequent analysis of the material. Two considerations bear on this. The analysis works only from material the original study

has already deposited or published, so it discloses nothing that the original consent did not already cover. It concerns culturally shared practices rather than personal circumstances, so the accounts contain no private information about the individuals who gave them. Where consent for an original study cannot be shown to extend to secondary use, the appropriate constraint is to confine the reuse to material already in the public record, and that constraint has been observed here.

Table 1: The Twenty Marriage Resources Analysed, With the Participants and Interactional Context Recorded for Each, the Meaning Documented in the Original Study, and the Social Function it is Argued to Perform

Semiotic resource	Participants; Interactional context	Culturally recognised meaning	Social function
Korosek (sacred plants)	Groom's delegation; bride's family; Approach to the bride's homestead, before entry	Received indicates acceptance of the proposal; "put down" or "left with the delegation" indicates rejection.	Regulates passage into the next phase of the marriage process
Totems	Elders of both families; After the delegation has entered, before bridewealth discussion	The clans to which the prospective spouses belong	Situates the spouses within the Nandi kinship system and determines whether the union is culturally permissible
Quiver	Bride's family; groom's spokesman; Opening of bridewealth discussion	Dowry	The instruction to open it initiates bridewealth negotiation
Livestock	Both families, through their spokesmen; Bridewealth negotiation	The obligations under negotiation	Materialises the obligations being proposed, contested and agreed
Finger gestures	Spokesmen; Bridewealth negotiation	Quantities	Communicates the number of animals offered
Bracelet or necklace	Groom; the bride and her age-mates; Following the successful completion of negotiations	Betrothal	Identifies and formally marks the intended bride
Processional order	Elders and spokesman at the front; groom and other members of the delegation; Approach to the homestead	Seniority and representative authority	Makes the internal hierarchy of the visiting delegation visible before formal discussion begins
Waiting outside the homestead	Groom's delegation; bride's family; Arrival, before admission	Deference to the bride's family as host	Distinguishes physical arrival from formal admission; entry depends on the response of the receiving family
Opposed seating of the two families	Both families; Throughout the negotiation, after entry	The two negotiating parties	Makes family affiliation visible and establishes the direction in which proposals and responses move
Central position of the spokesmen	Spokesmen of both families; Throughout the negotiation	Delegated authority to speak on behalf of a family	Connects the two family groups while preserving the distinction between them
Position of the elders	Elders of both families; Throughout the negotiation	Collective seniority	Grounds the spokesman's individual authority in the collective presence of the family

Position of the groom near the door	Groom; Throughout the negotiation	Not fully established in the original data	Distinguishes personal involvement in the marriage from authority to conduct its negotiation
Women in adjoining rooms	Some women of the households; During the principal negotiations	Not fully established in the original data	Indicates differentiated access to the central negotiating area and to formal speaking turns
Butter	Mothers-in-law, then aunts of both families; the exchange is restricted to women; After the successful completion of bridewealth negotiations	Joining of the two families, who acquire the relationship known as <i>bamwai</i>	Marks the agreement as having created a recognized inter-family relationship
Couch grass (Segutiet)	Not specified in the original data; Sealing of the marriage	Union of the bride and groom	Tying makes the union materially visible and marks movement from negotiation to a recognised marital tie
Beer	Not specified in the original data; Sealing of the agreement, following the completion of bridewealth negotiations	Sealing of the marriage covenant and celebration of the marriage union	Marks the agreement as binding, and places recognition of it in an act performed together
Calabashes	Bride's mother, escorted by her aunts, presented to the bride and groom.; Wedding ceremony,	Prosperity, and the expectation of owning a herd	Projects culturally valued expectations for the couple's married life
Blankets	Women of both families; given to elders of both families; Engagement and wedding	Love and warmth	Projects expectations of support extended by senior kin to the couple
Palm-tree strands	Not specified in the original data; Presented among the gifts once agreement has been reached	Respect and honour; associated with the care of calabashes and with parental discipline	Projects the expectation of respectful and responsible conduct within the marriage
Flavouring twigs	Not specified in the original data; Presented among the gifts once agreement has been reached	A sweet and happy marriage	Projects the hoped-for character of married life

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Regulating the Progression of Marriage Negotiations

The findings show that Nandi marriage negotiations progress through a sequence of culturally recognised semiotic resources. Korosek first communicates whether the marriage proposal has been accepted or rejected. After the proposal has been accepted and the groom's delegation has entered the homestead, the clan totems of the prospective spouses are established to determine whether the families are eligible to intermarry. The quiver subsequently initiates bridewealth discussion, livestock represents the obligations under negotiation, and finger gestures communicate quantities. Following the successful completion of negotiations, a bracelet or necklace identifies and formally marks the intended bride. Together, these resources regulate progression from acceptance of the proposal through compatibility

assessment, bridewealth discussion and agreement to the formal confirmation of the intended bride.

Korosek are culturally recognised plants that the groom's delegation carries when approaching the prospective bride's family. The original study established that the bride's family communicates its response to the marriage proposal through its treatment of the plants. Receiving Korosek from the visiting delegation indicates acceptance of the proposal, whereas putting the plants down or leaving them with the delegation indicates rejection (Chemis, 2020).

The meaning of Korosek is produced through the relationship between the material resource, the act of offering it, and the response of the bride's family. The plants do not communicate acceptance merely through

their presence. Their meaning is realised through whether they are received or rejected. Receiving them changes the relationship between the parties by permitting the marriage process to proceed, whereas rejecting them prevents formal negotiations from beginning. Hence, Korosek is not only a symbol of acceptance or rejection but also a mechanism to regulate passage into the next phase of the marriage process. Ugwu and Ugwu (2023) also found that the presentation and consumption of kola nut, as well as verbal and embodied acts, contributed to the performance of the marriage contract in Nike traditional marriage ceremonies. While Korosek and kola nut have culturally distinct meanings and functions, both cases show how plant resources can play consequential roles in social actions within marriage processes. In the Nandi context, however, the distinctive function of Korosek lies in its use to determine whether a proposal proceeds to formal negotiation.

After the proposal has been accepted and the visiting delegation has entered the homestead, the clan totems of the prospective spouses are established. Totems identify the clans to which the prospective spouses belong and enable the families to determine whether the proposed union is culturally permissible. If the relationship between the clans is considered prohibited, the marriage negotiations are discontinued (Chemis, 2020).

Totems therefore function as resources of social classification. They situate the prospective spouses within the wider Nandi kinship system and make their clan relationship relevant to the proposed marriage. Establishing the totems does not merely communicate personal or family identity; it enables the families to assess compatibility according to culturally recognised rules of intermarriage. The outcome of this assessment determines whether the negotiations can continue.

Set against previous scholarship, the Nandi evidence confirms and specifies. Oboler (1985) records that those negotiations could open with questions about the identity of the visiting party and the clan of the prospective groom, and could extend to an examination of earlier marriages between the families concerned; Ng'etich (2024) identifies clan, age set and kindred group as the exogamous categories that historically regulated Nandi marriage. Both establish that eligibility is assessed through collective kinship identities rather than by the couple's preference. What the present material adds is the point at which that assessment is made and the resource that carries it. The totems are established after the

delegation has been admitted and before the quiver is opened, so the kinship rule operates as a condition on whether the discussion may turn to obligations at all.

A totem's meaning potential rests on its established association with clan identity, family history and the rules governing permissible unions (van Leeuwen, 2005). Stating it, therefore, does two things at once: it identifies the clan affiliation of each prospective spouse, and it determines whether the visiting and host families may proceed to substantive negotiation.

Once compatibility has been established, the quiver opens the discussion of bridewealth. A quiver is a traditional bag made of cowhide in which arrows are kept. During the negotiations, the groom's side is asked to open the quiver, and the spokesman responds by reading out the bridewealth the visiting family is prepared to give. One participant explained that when the groom's side is told to open the quiver, "it means that they should state the dowry they are prepared to give" (Chemis, 2020).

The quiver is not opened in any literal sense. The instruction to open it is an invitation to speak, and what emerges is not arrows but a spoken list of obligations. Its use marks a transition: before the instruction is given, the families are establishing whether they may negotiate at all, and after it, they are negotiating substance. The quiver therefore performs a function comparable to that of Korosek at an earlier stage, in that it does not describe the discussion so much as authorise its next phase.

Its meaning potential derives from a history of use rather than from any resemblance to bridewealth (van Leeuwen, 2005). A container for arrows belongs to a pastoral order in which cattle were acquired and defended by force, and invoking it at the point where cattle obligations are stated connects the present exchange to that older economy without requiring any reference to it in speech.

Livestock represents the obligations under negotiation. The original study established that Nandi bridewealth is given in the form of cattle and that when the bridewealth is read out, the spokesman does not use the ordinary names for the animals. He uses a set of culturally specific designations understood only within the community. Four animals are named in a fixed order: *chemwait*, a cow with a calf; *kimwait*, an ox; *kanyiyet*, an ox or heifer; and *ne bo nego*, an ox or heifer standing in place of sheep; and they are accompanied by a sheep provided by the groom's mother (Chemis, 2020).

Two features of this practice are of communicative significance. The animals are recited in a prescribed sequence rather than in whatever order the parties choose, which presents bridewealth as a culturally established set rather than one assembled anew at each negotiation. The designations are also intelligible only within the community, so that a person unfamiliar with the register may hear the recitation without understanding what is offered. Naming the livestock, therefore, fulfils the obligation and marks those able to interpret it.

This may be contrasted with Ohta's (2007) account of Turkana bridewealth, in which the number of livestock is not predetermined but settled through extended face-to-face negotiation. The Nandi material suggests a differently organised process, in which the categories of animals are fixed in advance and in sequence. Akurugu et al. (2022) observe that, in several African settings, marriage gifts distribute obligations between families rather than function solely as economic transfers; the Nandi practice indicates that such obligations may also be communicated through a culturally regulated form.

Finger gestures accompany the spoken recitation. The original study documented a set of forms in which one is indicated by a single extended finger, two by the index and middle fingers held together. It flashed forward with the hand raised, four by four fingers with the thumb withheld, and five by raising the hand with the fingers closed. Participants reported that interlocutors use their fingers to convey information during negotiations, and that the meaning attached to these forms is counting (Chemis, 2020).

The gestures do not replace speech but operate alongside it, forming with the spoken recitation the kind of multimodal ensemble Kress (2010) describes. Speech identifies which animal is being offered and gesture specifies how many, so that the two modes carry complementary components of a single proposal. Neither is sufficient alone: a category without a quantity does not constitute an offer, and a quantity without a category does not identify what is offered.

The forms are not uniformly motivated. Those for one, two and four correspond in number to the fingers extended, whereas five is produced with the fingers closed and does not depict the quantity it conveys. The set therefore combines forms supported by their appearance with at least one that rests on convention alone, indicating that the system is learned as a culturally specific

repertoire rather than read off the hand (van Leeuwen, 2005).

Following the successful completion of negotiations, a bracelet or necklace identifies and formally marks the intended bride. The original study established that once negotiations conclude at the bride's home, several young women are lined up before the groom. They are age-mates of the bride and of similar physique, and the arrangement is described as intended to confuse him. The groom is expected to identify the bride correctly and, having done so, place a bracelet or necklace on her. One participant explained that the ornament shows "that she is the one he has chosen and that now they are engaged" (Chemis, 2020).

This step performs two distinct roles. The line-up requires the groom to demonstrate personal recognition of the bride, and its composition ensures that the demonstration is not trivial: the other women are selected precisely because they resemble her in age and build. Correct identification is therefore evidence of an existing personal acquaintance, publicly produced before the assembled families. The ornament then converts that recognition into a visible and durable status. Identification establishes who the bride is; the marking establishes that she is now betrothed.

The sequence bears on the wider question of participation. Spokesmen and elders conduct the preceding negotiations on behalf of the families, and the bridewealth is settled between them; yet the process does not conclude with that settlement. It concludes with an act only the groom can perform, and only if he knows the bride individually. Oboler (1985) cautions against assuming that Nandi marriage was arranged wholly without the couple's involvement, noting that a prospective bride was expected to see and approve the suitor. The identification episode is consistent with that caution: whatever authority the families exercise over the negotiation, confirming the bride requires a personal relationship the negotiation itself cannot supply.

Kaunda (2023) demonstrates in the Bemba context that ornaments worn on the body may serve as consequential resources in marital communication, deriving their significance from shared cultural knowledge rather than from any property of the objects themselves. The Nandi bracelet and necklace function comparably, though to a different end: their communicative work lies not in what

they are but in who places them, on whom, and at what point in the process.

Taken together, the six resources form a regulated progression. Korosek determines whether a proposal is entertained at all; totems determine whether the families may negotiate; the quiver opens the negotiation of substance; livestock names constitute the obligations at issue; finger gestures specify their quantities; and the bracelet or necklace confirms the bride once agreement has been reached. Each resource governs a transition rather than describing one, and none can be moved to a different point in the sequence without losing its function. The progression of Nandi marriage negotiation is accordingly not merely accompanied by these resources but accomplished through them.

Organising Authority, Participation, and Space

The second theme concerns how bodily movement and spatial arrangements organise authority and participation during Nandi marriage negotiations. The order in which the groom's delegation approaches the homestead, the requirement that the visitors wait before entering, the positioning of the two families, and the places occupied by spokespeople, elders, the groom, and other participants communicate their respective roles. Space, therefore, functions as a communicative resource within the negotiations rather than merely as their physical setting.

The groom's delegation approaches the bride's homestead in a single file, with the elders and spokesman at the front (Chemis, 2020). This processional order identifies the senior representatives who lead the delegation and distinguishes their roles from those of the other members. The delegation consequently approaches the bride's family as an organised group rather than as a collection of individuals.

Leading the procession communicates the elders' seniority and the spokesman's authority to represent the visiting family. Their position also indicates that the proposed marriage involves the recognition and participation of the groom's wider family. Although the groom is seeking marriage, he does not approach the bride's family solely as an individual. Senior family members accompany him and assume responsibility for presenting the family during the formal negotiations.

Walking at the front does not communicate leadership everywhere. It does so here because the order of a Nandi delegation is understood to display seniority and the right

to represent, so the arrangement is a semiotic resource in its own right rather than a practical consequence of who set off first. Its effect is that the internal hierarchy of the visiting party is legible before a word of formal discussion has been spoken.

Upon arriving at the homestead, the groom's delegation remains outside until the bride's family invites it to enter (Chemis, 2020). Waiting distinguishes the visitors' physical arrival from their formal admission into the negotiation setting. Although the visiting family initiates the encounter by approaching the homestead, it cannot independently decide when to enter. Entry depends upon the response of the receiving family.

Waiting outside signals deference to the bride's family and recognises the bride's family's position as the host. The invitation to enter changes the visitors' status within the encounter: they move from a delegation seeking reception to recognised participants permitted to begin the formal discussions. Admission therefore represents both spatial movement and progression within the negotiation process.

The distinction between outside and inside communicates more than physical location. Access to a homestead is controlled by the family that occupies it. Hence, the boundary separates the party that admits from the party that must wait to be admitted, and crossing it signifies that the approach has been acknowledged and that the visitors may enter the proper negotiation. Regulated access of this kind is one way in which social space is produced rather than occupied (Van Leeuwen, 2008).

After entering the homestead, the bride's family sits on one side, and the groom's family sits on the opposite side. The spokespeople occupy positions between the two groups and are supported by elders, while the groom sits near the door (Chemis, 2020). This arrangement identifies the two negotiating parties and distinguishes the roles of their members.

The opposed seating of the two families does not necessarily indicate hostility. It makes each participant's family affiliation visible and establishes the direction in which proposals, responses, and counterproposals move. Members of the groom's family speak from one side of the interaction, while members of the bride's family respond from the other. Spatial position and verbal communication therefore work together to organise the exchange.

The arrangement maintains a distinction between the two families while enabling them to interact. This separation is significant because the relationship that marriage will establish between them has not yet been formally created. They enter the negotiation as distinct parties whose interests, responsibilities, and obligations must be discussed before they can recognise one another as families joined through marriage.

The spokespeople's position between the two families communicates delegated authority. They occupy the interactional centre and conduct the principal verbal exchange (Chemis, 2020). Their authority does not derive merely from speaking more frequently. It comes from their recognition as representatives permitted to speak, propose, and respond on behalf of their respective families.

Kinuthia, Wathika and Yakobo (2015) record appointed spokespeople conducting the principal discussions in Agikuyu bridewealth negotiations, and the Nandi evidence confirms that delegated negotiating authority is not peculiar to a single Kenyan community. It also extends their account. In the Agikuyu case, the delegation is established by who speaks; here it is established twice over, by who speaks and by where he sits. Because the spokesmen occupy the ground between the two families, their authority is visible to everyone in the room before they speak and remains visible while others speak.

The Nandi findings further show that spatial communication conveys such representative authority. The spokesmen do not merely conduct the verbal exchange; their central position connects the two-family groups while preserving the distinction between them. Their location supports the communicative movement through which proposals are presented, responses are given, and agreement may eventually be reached.

The elders surround or support the spokesmen during the negotiations (Chemis, 2020). Their positioning associates the spokesmen's verbal authority with the senior members of the families they represent. Although an individual spokesman conducts the principal exchange, his authority is supported by the collective presence of the family and its elders. Negotiating authority is therefore exercised individually but grounded collectively.

The groom sits near the door rather than occupying the central negotiating position (Chemis, 2020). This arrangement distinguishes his direct involvement in the

proposed marriage from the authority to conduct its formal negotiation. He is present and personally connected to the outcome, but the principal discussions are conducted by the spokesmen and elders representing the two families.

The available data do not provide a complete cultural explanation for the groom's location near the door. His position can nevertheless be interpreted cautiously as indicating a differentiated form of participation. He belongs within the negotiation setting but remains outside its principal communicative centre. A more specific interpretation of the doorway itself would require further evidence from participants.

The original study also indicates that some women may remain in adjoining rooms while the principal negotiations occur (Chemis, 2020). This spatial arrangement suggests that access to the central negotiating area may be differentiated according to culturally established participant roles. Distance from the principal discussion may be associated with reduced access to formal speaking turns. However, it does not necessarily establish complete exclusion from the marriage process or from family decision-making.

By gender, the relationship differs. Kinuthia et al. (2015) found communicative roles differentiated in Agikuyu negotiations, with male representatives leading much of the bridewealth discussion and women more prominent in welcoming, singing and selected stages of exchange. Against that account, the Nandi evidence qualifies rather than confirms. It records a spatial differentiation: some women remain in adjoining rooms while the principal negotiations proceed, but it does not specify what those women do there, and Oboler's (1985) account indicates that a prospective bride was expected to see the suitor and approve the marriage. The material supports the view that access to the central negotiating space is differentiated. It does not support the stronger claim that women are excluded from the decision, nor does it establish that Nandi and Agikuyu arrangements coincide.

The Nandi findings support the conclusion that participation is spatially differentiated, but they do not establish that all women are excluded from decisions concerning the proposed marriage. Formal speaking authority must be distinguished from participation in the wider decision-making process. Those who conduct the principal verbal negotiations are not necessarily the only

people involved in determining whether the marriage proceeds.

Taken together, the procession and spatial arrangements constitute an organised system of authority and participation. The elders and spokesman lead the visiting delegation; the bride's family controls admission to the homestead; the two families occupy distinct sides; and the spokesmen conduct the principal exchange from the interactional centre. The groom and other participants occupy positions that communicate different forms and degrees of involvement.

The central finding is that authority in Nandi marriage negotiations is communicated through the combined use of bodily movement, processional order, speech, regulated access and spatial positioning. These modes form a multimodal ensemble that identifies leaders, distinguishes hosts from visitors, separates the negotiating parties and establishes who may speak on behalf of each family (Kress, 2010). The organisation of space therefore contributes directly to the organisation of the negotiations and the relationships among their participants.

Creating the Marital Bond and Projecting Married Life

The third theme concerns resources that communicate the successful completion of negotiations, the creation of relationships between the families, and the qualities expected of married life. Butter, couch grass, and beer mark the formation and celebration of the marital relationship. Calabashes, blankets, palm-tree strands, and flavouring twigs communicate expectations concerning prosperity, love, honour, respect, and happiness. These resources shift the communicative focus from determining whether the marriage may proceed to recognising the relationship created through marriage and expressing how it should be sustained.

Butter is introduced after the successful completion of bridewealth negotiations. It signifies the joining of the bride's and groom's families, who acquire the relationship known as "*bamwai*" (Chemis, 2020). Its introduction therefore occurs only after the parties have reached an agreement. Before this point, the families interact as separate parties negotiating a prospective marriage; following the negotiations, butter marks their recognition as families joined through that marriage.

The meaning of butter arises from the relationship between the material resource, its culturally recognised

significance, and its position within the ceremonial sequence. It does not simply represent a general idea of unity. Its use at the conclusion of the negotiations communicates that the agreement has changed the relationship between the two families. A social relationship that might otherwise remain abstract is made materially and publicly recognisable. Butter therefore performs more than a decorative or representational function. Its use communicates that the negotiations have produced a recognised inter-family relationship.

Akurugu et al. (2022) establish that marriage gifts in several African settings create and reinforce relationships between families rather than functioning only as economic transfers. The Nandi case extends that finding in a particular direction: the relationship the gift creates is not merely established but named. The two families become Bamwai, united by butter. What the resource communicates is therefore not that an obligation has been discharged but that a category of relative now exists where none existed before.

Couch grass, known as *Segutiet*, is tied into a knot to represent the union of the bride and groom (Chemis, 2020). The grass provides the material resource, while tying it provides the embodied action through which the meaning is communicated. The transformation of separate strands into a joined form makes the union of the prospective spouses materially visible.

The meaning of "*Segutiet*" therefore depends on both the grass and the action performed upon it. Its flexibility allows for the bringing together of previously separate strands and thus provides a motivated connection between physical binding and the union of marriage. The resource does not state that the couple is united; rather, the act of tying signifies this union by creating an observable material transformation. Kress (2010) argues that the material properties of a resource are contributors to its meaning potential. In this case, the physical capacity of couch grass to join and knot supports its use in communicating the couple's social connection. Its meaning, nevertheless, remains culturally situated because the material resemblance becomes significant through Nandi conventions governing its use in marriage.

Mahmud (2022) found that linguistic and non-linguistic resources together index a Yoruba bride's movement from one social status to another. The Nandi evidence confirms that such transitions are marked multimodally and extends the point to a resource whose meaning

depends on an act performed upon it. It is not the grass that signifies but the knot. The transition is accordingly not represented by an object but produced by something done to one, in front of the people whose recognition makes it binding.

Beer seals the agreement. The original study records that two things are used to seal a Nandi marriage: knotted couch grass and beer, which seals the marriage covenant and celebrates the marriage union (Chemis, 2020). Where couch grass makes the union visible, beer marks it as settled. The two are used at the same point in the sequence and do different work; it is the pairing, rather than either resource alone, that completes the agreement.

What distinguishes beer from the resources discussed so far is that it must be consumed. Korosek is received, a quiver is opened, couch grass is tied and left tied; each of these can be witnessed. Beer is drunk, and drinking is something the participants do rather than something they observe. Recognition of the completed marriage is thereby placed in an act that those present perform together rather than in an object displayed before them.

This is a limiting case for the analysis, as much as an illustration of it, because the original study records what beer accomplishes without detailing the manner of its use. Who provides it, at what moment it is brought, and who drinks are not documented, and the provenance of the record is the summarising chapter rather than the findings chapters. What can be said on the available evidence is that a consumable substance carries the covenant, and the same resource accomplishes that celebration and sealing. How the drinking is organised, and whether its organisation communicates anything further about the standing of those who take part, are questions the present material cannot answer.

The calabashes presented to the bride and groom communicate prosperity. Their use for storing milk connects them with cattle ownership and the establishment of a productive household (Chemis, 2020). Their meaning develops through a culturally recognised series of associations among calabashes, milk, cattle, and household wealth.

Although calabashes are practical household objects, their presentation during the marriage ceremony activates a broader meaning. They project the couple beyond the immediate event into their anticipated domestic and economic life. The presentation of several calabashes

communicates the hope that the new household will possess cattle, produce milk, and experience material prosperity.

Ogunkunle (2013) shows that objects used in Yoruba traditional marriage carry culturally specific meanings that cannot be read off the objects themselves. The Nandi calabash confirms the principle and exhibits the chain of associations on which such a meaning can rest: calabash to milk, milk to cattle, cattle to a productive household. The meaning is not attached to the object directly but assembled from what the object is ordinarily used for (van Leeuwen, 2005).

Blankets communicate warmth and love. They are presented to elders, who are expected to extend these qualities to the newly married couple (Chemis, 2020). The physical capacity of a blanket to cover, protect, and provide bodily warmth supplies the material basis for its relational meaning. Physical warmth is metaphorically extended to the care, affection, and support expected from the elders. The presentation of blankets to elders is significant because it locates responsibility for sustaining the marriage beyond the couple. Elders who exercise leadership during the negotiations are also expected to contribute to the well-being of the resulting union. The blanket therefore connects seniority with both authority and care, situating the couple within a wider network of kinship support. Palm-tree strands communicate respect and honour within marriage. They are associated with cleaning or flavouring calabashes and with parental discipline (Chemis, 2020). Within the marriage ceremony, these established associations are directed toward expectations of responsible and respectful marital conduct.

The strands connect domestic practice with moral behaviour. Their association with cleaning and maintaining calabashes links them to proper household care, while their association with discipline invokes socially regulated conduct. They therefore communicate the expectation that marriage should be sustained through respect, honour, and responsibility. This interpretation concerns the culturally reported value of disciplined conduct and should not be extended into an endorsement of physical punishment.

Flavouring twigs communicate the expectation of a sweet and happy marriage. The twigs are used to add flavour to milk, and the sweetness they produce provides the material basis for their marital meaning (Chemis, 2020).

Interpreting them requires practical cultural knowledge of their ordinary use and the sensory transformation they produce.

The flavouring twigs draw on sweetness to project a desirable future for the couple. Their ability to change the taste of milk becomes a semiotic resource for expressing how participants hope the marital relationship will develop. The twigs, therefore, shift the communicative focus beyond recognising that a marriage has occurred to expressing expectations about the quality of married life.

Taken together, these resources perform two closely connected functions. Butter, couch grass and beer communicate that the negotiations have produced a recognised marital and inter-family relationship. Calabashes, blankets, palm-tree strands, and flavouring twigs communicate the material, relational, and moral qualities expected of that relationship.

The central finding is that Nandi marriage resources do more than mark a change in marital status. Through their coordinated use, they communicate a culturally grounded model of marriage in which the union joins families, establishes a productive household, receives the support of elders and is expected to be characterised by love, respect, honour and happiness. Material, embodied, and sensory resources therefore make both the newly created relationship and its anticipated future socially recognisable.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion: This study examined how semiotic resources regulate Nandi marriage negotiations, organise relationships among participants, and communicate marital and inter-family transitions. It concludes that these resources constitute a socially organised system of communication rather than a collection of isolated signs. Their significance depends on culturally established conventions, the participants who use and interpret them, their interaction with other communicative modes, and their position within the unfolding marriage process.

The findings demonstrate that semiotic resources perform consequential social actions throughout the negotiations. The reception or rejection of Korosek determines whether the proposal proceeds to formal discussion, while processional order and spatial positioning organise admission, participation, and representative authority. Following successful negotiations, resources such as butter and couch grass make the resulting inter-family and

marital relationships socially recognisable. Material objects, bodily movement, speech, sensory experience, and space therefore operate together to regulate the negotiations and communicate changes in participants' relationships. What holds them together is order. Korosek must be received before the delegation is admitted, the totems must be settled before the quiver may be opened, and the bridewealth must be agreed before the knot is tied, so that each resource acts on a situation that an earlier one has already changed.

The study extends the earlier analysis by Chemis et al. (2020), which identified the culturally recognised meanings of individual signs and classified their relations with what they signified. Concentrating on marriage alone, the present analysis shows how those resources operate sequentially and collectively within an organised process. Its contribution is threefold: for Nandi scholarship, a sequential account of marriage communication in place of an inventory; for comparative work on African marriage, a Southern Nilotic case in a literature drawn largely from Bantu and West African settings, in which the negotiation is organized by resources other than the livestock under discussion; and for social semiotics and multimodality, evidence that the regulation of space, sequence and speaking rights is itself a communicative resource rather than the setting in which communication happens.

Recommendations: Three questions arise directly from what the material could not settle. The first concerns the resources on which the original data record is based without explaining: the groom's position beside the door and the presence of some women in adjoining rooms during the principal negotiations. Participants' own accounts of these arrangements would establish whether they mark differentiated involvement, differentiated authority, or something else again. The second concerns beer, which the record establishes as sealing the covenant without recording how it is used; who provides it, when it is brought and who drinks would show whether the act of sealing is itself organised in the way the earlier phases are. The third is comparative: work across Kalenjin communities would establish how far the sequence described here is shared, and research on contemporary negotiations would show how it is changing under Christianity, urbanisation, inter-community marriage and shifting gender relations.

Limitations: The study is limited by its reliance on previously collected data not originally generated to

address the present research question. Consequently, some dimensions of participation, including the bride's consent, women's involvement in decision-making, and participants' explanations of particular spatial positions, could not be examined fully. The findings are also confined to the practices documented in the original study and should not be generalised to all contemporary Nandi marriages.

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