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Gender Roles and Family Responsibilities in Nyiha Babatoni Songs of Southwestern Tanzania

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Abstract

Nyiha *babatoni* musical performances constitute a vital oral literature genre in southwestern Tanzania that entertains, instructs, and encapsulates evolving socio-cultural and economic dynamics. Although *African literary scholarship has given babatoni songs limited critical attention*, their themes remain central to contemporary feminist and sociological discourses. Grounded in African feminism—specifically Ezenwanebe's concept of complementarity and Nnaemeka's nego-feminism—this article critically analyses how Nyiha babatoni compositions represent gender roles, marital power relations, and family obligations. Drawing upon qualitative ethnographic data collected from six youth *babatoni* bands across Igamba and Itaka wards in Mbozi District (Songwe Region), the study examines five purposively sampled songs: "Roda," "Shule," "Udada Neema," "Mwinga," and "Asha." Through close textual reading, interlinear transcription, and socio-linguistic analysis, the study reveals that *babatoni* lyrics actively contest rigid patriarchal paradigms by presenting husbands and wives as co-providers, co-educators, joint decision-makers, and mutual caretakers. The analysis highlights how male artists depict paternal nurturance, shared financial agency, and cooperative child discipline, while utilising Ishinyiha-Kiswahili code-switching to articulate both local ethnic identity and broader national solidarity. The article demonstrates that oral literature serves as a dynamic site for negotiating marital authority and recommends greater scholarly recognition of vernacular music as an instrument of gender equity and social transformation.

Keywords:
Babatoni songs, African feminism, complementarity, nego-feminism, gender roles, Nyiha oral literature, Songwe Region, code-switching.

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1. Introduction

1.1 Socio-Cultural and Linguistic Context of the Nyiha

The Nyiha people (avhanyiha) constitute an indigenous Bantu ethnic group predominantly inhabiting the high-altitude agricultural plateau of Mbozi District within Songwe Region, Southwestern Tanzania. Linguistically, Ishinyiha belongs to the Southwestern Bantu language group and shares high mutual intelligibility and structural affinity with neighbouring tongues, including Nyamwanga, Wanda, Bungu, Safwa, Malila, and Lambya (Walsh & Swilla, 2000; Wilson, 1977). This geographical positioning in the borderlands linking Tanzania, Zambia, and Malawi has historically nurtured vibrant cross-border trade, socio-linguistic convergence, and inter-community dialogue (Knight, 1974; Mwasunda et al., 2023). Within this agrarian society, social organisation has traditionally revolved around patriarchal lineage structures, bride-wealth exchanges, and agrarian subsistence modes wherein marital unions determine both family continuity and community social capital.

1.2 The Babatoni Musical Performance Context

Like many African ethnic groups, the Nyiha utilise oral literature—encompassing proverbs, folktales, riddles, and performance arts—as primary vehicles for moral instruction, historical documentation, and social commentary. Among these oral art forms, babatoni performance occupies a unique socio-cultural space. The term babatoni refers both to a specialised musical genre and to its defining instrument: a large, single-stringed bass instrument indigenous to southwestern Tanzania and northern Malawi (predominantly featured across Mbozi, Kyela, Rungwe, and Mbeya districts). The babatoni is a long wooden pole fitted with a metallic string attached to a hollowed resonator box at its base, producing a deep, resonant bass rhythm when plucked.

Youth bands typically perform babatoni music, featuring lead vocalists, plucked string accompaniment, percussive clapping, and rhythmic dancing. In recent decades, babatoni performances have shifted from informal rural gatherings to structured youth entertainment groups that perform at trading centres, wedding ceremonies, political rallies, and cultural festivals. These youth bands—composed of both male and female performers—blend traditional Ishinyiha lyrical arrangements with contemporary urban dance styles and Kiswahili phrasing, transforming the genre into an active forum for youth expression and social reflection.

1.3 Problem Statement and Research Objectives

Despite its widespread popularity and social resonance in Southwestern Tanzania, *babatoni* music has received surprisingly little systematic academic inquiry within African literary scholarship and ethnomusicology. While literary analyses of Tanzanian oral literature have frequently focused on national Kiswahili taarab, wedding songs, or traditional initiation rites, esoteric vernacular music like *babatoni* has been marginalised. Furthermore, contemporary gender debates in African literature often assume a stark dichotomy between oppressive traditional patriarchy and modernised gender activism. This study addresses this scholarly gap by critically examining how Nyiha *babatoni* songs articulate internal cultural reform, renegotiate marital power relations, and promote gender equity from within indigenous oral performance traditions.

The primary objectives of this study are threefold: (1) to document and transcribe key *babatoni* lyrical compositions performed by youth bands in Mbozi District; (2) to analyse the representation of marital roles, child-rearing duties, economic co-ownership, and domestic authority through the framework of African feminism; and (3) to evaluate how linguistic code-switching between Ishinyiha and Kiswahili serves as a strategic medium for negotiating local ethnic identity alongside national solidarity.

2. Theoretical Framework & Literature Review

2.1 African Feminism, Complementarity, and Nego-Feminism

To avoid imposing Eurocentric feminist paradigms that often conceptualise men and women as perpetually opposed, this study grounds its textual and cultural analysis in African feminist theory. Foundational works by Flora Nwapa (1966), Molara Ogundipe-Leslie (1994), Clenora Hudson-Weems (1993), and Susan Arndt (2002) emphasise that African feminism operates within specific cultural, historical, and communal matrices. Unlike radical Western feminist models that may advocate for the complete dissolution of traditional family structures, African feminist paradigms prioritise communal survival, family cohesion, and mutual partnership while fiercely critiquing patriarchal subjugation.

This study's analytical lens centres on the principle of complementarity as formulated by Osita Ezenwanebe (2008). Ezenwanebe posits that traditional African gender ideologies, when uncorrupted by colonial and feudal distortions, recognise the essential interdependence of male and female roles. Complementarity posits that neither men nor women can achieve social fulfilment in isolation; rather, societal well-being depends on equitable partnership, mutual respect, and shared authority. Ezenwanebe (2008) asserts that complementarity utilises culture not as an immutable anchor for oppression, but as a dynamic platform for critical transformation, allowing communities to redefine domestic roles in response to evolving socio-economic pressures.

Complementing Ezenwanebe's paradigm is Obioma Nnaemeka's (2005) theory of nego-feminism ('the feminism of negotiation'). Nnaemeka conceptualises African feminist practice as grounded in negotiation, compromise, give-and-take, and structural balance. Nego-feminism recognises that African women frequently exercise agency not through

outright confrontation or institutional abandonment, but by strategically negotiating authority, economic co-ownership, and domestic influence within relational frameworks. Applied to Nyiha *babatoni* songs, these theoretical perspectives allow us to examine whether lyrical representations reinforce rigid patriarchal domination or actively construct possibilities for shared power and gender equity.

2.2 Gender Divisions of Labour and Marriage in East African Contexts

To properly contextualise Nyiha marital dynamics, it is necessary to locate them within broader East African ethnographic literature. Historically, African marriage has served as a central socio-economic institution that regulates kinship networks, property inheritance, labour allocation, and lineage continuity (Coast, 2006; Mbiti, 1969; van Gennep, 1960). In traditional patriarchal frameworks across East Africa, domestic labour and reproductive care were heavily gendered and disproportionately saddled upon women. For example, Monica Wilson's (1977) classic ethnography on the neighbouring Nyakyusa of Southwestern Tanzania highlights how women were systematically excluded from public political governance while shouldering strenuous domestic labour—including farming, cooking, brewing beer, fetching firewood, plastering mud walls, and managing household sanitation.

Similarly, in traditional agricultural communities, polygyny was often practised to maximise agrarian labour, with women and children serving as economic producers whose output remained under the exclusive administrative control of male household heads (Cook, 2007; Korosso, 1994; Nakalani & Sokoni, 2013). Ogundipe-Leslie (1994) conceptualises these accumulated structural burdens as the 'six mountains' on the African woman's back: colonial legacy, traditional structures, economic backwardness, male dominance, race, and internalised subjugation. However, contemporary sociological research in East Africa indicates that rigid divisions of labour are undergoing significant erosion. Scholars such as Archambault (2013), Tarayia (2004), and Okiya (2016) demonstrate that

contemporary rural couples increasingly navigate shared parental care, joint decision-making, and collaborative financial management in response to economic modernisation and educational expansion.

2.3 Oral Literature as a Site of Gender Negotiation

Oral literature in Africa has never been a static repository of ancient folklore; rather, it functions as a vibrant, living medium for contemporary social commentary and ideological debate (Miruka, 1999; Sone, 2018). As scholars like Wakota (2018) observe in the context of Tanzania's Ujamaa literary history, popular performance genres serve as crucial battlegrounds where social norms are interrogated, reinterpreted, and transformed. Babatoni music, performed by young musicians for diverse public audiences, serves as both entertainment and civic education, giving artist-activists a platform to challenge outdated marital expectations and project egalitarian visions of family life.

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Qualitative Design and Ethnographic Recording

This study adopted a qualitative, interpretive research design suitable for exploring socio-cultural meanings, humanistic agency, and shifting gender perceptions in performing arts (Creswell, 2009). The study gathered primary qualitative data through ethnographic field observations across Igamba and Itaka wards in Mbozi district, Songwe region. The research team systematically recorded live musical performances by six active youth babatoni bands during local community gatherings, social celebrations, and performance venues. The study chose field observation as the primary data collection tool because it focused on analysing the lyrical content, narrative structures, and gender representations embedded in the songs themselves,

rather than measuring audience reception or retrospective performer reflections.

3.2 Corpus Selection and Sampling Strategy

A purposive sampling strategy was employed to select representative *babatoni* compositions from the broader field recordings. The sampling criteria required that selected songs: (1) were composed and performed by active youth bands incorporating both male and female artists; (2) contained rich narrative content specifically addressing marital relationships, child upbringing, domestic labour, or economic management; and (3) exhibited contemporary artistic elements such as modern dance arrangements and bi-lingual lyrical composition. A total corpus of five (5) *babatoni* songs was selected for in-depth literary and socio-linguistic analysis:

Song Title	Language(s)	Primary Thematic Focus	Performance Group
Roda	Ishinyiha	Paternal Nurturance, Shared Childcare & Destigmatising Domestic Male Labour	Igamba Youth Band
Shule (School)	Kiswahili / Ishinyiha	Shared Parental Agency, Education as Asset & Joint Decision-Making	Itaka Youth Ensemble
Udada Neema	Ishinyiha	Inter-Ethnic Marriage, Parental Guidance & Cultural Complementarity	Songwe Stars Babatoni
Mwinga	Ishinyiha / Kiswahili	Female Economic Ownership, Artisanal Mining Migration & Ujamaa Solidarity	Mbozi Central Band

Song Title	Language(s)	Primary Thematic Focus	Performance Group
Asha	Kiswahili	Parental Vigilance, Educational Monitoring & Shared Discipline	Itaka Youth Ensemble

3.3 Transcription, Interlinear Translation, and Textual Hermeneutics

Audio recordings of the five selected songs were transcribed verbatim from field tapes. Because *babatoni* compositions feature both Ishinyiha and Kiswahili—frequently shifting between the two within a single stanza—transcription required meticulous linguistic precision. To ensure analytical rigour without losing cultural nuances, figurative metaphors, or idiomatic proverbs, the principal investigator (a native Ishinyiha speaker) collaborated with expert bilingual translators proficient in Ishinyiha and English (Finnegan, 2012). The team organised transcriptions into interlinear layouts featuring the original vernacular text alongside line-by-line literal and idiomatic English translations. Guided by close reading techniques (Schur, 1998), the translated text was analysed hermeneutically across four thematic clusters: (a) child upbringing and paternal care; (b) family earnings and property ownership; (c) joint decision-making; and (d) domestic authority and moral discipline.

4. Shared Responsibilities in Nyiha Babatoni Songs: Critical Analysis

4.1 Redefining Fatherhood and Domestic Care: Paternal Nurturance in 'Roda'

One of the most striking thematic departures from traditional patriarchal literature observed in Nyiha babatoni songs is the explicit portrayal of direct

paternal childcare. In traditional Nyiha society, infant care, feeding, and comforting were strictly classified as female domestic obligations; men seen cradling an infant or doing domestic chores were often mocked and accused of being emasculated or controlled by their wives (Olawoye et al., 2004; Wilson, 1977). The song 'Roda' directly confronts and dismantles this taboo.

In 'Roda,' the male persona is alone at home, caring for his infant daughter while his wife, Roda, has travelled across the border to Zambia. Rather than neglecting the child or delegating care to female relatives, the father actively engages in intimate paternal caregiving. He sings of comforting the infant and cradling her to sleep during the night:

> ***Original (Ishinyiha/Kiswahili): "Palamila tuny'engane wee Roda […] nsanga ukalale mwila wane"***
> English Translation: "Come across me, Roda, so that we cuddle one another […] and cradle the baby to sleep."
> *(Refrain from 'Roda' depicting tender paternal care and infant co-sleeping.)*

As night progresses and the infant grows restless, the persona expresses emotional distress and longs for his wife's return, not to shirk responsibility, but because effective child-rearing requires parental partnership. In a humorously candid stanza, the husband calls out across the compound upon discovering that the baby has wet the bed:

> ***Original (Ishinyiha/Kiswahili): "Nzaga uyenye mayi umwana waho atunda munyumba…"***
> English Translation: "Come on my dear and see, your child is bedwetting in the house…"
> *(Stanza from 'Roda' highlighting the reality of daily infant care.)*

From a literary and socio-linguistic standpoint, the father's use of the phrase 'umwana waho' ('your child') carries layered ideological significance. On a surface reading, the phrase appears to echo a stubborn patriarchal trope wherein men disavow parental ownership the moment a child displays messy behaviour or misconduct. However, in the song's broader performative context, the phrasing serves a subtle rhetorical purpose: it

humorously exposes the husband's practical limits in handling infant care alone, forcing him to acknowledge his fundamental dependence on his wife. By depicting a father directly cradling, comforting, and managing a bedwetting infant, Roda expands the operational boundaries of Nyiha masculinity, demonstrating through African feminist complementarity that nurturance is an essential human responsibility rather than an exclusively female biological trait.

4.2 Shared Parental Authority and Educational Guidance: 'Shule' and 'Asha'

The second thematic cluster focuses on parental guidance, formal schooling, and joint decision-making regarding children's futures. In traditional agrarian societies, fathers held exclusive authority over public decisions—such as determining whether a son would attend school or remain home to herd cattle—while mothers were relegated to domestic training. In contrast, the babatoni song Shule (School) constructs a narrative of joint parental invocation and shared educational agency.

In 'Shule,' the narrative persona reflects on the pivotal moment that set his educational trajectory. The singer opens with a clear affirmation of dual parental authority:

> ***Original (Ishinyiha/Kiswahili): "Baba na mama yangu waliniita. Mimi nilipoenda walinieleza, nenda kusoma shule."***
> English Translation: "My father and my mother summoned me. When I went, they explained to me: go and study at school."
> *(Opening stanza of 'Shule' asserting joint parental educational counsel.)*

The Kiswahili plural verb 'waliniita' ('they summoned me') and the compound subject 'baba na mama yangu' ('my father and my mother') are linguistically significant. The song presents the directive to pursue formal

education not as a patriarchal decree handed down solely by the father, but as a unified family policy crafted jointly by both parents. The song presents education as the modern foundation for wealth, social mobility, and self-reliance, explicitly arguing that academic knowledge transcends traditional inheritance such as land or livestock. By portraying the mother alongside the father in this strategic family council, Shule illustrates Ezenwanebe's principle of complementarity: the mother's voice carries equal weight in shaping the family's socio-economic destiny.

This theme of shared educational stewardship is further amplified in the song Asha. Performed in Kiswahili to reach a broader regional audience, Asha addresses the perils of truancy, urbanisation, and youth delinquency. The song explicitly admonishes both parents to maintain active, collaborative oversight of their children's daily routines:

> ***Original (Ishinyiha/Kiswahili): "Sikia nanyi wazazi, watoto wenu, muwe mnafuatilia nyayo zao, wanapoondoka hapo nyumbani, kwenda shule eee, kuna wengine kweli watoto wote ni wajanja wengi, wanapita njia za uchochoro."***
> English Translation: "Listen, you parents, closely follow up on your children's footsteps as they leave home for school; some children are very cunning and take back alleys."
> *(Core admonition from 'Asha' emphasising active parental monitoring.)*

By addressing 'wazazi' ('parents' in the plural) rather than isolating fathers or mothers, Asha reinforces Archambault's (2013) ethnographic assertion that in contemporary East African communities, children are viewed as 'gifts from God given into shared human stewardship.' The song insists that protecting children from social downfall requires continuous, joint vigilance from both mother and father, thereby solidifying shared parental agency as an essential moral duty.

4.3 Marital Instruction and Inter-Ethnic Alliance: 'Udada Neema'

In traditional patriarchal literature, instructions given to a bride prior to marriage were strictly the domain of female elders (aunts and grandmothers) during seclusion rites, while male elders negotiated bride-wealth. The babatoni song Udada Neema (Sister Neema) offers a nuanced reimagining of premarital counsel and interethnic marital alliances.

Udada Neema narrates the story of Neema, a Nyiha young woman who marries Aizaki, a Chagga man from Northern Tanzania. The song opens with joyous celebration, celebrating Neema's choice among many suitors who had visited her family home. As the narrative transitions into instructional advice aimed at ensuring marital longevity in an inter-ethnic union, the singer (Neema's brother) explicitly cites the joint instructions provided by both parents:

> ***Original (Ishinyiha/Kiswahili): "Ane nkumanya kuti ubaba nu mayi waho […] vakusunzite inkani"***
> English Translation: "I know that your father and your mother […] have thoroughly instructed you in wisdom."
> *(Excerpt from 'Udada Neema' highlighting joint parental pre-marital instruction.)*

The explicit pairing of 'ubaba nu mayi waho' ('your father and your mother') acknowledges that moral formation and marital preparation are shared parental responsibilities. Furthermore, the song depicts the brother taking an active, supportive role in encouraging his sister to uphold Nyiha values of dignity, hard work, and mutual respect as she adapts to her new Chagga household. From an African feminist perspective, Udada Neema illustrates how familial networks operate collaboratively to support women entering new marital institutions, framing pre-marital instruction as a holistic, family-wide endeavour.

4.4 Economic Co-Ownership, Code-Switching, and Female Agency in 'Mwinga'

Economic provision and property ownership represent crucial sites of gender power negotiation in African marriages. Historically, customary legal regimes in Southwestern Tanzania granted husbands exclusive ownership of land, cash crops, and household assets, treating wives as economic dependents (Korosso, 1994). The complex babatoni composition of Mwinga radically reconfigures these economic dynamics.

The narrative of Mwinga centres on a young wife, Mwinga, whose husband, Asile, has left their rural home in Mbozi to seek economic fortune in the artisanal gold mines of Chunya District. During her husband's prolonged absence, Mwinga's brother approaches her and urges her to abandon the marriage because of economic hardship and loneliness. The brother sings:

> ***Original (Ishinyiha/Kiswahili): "Mwinga! Mwinga!, utendamiye amayimba dada, ngavha nene ningepa kwa bwana uyooo"***
> English Translation: "Mwinga! Mwinga!, you are living in distress, my sister; if it were me, I would divorce that man right away!"
> *(Opening challenge in 'Mwinga' proposing marital separation.)*

This opening exchange is remarkably provocative. In traditional Nyiha society, divorce was heavily discouraged, and women were expected to endure severe marital hardship to preserve family honour and avoid bride-wealth repayment disputes (Cook, 2007). By depicting a brother explicitly advising his sister to exercise divorce as a legitimate exit option from economic distress, Mwinga presents divorce as a viable assertion of female agency and bodily dignity. This aligns directly with Nnaemeka's nego-feminism: a woman's marital commitment is not unconditional servitude; it requires reciprocity, dignity, and economic security.

However, Mwinga chooses not to abandon her marital home. Instead, she asserts economic stewardship and co-ownership of household assets in her

husband's absence. The song describes her managing the modest family homestead, symbolised by traditional domestic utensils:

> ***Original (Ishinyiha/Kiswahili): "Nu vhugali ukulila mwifulila aaa, zyope inyanyi ukulila mushitovha…"***
> English Translation: "You eat vhugali (stiff porridge) from the ifulila (cooking pot), and vegetables from the ishitova (pumpkin-bark bowl)…"
> *(Stanza from 'Mwinga' highlighting domestic resource preservation.)*

The ifulila (clay cooking pot) and ishitova (traditional bowl crafted from dried pumpkin bark) are highly evocative cultural symbols. They signify the household's humble material baseline and underscore Mwinga's vital role in safeguarding family assets while her husband seeks wealth elsewhere. Rather than viewing Mwinga as a passive victim awaiting male rescue, the song portrays her as an active manager and co-owner of the domestic domain.

As the narrative unfolds, the singer intervenes to urge the absent husband, Asile, to return home from the gold fields, arguing that true economic prosperity is built not through speculative migration, but through joint agricultural production at home. In a pivotal linguistic shift, the song transitions from pure Ishinyiha into bilingual code-switching with Kiswahili:

> ***Original (Ishinyiha/Kiswahili): "Mtaji wa masikini ni nguvu zake kaka, uzunde umwoyo […] Asile kaka, uko wapi kaka, dunia ya leo ni mshikamano… twende kumwitu Asile kwa Nambinzo oooo"***
> English Translation: "The poor man's capital is his own labour power, my brother; take heart […] Asile, my brother, where are you? Today's world is for solidarity… let us return home to Nambinzo!"

(Climax of 'Mwinga' utilising Kiswahili code-switching to advocate solidarity.)

The inclusion of the popular political slogan 'mtaji wa masikini ni nguvu zake' ('the poor man's capital is his labour power') and the explicit appeal 'dunia ya leo ni mshikamano' ('today's world requires solidarity') connects domestic marital partnership to national socialist (Ujamaa) philosophies of collective labour and mutual cooperation. The song forcefully argues that sustainable wealth emerges when husbands and wives combine their physical energy in joint domestic production.

5. Critical Discussion: Shifting Masculinities and Ujamaa Ideology

5.1 Reconsidering Male Stigmatisation in Domestic Work

The analytical findings show that Nyiha babatoni songs actively reshape traditional gender constructs. A central contribution of these songs is their deliberate destabilisation of male stigmatisation surrounding domestic labour. As Olawoye et al. (2004) observe in broader African contexts, traditional male socialisation often framed domestic work as degrading to manhood. By contrast, *babatoni* compositions like Roda reframe paternal involvement in childcare as a mark of mature, responsible masculinity. As Wakota (2018) notes in studies of Tanzanian domestic labour, when men do domestic work at home, it strengthens marital trust and fosters deep emotional bonds with children, effectively liberating men from rigid patriarchal scripts that distance them from family life.

5.2 Linguistic Code-Switching as Cultural and Political Solidarity

The socio-linguistic phenomenon of code-switching between Ishinyiha and Kiswahili—prominently featured in Mwinga, Shule, and Asha—warrants critical theoretical attention. As Karsten Legere (1992) and Goodness (2014) document, Julius Nyerere's post-independence nation-building strategy systematically promoted Kiswahili as a national lingua franca to transcend regional ethnic divisions and foster Ujamaa (socialist solidarity). In babatoni songs, code-switching operates on two complementary levels:

First, preserving Ishinyiha stanzas anchors the music within Nyiha ethnic heritage, maintaining esoteric cultural authority and resonance with local audiences. Second, seamlessly weaving Kiswahili phrases—such as 'dunia ya leo ni mshikamano' (solidarity) and 'mtaji wa masikini ni nguvu zake' (labor power)—bridges the local Nyiha experience with national Tanzanian discourses of equality, development, and collective responsibility. This socio-linguistic blending distinguishes Tanzanian Nyiha babatoni artists from neighbouring Nyiha populations in Zambia and Malawi, demonstrating how national language policy has enriched local oral literature as a vehicle for progressive gender reform.

5.3 Reconceptualising Power and Authority in Contemporary Nyiha Families

Ultimately, the textual evidence from the five *babatoni* songs supports a profound reconceptualisation of marital power. Rather than depicting household authority as a zero-sum game in which female empowerment requires male disenfranchisement, the songs present a model of joint governance. The songs present domestic discipline, moral instruction, educational investment, and property management as shared domains that require mutual consent and active cooperation. Aligning with Nnaemeka's (2005) nego-feminism and Ezenwanebe's (2008) complementarity, Nyiha *babatoni* songs articulate an indigenous feminist vision in which equality is realised through partnership, balance, and shared responsibility.

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

6.1 Key Theoretical Contributions

This study has demonstrated that Nyiha babatoni songs from Southwestern Tanzania constitute a vital, highly sophisticated oral literature genre that actively engages with contemporary debates on gender equity and family

transformation. Through close textual analysis grounded in African feminism, the article shows that *babatoni* lyrics challenge conventional patriarchal paradigms by portraying husbands and wives as co-caretakers, joint financial providers, mutual educators, and co-equal disciplinarians. By portraying direct paternal nurturance in Roda, joint educational decision-making in Shule and Asha, complementary pre-marital guidance in Udada Neema, and female economic agency alongside Ujamaa solidarity in Mwinga, *babatoni* artists redefine traditional domestic roles to reflect contemporary socio-economic realities.

6.2 Recommendations for Ethnomusicological and Literary Research

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proposed for future scholarly inquiry:

- **Ethnomusicological Archiving and Documentation:** Scholars and cultural institutions in Tanzania should prioritise the digital recording, transcription, and archiving of esoteric musical genres like babatoni across Songwe, Mbeya, and neighbouring regions before performance traditions are overtaken by commercial urbanisation.
- **Comparative Studies across Generational Genres:** Future research should conduct comparative analyses between youth *babatoni* performances and traditional genres performed exclusively by elders (such as ritual initiation chants or wedding songs) to evaluate generational shifts in gender ideology.
- **Cross-Border Comparative Oral Literature:** Given that the Nyiha ethnic group spans international borders, comparative studies should examine *babatoni* performances among Nyiha communities in Northern Zambia and Malawi to assess how differing national language policies and political histories shape oral literature and gender representations.

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