

Debunking Stereotypes: Gendered Women's Roles in Wedding Songs of the Nyiha of Mbozi in South-western Tanzania

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Abstract

Wedding songs, as a genre of oral literature, entertain, instruct, and spread cultural values such as civility, respect, and environmental conservations in different traditional societies, including the Nyiha of South-western Tanzania. Although these songs have attracted the attention of many scholars, many of the scholars have focused on their performative roles during wedding ceremonies and neglected the representation of gendered roles of women in these songs. In this regard, the cultural representation of social beliefs and attitudes towards married Nyiha women is a contested aspect which the present article investigates. Informed by African feminism, this article contextually analyses wedding songs using data obtained through observation, which entailed systematically selecting, watching, listening to, and recording songs. Subsequently, through close listening and reading of the transcribed songs, the article analysed the lyrics translated into English. The article found that Nyiha wedding songs situate married women in a position where they are obliged to serve their families and take care of their husbands throughout their marriage life irrespective of their age. On this account, the article argues that Nyiha wedding songs portray a woman as a provider, a role that she assumes from the first day of her marriage. The songs paint a married Nyiha woman as the only individual in the family who is accountable to ensure the survival if not success of the marriage institution.

Keywords:

Nyiha wedding songs, woman as provider, African feminism, Nyiha brides
<https://dx.doi.org/10.56279/ummaj.v10i2.5>

Introduction

The Nyiha are an ethnic group found in South-western Tanzania in Mbozi district of Songwe region. They are the original inhabitants of the corridor between Lake Tanganyika and Lake Nyasa, which

covers 9,679 square kilometres (Goodness 2014; Walsh & Swilla 2001). They speak an Eastern Bantu language called Kinyiha in Kiswahili or Ishinyiha in Nyiha. Ishinyiha is closely related to the languages spoken by the people surrounding the Nyiha community. These are the Nyamwanga (bordering the Nyiha to the West), Wanda (to the Northwest), Bungu (to the Northeast), Safwa (to the East), Malila (to the Southeast), and Lambya (to the South) (Walsh & Swilla; Wilson 1977). The close relationship that the Nyiha language has with the languages spoken in the surrounding communities simplifies interaction between the Nyiha and the people from those ethnic groups (Knight 1974). Nyiha people learn Ishinyiha from their childhood and as an aspect of culture, Nyiha songs do play a crucial role in moulding a Nyiha community.

More significantly, Nyiha wedding songs composed in Ishinyiha serve functional and educational purposes by directing the newly-weds on how to live a better life and sustain their marriages (Mtose 2011; Mugandani & Vermeulen 2016). Wedding songs also represent various perspectives of the respective community (Mulaudzi 2013; Narayan 1986). They also represent the customary laws on gender relations and the roles that men and women have to perform in their households (Dlamini, 2009). Information on gender relations and roles is specifically meant for the newly married couples, their relatives and other members of society young and old alike. This paper critically looks at the Nyiha perspectives of women's roles as represented in six Nyiha wedding songs: "Sekelele" (I am Happy), "Mayi" (Mother), "Ubaba Umpwana" (An Inheriting Father), "Lola Abhanji" (See Others), "Ayanda izya Mwanyina" (She Acts like Her Mother), and "Kumbuna" (You Envy Me).

Theoretical Orientation

As mentioned earlier, this article is underpinned by the African Feminist theory. According to Hooks (2000), African feminism supports the fight against injustice based on gender. Its goal is not to assist women of any race, class, or organisation and neither does it give preference to women over men; instead, it aims to meaningfully change everyone's life. Based on Hook's argument, feminism is a philosophy that draws attention to issues that women encounter in their separate communities, issues that are brought about by both genders (Rinck 1990; Nzeyo 2019). Thus, by

employing African feminism in this article, authors hope to shed light on concerns about advancing women's autonomy, empowerment, and de-gendering in an effort to bring people's private roles into the public domain (Arnot & JO-Anne 2006). Moreover, the theory facilitates critical examination of the controversy between traditional perception of women as weak with negative symbolic characters and the actual representation of women in Nyiha wedding songs. Based on the material evidence gleaned from the Nyiha wedding songs, the article further illuminates on the Nyiha belief that the women are instrumental when it comes to protecting their natural environment because their livelihoods are dependent on it.

Nyiha Wedding Songs Analysis

This study uses a qualitative approach. Its data was generated from the Nyiha community of Mbozi using observation method, which involved systematically selecting, watching, listening to, and recording songs. In addition, documentary reviews helped to get background information about the Nyiha community and their wedding songs. The article analyses six (6) representative Nyiha wedding songs focusing on how these songs capture thematic expressions pertaining to the Nyiha people's cultural perspectives on the role of the bride from the first day of her marriage. These six (6) songs (mentioned earlier) provide clues to Nyiha people's traditional belief that the sustainability of a family depends on the women's ability and resourcefulness.

In the song "*Sekelele*", the groom's relatives express their joy of having the bride to prepare food for them. Implicitly, once a woman gets married in the Nyiha community, she assumes the responsibility of cooking for the family. She has to cook for her husband, and his relatives. The soloist's verses "*azuga ubhugali, ni izumba*" (she has cooked *ubhugali*¹, with *izumba*²) followed by the respondents' verse "*natemwa*" meaning 'congratulations' illuminate the mentioned role. These sang verses suggest fulfilment of the community's expectations on the bride that she is a good cook. According to Mtose (2011), the kind of bride that the groom's relatives describe

¹ *Ubhugali* is a stiff porridge made of maize-flour.

² *Izumba* is a certain kind of vegetable relish popular in the Nyiha community.

ought to know how to make her home comfortable and welcoming. Thus, the bride described in the song is an ideal wife who knows all her important domestic chores, including cooking. Therefore, the song reflects that Nyiha traditions situate a married Nyiha woman in a position where she is obliged to cook and care for her family. Mtose (2011) further describes the attributes of an ideal woman in Africa to be one capable of cooking, bearing and looking after children, cleaning the house, washing clothes and dishes, and taking good care of her husband and his relatives. Thus, the song “*Sekelele*” is a further manifestation of these womanly attributes that a bride embodies including fending for the family without relying on her man.

In the Nyiha community, *izumba* is a vegetable that grows in the wild. Since the song talks about cooking *ubhugali* with *izumba*, one may conclude that a woman has to go to the wild to fetch *izumba* to feed her family, and in addition to collecting *izumba* from the wild she has to cook *ubhugali*, most likely- with flour made from maize, millet or sorghum. As the song does not say anything regarding whether the woman’s husband is responsible for cultivating the crops used to make the flour for *ubhugali*, it is implicit that the only person mentioned in relation to the task of cooking *ubhughali* (the bride) is also the cultivator of those crops. The song only emphasises cooking *ubhugali* as a woman’s responsibility without specifying the person who produces the maize, millet and sorghum grains. Even though the husband’s relatives, mostly women, sing the song to show that they are happy to get someone (the bride) to cook for them *ubhugali*, they do not make any comment of where the bride will get the flour for *ubhugali*. This leaves a strong possibility that the bride is responsible for the cultivation of the grains; especially, since among the Nyiha women are active tillers of the land who also take care of the crops that keep the family fed.

In addition, “*Sekelele*” seems to demonstrate that not only is the woman responsible to protect her environment so as to ensure the availability for food (*izumba*) for the survival of her household, but also suggest that it is a woman’s role to sustain her family all the time regardless of the climatic condition that may affect the growth of *izumba* in the wild. Therefore, the

issue of protecting the environment seem to largely be the woman's concern because it is the natural environment in which she can find *izumba*, and cultivate the crops used for grinding *ubhugali* flour. Such roles are also observed by Brock (1966) as she comments that in the Nyiha community once a bride joins her husband, she immediately starts farming activities and after harvesting her first produce, which is normally millet, she prepares beer for her in-laws.

Moreover, the repetition of the word "*sekelele*" (I am happy) in the first and third verses of the song describes the joy expressed by the in-laws following the bride's arrival in their homestead. The in-laws would be happy to have a bride who can cook *ubhugali* and *izumba*, which metaphorically represents food as per the Nyiha's culture. In addition, the words *azuga*³, *ubhugali*, and *izumba* (she has cooked, *ubhugali* and *izumba*) indicate that the bride is well-trained and well-prepared to cook food for the family that she gets from both the fields (through cultivation) and from the wild (nature harvesting). Thus, her husband's relatives rejoice to get such a woman endowed with attributes that will make the family proud and content which, could also contribute to family progress and sustenance.

Kinunda (2017) describes Nyiha women in the same way as they are represented in the song "*Sekelele*". She comments that Nyiha women are productive for they effectively engage in farming activities. This attribute is reflected in the oral traditions of the community just like in the song under discussion where women produce food for their families. The depiction of this idea in the song is, possibly, meant to alert the bride that she does not have to depend on her husband or other relatives to feed the family—she has to be industrious, work hard, and ensure the family is well-fed; that being married does not necessarily make a bride dependent on a man, she has to engage in socioeconomic activities (as African feminists advocate) for the family's better diet and nutrition. This practice is not exclusive to the Nyiha; it is evident in other cultures as well. Madzorera et al. (2023) argue that Tanzanian women's engagement in farming activities, and decision-making coupled with having access to

³ An act of cooking *ubhugali*

resources are important in improving the diet and nutrition of their respective families. With reference to Madzorera et al. (2023) the Nyiha community is, possibly, aware of this as through better diet and nutrition, the birth rate increases in the community and health challenges such as preterm births decrease.

The words “*sekelele*” and “*natemwa*” meaning ‘I am happy’ and ‘congratulations’, respectively, suggest that the husband’s family will continue to be happy as long as the bride fulfils her predetermined socially-sanctioned roles in the home. Moreover, the repetition of the verse “*natemwa*” demonstrates the community’s belief that women are crucial for Nyiha people’s development; thus, congratulations would be in order for having a wife. However, the portrayed position of a woman in her marriage focuses on one party in the marriage made of two, it mostly about the wife rather than a couple. As singers say nothing on the role of the husband in this newly-formed family, it can be concluded that the wife is charged with the sole responsibility of ensuring the family’s sustainability and progress.

Like *Sekelele* (I am happy), the song *Mayi* (Mother) portrays the kind of subservience and obedience that the bride has to maintain towards her husband. In this song the conventional age defining terms are twisted where the bride is referred to as *Mayi* (mother) while the husband is called “*umwana*” (child) to reflect the constructed, respective roles of both parties. Singers repeat the word “*sungaga*” (keep on raising) throughout the song to emphasise that the bride has to keep on taking care of her husband. The repetition of the word may also work to remind the bride of her responsibility to treat her husband in a nurturing manner as per the socially - constructed norms and standards. Throughout the song, the soloist introduces a number of socially - defined perceptions regarding the wife/ husband relationship. The second line of the song describes the husband as “*umwana*” (a child), who needs to be under the care of an adult person who in this context would be the wife. Moreover, the use of the word “*uyo*” (that) implies the groom’s parents’ withdrawal from the responsibility of taking care of this “child”, the role that is transferred over to the wife as soon as he gets married. Whereas the bride is physically

transferred from her parents to her husband household, that of the husband is rather symbolic signifying transfer of responsibility which is sanctioned by a set of community standards under which a married woman is expected to serve as a caregiver to her husband regardless of who is older or how (in) experienced she may be considering how long she has been married.

Going further, the song *Mayi* (Mother) depicts what motherhood versus childhood mean in the Nyiha traditional sense, which may not be based on age but rather on one's marital status. For the Nyiha community as depicted in the song under discussion a woman (irrespective of her age) is accorded the status and responsibility of motherhood from the minute she is married. In initiating the song, the soloist begins by calling the bride "*mayi! mayi!*" (mother! mother!), then the followers join by chanting the verse "*sungaga*" (keep on raising). The purpose of beginning with a line like this is to let the bride realise that she is a mother now and no longer a child with responsibilities of looking after her husband and his family. This opening line also serves as a call on the bride to realize and commit to her new position as a mother- from the time of her wedding. It also implies that she is supposed to fulfil the dual roles of wife and mother to her husband: being a companion and a caretaker. These dual roles seem to echo the African conception of motherhood; the Nyiha people's African womanist philosophy is justified by the song's incursion of motherhood. As the bride fulfils her responsibilities as a mother, she is considered blessed and she is accorded a higher status in society, respected, and mythologised (Akujobi 2011, p. 6). With the song being accessible to all, it is also possible that younger members grow up with similar expectations; the boys to forever be taken care of (first by their parents and later by their wives) while the girls would unquestionably look forward to the dual role with pride and anticipation.

The song *Mayi* (Mother) also terms the husband as an ‘orphan’ who needs not only social support but also psychological therapy. In the fifth line of the song, the soloist sings *mbona untagwa* (he is an orphan) to depict the husband’s new state after “loosing” his parents following his marriage. This term could be placing emphasis on the way the bride has to serve her husband, who has symbolically become an orphan after being weaned of the care of his own family and thrust into the custody of the bride—the new mother. Emphasizing on the delicate position that orphaned children are in compared to other children Makame et al. (2002) aptly observe that orphans not only lack basic necessities but also exhibit a significant rise in internalising issues, and, consequently, their long-term mental well-being at risk. Consistent with Makame et al.’s (2002) comment, the song under discussion metaphorically likens a husband to an orphan who has to be handled with great care for his psychological and all round wellness. This way the song may be urging the bride to make sure she not only attends to the groom’s basic needs like *ubhughali*—the staple food that represents sustenance - but also tend to his special needs or wants in marriage, which include sexual satisfaction.

What is generally observed from the song *Mayi* (Mother) matches with Wakota’s argument on African women. In his “Ujamaa’s Villagization and Gender Dynamics in Selected Tanzanian Fiction”, Wakota (2014) points out that an African woman is expected to take care of the family and is, therefore, ‘a mother’ for most of the time. In light of Wakota’s (2014) observation, *Mayi* presents a similar belief of the Nyiha regarding women. From the opening verse to the last, the song insists on the social role that a woman has: motherhood. The soloist sings “*mayi! mayi!...umwana uyo ... mbona untagwa*” (mother! mother! ... that child ... he is an orphan...) while the respondents sing *sungaga* (keep on raising). The two sides remind the bride of her social status and her responsibility to maintain it’s sustainably. This depiction supports the argument that mothering in the Nyiha community is not a matter of age and experience that a bride needs to have as she enters a marital relationship; it is a matter of being a married woman who ought to shoulder her dual responsibilities as a mother and as a wife. In this regard, in the song *Mayi* (Mother), marriage serves as a criterion for a woman to become a mother even if she is not yet mature enough to give birth. Marriage and mothering are intertwined

responsibilities of a Nyiha woman, which make her to be perceived as different from a Nyiha man.

Significantly, as was the case with *Sekelele*, the Nyiha's cultural traditions biasedly accord woman/wife the parental role while leaving out her spouse (the man/husband). The song *Mayi* portrays a woman as someone whose ability to handle family issues as naturally high contrary to that of a man, and whereas such views orient girls to assume such roles upon becoming women/wives, the same depiction supports the view that the Nyiha community does not see the need to orient their boys to handling family responsibilities such as taking care of their wives and children. This explains why the soloist uses the orphanage imagery when insisting on the bride taking good care of her now orphaned groom, who is incapable of taking care of himself and whose care had to be transferred from his mother to the bride as a new 'mother' to the husband. Similarly, by depicting a woman as someone who has the role of taking care of her husband, the song *Mayi* (Mother) complements *Sekelele* (I am happy), which also characterises a husband as *umwana* 'a child' (of some kind). This is evidenced by the soloist as s/he uses the expression "*umwana uyo*" (that child) while referring to the bridegroom. With the word "*umwana*", the soloist shows that a husband is someone with the same attributes as those of a child and in the seventh verse, the soloist adds "*umpanje ubhugali*" (give him *ubhugali*), connoting to the child's need to be fed. Mulaudzi (2013) contends that mothers provide care to infants, the elderly relatives, and the sick or the disabled. They also keep the house and cook for the family. In relation to Mulaudzi's (2013) contention these two songs; *Sekelele* (I am happy) and *Mayi* (Mother) exempt husbands from serving their wives and other relatives because they are already child-like persons who are supposed to always be under women's care. Therefore, a bride should be someone who fulfils such roles.

Whereas *Sekelele* (I am Happy) and *Mayi* (Mother) represent the social perception pertaining to the bride who had never married before, the song *Ubaba Umpwana* (An Inheriting Father) focuses on a woman who remarries following the death of her first husband. In the Nyiha community, as it is elsewhere in other parts of Africa where wife-inheritance is a cultural practice under the control of community elders (Tembo 2013), when a

husband dies, older relatives of the deceased family choose another man from their clan to substitute the deceased person. This is done at a traditional ceremony known as “*kuzinda*” where the family of the deceased initially declares the end of mourning period before officially naming the inheritor of the widow who will perform all the duties of a husband and a father. Thus, unlike *Sekelele* (I am Happy) and *Mayi* (Mother), which depict the bride being physically transferred from her father’s home to that of her husband when married, *Ubaba Umpwana* (An Inheriting Father) depicts the move of the inheritor from his home to that of the deceased upon marrying the widow, the wife of the deceased’s brother. Another difference is that the inheritor does not pay bride price to the widow’s clan as his deceased brother had already paid it during his marriage. Additionally, if the inheritor is already married, the act of inheriting his brother’s wife changes his monogamous marital status to a polygamous one.

At the “*kuzinda*” ceremony, which also marks this inheriting procedure people sing to celebrate the life of the deceased and praise the wife-inheritor. The relatives of the deceased clan, relatives of the deceased’s wife, and the children of the deceased all participate in the ceremony and sing songs such as “*Ubaba Umpwana*” (An Inheriting Father) which is actually one of the foremost songs during such events. Although the singers sing for celebration, the song portrays social perceptions of the wife who is inherited as analysed below.

On the one hand, this practise seems to favour the husband’s family. The Nyiha people believe that when the husband dies, the widow must marry one of the brothers of the deceased. The first section of the opening verse “*ubaba umpwana*” (an inheriting father) suggests that the Nyiha community does practice this tradition and expect elders from the deceased’s clan to choose a man who inherits the deceased’s wife as they see fit. However, the second part of the verse “*faida kwa mayi*” (it is a mother’s benefit) suggests that this wife-inheritance tradition may be beneficial to the wife as it strengthens a woman’s social security and gives her a new identity following the demise of her husband. Thomas (2008) argues that the choice to remarry is far more limited for a sizable portion

of widowed women in Sub-Saharan Africa, which affects not just the widow's identity and function but also her security, well-being, and means of subsistence. Therefore, from the song, one can conclude that the "faida" (benefits) that the singers are referring to stems from what Thomas explains.

Furthermore, *Ubaba Umupwana* (An Inheriting Father) portrays a widow as a beneficiary in various ways when this wife-inheritance tradition applies. According to Tembo's (2013) study she argues that "not all women hate wife-inheritance [since] some approve and perceive it as crucial for them because it gives them a chance to remarry 'better men' than those in their first marriages" (p.65). The goodness that Tembo refers to is in terms of better economic wellbeing and better husbandry attributes of the inheritor including his physical appearance. Implicitly, the Nyiha community perceives a widow to be at an advantageous position when she re-marries being it for her economic wellbeing or for the possibility of ending up with a better man than the deceased. From the song, it seems community members have witnessed how widows benefit from the tradition and are now reassuring the widow-to-be-inherited not to hesitate in taking advantage of what lies ahead, hence their use of the verse "*faida kwa mayi*" (it is for the mother's benefit). In this context, the singers illustrate how it is the widow and not her children or other family members that stands to benefit from the inheritor-husband.

One can extend the argument even further: the inherent benefits can also cover emotional and psychological issues such as the widow's sexual desires, which can be satiated by her new inheriting husband, hence saved from the life of solitude, particularly in a traditional set-up, that befall many widows after their husbands pass on. In such a context, there is nothing that the children of the deceased gain from their new father. As such, the singers from the beginning state:

Soloist: *Ubaba umupwana, faida kwa mayi x2* (a
father who inherits, it is a benefit to
the mother)

Responders: *Ubaba umupwana, faida kwa mayi*
(a father who inherits, it is a benefit
to the mother)

The song is silent on the social obligation that the inheriting husband has to the children of the deceased it solely focuses on the mother as the beneficiary to this reunion. This might imply that, after the death of the husband, the responsibility of raising the children and the family in general remains in the hands of the widow; thus, presence of this new husband is insignificant to the children.

Overall, "*Ubaba Umpwana*" showcases the reality of the wife-inheritance tradition in the Nyiha community. Traditionally, it is a long-established customary rite that allows male members of the deceased's clan to assume an automatic right to inherit the widow. Under such a traditional set-up, the widow has no power to decide otherwise. The song refers to the financial, emotional, psychological, and social assistance that a widow might receive from this custom, but it makes no mention of whether the inheritor provides any help at all to the deceased's children. Implicitly, the deceased's widow still bears the burden of supporting her children as well as the extended family left by her deceased husband. Therefore, when it comes to wife-inheritance, children remain an integral part of the wife's duty to take care of and in that way children remain fatherless, so to speak, as they continue depending to their mother contrary to the social expectations that the inheritor could help them.

Another piece of evidence that a woman is a family's cornerstone is found in the song "*Lola Abhanji*" meaning 'see others.' In this song, the soloist (who is the bride) laments over her psychological instability. When a woman departs from her family, she becomes psychologically and socially affected out of fear or concern for leaving the familiar for the unfamiliar. The bride's psychological torture seems to start immediately as the wedding ceremony begins. This is why the song starts with the bride's lamentation because she does not see her mother during the occasion:

Soloist: *Lola abhanji, lola abhanji* (see others,
see others)

Responders: *Lola abhanji nabhanyina* (see others with their moms)

Soloist: *Lola abhanji, lola abhanji* (see others, see others)

Responders: *Lola abhanji nabhanyina* (see others with their moms)

The bride shares her own sentiments over her mother's absence from the wedding celebration with the wedding invitees while singing the song. Eagerness is the main emotion felt. Her lack of enthusiasm suggests that her mother's absence has an impact on her socially and mentally, even though the groom, the groom's relatives, and other members of her tribe are present. The bride feels destitute and lonely due to her mother's absence. The song serves as a reminder of how important a mother is to her daughter. The bride further expounds:

Soloist: *Ne mupina njikumbate* (I am poor and hugging myself)

Responders: *Lola abhanji nabhanyina* (see others with their moms)

Soloist: *Ne mupina nsupiye* (I am poor and lonely)

Responders: *Lola abhanji nabhanyina* (see others with their moms)

In this song, the bride's miserable conditions are attributed to her mother's absence as she complains and expresses her sentiments she does so in comparison to others with their mothers on their sides. In this song we can see the bride touching on three problematic issues that arise due to her mother's absence. The first issue referred to as "*ubhupina*." In Nyiha culture "*ubhupina*" can be described as a condition where one absolutely lacks social or economic necessity. Umupina is a creature in need of necessities. Because this bride doesn't have a mother she is referred to needy in the lyrics above. The song's repetitive use of the term "*ne mupina*" underscores the significance of a mother in a girl's upbringing without which the bride would be constantly in need. In such crucial

moments like one's wedding where priceless marital advice is imparted by a mother to her daughter, even when other relatives may be around the bride views other women as less significant on her special day compared to her mother.

The second problem that is highlighted is that the bride is psychologically uncomfortable, as she hugs herself. Since the event under discussion is a joyous one, the bride ought to be happy. Yet, paradoxically, the bride sings "*njikumbate*" (let me hug myself) which signals how miserable and lonely she is at that moment such that instead of anticipating a warm hug from the soon to be husband this bride resorts to hug herself. This state raises multiple questions. Did she consent to this marriage? What effect does the absence of her mother have on her wedding ceremony and, perhaps, her marriage in general? What are the roles of other women to the girls without mothers? As in the previous concern, the bride's expressed loneliness is related to her mother's absence which could also suggest that every family member of the bride; especially her mother, is important at the marriage ceremony as she needs all the social support she can get.

On the other hand, "*Lola Abhanji*" seems to depict the current situation of Nyiha girls who view themselves as individuals, are aware of their human rights and can voice up their feelings. Taking a hint from the word "*njikumbate*" (let me hug myself) this bride does not seem excited to be getting married and is not afraid to express it, which could raise the question posed above; did she consent to the wedding? Whether being due to her young age or lack of love/interest towards the expected groom this expression which denotes the woman's preference to her own comfort suggests the bride's protesting if not objecting to the marriage. It also interweaves the past and present facts to strongly warn the Nyiha community on the need to consider girls' consent for marriage to avoid condemning them to undesired marriages—without obtaining their consent first. Indeed, the context of the song "*Lola Abhanji*" shows clearly that happiness in marriage depends on the partners' willingness to marry. It is fascinating to find from the song that Nyiha girls are mindful of the fact that their happiness in marriage depends on their consent to marry.

In the same vein, the song *Ayanda izya Mwanyina* (She Acts like Her Mother) expresses the position that a woman has in her family and community in general. The song highlights complaints that a man apportions to his wife as their daughter misbehaves. This means the responsibility of raising girls and making them behave well and be accepted by their husbands belongs to women in the Nyiha community. In the Nyiha patriarchal community, a woman is entrusted with the double burden of building not only her family but also her entire community, with the father or male detachment. The verses “*walii umwana ... ayanda izya mwanyina*” (that girl, acts like her mother) expresses it all. The song really depicts males as standard examples of patriarchal enculturation. The soloist appears to be toying with a patriarchal conception of women throughout the song where the males reinforce the traditional expectations about parenting by pairing the child's actions with her mother's, and thus solidifying the role of the woman in marriage. Men blame their spouses for their children's bad conduct because they do not want to be perceived as having failed to raise their children with manners.

Whereas *Ayanda izya Mwanyina* (She Acts like her Mother) depicts how patriarchal fathers shirking their responsibility of raising well their children heap all the blame on their wives, *Kumbuna* (You Envy Me) shows the power that a woman has in serving children and her grandchildren. The singers in the song portray mothers—regardless of their advanced age—with power and capacity to serve admirably their families. The verses *kumbuna bhayaya, uhandilaga umayi, ahampanga utunyego, twa kulelela abhana* (you envy me, you have killed my mom, who was giving me millet, for child rearing) reveal how the woman is responsible for making sure that her children and grandchildren do not starve. The societal emphasis on women's involvement in family rearing and responsibilities debunks the notion that women are lazy and less productive. This sensible reality, as represented in the Nyiha wedding songs, suggests the need to review the patriarchal system that continues marginalising women despite their positive contribution and tireless work ethic to ensure their families and well-fed and children well brought up.

Overall, the analysis and discussion of these six (6) wedding songs negate the living misconception that wives' earnings are for supporting their

families and that the wives are secondary providers who are there to help their husbands in fulfilling their responsibilities. The Nyiha songs portray women as not only care-givers but also family providers, who work to both put food on the table and cook it for the family. In fact, contemporary scholarships on family is now replete with positive roles signal that rise an awareness about women's roles in the family, which has also changed the social perception of men as the only family providers—the proverbial bread-winners. In this traditional regard, Thompson and Walker (1989, p. 864) further explicated:

Every day and ultimate responsibility for marriage, housework, and parenthood usually remains with women; and responsibility for bread-winning usually remains with men. Most women “help” men with provision, and many men “help” women with family work and parenting, although partners collude to sustain belief that men are primary providers but parenting is shared. Partners tend to view men's minimal help with raising children as substantial, and women's substantial help with provision as minimal.

Yet, the songs analysed in this article show that the long-lived misconception about a wife's position in marriage is delusive since it fails to account for the role of women as family providers, as Nyiha wedding songs illustrate. The songs present Nyiha wives as primary providers in their families—for both their husbands and children. Indeed, they serve as parents of both their children and their husbands. They are also doubly responsible for satisfying the psychological and emotional needs of their husbands and children. Due to this obligation on the part of a wife in her home, African feminist knowledge may now be included in the deliberations and thought processes surrounding the battle against sexism. As Arnfred (2015, p. 167) insists:

The study of sexualities in Africa [needs] a conceptual reframing, moving away from implicit, taken-for-granted notions of male domination and female subordination, and of men as the sexual subjects and women as objects. Placing female sexual pleasure,

agency, and power centre stage, as a point of departure for analysis, changes the entire picture.

When examining oral literature in traditional cultures, where orality is still prevalent and flourishes, Arnfred's perspective ought to serve as the starting point. Additionally, because African traditional songs often convey themes that the society values and believes in, it is important to examine them in detail (Tracey & Uzoigwe 2003, p. 75). This argument supports the claim that wedding songs accurately capture cultural customs around married women's duties. To better understand cultural attitudes towards married women, it is thus advisable for more research to be conducted on African wedding songs.

Conclusion

This article has provided an understanding of African oral literature in a new way using the case of Nyiha wedding songs. Based on presentation, and analysis from an African point-of-view of the Nyiha wedding songs, the article shows that the Nyiha, as a community, are aware of the new family values that influence changes in gender roles, especially by recognising the role of the woman as a family provider contrary to the much-hyped conservative domesticity role of a woman place, when she brings so much to the family and its upkeep and survival. Moreover, the article reveals the social reality of men's roles, depicting how –contrary to popular belief in many a patriarchal society– they are less involved in providing for their families than their womenfolk. On the other hand, the songs examined in this article do not, in the opinion of feminists, portray marriage as a significant milestone that denotes a woman's achievement. Put differently, Nyiha wedding songs do not always depict married women as prosperous, much as they offer so much promise for families and their survival. In fact, some wedding songs – which are not included in this article – even go so far as to suggest that a woman can end her marriage's pain by getting a divorce. Nevertheless, this article concentrated on wedding songs rather than those discussing marriage institutions in-depth, including married couples' reality in their marriages, which could have further explicated that reality.

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