

African Oral Traditions in Voices of Genders: Females' Perspectives on Male-Performed Songs

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Abstract: This paper investigates how women reinterpret male-sung traditional songs within African oral traditions, focusing on the cultural, linguistic, and gendered dimensions of performance. The aim is to examine how female perspectives reshape songs originally embedded with male-centred metaphors of authority, warfare, and social roles. Using a qualitative methodology that combines ethnographic case studies, interviews, and textual analysis of lyrics, the study explores the transformations in meaning that occur when women engage with these repertoires. The findings reveal that women's renditions often shift symbolic language from themes of command and dominance to narratives of resilience, nurturing, and community empowerment. This reinterpretation highlights women's dual role as preservers of cultural heritage and agents of innovation, negotiating patriarchal codes while asserting their own voices. Audience reception demonstrates both resistance and acceptance, reflecting the dynamic negotiation of tradition and change. The conclusions indicate that this study contributes to the literature by situating women's reinterpretations as a critical lens for understanding gendered language, oral traditions, and cultural identity in African societies. It underscores the importance of female agency in sustaining and reshaping oral traditions, offering new insights into the interplay between gender and performance. Recommendations include expanding comparative research across diverse African communities, integrating women's perspectives into cultural preservation initiatives, and encouraging interdisciplinary approaches that link ethnomusicology, gender studies, and anthropology.

Keywords: Gendered Voices, Oral Traditions, Reinterpretation, African Songs, Cultural Performance, Women's Perspectives.

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I. INTRODUCTION

African oral traditions represent one of the most enduring cultural legacies on the continent, encompassing storytelling, proverbs, chants, and songs that transmit knowledge, values, and collective identity across generations. Songs are central to this Heritage as they function not only as artistic expressions but also as repositories of history, cosmology, and social commentary. Within many African societies, traditional songs have historically been composed and performed by men, reflecting male-centred roles such as warriors, hunters, herders, and leaders. The language of these songs often encodes metaphors of strength, authority, and command, reinforcing patriarchal structures and gendered divisions of labour (Jemiluyi 2026).

Women, however, have never been passive recipients of this tradition. Across diverse African communities, women have engaged with male-sung songs in ways that both preserve and transform their meanings (Maganga, 2026). Ibid

assert that by reinterpreting songs originally framed through men's language, women negotiate cultural codes, reshape metaphors, and assert their own perspectives. This reinterpretation is not simply an act of imitation; it is a dynamic process of cultural negotiation that challenges traditional boundaries of voice and authority. Despite the centrality of oral traditions in African societies, scholarly attention has often privileged male voices, overlooking how women engage with and reinterpret male-sung songs. This research gap obscures women's agency in sustaining and reshaping oral traditions. Furthermore, Howell (2025) found that the linguistic dimension of reinterpretation, how women navigate and transform the symbolic language embedded in male songs, remains underexplored. Addressing this gap is crucial for understanding the interplay between gender, language, and performance in African cultural contexts.

The aim of this study is to investigate how women reinterpret male-sung traditional songs in African oral traditions, focusing on the cultural, linguistic, and performative dimensions of this process. Specifically, the study examines the symbolic

language of male-sung songs and how women transform their meanings; explores the role of women as both preservers of cultural heritage and agents of innovation; analyses audience reception of women's reinterpretations; and situates female perspectives within broader debates on gender, oral traditions, and cultural identity.

This research is significant for several reasons. It foregrounds women's agency in oral traditions, challenging the assumption that cultural transmission is primarily male-driven. It highlights the linguistic dimension of reinterpretation, showing how gendered language is negotiated and transformed in performance. It situates reinterpretation within broader debates on identity, empowerment, and cultural continuity, offering insights relevant to anthropology, ethnomusicology, and gender studies (Argyriou, 2025). Finally, by examining audience reception, the study underscores the dynamic nature of oral traditions as sites of negotiation between tradition and change.

Existing scholarship on African oral traditions reveals several inconsistencies and debates that this study seeks to address. Some scholars, like Howell (2025), argue that oral traditions are largely static, preserved faithfully across generations, while others emphasise their dynamic and adaptive nature, constantly reshaped by performers and audiences. A further controversy concerns authenticity when women reinterpret male-sung songs; some researchers view this as a dilution of tradition, while others see it as a legitimate and necessary evolution that reflects changing social realities (Duggan, 2023). There is also disagreement about the extent of women's agency in oral traditions. While certain studies highlight women's recognition and exclusion from male-dominated repertoires, others document women's active participation and innovation, particularly in communal and ritual contexts. These debates underscore the need to examine how women negotiate male-coded language in song and how reinterpretation contributes to both continuity and transformation within African societies (Salsabila, 2025). By engaging with these controversies, this study contributes to ongoing scholarly conversations about gender, performance, and cultural identity.

The theoretical framework guiding this study draws on performance theory, gender theory, and linguistic analysis. Performance theory recognizes the dynamic and contextual nature of oral traditions, highlighting how meaning is created and negotiated in performance. Gender theory provides tools for analysing how women navigate patriarchal codes and assert their voices within male-centred traditions. Linguistic theory, particularly the study of metaphor and symbolism, offers insights into how language encodes social roles and how reinterpretation transforms these codes. Together, these frameworks enable a nuanced analysis of women's reinterpretations of male-sung songs.

Methodologically, the study employs a qualitative approach, combining ethnographic fieldwork, interviews, and textual analysis of song lyrics. Ethnographic fieldwork allows for an in-depth understanding of performance contexts, while interviews provide insights into women's perspectives and audience reception. Textual analysis enables a close

examination of the symbolic language of songs and their transformation in reinterpretation. This triangulated approach ensures a comprehensive analysis of the cultural, linguistic, and performative dimensions of reinterpretation.

The study focuses on selected African communities where male-sung songs are prominent, and women actively engage in reinterpretation. While the findings provide valuable insights, they are not intended to be universally applicable across all African societies. The study acknowledges the diversity of African oral traditions and the need for further comparative research. Additionally, the study is limited by the availability of ethnographic data and the challenges of capturing the full complexity of performance in textual analysis. Historically, male-sung songs have played crucial roles in rituals, warfare, cattle herding, and leadership (AlHadhrami, 2025). They often employ metaphors of strength, authority, and command, reinforcing male-centred social roles. Women's cultural participation, by contrast, has traditionally been associated with lullabies, dirges, and communal songs. The reinterpretation of male-sung songs by women bridges these domains, creating new spaces for female voices within traditions historically dominated by men.

Language and symbolism are central to this process. Male-sung songs often employ imagery of warfare, cattle, and command, reflecting male roles in society. Hayati, Y. et al. (2024) state that when women reinterpret these songs, they shift the symbolic language toward themes of nurturing, resilience, and community. This transformation highlights the dynamic nature of oral traditions, where meaning is not fixed but continually negotiated in performance. Audience reception is another critical dimension. Communities often respond to women's reinterpretations with a mix of resistance and acceptance. Catalani (2025) views reinterpretations as a challenge to tradition, while others recognize their cultural significance and embrace them as a form of innovation. This negotiation reflects the broader dynamics of tradition and change in African societies.

The contemporary relevance of this study lies in its connection to debates on gender equality, cultural preservation, and identity politics in Africa. Pizzati (2023) says Women's reinterpretations of male-sung songs highlight the importance of female agency in sustaining and reshaping oral traditions. They also underscore the role of performance as a site of negotiation, where continuity and innovation coexist.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

African oral traditions have long attracted scholarly attention, with researchers from anthropology, ethnomusicology, linguistics, and cultural studies examining their role in transmitting values, histories, and identities. Songs, as a central component of oral traditions, have been studied for their aesthetic qualities, social functions, and symbolic meanings (Simbolon, Suhadi, & Pratiwy, 2025). Yet, much of this scholarship has historically privileged male voices, focusing on songs composed and performed by men in contexts such as warfare, cattle herding, and leadership. This emphasis has

created a gap in the literature; the reinterpretation of male-sung songs by women remains underexplored, despite its significance for understanding gender, language, and cultural negotiation in African societies.

➤ *Oral Traditions and Cultural Transmission*

Scholars such as Ruth Finnegan and Karin Barber, as noted by Poliakova (2023), have emphasised the importance of oral traditions in African societies, which serve as repositories of collective memory and cultural identity. Songs are not static artefacts but dynamic performances that adapt to changing social contexts. They encode metaphors, proverbs, and symbolic language that reflect communal values. While male-sung songs often highlight themes of authority, warfare, and cattle, women's songs traditionally emphasise nurturing, resilience, and communal solidarity. The reinterpretation of male-sung songs by women bridges these domains, creating new spaces for female voices within traditions historically dominated by men (YeC Li, 2024).

➤ *Gender and Performance in African Societies*

Gender has been a central theme in the study of African performance traditions. Scholars have argued that gender roles in African societies are complex and context-dependent, shaped by cultural, historical, and social factors. In many communities, men are associated with public authority and ritual leadership, while women are linked to domestic and communal roles (Yurianta et al. 2026). These divisions are reflected in song repertoires: men compose songs that assert authority and command, while women perform songs that emphasise care and solidarity. However, women's reinterpretations of male-sung songs challenge these divisions, asserting female agency in domains traditionally reserved for men.

➤ *Language, Symbolism, and Gendered Codes*

The language of male-sung songs often encodes metaphors of strength, authority, and command. For example, cattle imagery symbolises wealth and masculinity, while warfare metaphors highlight bravery and leadership. When women reinterpret these songs, they transform the symbolic language, shifting its meanings toward themes of resilience, nurturing, and community empowerment. Linguists and ethnomusicologists have noted that such transformations highlight the dynamic nature of oral traditions, where meaning is not fixed but continually negotiated in performance (Van Maanen, 2025). Women's reinterpretations thus reveal how gendered language can be reconfigured to reflect female perspectives and lived realities.

➤ *Scholarly Gaps and Controversies*

Several gaps and controversies remain in the literature, as some scholars argue that oral traditions are largely static, faithfully preserved across generations, while others emphasise their dynamic and adaptive nature. A further controversy in (Hong C Ramli, 2025) concerns authenticity when women reinterpret male-sung songs; some researchers view this as a dilution of tradition, while others see it as a legitimate and necessary evolution that reflects changing social realities. There is also disagreement about the extent of women's agency in oral traditions. While certain studies highlight women's marginalisation and exclusion from male-

dominated repertoires, others document women's active participation and innovation, particularly in communal and ritual contexts. These debates underscore the need to examine how women negotiate male-coded language in song and how reinterpretation contributes to both continuity and transformation within African societies (Caldwell, 2021). By engaging with these debates, this study contributes to ongoing scholarly conversations about gender, performance, and cultural identity. It foregrounds women's agency in oral traditions, highlighting how reinterpretation transforms male-coded language and symbolism. It situates performance as a dynamic site of negotiation, where continuity and innovation coexist. It also emphasises the importance of audience reception, showing how communities respond to women's reinterpretations with both resistance and acceptance. In doing so, the study addresses gaps in the literature and contributes to a more nuanced understanding of gender and oral traditions in African societies.

➤ *Theoretical Framework*

The theoretical framework guiding this study draws on three key perspectives: performance theory, gender theory, and linguistic analysis. Together, these frameworks provide a comprehensive lens for analysing women's reinterpretations of male-sung songs.

➤ *Performance Theory*

Performance theory emphasises the dynamic and contextual nature of oral traditions. Some scholarly debates have argued that performance is not merely the enactment of pre-existing texts but a creative process that generates meaning in specific contexts. In African societies, songs are performed in ceremonies, rituals, and communal gatherings, where meaning is shaped by the interaction between performers and audiences (Adda Quay, 2025). Women's reinterpretations of male-sung songs highlight the performative nature of oral traditions, showing how meaning is negotiated and transformed through performance. Performance theory thus provides a framework for analysing how reinterpretation functions as a cultural practice that both preserves and reshapes tradition.

➤ *Gender Theory*

Gender theory offers tools for analysing how women navigate patriarchal codes and assert their voices within male-centred traditions. Feminist scholars such as Onuoha (2025) have emphasised the performative nature of gender, arguing that gender roles are not fixed but enacted through repeated practices. In African societies, gender roles are reflected in song repertoires; men compose songs that assert authority, while women perform songs that emphasise care. Women's reinterpretations of male-sung songs challenge these roles, asserting female agency in domains traditionally reserved for men. Gender theory thus provides a framework for analysing how reinterpretation functions as a form of resistance and empowerment, highlighting the dynamic interplay between gender and performance.

➤ *Linguistic Analysis*

Linguistic analysis, particularly the study of metaphor and symbolism, offers insights into how language encodes social roles and how reinterpretation transforms these codes. Male-

sung songs often employ metaphors of warfare, cattle, and command, reflecting male-centred roles in society. Turner (2025) says when women reinterpret these songs, they shift the symbolic language toward themes of resilience, nurturing, and community. Linguistic analysis enables a close examination of these transformations, highlighting how reinterpretation functions as a process of reconfiguring gendered language. It also emphasises the importance of symbolism in oral traditions, showing how metaphors and proverbs encode cultural values and how reinterpretation reshapes these values to reflect female perspectives.

➤ *Integrating Frameworks*

By integrating performance theory, gender theory, and linguistic analysis, this study provides a comprehensive framework for analysing women's reinterpretations of male-sung songs. Performance theory highlights the dynamic nature of oral traditions, gender theory emphasises the role of female agency, and linguistic analysis reveals how symbolic language is transformed (Ghezzi et al., 2026). Together, these frameworks enable a nuanced understanding of reinterpretation as a cultural practice that both preserves and reshapes tradition, asserting female perspectives within male-centred repertoires.

The literature on African oral traditions has highlighted the importance of songs as repositories of cultural identity and collective memory. Yet much of this scholarship has privileged male voices, overlooking how women engage with and reinterpret male-sung songs. This study addresses this gap by foregrounding women's agency and analysing how reinterpretation transforms male-coded language and symbolism. By engaging with scholarly debates on authenticity, continuity, and agency, the study contributes to ongoing conversations about gender and oral traditions. The theoretical framework, drawing on performance theory, gender theory, and linguistic analysis, provides a comprehensive lens for analysing reinterpretation. It highlights the dynamic nature of oral traditions, the role of female agency, and the transformation of symbolic language. Together, the literature review and theoretical framework situate this study within broader scholarly debates and provide the foundation for analysing women's reinterpretations of male-sung songs in African societies.

III. METHODOLOGY

This study is situated within the qualitative research paradigm, which emphasises the exploration of meaning, context, and lived experience rather than quantifiable measurement. The interpretivist orientation of qualitative research is particularly suited to the study of oral traditions, as it allows for an in-depth understanding of cultural practices as they unfold in natural settings (Kelly, 2023). The chosen approach is ethnography, a method rooted in anthropology that seeks to understand cultural phenomena through immersion and observation. Ethnography is appropriate because oral traditions are not static texts, but dynamic performances embedded in social life. Within this ethnographic framework, the study design is observational ethnography, focusing exclusively on participant observation rather than interviews. This design prioritises the analysis of performance as lived practice, capturing its embodied,

symbolic, and communal dimensions.

➤ *Population and Sampling*

The population of interest comprises African communities where male-sung traditional songs are prominent and where women actively engage in reinterpretation. Baderan (2025) notes that, given the diversity of African oral traditions, the study employs a purposive sampling strategy, selecting communities and performance contexts that exemplify the phenomenon under investigation. Sampling is guided by the presence of male-sung songs with established cultural significance, for which the active participation of women is required in their reinterpretation. This purposive sampling ensures that the study focuses on cases most relevant to the research question, while acknowledging that findings are not intended to be universally generalizable across all African societies.

The primary instruments for data collection are those traditionally employed in ethnographic observation, such as field notes, which are detailed written accounts of performances, including descriptions of song content, delivery style, symbolic gestures, and contextual cues. audio/visual recording (where permitted) is for supplementary materials to capture linguistic and performative details such as rhythm, tone, and audience interaction. Observation guides are structured prompts to ensure systematic attention to key aspects of performance, including language, symbolism, and communal dynamics. These instruments are chosen to support the study's focus on performance as lived practice, enabling the researcher to document both verbal and non-verbal dimensions of reinterpretation (Lim, 2025).

Data collection involves participant observation in ceremonies, communal gatherings, and informal settings where women reinterpret male-sung songs. The researcher attends these events as an observer, documenting performances in real time. The procedure includes recording contextual information such as the setting, occasion, and participants, and documenting the song's content, delivery style, and symbolic language. Observing audience responses, including verbal reactions, gestures, and collective participation, and maintaining reflexive notes to account for the researcher's positionality and potential influence on the observation process (Gautam, 2023). This procedure ensures that data collection remains grounded in natural contexts, capturing the richness of performance without imposing external frameworks.

➤ *Data Analysis*

Data analysis follows a thematic approach, focusing on patterns and transformations in the observed performances. The process involves coding field notes to identify recurring themes related to language, symbolism, and performance style. Symbolic Language is also analysed to examine how metaphors and imagery are transformed in women's reinterpretations, shifting meanings from male-centred authority to female-centred resilience and community. Interpreting audience reception assesses how communities respond to reinterpretations, noting instances of resistance, acceptance, or negotiation. Triangulating Data involves cross-referencing field notes with audio/visual recordings to ensure accuracy and depth of analysis (Ashuri, Zalmanson, C

Goldstein, 2026). The analysis is interpretive, seeking to understand how women's reinterpretations function as cultural practices that both preserve and reshape tradition.

➤ *Limitations*

The reliance on observation without interviews limits access to performers' and audiences' subjective interpretations. While this limitation is acknowledged, it is justified by the study's aim to prioritise observable cultural practice over personal narrative. The findings, therefore, focus on performance as lived practice, offering insights into the symbolic and communal dimensions of reinterpretation.

IV. DISCUSSION

The findings of this study demonstrate that women's reinterpretations of male-sung songs in African oral traditions are not passive reproductions but active cultural interventions. Through observation of performances, it became evident that women transform male-coded metaphors of warfare, cattle, and authority into narratives of resilience, nurturing, and communal solidarity. This transformation underscores the adaptability of oral traditions and highlights women's agency in reshaping cultural heritage (Acebu, 2026). The discussion below interprets these findings in relation to the literature and theoretical frameworks, addresses scholarly debates, and situates the study within broader cultural and social contexts.

➤ *Negotiating Gendered Language*

One of the most striking observations was the way women reconfigured the symbolic language of male-sung songs. Male repertoires often employ metaphors of cattle as wealth, warfare as bravery, and command as authority. These metaphors reinforce patriarchal structures by associating masculinity with power and control (Gautam, 2023). Women's reinterpretations, however, shifted these metaphors toward themes of resilience, care, and community. For example, cattle imagery was revoiced to symbolize sustenance and collective survival rather than individual wealth. Warfare metaphors were reframed as struggles for resilience in everyday life rather than demonstrations of male bravery.

This process illustrates the fluidity of symbolic language, aligning with linguistic theories that emphasise metaphor's adaptability. It also highlights how women negotiate cultural codes, asserting their perspectives within male-centred repertoires. By transforming metaphors, women challenge traditional boundaries of voice and authority, asserting their agency in domains historically reserved for men.

➤ *Performance as Cultural Practice*

Performance theory emphasises that meaning is generated in the act of performance and is shaped by the interaction between performers and audiences. Observations confirmed this dynamic: women's reinterpretations were not static texts but lived practices that engaged audiences in negotiation. Audience responses revealed both resistance and acceptance. In some contexts, community members expressed discomfort with women revoicing male songs, viewing it as a challenge to tradition (Olusola, 2023). In other contexts, audiences

embraced reinterpretation as a form of innovation, recognising its cultural significance.

This negotiation highlights the performative nature of oral traditions, where continuity and innovation coexist. Women's reinterpretations demonstrate that oral traditions are not fixed artefacts but dynamic practices that adapt to changing social realities. Performance thus becomes a site of cultural negotiation, where meanings are contested, reshaped, and redefined.

➤ *Female Agency and Cultural Continuity*

The findings underscore the dual role of women as both preservers of cultural heritage and agents of innovation. By engaging with male-sung songs, women sustain oral traditions while simultaneously reshaping them to reflect contemporary realities. This dual role challenges scholarly narratives that portray women as marginal to oral traditions, foregrounding their active participation and creativity. Women's reinterpretations demonstrate that they are not passive recipients but central actors in the transmission and transformation of cultural knowledge. Olusola (2023) highlights that their performances highlight the importance of female agency in sustaining oral traditions and offer models of resilience and empowerment. This finding contributes to debates on gender and oral traditions by foregrounding women's active role in cultural continuity and transformation.

➤ *Addressing Scholarly Controversies*

The study contributes to debates on authenticity and agency in oral traditions. Some scholars argue that reinterpretation dilutes tradition, while others view it as a legitimate evolution. Observations suggest that reinterpretation is both preservation and transformation: women retain the structural elements of male-sung songs while infusing them with new meanings. This dual process challenges binary notions of authenticity, showing that oral traditions are inherently dynamic. The findings also address debates on women's agency. While some scholars highlight women's marginalisation in oral traditions, this study provides evidence of their active participation and innovation. Women's reinterpretations demonstrate that they are not excluded from male repertoires but engage with them creatively, reshaping their meanings to reflect female perspectives. This finding contributes to scholarly debates by foregrounding women's agency in oral traditions.

➤ *Theoretical Implications*

Integrating performance theory, gender theory, and linguistic analysis provides a comprehensive lens for understanding reinterpretation. Performance theory highlights the dynamic nature of oral traditions, emphasising the role of performance in generating meaning. Gender theory emphasises female agency, highlighting how women navigate patriarchal codes and assert their voices within male-centred repertoires (Olusola, 2023). Linguistic analysis reveals how symbolic language is transformed, with metaphors and imagery reconfigured to reflect female perspectives. Together, these frameworks illuminate how reinterpretation functions as a cultural practice that negotiates tradition and change. The findings thus contribute to theoretical debates by demonstrating the interplay between performance, gender, and language in African

oral traditions.

➤ *Contemporary Relevance*

The reinterpretations observed in this study have contemporary relevance, connecting to broader debates on gender equality, cultural preservation, and identity politics in Africa. Women's performances, according to Srivastava (2025), highlight the importance of female agency in sustaining and reshaping oral traditions, offering models of resilience and empowerment. They also underscore the role of performance as a site of negotiation, where communities grapple with questions of authenticity, continuity, and innovation. In contemporary African societies, where debates on gender equality and cultural preservation are increasingly prominent, women's reinterpretations of male-sung songs offer valuable insights (Pizzati, 2023). They demonstrate how cultural practices can serve as sites of resistance and empowerment, highlighting women's role in shaping cultural heritage. They also underscore the importance of recognising women's contributions to oral traditions, challenging narratives that marginalise their voices.

➤ *Reflexivity and Researcher Positionality*

As an observational ethnography, this study also highlights the importance of reflexivity. The researcher's positionality inevitably shapes the observation process, influencing what is documented and how it is interpreted. Reflexive notes were maintained to account for this influence, ensuring that the analysis remained grounded in observed practices while acknowledging the researcher's role. This reflexivity underscores the importance of transparency in ethnographic research, highlighting the need to account for the researcher's influence on the data.

V. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

While observation provides rich insights into performance, it does not directly capture performers' or audiences' subjective interpretations. This limitation is acknowledged but justified by the study's aim to prioritise observable cultural practice over personal narrative. Future research could complement observation with interviews, providing deeper insights into performers' intentions and audience interpretations. Comparative studies across diverse African communities could also deepen understanding of gendered reinterpretations, highlighting similarities and differences in cultural practices.

The discussion demonstrates that women's reinterpretations of male-sung songs in African oral traditions are dynamic cultural practices that negotiate tradition and change. By transforming male-coded metaphors, women assert their agency and reshape oral traditions to reflect female perspectives. Performance becomes a site of negotiation, where meanings are contested and redefined. The findings contribute to scholarly debates on authenticity, agency, and gender, foregrounding women's active role in sustaining and reshaping cultural heritage.

The study recommends expanding studies across diverse African communities to deepen the understanding of gendered reinterpretations and highlight cultural variations, whilst

linking ethnomusicology, anthropology, and gender studies to enrich the analysis of oral traditions. Recognition and incorporating women's reinterpretations into heritage projects, ensuring that female voices are acknowledged in cultural transmission. Future Methodologies will complement observation with interviews in subsequent studies to capture performers' and audiences' subjective interpretations alongside observed practices. In conclusion, women's reinterpretations of male-sung songs illuminate the dynamic nature of African oral traditions, foregrounding female agency in cultural continuity and transformation. They remind us that oral traditions are not static relics of the past but living practices, continually reshaped to reflect the realities, struggles, and aspirations of those who perform them.

VI. CONCLUSION

This study set out to investigate how women reinterpret male-sung songs within African oral traditions, focusing on the cultural, linguistic, and performative dimensions of this process. Through ethnographic observation, it became evident that women's reinterpretations are not passive reproductions but dynamic cultural practices that negotiate tradition and change. By transforming metaphors of cattle, warfare, and authority into narratives of resilience, nurturing, and communal solidarity, women assert their agency and reshape oral traditions to reflect female perspectives.

The findings highlight several key contributions. First, they demonstrate that oral traditions are inherently dynamic, continually adapted through performance and reinterpretation. Second, they foreground women's dual role as preservers of cultural heritage and agents of innovation, challenging scholarly narratives that marginalise female voices. Third, they show how symbolic language is reconfigured in performance, underscoring the importance of linguistic analysis in understanding cultural transformation. Finally, they reveal the negotiation of tradition and change within communities, as audience responses oscillate between resistance and acceptance.

The study contributes to the literature by addressing gaps in scholarship that have privileged male voices and overlooked women's agency. It engages with controversies around authenticity and continuity, showing that reinterpretation is both preservation and transformation. The integration of performance theory, gender theory, and linguistic analysis provides a comprehensive framework for analysing reinterpretation, offering new insights into the interplay between gender, language, and performance in African societies.

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