

## **Chapter Four**

### **GENDER CONCEPTS AND THE ACOLI SOCIETY**

#### **4.1. Introduction**

Over the years gender theorists have elucidated some of the gender ideologies in different societies that direct gender practices. In the process they have theorised about basic gender concepts that shaped and influenced gender identity construction and relations. However, gender concepts are often offshoots of the larger societal ideologies that deal with the way society is structured, organised and managed – especially those regarding authority, power, subjectivity and the place (or position) of individuals within society in relation to others.

In this chapter I look at some basic concepts and how they relate to gender concerns within Acoli worldviews about culture. These concepts impact on social construction of gender identity, which inevitably shape gender power relations in society. Furthermore, I discuss ideas related to gender identity definition and the concepts regarding the nature of the gender power relations matrix.

#### **4.2. Personhood, Individualism and Community**

The concept of personhood, in one way or another, impacts on gender identity construction among the Acoli. As Dainne Irving points out, “[t]he question as to when a human being begins is strictly a scientific question,” but “[t]he question as to when a human person begins is a philosophical question” (Irving 1999: 22). Worldviews differ from culture to culture, and so does the concept of personhood. The question “When does a human being become a person?” has various answers, depending on the different cultural philosophy.

To the Acoli, a child is not yet considered a person. At a certain stage in his or her life a human being can become a person, and thereby acquires specific identities. That is when the Acoli would say in regard to such a human being “*Dong odoko dano*” [He/She has become a person]. In an interview with Cyril Obol<sup>1</sup>, a 63 year old male, the question of personhood among the Acoli came up. He narrates to me what would happen in a typical Acoli village in case of a lazy young wife who neglects her duty of weeding the field. Below is an excerpt:

Cyril Obol: Now, if you have got a problem.... life is not going well, you bring it, you go to the head of the village, and say “My wife these days is not doing well. I have dug two, three fields. You people have seen, you helped me to dig. She is not weeding it. She is always sitting lazy.” [The head of the village would call a few elders].

Researcher: You don’t go straight away beating her?

Cyril Obol: No. Not just like that. Now, they [would] say, “The wife of my friend, you come. Your husband has said you are not doing the weeding. We have also seen the field, you have not weeded. Now, what are you doing here? What are you going to give this dog [child] which God has given you. *Lee ma Rubanga omini i kori* [This animal which God has put in your bosom]. They call these children dogs. They use that language.

Researcher: Why do they call them dogs?

Cyril Obol: [Laughs] *Gwok ma i kori ni!* [The dog in your bosom!]

Obol saw no point in answering my ‘naïve’ question because as a grown up Acoli man it should have been obvious to me that a child is not yet a person in the cultural sense. This cultural attitude is also highlighted by Odoch Pido (2000: 105-135) in his study of the concept of personhood among the Acoli as expressed in their songs. According to him, the Acoli consider being a person as behaving or doing according to the ‘rules’ of life in relating to other persons. In other words,

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<sup>1</sup> Cyril Obol, from the Payira clan of Acoli, was one of my guides during a field research in 1993 in Acoliland. The interview took place en route as we went to talk to some elders at Laroo, Gulu on September 16, 1993.

personhood is defined in relation to conformity to cultural and social norms. Personhood is also defined in relation to the onset of puberty, the ability to produce children and assume social responsibilities. Pido points out that the loss of personhood among the Acoli is associated with deviance from acceptable cultural norms, and most importantly with being in a state of subordination.

The above view can be compared to Segun Gbadegesin's comment on the Yoruba concept of personhood. He writes:

The Yoruba word for a person is *eniyan*. However, *eniyan* has a normative dimension as well as an ordinary meaning. Thus it is not unusual when referring to a human being for an observer to say, "*Ki i se eniyan*" (He/she is not an *eniyan*). Such a comment is a judgement of the moral standing of the human being who is thus determined as falling short of what it takes to be recognized as such (Gbadegesin 1998: 149).

The concept of personhood among the Acoli as hinging on ingesting the culturally and socially acceptable values is expressed in the song below:

<p><i>Aii, dako na!</i>  <i>Ceng apako ni ber</i>  <i>Ceng apako,</i>  <i>    Kwac-pa-Nyaga.</i>  <i>Dano ku!</i>  <i>Labal-piny eno</i>  <i>Labal-piny eno</i>  <i>Dako man obalo gang-wa woko.</i></p>	<p>Oh, my wife!          Once I praised her as good          Once I praised her,              but she is the Leopard-of-Nyaga.          She is not a person!          She goes against acceptable norms          She goes against acceptable norms          This woman has wrecked our home.</p>
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<p><i>Wululu, dako na</i>  <i>Ceng apako ni mwol</i>  <i>Ceng apako,</i>  <i>    Kwac-pa-Nyaga.</i>  <i>Dano ku!</i>  <i>Twon dako lamero</i>  <i>Twon dako lakolo</i>  <i>Dako man obalo ganga woko</i></p>	<p><i>Wululu, my wife!</i>          Once I praised her as meek          Once I praised her,              but she is the Leopard-of-Nyaga.          She is not a person          The bull of a woman is a drunkard          The bull of a woman is a fighter          This woman has wrecked my home.</p>
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For a female, becoming a person is assuming the identity and the responsibilities of a woman as circumscribed by Acoli culture. In the song the persona sings:

Once I praised her as good....  
Once I praised her as meek....

To be a person a woman is expected to be 'good' and to be 'meek' among other culturally assigned qualities. However, the persona is disappointed in his wife, because, as he puts it:

She is not a person!  
She goes against acceptable norms....  
The bull of a woman is a drunkard  
The bull of a woman is a fighter....

The wife is also described as the Leopard-of-Nyaga, beautiful but fierce (cf. p'Bitek 1980: 107). This is in direct comparison with the obdurate Jok Labeja (an Acoli spirit who sometimes possesses human beings), whose praise name is the Leopard-of-Nyaga (p'Bitek 1980: 108).

The wife loses her personhood in the eyes of her husband because "She goes against acceptable norms." She assumes some of the qualities considered as masculine like becoming a fighter and a drunkard – being a drunkard is excusable in a man but never in a woman among the Acoli. The panegyric reference *Twon* [The bull] is used here in a pejorative sense, a kind of irony, because the woman in this case seems to have assigned herself traits incompatible with her gender.

In the above song, the woman seems to have failed to reconcile the culturally assigned traits of personhood and her experience of selfhood. Both Acoli males and females have to harmonise the culturally constructed ideology of personhood and emotional experience of selfhood. Often in a society like the Acoli, which is more communal in nature rather than individualistic, selfhood seems to be subsumed by communal considerations. As Anita Jacobson-Widding writes:

[I]n the realm of symbolic representations of personhood, we are dealing with different cultural ideologies, and with expressions of universal, human emotions as well.

These two aspects of personhood, i.e. ‘the cultural’ and the ‘experiential’, may be difficult to keep apart from the point of view of the actor in any given social context. However, from the analyst’s point of view, there is reason to distinguish between the *culturally constructed ideology of personhood*, on the one hand, and the *emotional experience of selfhood*, on the other. Although these two aspects of personhood may coincide, they often represent a fundamental contradiction between “what I am supposed to be”, and “what I feel that I am” (Jacobson-Widding 1990: 31).

Jacobson-Widding terms the two aspects of personhood as *socio-centric* and *ego-centric*. She adds that “[t]he former concerns ‘the moral person’.... While the latter concerns the emotional and interactional experience of selfhood, in particular in connection with individual agency” (Jacobson-Widding 1990: 33-34).

This notion of selfhood (ego-centricism) as opposed to culturally accepted notion of personhood (socio-centricism) is brought out in a rather subtle manner in the excerpt of the duet below performed by a female singer and Amone Watmon, playing the *nanga*.

<p>Female: <i>Aii ye!</i>  <i>Meja man lamero</i>  <i>Nenu kong, ka kuma peke</i>  <i>Twon coo koko malaya</i>  <i>Pongo i rum.</i></p>	<p><i>Aii ye!</i>  This lover of mine is a drunkard  He waits, when I am absent  The bull of a man collects prostitutes  And packs them in the room.</p>
<p>Male: <i>Kara anyomo lakwele!</i></p>	<p>I have married a loose woman!</p>
<p>Female: <i>Aii ye!</i>  <i>Meja man lamero</i></p>	<p><i>Aii ye!</i>  This lover of mine is a drunkard</p>
<p>Male: <i>Nene kwede</i>  <i>Ka mato yaka pyem.</i>  <i>Lakwele!</i>  <i>Ka inyomo lamero ba!</i></p>	<p>Look at her  She drinks yet denies it.  A loose woman!  [That is what happens] when you  marry a drunkard!</p>
<p>Female: <i>Aii ye!</i>  <i>Meja man lamero</i>  <i>Nenu kong, ka kuma peke</i>  <i>Twon coo mako Malaya</i></p>	<p><i>Aii ye!</i>  This lover of mine is a drunkard  He waits, when I am absent  The bull grabs a prostitute</p>

	<i>nango doge.</i>	and licks her mouth.
Male:	<i>An do wora!</i>	Oh, my father!
Female:	<i>Aii ye!</i> <i>Meja man lamero.</i>	<i>Aii ye!</i> This lover of mine is a drunkard.
Male:	<i>Nene kwede</i> <i>Ka codo yaka pyem.</i> <i>Lakwele!</i> <i>Ka inyomo latek dog!</i>	Look at her She sleeps around yet denies it. A loose woman! [That is what happens] when you marry one with a strong mouth!
Female:	<i>Aii ye!</i> <i>Meja man lamero</i> <i>Nenu kong, ka kuma peke</i> <i>Twno coo mer</i> <i>malaya laro-alara.</i>	<i>Aii ye!</i> This lover of mine is a drunkard He waits, when I am absent The bull gets so drunk prostitutes struggle for him.
Male:	<i>Kara bene anyomo labal.</i> <i>Kura bene ka kuma peke</i> <i>Nen dong kwanyo ciling,</i> <i>ceto i bar.</i>	I have married a criminal She waits, when I am absent She takes money and goes to the bar.
Female:	<i>Lacoo ineno ki kite weng.</i>	A man is judged by all his acts.
Male:	<i>Ki i gang lyel</i> <i>Ka kuma peke</i> <i>Nya-pa-twon nyinyo</i> <i>ma coo yilo odo malo.</i>	At funerals When I am absent The daughter-of-the-bull dances until men lift up their sticks. <sup>2</sup>
Female:	<i>Lacoo ineno ki kite weng.</i>	A man is judged by all his acts.

Dancing freely without restraint at a funeral dance, and going out to a bar to have a drink, is considered incompatible with a woman's cultural identity as circumscribed by Acoli socio-centric ideology and thereby goes against her sense of personhood as viewed by society. She is considered a "loose woman" because of these acts. Hence, through songs she is abused and restrained into the circumscribed space in the social fold. As the female persona in the song says "A

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<sup>2</sup> At a funeral of an elderly person the Acoli usually celebrate his or her life with *myel-lyel* (funeral dance). At such an occasion the community does not only mourn the passing away but also celebrates life with much drinking and dancing. This is one of the occasions where sexually provocative dancing from females may be ignored or even relished.

man is judged by all his acts” whether they are good or bad, but a woman by the very nature of her personhood and identity is barred from certain acts regardless of any wrong doing. This is where the conflict between socially acceptable norms or values and selfhood (or individual agency) comes in. The tendency to portray free spirited females as promiscuous “may say more about the desire of male vested interests to control these women than about the actualities of their experience” (James 1999: 47).

Note that the female calls her husband a drunkard and never a “loose man,” although she refers to his escapades with prostitutes. A man is never actually considered promiscuous, but a woman at the very slightest chance of inappropriately associating with the opposite gender (like in a bar or at a dance) is labelled promiscuous. This attests to the fact that the perception of personhood is not even for both males and females, but rather it is designated by gender among the Acoli. In a rather indirect and subtle manner the female persona in the song tries to confront this double standard.

The concept of personhood among the Acoli seems to directly impact on the individuals’ roles and place within the society. As one grows up, the Acoli concept of personhood and with it the sense of one’s place in society is inculcated into the young through several processes, including through song performances. As Melissa D’Agostino puts it, “Personhood draws on the embodied traits and physical manifestations acquired by individuals as they develop an understanding of their place within a group” (D’Agostino 2003: 290). This line of thinking draws on Marcel Mauss’ thought which acknowledges the role of community in shaping the development and definition of personhood.<sup>3</sup> Having examined

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<sup>3</sup> For details see: M. Mauss (1989), ‘A Category of the Human Mind: The Notion of Person; the Notion of Self’, in eds M. Carrithers, S. Collins and S. Lukes, *The Category of the Person: Anthropology, Philosophy, History*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; M. Mauss (1973), ‘Techniques of the Body’, *Economy and Society*, Vol. 2, pp. 70–88.; E. McHugh (1989), ‘Concepts of the Person among the Gurungs of Nepal’, *American Ethnologist*, Vol. 16, pp. 75–86; S. M. Parish (1994), *Moral Knowing in a Hindu Sacred City*, New York: Oxford University Press.

conceptions of personhood from various African cultures, Didier N. Kaphagawani concludes:

From the foregoing discussion of some African conceptions of personhood, it seems quite apparent that an African acquires an identity not in an instant, but through a process.... A person is African not only for geographical reasons or accidents, but also for being born and bred in the African environment, one of whose fundamental elements is culture (Kaphagawani 1998: 176).

Song performance, as a popular cultural form, is part and parcel of the process referred to by Kaphagawani. A close examination of the texts of many Acoli songs seems to suggest that the cultural environment in which one grows helps shape one's concept of personhood and thereby one's identity. Let us consider one such song performance by Roslyn Otim:<sup>4</sup>

<i>Nyeka oleyo ganga yo</i>	My rival has taken over my household, oh
<i>Nyeka okwanyo kwona yo</i>	My rival has taken away my life, oh
<i>Dok oleyo cwara</i>	She has also taken over my husband
<i>Tin dong oleyo odda</i>	Now she has taken over my house
<i>Nyeka otedo i keno na</i>	My rival now cooks in my hearth
<i>Ka dong omayo ganga</i>	And she has grabbed my household
<i>Nyeka obalo kwona yo!</i>	My rival has ruined my life, oh!
<i>Angee tyene lit</i>	“I-wish-I-knew” has a sick leg [it arrives too late]
<i>An adok kwene?</i>	Where do I turn now?
<i>Angee dong bor ya</i>	“I-wish-I-knew” is so distant indeed
<i>An atimo nining?</i>	What do I do?
<i>Kono nene angee con</i>	I wish I knew early enough
<i>Kono amako odda.</i>	I would have secured my household.
<i>Kono nene angee con</i>	I wish I knew early enough
<i>Kono adoyo bella.</i>	I would have taken care of the weeds in my millet field
<i>Kono nene angee con</i>	I wish I knew early enough
<i>Kono atedo cwara</i>	I would have cooked diligently for my husband
<i>Kono nene angee con</i>	I wish I knew early enough
<i>Kono agwoko paco.</i>	I would have taken care of my marital home.
<i>Angee dong rem ya</i>	“I-wish-I-knew” is so painful, oh
<i>Atango cinga kwe....</i>	I throw my arms in despair in vain....

<sup>4</sup> Roslyn Otim is an Acoli public performer, whose songs have been recorded on audio-tapes and sold in shops in Acoliland. She performed the particular song examined here in Gulu town during the Easter festival in 2004



<i>Anyongo calo ayom</i>	I squat like a monkey
<i>i kum yat ma otwo.</i>	on a dry tree.
<i>Col-piny owuma woko</i>	Darkness has overwhelmed me
<i>Akuro rupiny....</i>	I await the advent of dawn....
<i>Akomo romo-romo yo</i>	I limp like a sheep, oh
<i>Ma akulu wiya piny.</i>	With my head bowed low.
<i>Lawic poya woko</i>	Shame drives my crazy
<i>Mingu akanyo ya.</i>	I have endured my foolishness.
<i>Kwayo wat oketa woko</i>	Begging relatives has exhausted me
<i>Dwon bene peke.</i>	I have no voice.
<i>Bedo akera diya ya</i>	Living at others' mercy is really oppressive
<i>Ajot calo two....</i>	I am worn out as if ill....

The text of the above oral poem, upon examination, reveals a lot about the nature of the Acoli society and thereby the personhood and identity of the woman as envisaged by society. The female is defined by virtue of her position in the household and the family (not the public sphere) – that is the exegesis of her existence. That is why the persona in the oral poem says:

My rival has taken over my household, oh  
My rival has taken away my life, oh

Her life is meaningless (as a person and a woman) outside the realm of the domestic household, because that is where society expects her personhood and womanhood to flower. But the question to ask is: Why does she feel she is to blame for another woman hounding her out of her marital home – why is she so remorseful? It is because society has conditioned her through the process of socialization to think of her responsibility as a woman in specific terms. She says she should have “taken care of the weeds” in her millet field, she should have “cooked diligently” for her husband, and “taken care” of her marital home. Hence, she declares,

Shame drives my crazy  
I have endured my foolishness.

There is a close relation between the Acoli concept of personhood and identity construction in the society. If, as Odoch Pido (2000) states, the acquisition of personhood among the Acoli is defined in terms of conformity to cultural and

social norms and the assumption of social responsibilities, then the identity of a female in Acoli society seems to be enshrouded in servitude. In other words, to be identified as a woman, one must serve diligently. Thus, the persona in the song remarks:

I wish I knew early enough  
I would have cooked diligently for my husband  
I wish I knew early enough  
I would have taken care of my marital home.

As one of the women interviewed as regards the meaning of the song declares, “A woman who cannot maintain a home is nothing in the eyes of the people.”<sup>5</sup> She adds that such a person is often ridiculed in songs as a warning to the growing young women not to follow in the failure’s foot-steps. Therefore, songs can be viewed as ideological tools for inculcating specific cultural ways of thinking and behaving, urging conformity to the cultural philosophical corpus – for there-in lies the sense of belonging, of being an Acoli. To emphasize her isolation and being a social outcast and to depict her loss of personhood in the eyes of the community the woman in the song uses the image of a monkey. She remarks: “I squat like a monkey/ on a dry tree.” To the Acoli the monkey resembles a human being but is in fact an animal, not a person. So although she looks like a human being, with the loss of personhood, the woman feels less than a person – like a misplaced monkey on a dry tree.

The sense of corporate existence seems to be very strong among the Acoli. Nobody wants to be an outcast (because then one becomes a laughing stock of the community); everybody wants to ‘belong’ to the corporate entity, thereby endeavouring to acquire and maintain an Acoli personhood and the culturally prescribed identity as an Acoli male or female – to have a sense of having a root. John Mbiti expresses well this cultural ideology of belonging in most African societies when he writes:

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<sup>5</sup> Betty Angom, 64, was interviewed on December 6, 2005 at her home in the outskirts of Gulu town.

In traditional life, the individual does not and cannot exist alone except corporately. He owes his existence to other people, including those of the past generations and his contemporaries. He is simply part of the whole. The community must therefore make, create, or produce the individual; for the individual depends on the corporate group.... Whatever happens to the individual happens to the whole group, and whatever happens to the whole group happens to the individual. The individual can only say: "I am, because we are; and since we are therefore I am." (Mbiti 1990 [1969]: 108-109.)

The above expressed characteristic is brought out in many Acoli song performances studied. There is a tendency for collective reference even where only an individual is involved. When a man faults, it is sometimes blamed on men generally, and where a woman falls short of societal expectations often a finger is pointed at the womenfolk as a whole; just as the fate of a section of Acoli citizenry is taken as the fate of the entire ethnic group, because of the ingrained collective sense of personhood. Let's consider the song below performed by Mallan from Agago in Pader District:

<p><i>An kadi atim ang'o</i>  <i>    c'wara ngeyo ku</i>  <i>Bedo i gang pa coo</i>  <i>    alany kite eno do.</i></p>	<p>Whatever I try to do,  my husband does not appreciate.  Living in the homes of men  [is] humiliation, that is how it is.</p>
<p><i>Alany pa coo kite eno.</i>  <i>Kadi adwor doge,</i>  <i>    c'wara ngeyo ku, lutuwa!</i>  <i>Bedo i gang pa coo,</i>  <i>    kite eno.</i></p>	<p>The humiliation by men is like that.  Even if I try to satisfy his appetite,  my husband does not appreciate!  Living in the homes of men,  that is how it is.</p>
<p><i>Ada, kite eno weng.</i>  <i>An kadi ago cati</i>  <i>    c'wara pwoyo ku.</i>  <i>Anywar pa coo,</i>  <i>    kite eno do.</i></p>	<p>True, that is how it is.  Even if I iron his shirt  my husband is not thankful.  The foolery by men,  that is how it is.</p>
<p><i>Ada, kite eno do.</i>  <i>An kadi acel dek,</i>  <i>    c'wara pwoyo ku.</i></p>	<p>True, that is how it is  Even if I fry the sauce,  my husband is not thankful.</p>

*Alany pa coo,  
kite eno.*

The humiliation by men,  
that is how it is.

Mallan is a male, but the persona in his song is a female expressing her humiliation at the hands of her husband. In this case, as in most cases of Acoli song performances, the performing artist is a medium of artistic expression of social realities – and often their songs are not a personal rendering but a collective position of popular feelings in society. Once a song has gained popular acceptance in society, they are performed by both males and females regardless of the ‘gendered’ message therein – and often people even forget who the original composer was (and it acquires the identity of an Acoli song and no longer the song of so and so).

In the above song men are depicted as an unappreciative group of people because of the act of one man. The Acoli say “*Ogwal acel obalo wang pii,*” meaning “One frog spoils the whole water source” – which can be explained as the action of one frog in kicking up mud at a water source covers not only itself but also the rest of the frogs in dirt. What she suffers at the hands of her husband is laid at the door of all men; it is considered “The foolery of men” and “The humiliation by men.” What one woman suffers is also taken as what women suffer. This tendency at generalisation and assigning collective responsibility and identity is also depicted in the song below performed by Santo Watber:

*Alany pa mon  
weko tin cwinya cwer do,  
Anywar pa mon  
weko cwinya cwer ba!*

The humiliation from women  
today makes my heart ache.  
The foolery from women  
makes my heart ache, oh!

*Kadi bed adonyo i mutoka ducu  
dako pud yeta.  
Jal, alany pa mon  
an iya wang do.*

Even if I enter into a car  
my wife still insults me.  
The humiliation from women  
makes my heart burn.

*Kadi bed adwoyo mutoka ducu  
dako pud jwiya.  
Jal, anywar pa mon*

Even if I drive a car  
my wife still jeers me.  
The foolery from women

*an cwinya cwer do.*

*Kadi bed aketo i wi piki-piki  
dako judu kweda.  
Jal, an iya ton do!  
Kadi aketo i wi piki-piki  
dako pud jwiya.  
Jal, alany,  
omiyo atamo do.*

*Alany pa mon man  
weko cwinya cwer ba.  
Nen kadi awoto i kabedo  
awoto cwinya cwer laling-ling.  
Gin ma dako timo ki yoo ngeya  
omiyo too tin i oda .*

*Anywar pa mon  
cenyo romo U-kombi ada  
Wek aywee gira.*

makes my heart ache.

Even if I put her on a motorcycle  
my wife is still moody with me.  
Comrade, my heart drips with pain!  
Even if I put her on a motorcycle  
my wife still jeers me.  
Comrade, this humiliation  
gives me worries.

This humiliation from women  
makes my heart ache.  
Look, even when I go somewhere  
my heart aches silently.  
What my wife does behind me  
has brought death to my home.

The foolery from women  
can make one drink U-kombi<sup>6</sup>  
So that I rest forever.

The concept of collective personhood to a great extent influences the way gender identity becomes construed as a group identity, thereby making such gender categorisation acceptable in the minds of the Acoli. With this kind of mental conditioning it becomes easier to conform to the group gender identity of the category ‘women’ or the category ‘men’ because of the corporate sense of existence.

In the above song the persona laments that “Even if I enter into a car/ my wife still insults me.... Even if I put her on a motorcycle/ my wife is still moody with me.” Entering a car should have raised his esteem in the eyes of his wife, but she still insults him thereby dragging him down. Being able to put her on a motorcycle taxi instead of her having to walk the whole way should have made her more appreciative of him, but his wife is still moody with him despite his effort. Instead of singling out his wife as an individual, the male persona blames it

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<sup>6</sup> U-kombi is the brand name for a pesticide used to rid cattle of ticks.

all on the womenfolk. He remarks: “The humiliation from women/ makes my heart burn.... The foolery from women/ makes my heart ache.”

The concept of collective personhood or identity seems to be common not only among the Acoli but also other African ethnic communities. Discussing the question of the jural conception of personhood as a matter of collective identity among the societies of the Lower Congo, for instance, Anita Jacobson-Widding explains:

Whenever two or more members of the same matrilineage are in company with people from some other clan they are supposed to regard each other as one single jural or moral person. This collective person should speak with one voice, represented by the individual who in this particular situation happens to be the big brother, the big sister, or the uncle. Thus, for instance, when I asked some ‘uncles’ among the Buissi of Congo if it was in their capacity of maternal uncles that they used to defend their nephews in judicial processes, their answer was: “No, it is not because I am his uncle, it is because we belong to the same clan” (*kifumba*).  
... The uncle purports to defend his nephew on account of their common clanship, thus by virtue of their equal identity in the face of outsiders. This implies the notion of an egalitarian, or at least symbiotic communality (Jacobson-Widding 1990: 35).

Having discussed the concept of personhood and its relatedness to gender identity construction, it is worth noting that the concept of personhood also relates to several other identities that an individual acquires in the process of growing up as a member of the Acoli society. Oftentimes an individual, both male and female, has to negotiate between multiple identities (including gender) in his or her everyday life.

### **4.3. Negotiating Multiple Identities**

As David Hume points out, “Most philosophers seem inclined to think that personal identity arises from consciousness; and consciousness is nothing but a reflected thought or perception” (Hume 1974: 635). I would argue that personal identity does not only arise from consciousness based on reflected thought or

perception, but is also a result of a combination of factors including cultural upbringing, and social construction and imperatives. I would agree with the earlier assertion by John Locke that the identity of a person is partly derived from remembering past experiences. For Locke, a person is “a thinking intelligent being, that has reason and reflection, and can consider itself as itself, the same thinking thing, in different times and places” (Locke 1947: 39). It is worth noting, however, that the interpretation of these past experiences is often from a specific cultural ideological standpoint inculcated into the person during the process of growing up.

Human beings, in the course of their everyday lives, oftentimes have to negotiate between multiple identities – and gender identity is just one of them (which at times is convoluted by other identities depending on time and space). This is quite evident in the general themes of most Acoli songs. One is therefore persuaded to agree with Kay Deaux and Brenda Major when they propound that:

Although the concept of gender identity is universal, substantial individual differences occur in the characteristics of these identities. First, people differ in the degree to which gender is a salient aspect of their identity.... The influence of gender on social interaction depends heavily on the degree to which associations with gender are invoked, either consciously or unconsciously. (Deaux & Major 1990: 93)

The two scholars acknowledge that many feminist analyses seem not to recognize the fact that people have identities other than gender. People often define themselves not only in terms of just one identity but several identities. These various senses of self may exist harmoniously within an individual, with one sense of self featuring more prominently depending on the circumstances in which the individual finds himself or herself from time to time that make a particular identity more relevant. Hence, Deaux and Major correctly conclude that:

Gender is most likely to dominate interaction, by this account, when it is an identity of primary importance and when the situation contrives to make gender relevant (Deaux & Major 1990: 94).

Regenia Gagnier picks up the thread of the above argument and pushes it even further. She propounds that in considering gender identity construction one must take cognition of the ‘numerous overlapping constructions’ of other identities as well. She refers to the theorization of scholars from the disciplines of psychology and sociology to bolster her point. She writes:

Psychologists explore the possibility that identity is founded on multiple relationships, that no person (like mother) or symbol (like the phallus) can hold a single, unvarying place in everyone’s psyche, and they call for a more critical approach to gender in psychoanalytic theory and practice. Sociologists have amassed persuasive evidence that there is no easy way to analyze gender construction without accounting for multiple differences, including differences of race, ethnicity, and class (Gagnier 1990: 22).

Just to demonstrate how ‘hyphenated’ one’s identity can be, Audre Lorde’s description of her multiple identities will suffice. She said: “As a forty-nine-year-old Black lesbian feminist socialist mother of two, including one boy, and a member of an interracial couple, I usually find myself a part of some group defined as other, deviant, inferior, or just plain wrong...”<sup>7</sup> In this statement she considers herself more than just a woman – she is many things in addition to her gender identity.

There is a whole range of identity positions available to people to locate themselves in (even within socially ‘fixed’ gender identity). However, as Stephen Frosh, Ann Phoenix and Rob Pattman point out, “less light has been thrown on the question of what it is that produces the specific ‘choice’ of location a particular individual makes amongst the available identity positions” (Frosh, Phoenix & Pattman 2003: 40). For example, they wonder why when given the possibility of being ‘macho’ or ‘new man’ a particular male individual may choose to locate himself as the latter and not the former. This is a question that

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<sup>7</sup> Quoted in: Regenia Gagnier (1990), “Feminist Postmodernism: The End of Feminism or the Ends of Theory?” in Deborah Rhode (ed.), *Theoretical Perspectives on Sexual Difference*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, p.25.



psychological researchers are still to answer; but it serves to show that we shouldn't take any identity positioning for granted or as a given.

Although gender identity construction in Acoli song performance is the primary focus of this study, evidence from the analyses of several Acoli song performances show that such identity construction is never in isolation from other identities. Sometimes they are intertwined. To illustrate this point let us examine the text of the song performance by Ogwang Killipa of Lira-Palwo in Agago County:

<i>Lotino anyira Acoli owiny ba!</i>	Acoli girls, please listen!
<i>Wai poro pe giporo i olet.</i>	Elopement is never in the grazing ground.
<i>Lotino anyira Acoli owiny ba!</i>	Acoli girls, please listen!
<i>Wai poro pe ki poro i okang.</i>	Elopement is never in the field.
<i>Lotino anyira Acoli owiny ba!</i>	Acoli girls, please listen!
<i>Wai poro pe ki poro i dye lyek.</i>	Elopement is never in the burnt grass.
<i>Wubalo cik Acoli woko ba!</i>	You have ruined Acoli traditional norms!
<i>Ceng ki tuwa pe giporo i olet.</i>	We never eloped in the grazing ground.
<i>Wubalo cik Acoli woko ba!</i>	You have ruined Acoli traditional norms!
<i>Ceng ki tuwa pe giporo wa i bolo.</i>	We never eloped in tents.
<i>Wubalo cik Acoli woko ba!</i>	You have ruined Acoli traditional norms!
<i>Poro ango iporo i bur lyel?</i>	What kind of elopement is in the grave?
<i>Poro ango ma oporo wa i bunga?</i>	What kind of elopement is in the bush?
<i>Winyo neni woko.</i>	Birds will see your nakedness.
<i>Poro pe giporo i ococ</i>	We never eloped in anthill holes
<i>Twol tongi woko.</i>	Snakes will bite you.
<i>Twol otongi</i>	A snake bit you
<i>wa i te yat ca.</i>	far under that tree.
<i>Ilili ki odur</i>	You made an alarm
<i>wa i te yat ca.</i>	far under that tree.
<i>Wubalo cik Acoli woko!</i>	You have ruined Acoli traditional norms!
<i>Poro ango iporo i adaki?</i>	What kind of elopement is in trenches?
<i>Wubalo cik Acoli woko!</i>	You have ruined Acoli traditional norms!
<i>Wugamo moko me culu luk.</i>	You take maize flour as elopement payment.
<i>Wubalo cik acoli woko!</i>	You have ruined Acoli traditional norms!
<i>Wugamo muranga me culu luk.</i>	You receive beans as elopement payment.
<i>Kadi maro bene por i adaki.</i>	Even the mother-in-law elopes in trenches

*Oleyo wiya!*  
*Ka oo odiku,*  
*maro telo yoo*  
*nyare lubu kore.*  
*Wun wuloko adaki*  
*odoko dero miri-wu.*

I am really ashamed!  
When it is morning,  
the mother-in-law leads the way  
and the daughter follows her.  
You have turned the trenches  
into your communal granaries.

Before addressing the multiplicity of identity portrayed in the above song, we have first to take cognisance of the changing gender realities as a result of changing social and economic situations occasioned by the war. The notion of men as providers is challenged by the prevailing situation when women have to step in and take up the role of basic needs providers for the household using every available resource at their disposal including their body. (Desperate situations sometimes require desperate measures.) Also we note that the control that men used to exercise over their households is slipping, with women no longer passive recipients of male orders but active initiators of actions. This has a great implication for the re-signification of female gender identity.

By addressing the message to “Acoli girls” the persona is not only invoking gender identity but also the ethnic identity of the addressees. The two interwoven identities are important for the relevance of his message. First, let us consider the background to the song’s message. The war of insurgency has been raging in Acoliland since 1986, displacing most of the population from their original homes into concentrated settlements designated as ‘protected camps’ by government. This cut the people off from their usual source of livelihood, forcing them to survive on inadequate relief food handed down by relief agencies. In some instances, to provide for their household, some women have taken to the humiliating practice of exchanging sex for foodstuff from government soldiers who live in tents and trenches.

As per the Acoli gender identity construction, a woman’s nakedness is considered sacred, and is supposed to be jealously guarded from prying eyes by every grown-up female. When a woman exposes her nakedness in anger it is considered a

terrible curse for the target person. Yet some females have gone against their culturally prescribed femininity by exposing their nakedness in the open fields. The persona remarks:

What kind of elopement<sup>8</sup> is in the bush?  
Birds will see your nakedness.

Apart from invoking their feminine identity, the persona also invokes their ethnic identity:

You have ruined Acoli traditional norms!  
We never eloped in the grazing ground.  
You have ruined Acoli traditional norms!  
We never eloped in tents.  
You have ruined Acoli traditional norms!  
What kind of elopement is in the grave?<sup>9</sup>

To be associated with the ethnic identity of an Acoli one has to exude the cultural values of the Acoli and adhere to Acoli cultural traditional norms characteristic of the society. As for the mother of the young woman in question, her triple identity is called into play – as a woman, as an Acoli, and as a mother-in-law. The identity of a mother-in-law grants a woman a special respectable status among the Acoli, and she is expected to behave befitting this elevated station in society irrespective of her age. That is why the singing voice in the song comments, “I am really ashamed!” Linking the female gender identity to her ethnic identity brings into play the societal notion of women as the custodians of Acoli culture.

We have to take cognizance of the fact that as a result of the debilitating situation occasioned by twenty years of sporadic war, Acoli women have acquired identities hitherto unheard of in the peace-time Acoli society. One leading independent daily newspaper in Kampala reported that “The war has failed to break women’s determination to ensure that traditional family and community

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<sup>8</sup> Note that the performer is just trying to be polite (and cultured) by referring to sexual intercourse as elopement. Everyone in the audience who is culturally initiated reads the word ‘elopement’ as ‘sexual intercourse.’

<sup>9</sup> A war trench is often where people die, and that is why it is referred to as “the grave.”

customs and support structures are not destroyed.”<sup>10</sup> The females have taken over roles hitherto reserved exclusively for males, leading to identity re-signification and generally becoming the pillar for family survival.

As we have seen above, in examining gender identity construction in song performances, other multiple identities are also brought into consideration. Often these several identities overlap or complement each other in defining the person. However, at this juncture, it is important to clearly define what gender identity is.

#### 4.4. Defining Gender Identity

Gender identity, as aptly defined by Kay Deaux and Brenda Major, refers to a “fundamental, existential sense of one’s maleness or femaleness, an acceptance of one’s gender as a social-psychological construction that parallels acceptance of one’s biological sex” (Deaux & Major 1990: 93). This sense of one’s maleness or femaleness is inculcated into every member of the Acoli society at a very early age through various socialisation processes – and song performance is an integral part of the gender socialisation process. Take for example the children song below:

<i>Odure, katti woko,</i>	Odure, come outside,
<i>Wek keno;</i>	Leave the cooking-place;
<i>Mac keno wango cuni, ah!</i>	Fire from the stove will burn your penis, ah! <sup>11</sup>

Through song performance the male child who likes sitting around the cooking-place is being teased out of the habit by his playmates. Here the young male’s sense of maleness being inculcated is to dissociate himself from feminine traits which position females in the kitchen. A male child should not be associated with the cooking-place, but be outside playing with other boys; otherwise, the very

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<sup>10</sup> See: “UN Chief, Kony disagree,” *Daily Monitor*, September 13, 2006.

<sup>11</sup> Quoted in: Okot p’Bitek (1974), *Horn of My Love*, Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers, p.3.

essence of his maleness would be destroyed – “Fire from the stove will burn your penis...”

As Ellen Parrin notes, most two-year-olds in society know whether they are boys or girls, and can already apply gender labels on people around them; and as they grow older they begin to consistently classify personal characteristics like gentleness or robustness as female or male. Her analysis of US society can also be applied to the Acoli society but from a slightly different perspective. Parrin writes:

Young children also develop stereotypes regarding adult roles.... They know that blocks, hammers, trucks and wrestling are for males, while pots and pans, dolls, and aprons are for females, and they generally avoid playing with toys associated with the other gender.

Social rules regarding the patterns of thinking and behavior that are appropriate for girls and for boys are pervasive and strongly reinforced by television, books and the expectations of both adults and children. The boy who wants to help the girls dress the dolls, or the girl who wants to be one of the space warriors, is likely to be soundly criticized by his or her friends (Perrin 2003: 1).

Among the Acoli, the social rules regarding the pattern of thinking and behaviour that are appropriate for males and females are more strongly reinforced through song performance (as seen in the song above) rather than, say, television or books. To further illustrate this argument, let us consider the song below performed by pupils of Pageya Primary School:

*Laming-ming, ilak ata.*

*Ceng itimo ngo?*

*Ceng itimo ngo,*

*wa kit u?*

*Labangcata, ilak ata.*

*Ceng itimo ngo?*

*Ceng itimo ngo,*

*wa kit u?*

You are a fool, moving aimlessly.

What have you been doing?

What have you been doing,

right from your parent's home?

You are an imbecile, moving aimlessly.

What have you been doing?

What have you been doing,

right from your parent's home?

*Nen gang-wa!*  
*Nen ganga-wa!*  
*Wa yubu-ayuba,*  
*wan ki cwara.*  
*Ceng itimo ngo,*  
*wa kit u?*

Look at our home!  
Look at our home!  
We made it,  
together with my husband.  
What have you been doing,  
right from your parent's home?

*Nen lutino-wa!*  
*Nen lutino-wa!*  
*Wagwoko-agwoka*  
*wan ki cwara.*  
*Ceng itimo ngo,*  
*wa kit u?*

Look at our children!  
Look at our children!  
We looked after them,  
together with my husband.  
What have you been doing,  
right from your parent's home?

The song above endeavours to inculcate into the young females a particular pattern of thinking and behaviour culturally associated with their sense of femaleness – get married and raise children, otherwise you are a failure, a ‘fool’ and an ‘imbecile’. This is very much captured in Victoria C. Dickerson’s projection of US society. She writes:

A few decades ago, there was one major goal that young women were supposed to achieve: get married and have children. Now they are required to do much more – not only get married and have children but also have a career, be financially independent, create a social life, and know where they want to live. For all of this, they have no roadmap; in the past, these options and opportunities were more available to men than to women. In fact, by getting married and having children, women usually had those other things taken care of for them. Women’s work was to take care of their families (Dickerson 2004: 338-339).

Apart from endeavouring to have a career, getting married and raising children is still very much a central core of the woman’s identity among the Acoli. The sense of being a complete woman is expressed in the above song. The persona remarks:

Look at our home!  
We made it,  
together with my husband....  
Look at our children!  
We looked after them,

together with my husband...

To fulfil one's destiny in life, and be recognised as a complete woman, one must marry and have children. This way of thinking is ramped into the psyche of members of the Acoli community right from childhood through songs, such as the one quoted above, and through other means.

At this point, it is important to note that one cannot talk of a monolithic gender identity, even when talking about an ethnic community like the Acoli. It is more correct to talk of the dominant gender identities. Many feminists, especially in the early years of the 'feminist project', have sought to establish a kind of common gender identity for women. As Karen Offen notes, this claim "generally rested on a common set of female values and aspirations, rooted more often than not in motherhood and nurturance and also in an effort to reclaim for women the right to define what 'women' are and should be" (Offen 1990: 13). Over the years a number of scholars have highlighted differences among women (and by inference men) to challenge the notion of a unitary gender identity. Ruth Hubbard emphatically states that:

The very notion that there exists a prototypical woman who can be described in ways that reflect and have meaning for the lives of the many different women living in very different geographical, economic, political, and social settings needs to be challenged.<sup>12</sup>

Gender identity is defined differently by different cultures and communities. A number of factors, such as history, socio-cultural contexts and experiences, impact on how we perceive gender identity. It is imperative that we take into account differences among women (and, of course, men) if we are to, as Christina Crosby puts it, "escape the circularity of simply recognising a preconceived, pre-given women's identity" (Crosby 1992: 130). A number of scholars have

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<sup>12</sup> Quoted in: Regenia Gagnier (1990), "Feminist Postmodernism: The End of Feminism or the Ends of Theory?" in Deborah Rhode (ed.), *Theoretical Perspectives on Sexual Difference*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, p. 24.

highlighted this point, including Kay Deaux and Brenda Major who note that “Two individuals who are equally conscious of their identities as women may, by virtue of experience or belief, have markedly different conceptions of what that identity means” (Deaux & Major 1990: 93).

The importance of cultural upbringing on how we conceive gender identity is underscored by Victoria C. Dickerson when she states that:

Cultural expectations, norms, standards, ideas, and beliefs do not come out of nowhere; grand narratives are embedded in local narratives. How families understand, organize, and perform their lives shape the experiences, values, and beliefs of the young women who grew up in them. Working from a narrative approach with young women is very specific to each woman’s family of origin, race, ethnicity, class, religious orientation, and community context (Dickerson 2004: 339).

Yet we must also acknowledge that, despite the difference in the specificity of gender identity, there may still exist some commonality that makes a female or male identify with another female or male, as belonging to a common entity destined by biology, fate, experience or history. At the heart of this research is the intention to investigate the dominant gender identity constructions among the Acoli to which many males and females in the society ascribe to. An examination of various song performances seems to indicate the impact of cultural upbringing and dominant cultural ideologies on gender identity construction. That is why I find the assertion made by Thomas W. Bean and Karen Moni in their study of gender identity construction in the United States of America at variance with what pertains in the Acoli society. They write:

In summary, we found the following themes emerging from contemporary discussions of identity construction. First, identity is no longer anchored to stable employment, communities, or institutions. Rather, identity is constructed through the properties of individual action carried out – more often than not for urban teens – in non-places like malls, train stations, and airports.



Identity is now a matter of self-construction amidst unstable times, mores, and global consumerism (Bean & Moni 2003: 642).

The Acoli as a people are still very much community oriented and individualism is sometimes considered anti-social and frowned upon. The Acoli are basically a rural community and song performance is at the very heart of Acoli sense of communality, because song performance is often a collective enterprise. Cultural philosophy, community and ethnicity still have a strong bearing on the psyche of the Acoli as far as gender identity construction is concerned. So gender identity construction is much more communally influenced than an individualistic effort.

Gender identity construction has a direct impact on gender power relations in the Acoli society. It is often not easy to draw a clear line between gender identity and gender power relation because the two have an intricate relationship, influencing and shaping each other.

#### **4.5. The Nature of the Gender Power Relations Matrix**

Catherine Hall defines gender (in essence gender relations) as “the social organization of relations between the sexes,” and considers it to be a “constitutive element in all social relations” (Hall 1991: 209). In interpreting Hall’s assertion, Susan Pitt argues that “the gendered subject has some existence prior to social relations – there are (socially constructed) men and there are (socially constructed) women who then relate to one another” (Pitt 1998: 398). This brings to the forefront the intricate relationship between gender identity and gender relations. Pitt therefore concludes that gendered subjects are constructed in and through discourse instead of having ‘discourse’ simply laid on top.

Before discussing gender power relations and how these relations are mediated by song performance among the Acoli, we must first try to analyse how power can be conceived and understood. Anna Yeatman (1997) makes an incisive analysis of how power can be (and has always been) perceived, especially by leading

feminists. She identifies three major strands of feminist perceptions of power: power as domination, power as protection, and power as capacity.<sup>13</sup> Her analysis to a large extent did inform my inquiry during the course of the study, and I try to determine whether it correlates with Acoli concept of power.

Oftentimes feminists view power as domination or coercion; that is, power over somebody or a category of people who are subordinated. In other words, the male category are often portrayed as dominating and coercive (thereby bad in nature), and the female category as subjugated and powerless victims (therefore good). However, the gender power relation matrix in practice is much more complex than this over-simplification. As Yeatman rightly notes:

Domination can be used to control others in order to serve the interests of the powerful, or, domination can work democratically to extend or even constitute the powers of its subjects. (Yeatman 1997: 145)

Furthermore, some females are active participants in their apparent domination and therefore equally responsible; while some females are also engaged in dominating other females. There are as well cases of henpecked males who are victims of domineering females. As the song below performed by Ogwang Killipa illustrates, control and domination is not exclusive to the male gender:

*Omera, in ikelo dako ni*  
*Lanyom-ni,*  
*kong dong i mato nyee.*  
*En nga ma okello irii?*  
*In gire ma ikelo yo.*  
*In ikelo dako ni*  
*Labangcata,*  
*dako dong nywaro yee*

My brother, you brought this woman  
 You who married her,  
 now you have to suffer it.  
 Who brought her for you?  
 It is you who brought her yourself.  
 You brought this woman  
 An imbecile,  
 now a woman humiliates you.

*Omera, in ikelo Santa*  
*Lonyom-ni,*

My brother, you brought Santa  
 You who married her,

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<sup>13</sup> For details, see: Anna Yeatman, (1997), “Feminism and Power”, in Mary Lyndon Shanley and Uma Narayan (eds.), *Reconstructing Political Theory: Feminist Perspectives*, Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, pp. 145-154.

*kong dong ikanyo nyee.*  
*En nga ma okello irii?*  
*In giri ma imito yo.*  
*In ikelo dako ni*  
*Labangcata,*  
*dako dong loyo yee.*

*In ikelo dako-ni*  
*Lanyom-ni,*  
*kong dony idango nyee*  
*En nga ma okello irii?*  
*In giri ma ikelo*  
*In ikelo dako ni*  
*Labangcata,*  
*dako dong goyo nyee.*

now you have to endure it.  
Who brought her for you?  
It is you who wooed her yourself.  
You brought this woman  
An imbecile,  
now a woman dominates you.

You brought this woman  
You who married her,  
now you suffer it  
Who brought her for you?  
It is you who brought her yourself  
You brought this woman  
An imbecile,  
now a woman beats you up.

The above song attests to the fact that domination in gender relations is not exclusively exercised by the males – females too can be domineering in a relationship. Control and domination, when exercised by the female over the male, is often presented in Acoli song performances as a social aberration; and that is why it becomes a subject of songs. In the gender power relation it is culturally expected for the male to be the controlling and dominating partner. That is why in the song the dominated male is called “[a]n imbecile.” The blame is on the man for his stupidity: “You who married her/ now you suffer it.” To be dominated by a female is considered among the Acoli a humiliation for the male, and this is reflected in the song:

You brought this woman  
An imbecile,  
now a woman humiliates you.

The point that is underscored here is that there are cases of domineering women in gender power relations, although it is considered a peculiarity in the patriarchal socio-cultural set-up of the Acoli society as depicted by the tone in the song. As per Acoli gender relation perception, women can acceptably exercise dominance over the males from the vantage point of a mother. That is why women who rise to political prominence over men in society are bestowed with the title ‘Mother.’

Betty Bigombe, who made strenuous effort to initiate peace negotiation between Uganda government and the Lord's Resistance Army rebels, and Alice Auma who led the Holy Spirit Movement in rebellion against the Kampala regime are often addressed as Mother Bigombe and Mother Alice in a number of songs. The referent 'mother' makes their dominant positions acceptable. This leads us to another conception of power as not only domination but also productive.

As Michel Foucault points out, power is not just repressive but can also be productive as well. It is not simply something that one category of people exercise over another category of people, but rather a means through which they construct themselves as social actors in relations. Therefore, people are "vehicles of power, not its point of application" (Foucault 1980: 98). Hence, in discussing power relations, we should take note that there are multiple sites of power, just as there are multiple points of power contestation (Foucault 1981: 93-95).

The conception of power as productive is for instance exemplified in the song produced on page 95. Let us consider an excerpt of the song:

<i>Nen gang-wa!</i>	Look at our home!
<i>Nen ganga-wa!</i>	Look at our home!
<i>Wa yubu-ayuba,</i>	We made it,
<i>wan ki cwara.</i>	together with my husband....
<i>Nen lutino-wa!</i>	Look at our children!
<i>Nen lutino-wa!</i>	Look at our children!
<i>Wagwoko-agwoka</i>	We looked after them,
<i>wan ki cwara.</i>	together with my husband....

The male in a typical Acoli homestead has the authority as the head of the family, yet this power is projected in the song not as repressive but productive. The husband uses his power as a productive organising factor for the wellbeing of the family. The singing voice therefore remarks: "Look at our home! We made it, together with my husband.... Look at our children! We looked after them, together with my husband." These references are in acknowledgement of the

productive power exercised by the husband; the persona is proud of their achievement in building their home and raising their children. In any social organisation, even in a small social unit like the household, there is often some semblance of a chain of command with some kind of authority at the apex for it to function as a social unit. This authority or power can either be repressive or productive. Generally, in normal circumstances, the Acoli expect this power (usually exercised by the male in a family setting) to be productive and democratic.

Power can also be conceived in certain circumstances as ‘protection’. Among the Acoli it is incumbent upon the males to protect the females and the weak (and mothers are expected to protect their offspring). In this scenario power goes hand in hand with benevolence, and is not viewed as negative and overbearing. The females submit to the protection of the males in more than one sense – physically, socially and economically. At the extreme end, one may even view it as some sort of abdication of responsibility by the allegedly protected individuals – and in this case power comes with enormous responsibility for others. There are songs that taunt males who have failed in their responsibility to adequately protect their female folks and young ones. Consider the song below performed by Ogwang Kilipa with a female companion:

<i>Lanyom mono nga</i>	Who is this married man
<i>ma kono gwok dako ba?</i>	who fails to look after the woman?
<i>Ma kono gwok dako yo</i>	Instead of protecting the woman
<i>lanyom tiko mero.</i>	he is always drunk.
<i>Lanyomi kara nga</i>	Who is this married man
<i>ma kono igwok dako ba?</i>	who fails to look after the woman?
<i>Ma kono igwok dako yo</i>	Instead of protecting the woman
<i>lanyom tiko mero.</i>	he is always drunk.
<i>Inyoma, ka ilanya yo.</i>	You married me, yet make me suffer.
<i>Lanyomi kara car</i>	This married man is hopeless
<i>Lanyomi kara car</i>	This married man is hopeless
<i>Ma kono gwok dako yo</i>	He doesn't look after the woman
<i>En inyoma, ci igwoka ku</i>	He married me, yet doesn't look after me.

<i>Lanyomi kara car!</i>	This married man is hopeless!
<i>Lanyomi kara car!</i>	This married man is hopeless!
<i>Ma kono gwok dako yo</i>	Instead of looking after the woman
<i>Cwara inyoma yaka ilanya</i>	My husband married me, yet makes me suffer.
<i>In imer, nga ma gwoka mono?</i>	You get drunk, who will protect me?
<i>Lanyomi kara car!</i>	This married man is hopeless!
<i>In imer, nga ma pita do?</i>	You get drunk, who will feed me?
<i>Lanyomi kara car!</i>	This married man is hopeless!

The Acoli word *gwoko* means to look after, protect, care for and nurture. In the above song it is invariably translated as ‘look after’ and ‘protect.’ In the gender power relation the role of protector in the political, social and economic sense is by culture assigned to the male. When a male marries he is expected to ‘protect’ the female to whom he is married, otherwise he would have failed in his social duty. That is why the question is asked: “Who is this married man/ who fails to look after the woman?”

“Instead of protecting the woman” by ensuring she is economically provided for and socially shielded from public sneers, the failure portrayed in the song “is always drunk.” Hence, the declaration: “This married man is hopeless!” There are two voices in the song: the voice of public opinion, and the voice of the female whose husband has failed in his duty as protector in the gender power relation. Here we notice the Acoli conception of power as ‘protection.’

In the event of death of the male protector in a homestead, the power is passed on to another male (usually the nearest male relative of the deceased), and not the senior female. In the past, the male who inherits the power and responsibility of the dead also inherited the wife or wives as his own. In present times, he may only assume the power over the properties and ensure that the widow and the orphans are provided for (and not necessarily take up the widow as his wife – especially with HIV/AIDS being rampant). This practice of inheritance usually does not

serve the ends it is culturally intended to fulfil – ensuring continued male protection of the bereaved female – as depicted in the song below performed by Amone Watmon:

<i>Kony pa lalaku peke</i>	The inheritor is indeed useless
<i>Lalaku omoro wange i kum dyang</i>	He has his eyes fixed on the cattle
<i>Nga ma gwoko mon?</i>	Who will look after the women?
<i>Awobe pa jii olal i tim</i>	People's sons have perished in the wilderness
<i>Nga ma gwoko mon?</i>	Who will protect the women?
<i>Kony pa lalaku peke</i>	The inheritor is indeed useless
<i>Lalaku omoro wange i kum akul</i>	He has his eyes fixed on the kraal
<i>Nga ma gwoko mon?</i>	Who will look after the women?
<i>Awobe pa jii ogak i tim</i>	People's sons have remained in the wilderness
<i>Nga ma gwoko mon?</i>	Who will protect the women?
<i>Kony pa lalaku peke</i>	The inheritor is indeed useless
<i>Lalaku omoro wange i kum lim</i>	He has his eyes fixed on the wealth
<i>Nga ma gwoko mon?</i>	Who will look after the women?
<i>Awobe pa jii olal i tim</i>	People's sons have perished in the wilderness
<i>Nga ma gwoko mon?</i>	Who will protect the women?

The song reflects the dire situation in Acoliland whereby widows and orphans abound as a result of diseases and the war. The war has claimed mostly male victims, that is why the song states: “People’s sons have perished in the/wilderness.” The ‘wilderness’ here has multiple sites of meaning. It may mean the battle field, but more certainly the anomalous human situation characterised by the uncertainty and lurking dangers of a wilderness.

The song depicts the persistent cultural conception of patriarchal power as protection in the gender power relation by asking: “Who will protect the women?” With the changing realities, it also acknowledges the unfeasibility of the common traditional arrangement by declaring: “The inheritor is indeed useless.” The notion of ownership (often associated with male ownership) goes hand in hand with the conception of power as protection. He who owns, or inherits ownership,

has the responsibility to exercise this power as a means to protect. But the reality is that the males who acquire wealth through inheritance often ignore the females they are supposed to protect; and because of the weakened cultural system that in the past reinforced their responsibilities, the females are left hapless.

At another level the conception of power as protection can also be construed as having a negative connotation. For instance, Yeatman points out that:

When protectionist conceptions of power are operating, women are reconstituted as no longer agents, who in some complex way are involved in their oppression, but as simply “innocent victims.” Here victim status requires the suppression rather than the constitution of the capacities for agency of the subjects concerned. (Yeatman, 1997, p.151)

Furthermore, power can also be understood as ‘capacity’. Being endowed with capacity of various natures empowers one in society or in gender relations. This is where the much touted idea of the females being totally powerless is very much disputed, especially in some African communities like the Acoli. As Chinweizu (1990: 14) would put it, the capacity to control the cradle and nurturing gives the females power of a unique nature that the males cannot match. No gender category is more influential in the shaping of the minds and behaviours of the very young than the females. That is why it is rather paradoxical that the patriarchal ideologies become engrained in the young under the very watch of the females. Some thinkers like Chinwiezu argue that the females are more adept in manipulating situations from behind the scenes instead of being in the limelight, and therefore they possess immense covert power over their sons and husbands.

This covert power of the female to influence the male’s thinking and actions can be manifested in rather subtle manner. Consider, for instance, the song performed by Ogwang Killipa:

*Lalil kop ki coo*  
*Latube-tube*

The carrier of gossip to men  
The causer of conflict



<i>Iweko cwari goya</i>	You made your husband beat me
<i>Languna</i>	A liar
<i>Lilo kopi rac</i>	Your gossiping is bad
<i>Nyani, iweko cwari ogoya</i>	You woman, you made your husband beat me
<i>Lalila nye!</i>	You gossiper!
<i>Kop ma wan wapororo</i>	What we talked about
<i>ka twomo pii</i>	while drawing water
<i>nyani kelo paco</i>	this woman brings home
<i>ki tube-tube.</i>	to cause conflict.
<i>Kop ma tin ikelo</i>	The gossip you brought today
<i>oromo joo ne</i>	is too much
<i>Ma tin ogenga nino.</i>	It has prevented me from sleeping.
<i>Gin ma wan wapororo</i>	What we talked about
<i>ka yenyoko dek</i>	while looking for foodstuff
<i>ngo ma ikelo paco?</i>	Why do you bring it home?
<i>Lawang coo</i>	A spy for men
<i>Nyani kite rac</i>	This woman is bad
<i>Languna</i>	A liar
<i>Iweko cwari ogoya.</i>	You made your husband beat me.
<i>Nyani kur megibene.</i>	You woman wait for your turn.
<i>Ki tube-tube</i>	Because of causing conflict
<i>cengu cwari goyi bene.</i>	one day your husband will beat you also.
<i>Lalila!</i>	A gossiper!

In the privacy of marital life the female can influence the male's action. In the above song she influences her husband to beat up another person. She is called 'a liar' not because she told untruth but because she is a 'gossiper' who carries word to the man to do her own 'dirty' work. The singing voice remarks: "You woman, you made your husband beat me." The husband did not beat up the other person out of his own volition but because he was *made* to. This insinuates the ability or power of the female to make the male do her bidding.

It is worth noting that power when conceived as capacity denotes a capability of agency, and thereby the ability to do good or bad. In the above song the female uses her power to prevail over the husband to do bad; and the singing voice remarks: "This woman is bad." As if to acknowledge the capacity of the woman

to make the husband fulfil her desires, the singing voice does not blame the man for the action (but blames it on the woman).

There are times when the Acoli women have used their very femininity as a tool of empowerment in gender power relations. To illustrate this, let us go back and consider afresh the song reproduced on page 65. Here is an excerpt:

Woman: <i>Ineno ber kuma</i> <i>kumi ni kwel-kwel.</i>	You see the beauty of my body you are overwhelmed.
Man: <i>Aneno ber kumi</i> <i>oweko cwinya mitti.</i>	I saw the beauty of your body that is why my heart wants you.
Woman: <i>Ineno wota</i> <i>kumi ni te-te.</i>	You see my walk your body just trembles.
Man: <i>Aneno woti</i> <i>oweko cwinya mari.</i>	I saw your walk that is why my heart loves you.
Woman: <i>Ineno kere lakka</i> <i>kumi ni kwel-kwel.</i>	You see the <i>kere</i> <sup>14</sup> in my teeth you are overwhelmed.
Man: <i>Aneno kere lakki</i> <i>omiyo cwinya mari ada</i>	I saw the <i>kere</i> in your teeth that is why my heart loves you, true.
Woman: <i>Ineno yer wiya</i> <i>kumi ni kwel-kwel.</i>	You see my hair you are overwhelmed.
Man: <i>Aneno yer wiyi</i> <i>omiyo cwinya mari.</i>	I saw your hair that is why my heart loves you.
Woman: <i>Ineno dul kuma</i> <i>kumi ni te-te.</i>	You see parts of my body your body trembles.
Man: <i>Aneno dul kumi</i> <i>oweko cwinya miti ada</i>	I saw parts of your body that is why my heart wants you, true.

In the above song there is repeated reference to the body – “the beauty of my body.... the *kere* in my teeth.... my hair... parts of my body....” We notice feminine beautification being used as a tool in the gender power relation to “overwhelm” the male. Scholars like Sandra Lee Bartky (1990) and Susan Bordo (1993) have argued that feminine beautification is a social construction that acts as an oppressive controlling force in women’s lives and enhances their subjectivity in the patriarchal society. However, I would rather agree with Ann J.

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<sup>14</sup> *Kere* is a gap between the two upper front teeth. It is considered a symbol of beauty by the Acoli.

Cahill (2003) that feminine beautification is a pleasurable and an empowering experience for the women. It is not always a coercive process but usually a voluntary one characterised by a certain degree of intentionality on the part of the women. She argues that “women are more likely to perceive the production of their appearance as an aesthetic project rather than as a mere cultural necessity” (Cahill 2003: 44).

Cahill disagrees with Bartky’s claim that beautification is an “art of disguise” by which women cover their deficient and defective bodies (Bartky 1990: 71). In the song quoted above, the woman seems to celebrate her beautified feminine body as a tool of empowerment and enjoys the power it makes her have over the male gazer. She proudly remarks:

You see the beauty of my body  
you are overwhelmed....  
You see the *kere* in my teeth  
you are overwhelmed....  
You see my hair  
you are overwhelmed....  
You see parts of my body  
your body trembles.

The woman definitely relishes her capacity to ‘overwhelm’ the male through her feminine beauty and be recognised or noticed. As Cahill notes,

To beautify is to become a woman; it is to solidify and guarantee a particular social position, with all the rights and responsibilities thereof. From this perspective, beautification is prior to and a source of women’s agency (Cahill 2003: 54).

The fact that the woman has the capacity to use her feminine beauty as a bargaining chip in a relation shows that she is not powerless in the gender power relation. Here, we notice power as capacity.

Furthermore, to understand the gender power matrix in Acoli society, one ought to take into consideration their perception of subjugation or subordination. For

instance, some feminist activists consider childbirth as one of the tools of female oppression, but for most Acoli females childbirth is considered a blessing (and the more children one has the better). This is exemplified in the songs discussed in Chapter Five. Abortion is not freedom of choice or control over one's sexuality, but an abomination – the female (a mother) the giver of life going against her very destiny. This is the thinking that held sway at group discussions during the field research.

Each society or community should be considered on its own merit (or demerit) regarding the conception of subjugation or subordination and dominance. In this regard, Ama Ata Aidoo rejects the generalisation and sweepingly positioning the African women as a dispossessed and oppressed lot. She recounts some elevated positions that African women did occupy in traditional history and the heroic deeds of women that have gone down in the annals of history. Hence, she concludes:

Given such heroic tradition, it is no wonder that some of us regard the docile, mendicant, African woman of today as a media creation. But if she does exist, she is a result of the traumas of the last five hundred years' encounter with the West, the last one hundred years of colonial repression, the current neo-colonial disillusionment, and a natural environment that is now behaving like an implacable enemy. (Aidoo 1998: 41-42)

Aidoo feels that in gender power relations, the African woman is not the powerless under-dog she is portrayed as being. In her letter to Mineke Schipper to explain her chagrin at the title and subtitle of Schipper's book, *Source of All Evil – African Proverbs and Sayings on Women*, Aidoo wrote:

For years, some of us have been struggling to get the world to look at the African woman properly. Hoping that with some honesty it would be seen in actual fact, vis-à-vis the rest of the world, the position of the African woman has not only *not* been that bad but in some African societies .... she had been far better off than the others (Quoted in Aidoo 1998: 48).

A cursory survey of Acoli songs seems to reveal that subjugation or subordination is associated with being dispossessed and deprived of the necessities of life – when the necessary basic sustenance is assured, one usually does not talk of being subjugated. The Acoli traditional concept of subordination is more social and economic than political. I also found that whenever the concept of subordination or subjugation is invoked in songs, more often than not, it is about the fate of the Acoli as an ethnic group rather than about gender inequality. This can be explained by the fact that the prevailing state of insurgency in Acoliland has privileged and prioritised ethnic and communal survival over other concerns. To discuss this further, let us examine the song below performed by young men and women from Pawidi:

*Acoli, gang odoko rac  
Wadoko boyi ka jii.*

Acoli, the homeland has turned bad  
We have become other people's servants.

*Eee! Ayeli yee!  
Doko ka boyi tek!*

*Eee! Ayeli yee!  
Turning into a servant is hard!*

*Kop cero wanga nino  
Lotino Acoli,  
                  gang odoko rac  
Wadoko boyi ka jii.*

This matter prevents my eyes from sleep  
Children of Acoli,  
                  the homeland has turned bad  
We have become other people's servants

*Eee! Ayeli yee!  
Doko ka boyi tek!*

*Eee! Ayeli yee!  
Turning into a servant is hard!*

*Kop cero wanga nino  
Lotino Acoli,  
                  bedo i rok tek  
Idoko boyi ka lurok*

This matter prevents my eyes from sleep  
Children of Acoli,  
                  staying in a foreign land is hard  
You become servants of the foreigners.

*Eee! Ayeli yee!  
Doko ka boyi tek!*

*Eee! Ayeli yee!  
Turning into a servant is hard!*

*Kop cero wanga nino  
Lotino tuwa,  
                  lok odoko rac  
Wadoko boyi ka jii.*

This matter prevents my eyes from sleep  
Our children,  
                  this matter has turned bad  
We have become other people's servants.

*Eee! Ayeli yee!  
Doko ka boyi tek!*

*Eee! Ayeli yee!  
Turning into a servant is hard!*

In the song the Acoli are projected as subjugated or subordinated because they are displaced and deprived of the daily necessary sustenance and forced to work for the neighbouring ethnic groups like the Banyoro to survive.<sup>15</sup> The performers sing: “We have become other people’s servants.” This is living in a state of subjugation, crushing their pride as a people, and the singers remark: “Turning into a servant is hard!” In the gender relations, the females do not view themselves as ‘servants’ in the domestic setting – but as just performing their responsibility for the continued survival of the homesteads. In most songs portraying abusive relationships in the man-woman relation, the point highlighted is not ‘subjugation’ but ‘humiliation’ of the female by the male. This is quite telling how the Acoli perceive subjugation. However, in some songs, to depict her total dissatisfaction with the way her rights as prescribed by culture and tradition are being trampled on, a woman may refer to her self as a ‘slave’ to draw a parallel. There are some rights in the homestead which by tradition a slave could not exercise (and that was in the times of yore when slavery was still rampant).

The location of the family setting within the male clan environs also shapes gender relations in the Acoli society to a certain extent. The Acoli word for woman is *dako*. *Dak* means ‘migrate,’ and *dako* literally means ‘one who migrates.’ At marriage a woman leaves her parents, home and clan and migrates to settle with her husband in his homestead and clan. The patrilocal family setting in the patriarchal Acoli society tends to aggravate the position of women as ‘outsiders’ in their matrimonial home – which is a place they are supposed to live the rest of their lives and to be buried upon death. This relocation of the female to an allegedly ‘foreign’ clan impacts on gender power relations to a certain degree. The females often consider themselves as second class citizens in the new domestic setting, and only begin to consider themselves an integral part of the homestead when they acquire seniority with grown up children. This feeling is

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<sup>15</sup> Many Acoli escaping the escalating insecurity in Acoliland have settled among neighbouring ethnic groups, and usually have to earn their daily sustenance by working for the members of the host ethnic groups.

reflected in the song below performed by Ogowang Kilippa playing the *nanga* and his wife as the lead singer.

*Kop cero wanga nino*  
*An kono adok tuwa*  
*Tuwa yang,*  
*kitima kuman ku.*

The matter prevents me from sleeping  
Perhaps I should return to my natal home  
At my natal home,  
they used not to treat me like this.

*Bedo i rok tek*  
*Wek adok tuwa*  
*Tuwa yang,*  
*kicaya kuman ku.*

Staying in a foreign place is hard  
Let me return to my natal home  
At my natal home,  
they used not to despise me like this.

*Alany pa lutok tek*  
*Weko cwinya-cwer*  
*Tuwa yang,*  
*kilanya kuman ku.*

The humiliation of the foreigners is difficult  
It makes my heart drip with pain  
At my natal home,  
they don't humiliate me like this.

*Bedo i rok tek*  
*Wek adok tuwa*  
*Tuwa kwija,*  
*kidega kuman ku.*

Staying in a foreign place is hard  
Let me return to my natal home  
At my natal home, there,  
they don't hate me like this.

*Bedo i rok tek*  
*Kono adok tuwa*  
*Tuwa yang,*  
*kijola ki kol-kwac.*

Staying in a foreign place is hard  
Perhaps I should return to my natal home  
At my natal home,  
they welcome me with *kol-kwac*.

*Bedo i gang rok*  
*Oweka adoko opii*  
*Tuwa yang,*  
*kitima kuman ku.*

Staying in a foreign home  
Has made me become a slave  
At my natal home,  
they used not to treat me like this.

*Bedo i rok tek*  
*Oweko abedo ki cwer-cwiny*  
*Tuwa yang,*  
*kidega kuman ku.*

Staying in a foreign place is hard  
It makes me stay with a heavy heart.  
At my natal home,  
they used not to hate me like this.

The persona in the song states that “At our home/ they welcome me with *kol-kwac*.” In other words, she is treated like royalty. *Kol-kwac* is a motif made out of leopard skin to symbolise royalty. The fact that the female does not feel fully integrated into her marital family setting is portrayed by her reference to it as a ‘foreign place’ or a ‘foreign home.’ Therefore she cannot expect equal power in

social relations or equal treatment. Hence, the remark: “Staying in a foreign home/ Has made me become a slave.” Metaphorically she has become a slave, which implies that she does not feel she has equal rights. She makes comparison with her natal home where she was treated well, to show how the marital relation has robbed her of her basic rights to fair/equal treatment.

It is interesting to note that in a typical Acoli way when everything is going on well the female would always refer to her marital home as ‘my home’ or ‘our home’ (like in the song on page 95). But when things are amiss then it becomes ‘their home’ or a ‘foreign home’ (like in the above song). Just as a man would refer to a child as ‘my child’, but as soon as it becomes a problem child then it is the woman’s child.

However, the above song brings into the limelight a fundamental linchpin in the gender power relation due to the patrilocal family setting whereby the female relocates to the male’s domestic setting and clan. This is further emphasized in the duet below performed by Amone Watmon, playing the *nanga* and singing with a female companion as the lead singer.

Female: <i>Aii yee!</i> <i>Piny oloya kun ineno ba</i> <i>Kun balla mo peke.</i>	<i>Aii yee!</i> I am in dire state while you look on Moreover I committed no fault.
Male: <i>Bal mo peke!</i>	No fault at all!
Female: <i>Aii yee!</i> <i>Omera ma kono dwoka gang wa.</i> <i>Lok odoko rac.</i>	<i>Aii yee!</i> My brother should take me home. Things have turned bad.
Male: <i>Tim ma lurok ocaho</i> <i>Joni ocaho lok anywar.</i> <i>Oweko tin Watmon loko</i> <i>ma iye wang do.</i>	What the foreigners are doing is a matter of foolery. That is why Watmon talks with a burning heart.
Female: <i>Bal mo peke!</i> <i>Bal inongo kwene?</i> <i>Kum balla mo peke.</i>	No fault at all! Where can you get any fault? I have committed no fault.



Male: <i>Bal mo peke!</i>	No fault at all!
Female: <i>Aii yee!</i> <i>Omera ma kono dwoka gang wa</i> <i>ka leko dyang tuma.</i>	<i>Aii yee!</i> My brother should take me home to look after cows instead.
Male: <i>Eno tim ma lurok tin okelo</i> <i>tuma wabedo piny ka laro lok.</i> <i>Oweko tin Amone gonyo nanga</i> <i>ma cwinye cwer.</i>	What the foreigners are doing we better sit down and discuss. That is why Amone plays the <i>nanga</i> with a painful heart.
Female: <i>Joni gukelo anywar.</i> <i>Loko gire ma kun niang do</i> <i>ni balla mo peke.</i>	These people have brought foolery. He talks while he knows that I have committed no fault.
Male: <i>Bal mo peke!</i>	No fault at all!
Female: <i>Wora ma kono dwoko gang wa</i> <i>Lok odoko rac.</i>	My father should take me back home Things have turned bad.
Male: <i>Lurok okelo anywar</i> <i>Tuma wabedo piny ka laro lok</i> <i>Oweko Watmon goyo</i> <i>ma kun paro ba.</i>	The foreigners have brought foolery It is better we sit down and discuss. That is why Amone plays [ <i>nanga</i> ] with a lot of worries.

Note that in the above song the concept of power as protection is invoked. The female persona calls upon her father and brother for protection, not her mother or sister (may be because they are also equally ‘powerless’ in this kind of scenario). She says “My brother should take me home.... My father should take me back home/ Things have turned bad.” In an apparently male dominated society, it is male power that is expected to confront male power; therefore, she calls upon her father or brother to confront her husband and take her ‘back home.’ In a society where a female is expected to account for her movement, a male relative is expected to see her out of an abusive relationship instead of her taking the initiative on her own and quitting.

Descent is patrilineal among the Acoli. That means the female and her children belong to different clans. Although she lives the rest of her life in the clan to

which her husband and children are members, she culturally does not belong to that clan. It is in this context that we understand the reference to ‘foreigners’ in the song. In the song it is stated: “What the foreigners are doing/ is a matter of foolery.” Foreigners refer to her husband’s clansmen and immediate family.

To the Acoli the family location is very crucial in defining gender power relations. He or she who relocates to the clan territory of his or her partner loses authority in the relationship to the person on whose clan land the family settles. This is usually the female, although in exceptional circumstances the male who settles with his partner in the female’s clan territory also suffer the same fate. For example, in discussing the position of the priestess of Jok Lokka of Koc, a subgroup of the Acoli, Okot p’Bitek writes:

The clan of the priestess had a vested interest in the priesthood, because they benefited from it. This partly explains why, if Jok had fallen on a woman who was married in another part of Koc, or elsewhere, it became necessary for her to leave the home of her marriage and come and settle in the territory of her clan. The position of the husband was greatly affected because he ceased to be the head of the homestead, and had almost no say with regard to property in their house. His name was very rarely mentioned, and even the children were called after their mother. (p’Bitek 1980: 78).

The above quote serves to show how the family location impacts on gender power relations among the Acoli.<sup>16</sup>

Just as descent is patrilineal, so is inheritance. In the event of death it is the male heir who inherits property of the deceased, not his wife or wives. In the event that the male offspring is still a minor, the next male relative (usually the brother of the dead) inherits the property in a care-taker capacity. This traditional practice deprives the female of the right to property or wealth which she contributed

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<sup>16</sup> I remember in 1984 the husband of one of my paternal aunts settled with her on the land of my grandfather, Cumuni Okene, because it was closer to his work place in Gulu. His father from Kitgum paid a visit and asked my grandfather for the “bride-wealth” for his son since he has been “married” into the family and lost his authority as a man.

towards together with her late husband. There are numerous songs of veiled protest to this practice. For instance, the common song sang in many parts of Acoli which is here performed by Amone Watmon:

<i>Can opoto,</i>	Death has occurred
<i>lalaku kumi litete</i>	the inheritor is excited.
<i>Dyang odong,</i>	The cattle has been left behind
<i>lalaku leko</i>	the inheritors herds it
<i>Calo yang ongeyo willo</i>	As if he knew how to buy.
<i>Lalaku mak giri</i>	Inheritor you just grab it
<i>Kumi gum ada</i>	You are lucky indeed.
<i>Can opoto,</i>	Death has occurred
<i>lalaku kumi litete</i>	the inheritor is excited.
<i>Won lim odonyo i bur</i>	The wealth's owner has entered the grave
<i>lalaku mato laling-ling</i>	the inheritor drinks it quietly
<i>Calo yang ogeyo tiyo lim.</i>	As if he knew how to work for it.
<i>Lalaku cam giri</i>	Inheritor just eat it
<i>Kumi gum ada.</i>	You are lucky indeed.
<i>Ka can tin opoto ada,</i>	If death occurs today,
<i>lalaku kato oyot</i>	the inheritor hurries immediately
<i>Macalo yang opiro pire wa con.</i>	As if he had been wishing for it.
<i>Lalaku kumi gum ada</i>	Inheritor you are lucky indeed
<i>Lalaku lak giri</i>	Inheritor just inherit
<i>Kumi gum daa,</i>	You are lucky indeed.

The above song is a criticism of the lopsided gender power relation whereby the females who often actively participate in helping their male partners to accumulate wealth are denied direct ownership. Instead, upon the death of their male partners, loafers take over the hard earned gain just to squander it. By referring to the dead as “[t]he wealth’s owner,” there seems to be a negation of the claim laid to the household wealth by the widow(s). Because inheritance is patrilineal, the female cannot inherit property or wealth because she is dislocated from her own patriarchal clan to a ‘foreign’ patriarchal clan at marriage.

We do notice the sarcastic tone of the song in remarks such as:

Inheritor you are lucky indeed  
Inheritor just inherit

You are lucky indeed.

The sarcasm is reinforced by the fact that as soon as the so-called owner of the wealth has been entered into the grave, “the inheritor drinks it quietly/ As if he knew how to work for it.” There is no mention of the widow in the song as if to emphasize her invisibility where wealth ownership is concerned.

As seen in the discussion in this section, the gender power relation matrix among the Acoli is indeed complex. It is influenced and shaped by both the traditional gender concepts in society as well as a number of socio-economic factors.

#### **4.6. Conclusion**

As P. Lather has suggested: “We are seen to live in webs of multiple representations of class, race, gender, language and social relations; meanings vary even within one individual” (Lather 1992: 101). So, in our analysis of Acoli song performance we are made to be aware of the negotiation of multiple identities – with gender being one of these identities that are often overlapping, complementing and sometimes even contradicting each other within an individual. We do take into consideration the complexity of identity positioning over time and space. As J. Scott points out, self-identity “is constituted and reconstituted relationally, its boundaries repeatedly remapped and renegotiated” (Scott 1987: 17). And, Acoli song performance is an integral part of this process of remapping and renegotiating gender identity; or even the process of resisting identity re-signification.

Gender identity construction has a direct impact on gender power relations. Although these can, to a certain degree, be influenced by the prevailing socio-economic realities in society, they are to a great extent shaped by traditional cultural ideologies and concepts. Sometimes the renegotiation and remapping of gender identity and relations takes place largely within the boundaries of the

greater cultural ideologies. Therefore, it is important that we should not stop only at analysing gender concepts and ideologies, but go a step farther to examine the overall cultural concepts and ideologies which do shape gender perceptions and practices in society.