

Chapter Seven

ACOLI SONG PERFORMANCE AND THE PERFORMATIVITY THEORY

7.1. Introduction

There is a popular anecdote of a man who lost something in the dark, but was found on his knees looking for it under the lamp-post. His logic was that it is easier to see in the light of the lamp-post, than in the dark where he lost it. In the same vein, to solve the gender problems and understand the complex gender situations in Africa, African gender activists and scholars have often searched under the intellectual and theoretical lamp-post of America and Europe – adopting paradigms brewed in the North-Atlantic academia and social set-up, and trying to map them onto African situations.

Some years ago, as young scholars at Makerere University, a few of us felt there was need to develop an African gender theory relevant to the African situation. (And we promised ourselves we could do it). A few years down the road and none of us has yet come up with such gender theory. We realised developing theories is not as easy as we had earlier thought. So one fellow said “To hell with theories, what is important is to analyse the African gender situation and tell it as it is.” But some of us felt theories are important in every academic discipline, and if we cannot develop what we can baptise as “African” gender theories, at least we should examine the merits and relevance of the various theories to the African gender situations, and see what useful insights we can garner from these so-called Western gender theories to understand better our gender situations. This is exactly what I set out to do in this chapter

This chapter attempts to explore the relevance and applicability of the gender performativity theory to the African situation.¹ This is done based on the fieldwork study of song performance among the Acoli of northern Uganda.

7.2. Gender as Performative

One aspect of the performativity theory I found particularly useful and insightful in my study of Acoli song performance is the casting of gender as performative. Judith Butler argues that:

... gender proves to be performative – that is, constituting the identity it purported to be. In this sense, gender is always a doing.... There is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very ‘expressions’ that are said to be its results. (Butler 1990: 25)

However, because of the cyclic nature of the process I would say it is difficult to definitely say what comes first (gender identity or the performance of it), but the argument that gender is performative is quite plausible. Sometimes identity is constituted in performance drawing from tradition. Generally human beings tend to assimilate/learn gender positioning by repeated acts right from childhood.

As Melissa D’Agostino (2003) would put it, personhood, and by implication gender identity, “draws on the embodied traits and physical manifestations acquired by individuals as they develop an understanding of their place within a group” (290). She adds that in this way, “individuals are able to embody the characteristics favoured by the group with whom they identify” (290). As members of the Acoli cultural group, males and females are conditioned through up-bringing to perform specific gender traits, and these gender identities find expression and re-enactment in song performance. A brief demonstrative analysis

¹ While I am aware that there are many writers/theorists in the field of performance like Dennis Tedlock, Charles Briggs, Elizabeth Fine, Richard Scheckner, Victor Turner, etc., I have chosen to focus mainly on a range of theorists who specifically address questions of gender and performance.

of the song below shows how song performance can be an occasion for a re-enactment or re-signification of gender identity construction. First, listen to the song:

*Latin kayo ka maa, aii!
Twon got ma yam ageno
Iweko ot odong malik
Iweko ot odong ki aculibe.*

My mother's first born, oh!
The bull rock I once hoped in
You left the homestead desolate
You left the homestead for *aculibe* [rats].

*Latin kayo ka maa, yai!
Oteka ma yam ageno
Iweko paco oling
Iweko cwinya cwer kuman!
why!*

My mother's first born, dear!
The hero I once hope in
You have terminated the lineage
You have left my heart dripping [with pain],
why!

*Latin kayo ka maa, wee!
Iweko gang odong ki turu obiya
Twon weko paco ling
Ot odong malik ada!*

My mother's first born, oh dear!
You left the homestead for *obiya* flowers
The bull has terminated the lineage
The homestead has truly turned desolate!

*Latin kayo ka maa, yai!
Okutu lango ma yam ageno
Iweko gang ki mon
Iweko gang odong obur.*

My mother's first born, dear!
The *lango* thorn I once hoped in
You left the homestead for women
You left the homestead dead.

The above dirge was performed by female relatives of a deceased male at a funeral at Okeyomero village, Acoyo parish, in Gulu district. The Acoli believe that tears don't lie – so, from a metacommunicative point of view, the imports of the dirge ought to be taken seriously as coming from deep down the hearts of the mourners.

Through use of language there is a re-creation of specific gender identity construction in the song performance. For example, note the symbolic reference to the deceased male as “The *lango* thorn....” Traditionally, the thorny branches of the *lango* tree (*zizyphus mauritana*) were used as a protective hedge around the homestead. The thorns secured the occupants, and obviously was an aggressive defence towards intruders. Although the *lango* is no longer used to secure the homestead in many Acoli homes, it has continued to be used in speech as a

symbol of protection and security. Here, the male is construed as the metaphorical *lango* thorn – the protector and defender of the homestead (and society). He is also looked at as “The bull rock...”, thereby associating masculinity with might. A ‘rock’ is, among other things, considered a cultural symbol of indefatigability and constancy; and a ‘bull’ is a panegyric metaphor among the Acoli.

On the other hand, the females are cast as “*aculibe* [rats]” to whom the homestead has been left by the demise of the only heir apparent. From the Acoli cultural conceptual point of view, a rat is an insignificant creature, and yet very destructive (cf. Okot 1994: 144). The *aculibe* species of rats is one that turns on and ‘cannibalises’ other rats – just as the females are assumed to turn on each other in moments of jealousy. The females are also referred to as “*obiya* flowers.” The *obiya* grass (*imperata cylindrica*) abounds in Acoliland. At the onset of the first rains in January/February the burnt *obiya* regenerate and soon cover the scenery with beautiful white flowers. For the Acoli, a flower depicts not so much beauty as temporality. Given the patrilocality of the marital abode among the Acoli, females born in a homestead are considered temporary – like flowers they are eventually ‘picked’ and go to ‘beautify’ other people’s homestead. Hence, as the dirge states, the demise of the only male-child in the homestead has “terminated the lineage” and “left the homestead dead.” Although the above cited song does not explicitly bring out the gender power relations, it points out the patriarchal practice in Acoli society, where descent (and by inference inheritance) is patrilineal.

Through the performance of the above dirge binary gender social construction is also performed and re-enacted – a continual repetitive act of what goes on in every day real life. In the song the women perform and reinforce their own ‘apparent’ social ‘insignificance’ in the domestic gender power relation. I say ‘apparent’ because the mourners are not directly referring to themselves as the relatives of the dead, but to ‘other’ women (the so-called foreigners) who are married into the homestead – although by inference they cast themselves too in

the same light. Both the female relatives and the women married in the home are *obiya* grass flowers with the potential to change their abode and marry/re-marry into another clan. The very social structure of the Acoli society occasion and reinforce the gender practices and perceptions highlighted in the dirge, which in essence is the gender performance engrained in the society.

The fact that the performers of the above dirge are females raises an issue worth further investigation: Do they actually consciously believe in the character traits portrayed in the song, or are they sub-consciously ‘compelled’ by the heterosexist identity construction occasioned by hegemonic discourses in Acoli society?

Apart from the verbal element, other components of Acoli song performance used to generate meaning are music (and other sound devices) and kinesics, which includes facial expressions, gestures and dance. In the case of the above-cited performance, there was a marked absence of dancing and use of musical instrument such as drums. This was to emphasise the sad occasion since the young man died in his prime without a male child. If he were an elderly person he would be mourned with drumming and dancing to celebrate his life – for in death the Acoli do not only mourn the dead but also celebrate his/her life. In this case the facial expressions and gestures of the performers expressed ultimate sadness and utter loss, and this went to complement the verbal element in accentuating meaning. Note that body language and gestures are to a great extent gendered among the Acoli. Public display of emotion is considered feminine – so is the act of showing a sense of loss by striking the chest and rolling in the dust that marked the performance of the above dirge.

As Judith Butler points out, “gender is not a noun, but neither is it a set of free floating attributes,” because “the substantive effect of gender is performatively produced and compelled by the regulatory practices of gender coherence” (1990: 24). The gender attributes expressed, performed and enhanced through Acoli songs is a continuation of the compelling gender socialisation through repeated

performance that goes on day-in-day-out. Song performance among the Acoli is part and parcel of their every day existence – they sing when they are happy, they sing when they are sad, and they sing when they are upset or angry. Songs welcome a child at birth, see him or her through life, inculcate into him or her the cultural philosophy and values of the Acoli, give expression to his aspirations and frustrations, and accompany him or her to the grave. Therefore, song performance is an integral part of Acoli social life; and an important component of Acoli gender performativity. Songs perform cultural functions, they are a form of social action and, hence, act as a compelling cultural agent for gender performativity.

An example of songs performing cultural functions is illustrated in the following wedding ceremony songs I recorded at a wedding I attended. Among the Acoli it is considered uncultured and crude for the groom’s party to tease or ridicule their in-laws in everyday ordinary speech. Such an act would be construed as an insult to the mother-in-law, and a hefty fine would be levied. However, it is acceptable for them to tease, ridicule or even insult the in-laws in songs; and their counterpart are expected to respond likewise in songs. This sets off a communicative dialogue in songs. In this case, it was the bride’s side that set off the ridicule after they had formally acknowledged the union. In the song below they ridiculed the groom for bringing in a meagre bride-wealth:

<i>In, ikwanyo waa tyen woru dong odoko lacul luk.</i>	You, you took away your father’s footwear and turned it into a payment for elopement fine.
<i>In, icato waa tyen meni ka inyomo ki dako, eno!</i>	You, you sold your mother’s footwear and married with it a woman, oh!
<i>In, iwoto pang pang man watimo nining....</i>	You, you are a loafer now, what can we do with you....

The groom’s party shot back with the following song:

<i>Won-kom kong ingol ba Ka ngolo yot Wabineno nyari ka ogwoko gang</i>	Chairman, you just set the bride-price Setting is easy But we shall see whether your daughter will take care of the home.
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Won nyako kong ilok ba
Ka loko yot
Wabineno nyari
ka ogwoko welo
Min nyako kong iker ba
Ka lilo yot
Wabineno nyari
ka odoyo doo...

Girl's father, you just talk on
Talking is easy
But we shall see whether your daughter
will take care of guests.
Girl's mother, you just brag on
Bragging is easy
But we shall see whether your daughter
will take care of weeds in the fields...

This demonstrates one of the important cultural functions that songs perform. It is common cultural practice for the two parties to ridicule one another during cultural wedding ceremonies, but only in songs. One may twist the wordings of a known wedding song to befit the appropriate response and what one wants to put across. It is like a teasing and ridiculing duel, which is part of the people's culture.

An examination of several Acoli wedding songs (the above inclusive) would attest to the fact that song performances do not only reflect or portray the existing 'compulsory' heterosexuality and binary gender attributes reinforced by hegemonic discourse in society, but act as a site for the performance and enhancement of those gender conceptions. This is in agreement with Butler's theorization. She argues that:

The institution of a compulsory and naturalised heterosexuality requires and regulates gender as a binary relation in which the masculine term is differentiated from a feminine term, and this accomplished through the practice of heterosexual desire. The act of differentiating the two oppositional moments of the binary results in a consolidation of each term, the respective internal coherence of sex, gender, and desire. (Butler 1990: 22-23)

In many Acoli song performances (like the two cited above) sex, gender and desire are collapsed together; and gender is presented as a binary relation, masculine as opposed to feminine. The masculine attributes are projected in the first song. The male is culturally designated as a provider, and to impress upon the groom's people his duty to provide for his wife the song indicates that the groom should have given

an ample amount for the bride-price.² Instead he turns up with a meagre amount and, hence, he is teased: “You, you sold your mother’s footwear/ and married with it a woman, oh!” To rub it in they sing to him: “You, you are a loafer/ now, what can we do with you....” A male is not only expected to be a provider for his household but also provide for his parents. That is why a male child is referred to as “*okutu lango*” (*lango* thorn) that ensures the protection (socially and economically) of members of his household and homestead. To be told that he sold the footwear of his mother (instead of providing for her) to marry a woman is to project his failure as a man; and it is an insult to his culturally designated manhood. No man wants to be laughed at through songs for not being man enough, and all throughout his life he will strain to perform the gender attributes assigned by hegemonic discourse to the masculine term.

The feminine attributes are projected in the second song which is a rebuttal to the first. Having borne the insult about the said failed gender performance of their son by their in-laws in the making, the groom’s people challenge the bride’s people saying that they will audit the gender performance of the wife-to-be. They sing: “...we shall see whether your daughter/ will take care of the home.... will take care of guests.... will take care of weeds in the fields....” Sticking with the heterosexual notion, domestic roles are assigned along designated gender lines among the Acoli. The female is expected to be welcoming and hospitable, so she is supposed to take care of guests. Her identity is circumscribed by the domestic setting, so she is expected to take care of the home. The male, attributed with strength, is expected to open up virgin fields and till the soil in preparation for planting; while the female attributed with diligence (but less strength) is expected to weed and tend the crops. The song challenges the wife-to-be to perform these culturally assigned gender attributes.

² I have used the compound word “bride-price” for lack of an English equivalent. *Lim-keny* is a token of commitment given to the bride’s people which acceptance culturally formalizes and seals not only the union between the man and woman but also cements a new relationship between their two families and clans. The bigger the token the better – as a sign of serious commitment. However, I must added that with the advent of the cash economy this cultural symbol of commitment and establishment of relationship has verged on commercialization, whereby the bride’s people sometimes seek to handsomely gain from the marriage of their daughter.

By assigning roles that are essential for the survival and continued existence of the family (and ultimately society) along male/female sex/gender lines, heterosexuality is reinforced and performed in songs and every day life practices. This in a way “regulates gender as a binary relation in which the masculine term is differentiated from a feminine term” (Butler 1990: 22).

It is also worth noting that in ritual efficacy among the Acoli, where words or the text of the songs are used to perform significant cultural and social actions, identity (including gender identity) is expressed and enhanced through performativity. Take, for example, the song below recorded at a spiritual ceremony to cast out Jok Kulu (an evil spirit) from a person:

<i>Eee-e! jok lawiny</i>	Eee-e! you listening deity
<i>Eee-e! watango cing wa</i>	Eee-e! we beseech you
<i>Eee-e! jok paco, kony wa.</i>	Eee-e! deity of the homestead, help us.
<i>Eee-e! two opoto i paco.</i>	Eee-e! sickness has fallen in the home.
<i>Eee-e! jok tuwa!</i>	Eee-e! our deity!
<i>Eee-e! gemo odonyo i paco.</i>	Eee-e! evil spirits have enter the home.
<i>Eee-e! wabako dog wa....</i>	Eee-e! we implore you...
<i>Awiyo tolla</i>	I make my rope
<i>tol ma laworo</i>	the rope of yesterday
<i>Awiyo tolla</i>	I make my rope
<i>omako lacek.</i>	which caught a duiker.
<i>Awiyo tolla</i>	I make my rope
<i>tol ma laworo</i>	the rope of yesterday
<i>omako jubi...</i>	which caught a buffalo...
<i>“Aa! adok tuwa ya</i>	“Hey! I am going back to my abode
<i>Adok tuwa.</i>	I am going back to my abode.
<i>Wan ki tuwa wa mwodo geng</i>	At my abode we eat flesh.
<i>Kany cam peke.</i>	Here there is no food.
<i>Adok tuwa.</i>	I am going back to my abode.
<i>Wan ki tuwa wa mwodo geng.</i>	At my abode we eat flesh.
<i>Adok tuwa....”</i>	I am going back to my abode....”
<i>Gang-wu tye i kulu,</i>	Your abode is in the rivers,
<i>Gange-wu tye i kulu....</i>	Your abode is in the rivers....

Ceng amaki,
twong-gweno kok.

Ceng amaki,
labolo woo....

If I catch you,
a cock will scream.

If I catch you,
bananas will yell...

The above in performance sounds like not one song but several songs strung together in clever successions. First the diviner (*ajwaka*) leads those present in a song beseeching the clan deity to come to their aid in casting out the evil spirit of sickness from the homestead. Next they purportedly join the deity in singing out a challenge and a threat to the evil spirit, Jok Kulu – making a rope for it.³ Then they give voice to the evil spirit, singing of going back to its natural habitat. Lastly, they join the deity again telling the evil spirit its habitat is in the rivers, and singing that if it ever got caught it will be completely annihilated. At this point the evil spirit flees (actually it is the possessed person who runs off), and the congregation gives chase with the diviner in the lead shaking a rattling gourd vigorously. I couldn't keep up with the chase, but I was told that eventually when the patient was caught up with, they sang asking the setting sun to take all the evil in the homestead with it into darkness; and the patient walked back home supposedly without the demon. This is a case where words in songs 'perform' action in ritual efficacy.

The above song(s) gives credence to Butler's assertion that identity is performative. As Jell-Bahlsen (1998) points out, understanding the divine aspect of womanhood would help to illuminate the powers of women who are priestesses of African deities. Diviners among the Acoli are usually women, and divination is closely linked to the female identity (and men who pose as diviners are often regarded as con-men who are in it for the money without any real spiritual powers).⁴ In the

³ Okot p'Bitek notes that Jok Kulu was held responsible for miscarriage, therefore blocking a female from childbirth and becoming a proper woman (p'Bitek 1980: 112).

⁴ Okot 'Bitek points out that the priestess of Jok Lokka, the chiefdom deity of the Koc clan could also divine, unlike her male counter-parts who were priests of deities of other clans who could only perform their priestly duties without the gift of divination (p'Bitek 1980: 77-80). Divination was often rewarded with presents and payment, but performing priestly duties at clan shrines had no rewards. That is why p'Bitek comments that:

Jok Lapul of Palaro was last celebrated in 1943. The priest died soon afterwards, and his sons refused to inherit the office. The priest's two brothers migrated and

song performance transcribed above, the diviner [see Appendix II, Photo U] actually performs the divine attribute of her culturally ascribed gender. At the beginning of the song she sings together with the congregation beseeching the deity for help: “Eee-e! you listening deity.... we beseech you.... deity of the homestead, help us.” Thereafter she makes some guttural sound and assumed another identity (apparently after the deity has entered into her, summoned by her spiritual powers); and the deity sings the threat to Jok Kulu through her mouth:

I make my rope
the rope of yesterday
which caught a buffalo...

If I catch you,
a cock will scream.
If I catch you,
bananas will yell...

By referring to “the rope of yesterday which caught a buffalo” the deity (and by association the diviner) is depicted as well practiced at ensnaring – so the evil spirit should be rightly scared. A cock is an Acoli metaphor for an arrogant fighter – so when caught the fighter [evil spirit] “will scream.” When one runs through a banana plantation there is some yelling noise made by the dry banana leaves – so the evil spirit is threatened with imminent flight resulting from what is going to be inflicted on it. During these utterances the diviner is no longer regarded as the every day woman going about her normal female duties in the village, but as possessed by a benevolent spirit using her human form and speech organ. (And the patient is no longer the ordinary sick human being but has become the embodiment of the evil spirit being addressed).

Although not every Acoli woman can be a diviner, diviners are usually women. It is believed the spirits choose women with a stronger feminine divine attribute than

settled in other parts of Acoliland to escape becoming priests. Today Lapul is without a priest (p’Bitek 1980: 65).

While the religious rituals at some clan shrines are no longer performed because of changing times, divination continues to be a common practice (especially by the *ajwaki* female diviners).

others to become diviners. This attests to Butler's assertion that we cannot talk of a uniform identity for the 'women' sorority (1990: 3-4) – the female identities are variegated and complex and conditioned by various factors even within one ethnic group like the Acoli. Yet all these identities are performative and naturalised through repeated acts. Butler contends that:

Gender is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of a substance, of a natural sort of being. (Butler 1990: 33)

We notice that gender identity construction is being performed and re-enacted at the above cited ritual ceremony. Apart from reinforcing and acting out the feminine divine attribute of the diviner, the act or ritual performance is also to secure the patient's gender identity as a woman by casting out Jok Kulu responsible for miscarriage that prevents the female from achieving full status as a *woman* as per the gender ideology of the Acoli which prescribes childbirth as essential to the achieving of full womanhood. In the above song we notice that song performance is not only a catalyst in the ritual efficacy, but an integral and indispensable part of it (cf. Kratz 1994).

From the examination of Acoli song performances in this section, and the whole thesis generally, one could say songs are part of gender performativity in the society. They help mediate gender performance both directly and indirectly since they are part and parcel of the Acoli people's every day life – as theatrical, aesthetic renditions and social actions.

Judith Butler's notion of performativity has to do with the 'small', seemingly insignificant acts of everyday life – how we sit, how we carry our body, etc. On the other hand (although borrowing heavily from Butler's notion) my ideas of performativity focus much on the visible and prominent popular cultural form of song performance, which is an important social tool in mediating gender performance in the Acoli society. My argument is that artistic oral performances

among the Acoli do constitute an overt form of gender performativity, an arena where everyday gender performance is re-enacted and re-affirmed.

7.3. The Notion of the Category ‘Women’

Acoli women through song performance express a sense of collective identity as ‘women’, by virtue of their common situation. As John Mbiti candidly puts it: “In traditional life, the individual does not and cannot exist alone except corporately” (Mbiti 1990: 108). Mbiti’s assessment is true of individuals within the Acoli community as a whole (who ascribe to a collective clan and ethnic identity), and also true of the category Acoli ‘women’ conceived as a collective identity

As we have noted before, in many Acoli song performances the voice speaking as and for women as a collective category is quite prominent, even in individualised circumstances of gender relations. It is only through such that a sort of collective subversion and resistance to certain dominant heterosexual notions seem to be attained through song performance – without necessarily running away from their culturally prescribed gender identity. The category ‘women’ is used as a rallying point for Acoli women; and for them this category is not a fiction but a fact they have to live with and use to achieve their aspirations.⁵ To examine this let’s look at the text of one song performance transcribed below:

*Kong ilok itam ba
cwara!*

*Lok onyo kibale ku
ki goyo mon.*

First think when talking
my husband!

Matters shouldn't reach
the point of wife-beating.

⁵ Among the Acoli, women always rally together in some kind of women cooperative, working the fields in women groups instead of individually – and they move from one woman’s field to another as a group. Rallying around the sense of belonging to the category ‘women’ they help each other and are very supportive of each other. Looking for firewood, drawing water, plaiting hair, etc., they always do it as a group (of girls or grown-up women). This kind of solidarity is lacking among the Acoli males who always tend to go it alone.

<i>Cwara!</i> <i>cwara kara pe!</i>	My husband! what a hopeless husband!
<i>Kong imany ngeyi ba</i> <i>cwara!</i> <i>Coo dong twenyo do</i> <i>ki leko mon.</i> <i>Cwara iumu kumi</i> <i>ki nyimi kwe.</i>	Now compare the present with the past my husband! Now you have to suffer because of over-controlling women. In vain will you try to cover yourself with your penis.
<i>Ceng iwaci mon rac</i> <i>kong dong ideno.</i> <i>Coo tye ka yengo olang</i> <i>i ot pa minne ba.</i>	You always said women are no good now you have to endure it. The man is now swinging his bell in his mother's hut. ⁶
<i>Ceng iwaci mon rac</i> <i>kong dong idoyo kwe</i> <i>Iumu kumi ki nyimi kwe</i> <i>Kong dong irego wai.</i> <i>Ceng iwaci mon rac</i> <i>kong dong iregi.</i> <i>Twon ka yengo olang</i> <i>gwok kumi</i> <i>ki kidi.</i>	You always said women are no good now suffer with the weeding. Now your penis won't protect you now you have to grind by all means. You always said women are no good now you have to do the grinding. When the bull swings his bell he should take care less the grinding stone crushes his private parts.
<i>Ceng iwaci mon rac</i> <i>Do mon ma rego</i> <i>Mon ma tedo</i> <i>Mon ma doyo dor.</i> <i>Twon coo ka doyo dor</i> <i>gwok kumi</i> <i>ki obiya.</i>	You always said women are no good Yet it is women who do the grinding It is women who do the cooking And it is women who do the weeding. When the bull of a man is weeding let him take care less the <i>obiya</i> grass cuts his penis.

The above song celebrates the category 'women,' and like many other Acoli song performances, acknowledges the existence of this category as a social and cultural fact. The woman in the song does not refer to herself as an individual but as part of a corporate identity. She remarks: "You always said women are no good...." Instead of referring to her own good deeds, as part of a collective identity in the

⁶ The 'bell' is a veiled reference to the man's testicles, symbolic of his manhood which is subdued by seeking refuge in his mother's hut like a child.

society, she gives the credit to the category 'women.' She says: "...it is women who do the grinding/ It is women who do the cooking/ And it is women who do the weeding." Thinking as part of the corporate entity is branded through socialisation into the Acoli psyche.

It is important to note that the woman does not try to subvert the existing gender situation by changing the way she performs her gender, but by celebrating the performance of her gender – and her corporate gender identity of the category 'women.' In a society where domestic responsibilities, social roles and economic tasks are performed along the binary sex/gender lines, it is hard to ignore the existence of the category 'women' in the survival of the community.

It is true that gender differentiation is sometimes used to discriminate against women. This is acknowledged in the above song by the singing voice's repeated remark: "You always said women are no good." Instead of attempting to subvert the gender differentiation through song performance, the singing voice appropriates this very notion of differentiation and endeavours to project the social and economic significance of the category 'women'. She paints the idea of male social and economic premium and male superiority as a myth when she says "In vain will you try to cover yourself/ with your penis." Without the females the males are depicted as helpless:

When the bull swings his bell
he should take care
less the grinding stone crushes
his private parts.

And:

When the bull of a man is weeding
let him take care
less the *obiya* grass cuts
his penis.

The phallic symbol of the 'penis' is constantly referred to in the song as in danger of harm when the female withdraws her complementary roles in the domestic existence. A man is never a man without the woman. In other words, it is the

females who prop up the male ego; and without the females the males' masculinity is in danger. In such cases the males are reminded "Now your penis won't protect you...."

Note that the persona in the song ascribes to the idea of an existing category 'women'. Although her husband is individualised as a person in the song, the persona submerges herself within the collective identity of 'women'. From that vantage point (using the category 'women' as a site of resistance) the performance attempts to subvert the heterosexual negative image ascribed to her as part of the category 'women' in society.

Although Butler asserts that "It would be wrong to assume in advance that there is a category of 'women' that simply needs to be filled in with various components of race, class, age, ethnicity, and sexuality in order to become complete (Butler 1990: 15), I would argue that this category of 'women' has been created in the minds of people at community level through gender socialisation. I agree with Butler though that we cannot have the same uniform characteristics that describe the category 'women' across race, class, age and ethnicity. At an ethnic level, like in the Acoli society, the notion of the category 'women' is concretised through real life experiences – although the women qualify their collective identity as 'Acoli women' (or even at a more localised level as, say, 'Pageya women' depending on the locale) as opposed to other women.

Acoli women seem to have appropriated the gender categorisation as a rallying point for solidarity, and this is projected in the various dance formations in song-performances. As Tania Kaiser puts it, "[t]he feeling of unity that is generated is reinforced by the fact that the women who are dancing together on special occasions also work together in the course of their day-to-day lives" (Kaiser 2006: 193). This is much more evident in the performance of women-only sub-genres such as *apiti* and *dingidingi* song-dances. For example, Aero Nyero Women's Group performing *dingidingi* (Appendix II, Photo B) and ABC BASH Women's

Group performing *apiti* (Appendix II, Photo J). Usually while dancing they carry flags bearing the name of their work groups, which are actually women's co-operative groups. Thus, I agree with Kaiser when she concludes that, "this is an example of how the social environment of dancing is revealing of entirely other aspects of life" (Kaiser 2006:193). Oftentimes song-dance performances are used to force women issues into the public arena.

The situation of dance-song performance as a tool for female empowerment among the Acoli compares well with Deborah James study of the *kiba* dance-song performance in Johannesburg, South Africa. She comments:

... for the women of *kiba*, singing and dancing were more than simply a source of amusement. Performance provided the initial context within which they were to meet, a model on which to base their association, and an opportunity for "showing off" to others the *diaparo tsa setso* (traditional clothing) which many were beginning to wear. (James 1999: 61).

Just like the women of *kiba* in Johannesburg, Acoli women have often used dance-song performance as a means to call attention to themselves as *women* – armed "with the power of knowledge of their own attractiveness" (Kaiser 2006: 196). Through performance they celebrate and display their femininity. Consider the song below in praise of feminine beauty performed by a group of young women with Susan Akello as the lead singer:

Leng wange, ka aneno
abolo gwon piny.
Aii, lamin apwai we
Leng wang meya.

The beauty of her face, when I see
I throw away the food in my hand.
Oh, the sister of the young man, dear
The beauty of the face of my love.

Otono gute, ka aneno
anino ku kwak
Aii, lamin apwai we
Leng kum meya.

Her graceful neck, when I see
sleep won't catch my eyes at all.
Oh, the sister of the young man, dear
The beauty of the body of my love.

Yom pyere ka abongo
ato woko.

The suppleness of her waist, when I touch
I just die.

*Aii, lamin apwai we
Yom pyer meya!*

Oh, the sister of the young man, dear
The suppleness of my love's waist!

*Taa lake, ka aneno
anino ku kwak
Aii, lamin apwai we
Meya obolo adyeny!*

The whiteness of her teeth, when I see
sleep won't catch my eyes at all.
Oh, the sister of the young man, dear
My love has ample buttocks!

*Leng kume, ka aneno
abolo kwon piny.
Aii, lamin apwai we
Nyapa twon balo wiya.*

The beauty of her body, when I see
I throw away the food in my hand.
Oh, the sister of the young man, dear
The daughter of the bull confuses my head.

The above song portrays how mesmerised the male can be when confronted with feminine beauty. The singing voice shows the male as admitting: "The daughter of the bull confuses my head." A supple waist is associated with femininity among the Acoli, and in performing the dance-songs the females often display how supple their waists are (especially in *dingidingi* and *larakaraka* which are the dances for the youth and the not so old). The song highlights how the male is knocked senseless by this display of femininity: "The suppleness of her waist, when I touch/ I just die." This could be an artistic exaggeration, but it serves to highlight the pride the Acoli females have in their femininity. In her study of Acoli dances Kaiser notes that:

Young Acholi girls are used to being relegated to the periphery of social activity, functioning as cooks and servers at parties and family or clan occasions; the opportunity to participate in a public realm in a situation where self-publicity is acceptable is very much a departure from the norm for them (Kaiser 2006: 196).

In song-dance performance the females not only display their significant selves as females, but also carve for themselves a space in the public realm through which women's issues are forced into the public arena. They appropriate the existing binary gender notions and use them to their advantage.

To further illustrate the use of gender in song performance to achieve desired goals by the female, let us consider the text of the song below performed by Josephine Adong and some women from her small co-operative group:

*Coo mogo lam ada , maa
Coo mukene gwoko mon gi
mega duru mero.
Lim ma ayenyo-ayenya
Lacoo mayo woko
laro te kongo.
Iyare ki cente pa mon*

Te coo ni lam.

*Coo mogo lam ada , maa
Coo mukene gwoko mon gi
mega duru lweny in kuma
dako ma mwa.
Lela ma awilo ki lim aleya*

*Lacoo mayo woko
lak kwede ba.
Iyare ki lela pa mon*

Te coo ni lam.

Some men are cheap, mother
Other men look after their wives
mine just keeps getting drunk.
The wealth I struggled to look for
The man just grabs
and hurries with it to drink.
You swell around
with a woman's money.
Your manhood is negligible.

Some men are cheap, mother
Other men look after their wives
mine just keeps fighting me
a mere woman.
The bicycle I bought
with co-operative money⁷
The man just grabs
and uses it to roam aimlessly.
You swell around
with a woman's bicycle
Your manhood is negligible.

In the above song the female does not attempt to subvert the binary heterosexual notion of gender. Instead she embraces it and from that vantage point uses song performance to present her disquiet in the public arena. She appeals to the culturally designated traits of the male identity as a provider and protector, and paints her husband as a failure and therefore declares: "Some men are cheap, mother."

Her major bone of contention is the husband's behaviour of grabbing whatever she works for, money or bicycle, and using them not for the benefit of the family but for his own selfish interests. Added to that, he physically abuses her. She uses the very cultural sense of masculinity to show how despicable her husband is. She comments:

⁷ Most Acoli women form small co-operative groups through which they give money to each other. The way it works is that each member contributes a small amount at specific intervals which is pooled together and given to one member to invest. At the next collection another member benefits; and it goes round and round.

You swell around
with a woman's money...
You swell around
with a woman's bicycle
Your manhood is negligible.

In the song performance the female does not change the way she performs her gender to protest or contest the abusive relationship. In fact she ascribes to the gendered category 'women', and even refers to herself as "a mere woman" against whom the husband should be ashamed to pit his manly strength. We note that she works the hegemonic gender ideology of the Acoli to her advantage by ascribing to the category 'women'. The Acoli have a saying "*Goro okoko apil*" meaning "The weak always have their weakness appeal for them." If you pit yourself against the weak you lose in the moral court of public opinion.

Thus, one could say the Acoli women to a certain extent do invest in the ideological gender differentiation as a rallying point to weave solidarity among the womenfolk to achieve their goals, and also to attain visibility through song performance, in addition to using the same gender differentiation in song performance to push women's issues into the public arena.

7.4. Contesting the Naturalised Unnatural through Performance

As noted earlier in this chapter, Acoli song performances enhance the performative nature of gender. Through re-enactment in songs, specific gender traits are passed on as natural and acceptable. As Butler puts it, "the power regime of heterosexism and phallogocentrism seek to augment themselves through a constant repetition of their logic, their metaphysic, and their naturalized ontologies" (Butler 1990: 32). Both in *Gender Trouble* and *Bodies that Matter*, Butler argues that repeated performance of specific gender traits serves to make what is unnatural appear natural and legitimises it.

Butler points out that since gender/sex is performative it is possible to change the way we perform our gender – which offers a possibility for re-signification of some of the normative heterosexual notions of gender. She argues that: “If the regulatory fictions of sex and gender are themselves multiply contested sites of meaning, then the very multiplicity of their construction holds out the possibility of a disruption of their univocal posturing” (Butler 1990: 32). She further adds that: “As an ongoing discursive practice, it is open to intervention and resignification” (Butler 1990: 33).

Some feminists who ascribe to the performativity theory, like Monique Wittig (1981), have called for the subversion of the normative notion of gender. However, Amy Allen raises some fundamental questions regarding subverting all the normative notions of gender just because they are unnatural (and are made to appear natural) which I find quite plausible from the Acoli gender perspective. She asks:

But why should we resignify these norms? Why expose them as unnatural? Why denaturalize sex? The answer has to be that unnatural constructs that parade as natural are, in some sense, bad and deserve to be subverted. (Allen 1998: 466)

She wonders what is so bad about the unnatural that all unnatural constructs have to be subverted in the performance of our gender. She argues that some of the constructs are not that bad. A critical study of Acoli song performance would seem to agree with her in some measures. Apart from entertainment, song performance is also didactic. It is especially used to inculcate into the young citizenry of society the cultural values that it upholds - gender perceptions inclusive. It is also used to correct members of society who violate the accepted social norms of the people.

Song performance can partly be viewed as a form of social intervention, especially in gender related disputes. Consider the song below:

<p>Woman: <i>Alany pa coo dwoko i kum mon. Mon ma kikelo-akela ki dyang.</i></p>	<p>The aggressiveness of [some] men they take it out on women. [Mere] women brought with cattle.</p>
<p>Men & Women: <i>Nen kong kit tic ci!</i></p>	<p>Look at this kind of behaviour!</p>
<p>Woman: <i>Eno ba! Cwara, wek lworu. Ma coo wadi wu goyi woko Idwoko among i kuma. Koni atwacci kir</i></p>	<p>There you are! My husband, stop being a coward When fellow men beat you up You take out your frustration on me. I will throw for you the <i>kir</i> curse.⁸</p>
<p>Men & Women: <i>Wek lworu obedi. Coo ngo ma idwoko i kum mon? Te coo ni peke.</i></p>	<p>Stop being a coward. What kind of manly strength is demonstrated on women? Your manhood is despicable.</p>
<p>Woman: <i>Anywar pa coo dwoko i kum mon Mon ma kinyomo-anyoma ki lim.</i></p>	<p>[Some] men are bullies and they take it out on women [Mere] women just married with wealth.</p>
<p>Men & Women: <i>Nen kong kit tic ci!</i></p>	<p>Look at this kind of behaviour!</p>
<p>Woman: <i>Eno ba! Cwara, wek lworu. Ka coo wadi wu loyi woko Idwoko ayella i kuma. Koni atwacci kir</i></p>	<p>There you are! My husband, stop being a coward When fellow men triumph over you You turn your trouble on me. I will throw for you the <i>kir</i> curse.</p>

⁸ *Kir* is a curse a wife can put on her husband and his homestead. Okot p'Bitek graphically describes the act of *kir* among the Acoli. He writes:

When a wife, because of extreme anger of frustration, deliberately took a pot or dish, with or without food in it, or scooped ash from the cooking stove (*keno*) and threw it out, this act was called *twacco kir*. And as she threw the pot, or dish, she said,

Uyaa! An mono pe adano?

Oh! Am I not a human being?

Twacco means to throw something heavy, and not to mind the consequence. The pot, or dish, broke up into bits and the ash scattered in the compound. But it was not thought that the destruction of these object in itself produced the effects of the *kir*. It was the act of throwing them and the few words muttered to herself, taken as expression of the very bitter state of mind, that constituted the *kir*. ... It was believed that ill-health and other misfortune followed the act of *kir* immediately... (p'Bitek 1980: 147).

Men & Women: *Wek lwooro obedi.*
Tek ngo ma idwoko
i kum mon?
Te coo ni peke.

Stop being a coward.
What kind of strength is let loose
on [mere] women?
Your manhood is despicable.

In the song we see the female appropriating the ‘unnatural’ but naturalised gender notion of male strength and female weakness, and using this very notion for her own protection. A man worth his manhood is expected to demonstrate his manly strength on fellow men who are his equal and not let it loose on a woman who is cast as *naturally* weak. Such conduct is considered a cowardly act, and that is why the men and women in the performance representing public opinion remark:

Stop being a coward.
What kind of strength is let loose
on [mere] women?
Your manhood is despicable.

The females are projected in the song as not equal to the males. This is because among other things they are “[Mere] women brought/ with cattle” into the homestead. The very fact that a male has to part with some wealth in the form of cattle to marry a female puts him in a different social rank from her. So to apparently lower himself to her level by pitting his strength against hers is considered despicable.

Because of the Acoli hegemonic discourse that attributes the male gender with physical strength, men are made to perform this gender attribute in daily life and take on roles and tasks that require physical strength. Because the female gender is projected as physically less strong, they too perform this gender attribute in real life and take on roles and tasks that require more tenacity and diligence instead of brute strength. Now, if this ‘unnatural’ notion of male strength which has been naturalised through “repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame” (Butler: 1990: 23) is pitted against an equally

'unnatural' notion of female physical weakness and used to deter domestic violence against women, should we subvert this gender performance?

Furthermore, the female in the song threatens to use the *kir* (a wife's curse) if her husband continues to trouble her. She sings:

My husband, stop being a coward
When fellow men
triumph over you
You turn your trouble on me.
I will throw for you the *kir* curse.

The heterosexual gender ideology of the Acoli gives a female, who has been abused into bitterness and frustration by her husband, the power to put a curse on him and the homestead. She would take a cooking pot or a feeding dish or the ash from the cooking stove and throw it out in an act known as *twacco kir* (throwing the curse). As she did this she would utter the words "*Uyaa! An mono pe adano?* (Please! Am I [also] not a human person?) Okot p'Bitek notes that:

By this act the woman brought an already highly strained relationship to a point of total rupture. In the act of throwing the pot or dish or ash, she symbolically broke off all the duties and obligations of a wife and mother. The pot which was used for cooking and the dish for feeding her husband and children were broken up, and the ash from the kitchen stove thrown out. At that point she ceased being a wife and mother, and worse, she became a dangerous person to the family and the lineage group. And what was a matter within the household now assumed lineage or even clan importance. (p'Bitek 1980: 147).

Through song performance the females often reminded the males of their ability and gendered power to curse the homestead and bring misfortune; and this usually acts as a check on male excesses. As p'Bitek puts it:

The wife's curse posed a permanent threat for husbands with a tendency to trouble their wives. Everyone knew that if a man persisted in troubling his wife she might commit *kir*. It operated as a brake in situations when relationships between husband and wife steadily deteriorated, mainly due to the man's fault. But it also offered an opportunity for a settlement of serious problems by a solemn ceremony. (p'Bitek 1980: 148)

Twacco kir is the ultimate weapon a female in an extremely abusive relationship would use, by virtue of her position as a mother and a wife. The females are discouraged by society to resort to this, but it is generally considered a better alternative than if she was driven to commit suicide because then, it is believed, her ghost would turn into *lacen* (an avenging spirit). The act of *kir* pushes a domestic situation into the public arena and a ceremony known as *goyo ayoo* (scattering peace) is performed to restore harmony. Songs such as the one cited in this section are often used to constantly remind the males of the gendered power of the females to *twacco kir*, and thereby caution them about pushing their wives to the limit. Here we see songs being used to propagate unnatural naturalised gender notion, but for a good cause.

In some of the song performances examined in this study, being hospitable and caring is projected as a feminine attribute among the Acoli. Should we endeavour to subvert this ‘unnatural’ phenomenon ‘naturalised’ and culturally assigned to the female gender? Should Acoli men stop performing their ‘unnatural’ but ‘naturalised’ gender attributes of providing for and protecting their household? As social beings, that have to co-exist in a social situation, do we have to subvert the culturally assigned gender attributes and roles for the sake of it?

To further illustrate the argument, let us consider again the text of the song performance by Ogwang Kilippa playing the *nanga* and his wife as the lead singer which is reproduced on page 160. Here is an excerpt:

<i>Lacen poto kili.</i>	The evil spirit drops like a knife without a handle.
<i>Lacen poto ni kili!</i>	The evil spirit drops like a knife without a handle!
<i>Ka ngat ma oketo cwinye</i>	She who devotes her heart
<i>ka twono cware kwon</i>	to denying her husband food
<i>cengu binongo.</i>	will one day meet it.
<i>Lacen poto ni kili!</i>	The evil spirit drops like a knife without a handle!
<i>Lacen poto kili.</i>	The evil spirit drops like a knife without a handle.
<i>Lacen poto ni kili!</i>	The evil spirit drops like a knife without a handle!
<i>Ka ngat ma oketo cwinye</i>	She who devotes her heart

ka yeto kwaaro
cengu binongo.
Lacen poto ni kili!

to insulting her father-in-law
will one day meet it.
The evil spirit drops like a knife without a handle!

Gender and social relations in general are regulated by a set of beliefs and taboos among the Acoli, which are reproduced and enhanced in song performances. In line with his gender attribute as a protector, the construction of a shelter is considered a male duty – and yet it is considered a taboo for the male to lock out his female counter-part from this shelter however angry he may be. Nurturing is a female gender attribute, and the preparation and serving of food is considered a female duty – and yet it is considered a taboo for the female to deny her male counter-part food. That is why in the excerpt of the song above it is stated: “The evil spirit drops like a knife without a handle! She who devotes her heart/ to denying her husband food/ will one day meet it.” Although highly gendered, the Acoli society has its checks and balances for male or female excesses in gender performance – this is reinforced through cultural beliefs.

Gender performance is one of the means through which the social order and organisation in Acoli society is ensured. A human being is a social being (with emotional and spiritual needs) and more than just a biological substance. Song performance serves as one of the vital tools for ideological propagation and, by extension, a means for social organisation.

Human beings are social beings that have to co-exist with others in a community; and to ensure harmony and order in this co-existence some regulatory frame is inevitable (be it philosophical or religious) – and often gender has been factored into the regulatory social framework (for better or for worse). Although some gender practices/performances are debilitating to the subject, others are essential for the harmonious and continued existence of society.

7.5. Contextualizing the Subject

I do agree with Lise Nelson (1999:342) in her argument that discussing performativity without contextualising the subject performing gender “leads to a static description of identities without inquiry into contextual causes and effects of various performances.” There is a need to treat the subjects performing identities as concrete human subjects within specific spatial and temporal contexts, without ignoring the socio-historical embeddedness of the performances themselves. Only then can we be able to adequately theorise agency, change and resistance involving multiply-positioned concrete subjects historically and geographically located; and understand better why and how the speaking human subject performs multiple identities, gender inclusive.(See Katz 1994; Nast 1994; and Staeheli & Lawson 1994).

Through contextualisation we can be able to explain how and why human subjects negotiate multiple discourses at specific moments in real life situations. For example, let us consider the song below performed by Roslyn Otim:

<i>Cwar mon alwak ka iyee ceng kom Nongo rac, nongo lara!</i>	A collective husband when you go for him It is terrible, it is competitive!
<i>En tamo ni en eryek In itamo ni in iryek. Idonyo kenyo, aya Diro kwiri cake. Ka nyuto diro wulek-lek mo!</i>	She thinks she is wiser You think you are wiser! There you go, oh [And] the show of diligence starts. To show diligence you strive to out-compete!
<i>Nyeka ocanyo leb i kum dyel Nongo yeta! Min-nyako ocelo wer i wii dyang Nongo caya! Nen ka olwongo gweno ni “lyer!” Nongo paka! Nyani ocuru gwok, aya Nongo coko an! Dok onwoyo leb ni “gitim!”</i>	My co-wife hits her tongue at a goat She is actually insulting me! The girl’s mother sings at a cow She is actually despising me! Look, she calls a hen an “ass-hole!” She is actually praising me! The woman blasts a dog, oh She is actually cautioning me! She repeats the insult “wild animal!”

<i>Nongo lanyala!</i>	She is actually humiliating me!
<i>Min-Okello ocibo bel i dye kal, agolo ita. Akuro wer, akuro mwoc ma ita twolo.</i>	[When] Okello's mother puts millet in the compound, I keep my ears open. I wait for a song, I wait for <i>mwoc</i> ⁹ with my ears wide open.
<i>Cako daa tek nongo ni wer yot. Min-jok ogungu i but kidi bel otum atura. Lanyani ocwinya Abwot kuku oduro....</i>	Starting a quarrel is hard, she finds singing easier. When the mother of the deity kneels by the grinding stone the millet gets finished quickly. The woman stung me [with insults] I almost made an alarm....
<i>Kwo nyeko yo, kwo nyeko kelo lara.....</i>	Living as co-wives, living as co-wives brings rivalry...

The above song performance shows us how important it is to contextualise the subjects performing gender so as to better understand how some gender attributes evolve, instead of blaming it all on some “patriarchal coercive hegemonic discourse.” One’s behaviour, personality and worldview are shaped by the environment in which one lives. In a situation where there is high male mortality and women greatly out-number men, polygamy has become acceptable. But this is wrought with its difficulties. As the sing voice states: “A collective husband/ when you go for him/ it is terrible, it is competitive!” And she concludes: “Living as co-wives... brings rivalry.” Women are not coerced into a polygamous relationship, but willingly enter into it instead of remaining single when they cannot get a man all to themselves. In the polygamous marriage they try to out-shine the ‘other’ woman, and in some cases even engineer her divorce so that they have the man all to themselves. This is the concrete reality pertaining in the Acoli society. As the singing voice puts it:

She thinks she is wiser
You think you are wiser!
There you go, oh

⁹ *Mwoc* is a poetic praise utterance, either in praise of one’s self or the clan to which one belongs, but it is sometimes laced with insults towards others.

[And] the show of diligence starts.
To show diligence
you strive to out-compete!

Jealousy and cunning is associated with femininity among the Acoli. It is not some attributes coercively handed down for the females to perform, but evolve out of the concrete situation of their lives where they have to survive; and through repeated performance of these attributes, they became gendered.

Song performance as a tool of social action and re-action is very much part of the Acoli social existence. She who starts a quarrel is always faulted, so some women cunningly try to make the other woman look bad as the originator of the quarrel by simply singing while performing the daily chores like grinding millet (to provoke the other to start a quarrel). It is rare to find an Acoli woman grinding silently – the logic is that singing makes the work less tiring, more enjoyable and faster. This is clearly put by the singing voice:

Starting a quarrel is hard,
she finds singing easier.
When the mother of the deity kneels
by the grinding stone
the millet gets finished quickly.
The woman stung me [with insults]
I almost made an alarm....

That is why the singing voice remarks: “[When] Okello’s mother puts millet in the compound, I keep my ears open. I wait for a song, I wait for *mwoc...*” This kind of rivalry and competitive existence sometimes make women quarrel a lot among themselves. A man who is quarrelsome is often cautioned by both women and men with these words: “*Pingo idaa calo dako!*” meaning “Why do you quarrel like a woman.”

Women are also known for having “sharp tongues” and being skilled in subtle insults. May be the circumstance in which many of them live have given them

enough practice in covert verbal assault. Consider for instance this excerpt of the above song:

My co-wife hits her tongue at a goat
She is actually insulting me!
The girl's mother sings at a cow
She is actually despising me!
Look, she calls a hen an "ass-hole!"
She is actually praising me!
The woman blasts a dog, oh
She is actually cautioning me!
She repeats the insult "wild animal!"
She is actually humiliating me!

We note that some of the gender traits attributed to the females emerge out of the social realities pertaining in society and not imposed upon them. The identity traits such as cunning and jealousy are a result of the competitive world in which the Acoli women live; and song performance is harnessed in the performance of these identity attributes.¹⁰

From the above brief analysis we are persuaded to believe that most of the gender attributes performed over and over through repeated acts by individuals in Acoli society are as a result of negotiating multiple discourse occasioned by the social and economic realities in society. Of course, the educated Acoli woman who works in an urban area is less likely to exude most of the so-called gender attributes of her peasant counter-part in the rural area. The economic life-style in the rural areas necessitates more than ever the division of labour along gender lines. So one cannot just change the way one performs his or her gender at a whim because that performance has a dialectical relationship with a number of factors – ecological, economic and cultural realities among others. Therefore, performativity as a theory of gender analysis has to take into account the highly contextualised rendering of gender attributes. Just like song performance, no one

¹⁰ This compares well with Judith T. Irvine's (1992) analysis of the Senegalese Wolof women's use of songs to denigrate one another in a polygamous situation. It is the contextual reality that gives rise to this practice by women that come to be regarded as their nature.

individual can perform his or her gender in exactly the same way at different times and different places, because gender performance is interactive.

7.6. Conclusion

In conclusion, I would like to state that the performativity theory has many insightful benefits to help us understand the workings of the gender processes both in everyday life and in song performance. Much 'Western' gender study has focused on a critique of gender roles and the idea that these underlie differential ideas of power and hence should be weakened or subverted in the interests of promoting greater democracy and equality. In these analyses, forms of gender differentiation are 'bad'. One strand in this debate has been on the idea of performativity which has been understood as focusing on small, everyday acts. Performativity is hence seen as the site of understanding how ideas of gender gain substance and are made 'real.'

However, in the context of my study of Acoli song performance, gender is embraced as 'good' and is seen as a site in and through which power can be debated. Also, given the prevalence and importance of expressive genres generally in Acoli society, these debates are often 'broadcast' and amplified in songs. The discussion in this chapter, therefore, seeks to throw light on the prevailing debates on gender by examining how gender is used as a resource and how people make powerful investment in it. Textual forms such as songs provide us with privileged insight into the nature of this investment.