

## ABSTRACT

The study explores the intricate relationship between Acoli song performance, gender identity construction and gender power relations. The investigation is guided by the understanding that gender identity construction does not only influence gender power relations but it is also part and parcel of the contextual performance of power relations. The study involves a contextual socio-cultural discussion of the gender situation in Acoli society, and with it the role of the performing arts in the gender identity construction and power relations. Gender performativity theory is revisited in light of the genre-based performance of one's gender, as manifested in the Acoli song performances. The analysis is guided by the argument that to understand gender one needs to pay attention to the genres through which it is expressed.

Despite over a century of gender theorisation, gender theorists are still not agreed on what constitutes power, neither has any offered an irreproachable and convincing conception of power. Given current debates in gender theorisation, the study attempts to make fresh empirical investigation to make valid and concrete entry into gender debates by deriving a situated gender concept of "power" based on field research evidence. By analysing Acoli song performances, the major sites of power in the society are elucidated and the positions of the two genders vis-à-vis these sites of power are examined to determine the nature of the gender power relations matrix. Song performance does not only act as a catalyst in gender performativity but it is an integral part of it, as the study reveals; and through song performance the Acoli females have particularly invested in the differential gender notions to make themselves visible and achieve their aspirations as 'women'.

## **DECLARATION**

I declare that this thesis is my own unaided work. It is submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination at any other university.

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\_\_\_\_\_ day of January 2007.

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