

**ACHOLI POPULAR MUSIC AND SOCIO-POLITICS: MUSIC IN THE PEACE
PROCESS IN THE WAR-TORN NORTHERN UGANDA**

by:

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation is about the relationship between Acholi popular music on war and the peace process among the Acholi people in northern Uganda. In this dissertation, ‘Acholi popular music’ is music created and performed by artists from Acholi who produce music for commercial purposes, which is mostly disseminated over the media. Although scholarly research has been done about the war and peace process in northern Uganda, the contribution of Acholi popular music in the peace process has received little scholarly attention. This study, therefore, examines the contribution of Acholi popular music in the peace process, focusing on how and what the music communicates in relation the peace process.

I analyze the song texts and images in music videos of selected music on war, highlighting how texts and images enhance an understanding of peace process in northern Uganda. I also draw on ethnographic research in Gulu District (northern Uganda), using extracts from semi-structured feedback interviews with individuals and focus-group discussions to show how informants interpret songs and music videos about the peace process. I translate the song texts into English for the messages in the music to be accessed by any member of the audience who does not speak Luo, the language of the Acholi.

I argue that there is a reciprocal relationship between the Acholi popular music and the peace process in northern Uganda. As such, the music describes the peace process, while the socio-political situation in the peace process shapes the musical ideas. The music analysis in this study is therefore, informed by theories that advocate for examination of music as cultural context. I specifically use: 1) the concept of dialectical relationship between music and its cultural context (Nannyonga-Tamusuza 2005); 2) music as a means to express views of war victims and refugees (Reyes 1999); and 3) music communications theory, especially Steven Feld’s (1994) view of social construction and interpretation of musical meaning. The study reveals that Acholi popular music is a participant voice of the Acholi people to call for an end of the war in northern Uganda. The musicians have communicated that military means to end the war creates fear among the civilians and leads to loss of lives, as well as showing that the war in northern Uganda is not only an Acholi issue but should be looked at as a national and international problem.

This study, however, examines only how music has been a medium for communicating about the peace process in northern Uganda. I, therefore, recommend that further research should investigate how the awareness through the music can lead more actors with influence on the rebels to put pressure on them to end the war.