Alice Lakwena & the Holy Spirits

War in Northern Uganda 1986-97 — HEIKE BEHREND

THE GUARDIAN T

THE INDEPENDENT Wednesday 25 November 1987

Reluctant soldiers of the holy spi

From Catherine Bond in Kampala

HELEN AYO is a wa girl who looks young her 15 years. She w tured on August 27 northern Ugandan dis Lira by Holy Spirit who surrounded her at night.

Helen and five other surrendered to Nat Resistance Army (NRA) ernment troops last Fr after trekking 200 m south through the bush w the rebels, fleeing army a tacks. They surrendered a Busalamu, a village 80 miles east of Kamapalaat, the heart of an offensive to crush the rebels and capture their leader, Alice Lakwena.

Throughout last week, the NRA's mobile force moved slowly on foot through dense

Escape adds o legend of Uganda's bel queen

priestess, Al last month led rillas from the miles of the checked, has ce of govern- for her.

cling on for in the south- , despite the Iteniu people tic rebels and

From Catharine Watson in Kampala

mander John Mugume asked last week. "The more she fights, the more she shows her bankruptcy."

Lakwena notwithstanding, the NRA now faces its toughest fights in the east. Dozens of freelance rebel gangs, some only six-strong, are murdering village heads, stag-

Alice the Crusader jailed in Kenya

NAIROBI (Reuter) — Alice Lakwena, the rebel priestess who led a crusade of poorly-armed fanatics against the Ugandan government this year, has been imprisoned in Kenya, it was announced yesterday.

Justus ole Tipis, the minister

'High on witchcraft' Ugandan rebels fight bullets with spells

AS THE dry season bites and the six-month war drags on, the rebels in northern Uganda are becoming desper-

Last Wednesday Catherine Bond of *The Guardian* and I were caught in a rebel attack and saw their desperation

Rebel priestess flees to Kenya after defeat

NAIROBI (AFP) — The Ugandan rebel priestess, Alice Lakwena, has fled to Kenya after her bloody, 11-month crusade against the Kampala government ended in defeat, informed sources said yesterday. The 27-year-old leader of the Holy Spirit Movement, whose followers were told that bullets could not harm them, is said to have crossed the border with an unknown number of fol-

taking part in secret ceremonies. Covered in sacred oils and armed with stones, which they believed would explode like hand grenades when thrown, they would launch themselves at Ugandan army artillery positions.

The beginning of the end came last October, when the rebels attempted to reach the eastern city of Jinja, thereby depriving themselves of the grassroots support

Alice Lakwena

&

the Holy Spirits

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Alice Lakwena & the Holy Spirits
War in Northern Uganda
Heike Behrend

* forthcoming

Alice Lakwena & the Holy Spirits

War in Northern Uganda 1985–97

HEIKE BEHREND

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For Dan Mudoola

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Preface

JOHN MIDDLETON

On 2 January 1985, an Acholi woman from northern Uganda named Alice Auma was possessed by an alien Christian spirit known as Lakwena ('Messenger' in Acholi), and became known as Alice Lakwena. From this event ensued a powerful prophetic movement, the Holy Spirit Movement, and its very nearly successful military insurrection against the government of Uganda. Alice was still alive, a refugee in Kenya, when this book was published. A last report was of her sitting in a bar drinking gin and Pepsi-Cola: Lakwena had deserted her. Hers was a personal tragedy. But if we look behind her, as is done in this valuable book, we can discern a far greater tragedy, namely, the history of the many thousands of Acholi men and women who took her as their prophet and followed Lakwena's message to put right the cruel and sinful world in which they lived, a message that led them to defeat and even greater misery. Alice's Holy Spirit Movement failed: yet, like many 'failures' it transformed its country's history.

Prophets and prophetic movements are nothing new in African history, but few prophets have been observed by outsiders. Many appeared during the colonial period in reaction to unpopular administrations; the colonial administrators considered the prophets to be rebels and tried to prevent outsiders from meeting them. A problem in studying them is that many prophetic movements have today been mythologized as national independence movements, and most of their prophets have become mythical personages. It is difficult to reconstruct events.

Many sanguine politicians expected that, after political independence, these movements would cease, but they have not done so. We

should ask why these movements still appear and become strong enough to lead to overt political action. The people who take part in them are ordinary citizens and not crazed religious maniacs. Why do people follow self-proclaimed prophets, and why do they die for their beliefs? These are important questions, and this book provides some of the answers within a specific region at a specific time in history, rather than giving wholly 'theoretical' generalizations.

Heike Behrend was not able to meet Alice Lakwena; but she had contact with many of Alice's former followers, in both Uganda and elsewhere, as she tells us in her introduction. Her research was as deep as was possible in the confused conditions of the time, and she managed to find many veterans of Alice's movement who were willing to tell its history as they recalled it. Behrend writes without sentimentality of Alice's followers, some of whom, after suffering cruel defeat by a brutal government army, themselves degenerated into a crew of predatory brigands.

Alice was originally one of many local Christian healers but only she appears to have become recognized as a powerful prophet. She organized and led the Holy Spirit Movement through its victories against the central government, then to its defeat and her final loss of authority when she became known as a mere witch doctor. At first she was the medium of an Italian military engineer, known as the spirit Lakwena, then later a medium for several alien spirits from America, Korea and Zaïre. Her authority was that of Lakwena himself and the other spirits who spoke through her body and voice; later she remembered nothing of what 'she' had uttered. These spirits possessed Alice on different occasions, and their various personalities and identities became known to her listeners as soon as she uttered their words. On another level considerable authority was exercised by the person known as the 'chief clerk' who summarized Alice's words to those listening. There was a triad of spirit, medium and translator. Alice had three 'chief clerks' in succession, all men of education and knowledgeable about the entire Ugandan political situation. Towards the end of the Holy Spirit Movement they separated themselves from Alice when she began to ignore the rules of the movement, and her followers then blamed her for the movement's defeat.

Why did so many people follow Lakwena and Alice? The immediate reason was that the leaders promised to rid the country of witchcraft. This might not 'exist' in actuality but beliefs about it did, as a dangerous sign of the evil that was taking over the land. The Acholi had suffered many years of wretchedness under Idi Amin, Obote and then Museveni, with continual military attacks and at times famine and

sickness. The country was riven with dissension and greed, seen as the consequence of witchcraft; and the power of the enemy, the government, was also regarded as being based upon witchcraft. Alice and her spirits, as Christians, claimed first to rid northern Uganda of its 'internal' witchcraft and then to destroy the 'external' witchcraft throughout the rest of the country. Witchcraft, like armed violence, was a form of aggression, and Behrend discusses the links and analogies between them as being clearly at the heart of the movement.

The Holy Spirit Movement, and its military wing the Holy Spirit Mobile Forces, were concerned with the purification of society from sin, especially as expressed in 'witchcraft'. Sin, unlike the breach of taboo, was considered a deliberate act for which the sinner had to take responsibility before both the living and the Divinity. To defeat external sin required armed force; to defeat internal sin demanded spiritual purification, and once that was gained the soldiers of the Holy Spirit Movement would be victorious against the government army. Pure soldiers had no fear of enemy bullets but stood in line singing psalms, their spirits deflecting the bullets. Defeat was seen as a consequence of their own moral backsliding and not of the superior military strength of the enemy.

Heike Behrend's account of the internal organization of the Holy Spirit Movement is welcome, as there are very few such accounts in the literature. The organization of the Holy Spirit Mobile Forces, the military wing of the movement, was complex. Beneath the overall authority of Lakwena, entitled 'Chairman and Commander in Chief', there were many levels of command and much use of written regulations such as the Holy Spirit Safety Precautions and the Holy Spirit Tactics. Many Acholi men had military experience, the older ones as members of the King's African Rifles during the Second World War and the younger majority as either members or foes of the various armed forces that had been raised by Obote and Idi Amin and had engaged in civil wars throughout much of the postcolonial period. They knew how to organize a modern and literate army. But there was more to it than the merely military aspect. The organization of the Holy Spirit Mobile Forces provided a coherent structure in an incoherent situation, and created order within disorder. The emphasis on controlling witchcraft, the rules against taking food or women by force, of giving written receipts for 'donations', and the other regulations, were all part of constructing order. As Behrend states, to draw up and date documents provided proof that the transactions had actually taken place: they constructed history. These rules served to form a new community and gave a new and common identity to people

of many descents and ethnic groups – Acholi, Lango, Teso and others. Their joining together validated Alice's claim to the leadership of all Uganda.

Besides their own leaders and troops, the Holy Spirit Mobile Forces had other allies in the form of the denizens of 'nature' and the environment. These appeared during the semi-mythical 'journey to Paraa' (a traditional spiritual centre) in May 1985, when Alice's prophetic powers began to take shape. She claimed to have persuaded many animals and natural phenomena to become allies; and in later battles her soldiers were aided by 140,000 spirits, bees, snakes, rivers, rocks and mountains. The link with nature meant more than merely extending Alice's authority beyond the human and social. It implied that Lakwena gave animals, bees and rocks speech and the power to communicate with one another, that the horrors perpetrated by the Ugandan government and its army affected not only the Acholi but also insulted and destroyed the environment in which they lived, and that Lakwena and his adherents were fit to lead and control the entire world.

All this actually happened only a few years ago. We are grateful to Heike Behrend for presenting the history of Alice and her Holy Spirit Movement so lucidly and movingly.

Foreword

This book was first published in 1993 in Germany. Since that time, the situation in Acholi has changed; in addition, my perspective also has been slightly transformed. This book is a revised version of the German original. Thanks to the comments and kind criticism of Alex and Zeru D.O. Abukha, Aidan Southall and Frank Schubert, I was able to correct a number of mistakes and expand some parts of the subject. In the Epilogue, I attempt to tell the story of the various Holy Spirit Movements and their protagonists up to 1996.

I would like to thank J. C. Winter and Gert Spittler of Bayreuth for their help and support, as well as the University of Bayreuth's Special Research Programme, 'Identity in Africa', whose generous support made this work possible. I thank Hans-Jürgen Greschat, Karl-Heinz Kohl, Fritz Kramer, Ute Luig, Claude Meillassoux, Louise Pirouet, and Catherine Watson for valuable discussions and information.

I would also like to mention Michael Twaddle and Holger Bernt Hansen, who, with the conferences they organized regularly in Roskilde, created a forum where many important topics that came into this work were discussed.

For their support in Gulu, I would especially like to thank the Lubwa family, Mike Ocan, R. M. Nono, Andrew Adimola, and Caroline Lamwaka, and, in Kampala, J. P. Ocitti, who provided valuable information.

This text could not have taken this shape without the friendship and co-operation of Alja Epp-Naliwaiko, Reiner Epp, and Maria Fischer in Kampala and Gennaro Ghirardelli in Berlin. I would also like to thank all those I cannot mention by name here, but who contributed

to this work through the conversations they granted me.

Above all, my gratitude goes to Dan Mudoola, without whose generous help and friendship my ethnographic work in Acholi would not have been possible. He died on 22 February 1993 in Kampala from wounds inflicted in an attack. This book is dedicated to him.

Heike Behrend

One

Troubles of an Anthropologist

The Holy Spirit Movement of Alice Lakwena

In August 1986, Alice Auma, a young woman from Gulu in Acholi in northern Uganda, began raising an army, which was called the Holy Spirit Mobile Forces (HSMF).[1] From a local perspective, she did this on orders from and as the spirit-medium of a Christian holy spirit named Lakwena. Along with this spirit who was the Chairman and Commander in Chief of the movement, other spirits – like Wrong Element from the United States, Ching Po from Korea, Franko from Zaire, some Islamic fighting spirits, and a spirit named Nyaker from Acholi – also took possession of her. These spirits conducted the war. They also provided the other-worldly legitimation for the undertaking.

In a situation of extreme internal and external threat, Alice began waging a war against Evil. This evil manifested itself in a number of ways: first, as an external enemy, represented by the government army, the National Resistance Army (NRA);[2] and secondly, as an internal enemy, in the form of impure soldiers, witches, and sorcerers.

In November 1986, Alice moved to Kitgum and took over 150 soldiers from another resistance movement, the Uganda People's Democratic Army (UPDA), which was also fighting the government. In a complex initiation ritual, she purified these soldiers of evil and taught them what she termed the Holy Spirit Tactics, a special method of fighting invented by the spirit Lakwena. She instituted a number of prohibitions, called Holy Spirit Safety Precautions, also ordered by the spirit Lakwena. With these 150 soldiers, at the end of

November she began attacking various NRA units stationed in Acholi. Because she was successful and managed to gain the sympathy of a large part of the population even outside Acholi, she was joined not only by soldiers (from other movements), but also by peasants, school and college students, teachers, businessmen, a former government minister, and a number of girls and women.

The HSMF marched from Kitgum to Lira, Soroti, Kumi, Mbale, Tororo, and as far as Jinja, where they were decisively defeated at the end of October 1987. Alice had to flee to Kenya, where she was granted political asylum, and she is alleged to be living in northern Kenya today.

The war in northern Uganda did not come to an end with her defeat, however, for the spirit Lakwena did not give up. He took possession of Alice's father, who continued fighting with the remaining soldiers of the HSMF until he surrendered to the NRA in 1989. In addition, Lakwena took possession of a young man named Joseph Kony, who continued the war against the NRA up to the present.

Mass Media and Feedback

When I began my work, the subject of my research, Alice Lakwena's Holy Spirit Movement (HSM), had no place in the books and articles of my colleagues; it had not yet been taken up in scientific discourse. But I did not have the privilege of writing the first text on the movement, for the HSM had already been created by the mass media.

In 1986, when a young woman in Acholi, in northern Uganda, began creating an army on orders from a holy Christian spirit, this was not really noted as an event. Not until she had inflicted severe losses on the government army in several battles, especially the battle at Corner Kilak, and marched on the capital, Kampala, was she seized upon not only by the local but also by the international mass media. The press created the images and stereotypes that would shape discourse on the HSM. In local and international headlines, Alice was designated as a rebel or voodoo priest, a witch, a prophetess, a former prostitute, the future Queen of Uganda, and a Jeanne d'Arc in the Ugandan swamp. (Jeanne d'Arc, too, was called a saint and a prophetess and was reviled by her enemies as a prostitute and a witch.) Her movement was depicted as a bizarre, anachronistic, suicidal enterprise in which hordes armed only with stones and sticks were conducting a senseless struggle.

The reporting addressed a topic that will be treated extensively in

what follows, namely witchcraft and sorcery. In *New Vision*, a Ugandan daily paper loyal to the government, Alice was called a witch doctor as early as 21 March 1987. And on 3 April 1987, one could read: 'The extraordinary casualties rate suffered by the rebels is largely explained by their continuing reliance on witchcraft as a means of primitive mobilisation.' This was followed by a report that provides a typical example of war propaganda:

> Alice murdered a child in a ghastly ritual sacrifice after the second attack on Lira 21 March [1987]. Lakwena found a woman who had twins and took one of them. The child was then killed and its liver eaten by the rebel soldiers. The sacrifice[3] was intended to strengthen rebels through witchcraft ... (*New Vision*, 3 April 1987).

It is commonplace that charges of witchcraft and cannibalism are among the stereotypes used to designate those to be excluded: the other, strangers, and enemies (cf. Arens 1980). War propaganda in the First and Second World Wars also employed this theme (cf. Fussell, 1977:115ff.).

The Holy Spirit soldiers did not remain uninfluenced by the mass media. They listened regularly to the radio, especially the BBC and *Deutsche Welle*. They also read newspapers and magazines. They heard and read the reports and reportage on themselves and their struggle. Their own significance was conveyed to them in the media.[4] They learned how they were seen by others and attempted to live up to, as well as to contradict, the images drawn of them.

In an interview Alice – or rather, the spirit Lakwena – granted reporters a few days before her defeat at Jinja, she tried to correct the picture the media had sketched of her and her movement. She announced in the Acholi language (which one of her soldiers, Mike Ocan, translated into English) that the spirit Lakwena was fighting to depose the Museveni government and unite all the people in Uganda. She said that the war was also being conducted to remove all *wrong elements* from the society and to bring peace, and that she was here to proclaim the word of the holy spirit (*Sunday Nation*, 25 October 1987). In addition, she demanded balanced reporting (Allen, 1991:395).

Alice and the Holy Spirit soldiers were aware of the power of the mass media, and tried to build up a counterforce to meet it by setting up a Department of Information and Publicity within the HSM. It produced leaflets giving information on the goals of the movement, distributed them among the populace, wrote letters to chiefs and politicians, and also collected information. A radio set was available and a photographer took pictures of prisoners of war, visitors,

captured weapons, and rituals. The Holy Spirit soldiers wrote their own texts. They kept diaries; the commanders and heads of the Frontline Co-ordination Team (FCT) drew up lists of casualties, recruitments, and gifts from civilians; they kept minutes of meetings and composed reports on the individual battles. And the chief clerk, Alice's secretary, wrote down what the spirits had to say when they took possession of Alice, their medium. Individual soldiers also noted in school notebooks the twenty Holy Spirit Safety Precautions, rules the spirits imposed on them, as well as prayers and church hymns. And pharmacists, nurses, and paramedics noted the formulas for various medications invented by the spirit Lakwena.

The HSM documented itself and produced its own texts in answer to the mass media. Composing these writings was an act of self-assertion, an attempt to have their truth, their version of the story prevail against others. In a certain sense it was also a magical act with which they fixed a reality that became more real through the very act of writing.

But even the attempt to shed the images and stereotypes of the mass media had to take their power into account. Some of these images remained powerful even in the opposing texts.

Field Research in a War Zone

Ethnography is currently conducted in a world in which the commodities of the Western and Eastern industrial countries – such as Coca-Cola, transister radios, sunglasses, clocks, cars, etc. – are found everywhere, including on the peripheries. And although it appears as if the differences between the various cultures are increasingly being levelled to produce a homogenous world (Kramer, 1987:284), ethnographic works have shown (cf., for example, Taussig, 1980; Appadurai, 1988; Werbner, 1989:68; Comaroff and Comaroff 1990) that the people of the so-called Third World adopt and transform these wares in their own independent way. The commodities develop their own life-history and their own meanings; sometimes they are transformed into status symbols or are integrated in a sacred exchange, thus even losing their character as commodities. Torn from the context of our culture, they confront us again in another context, one which is foreign to us. We think we recognize them as our own, and yet, when we look at them closely, they appear alien or at least alienated.

It is no longer ethnographic comparison that brings the objects of our culture and of other cultures together; rather, they confront us

side by side, already brought into a new context in cultures which are foreign to us. Perhaps recognizing familiar things in a foreign context allows us to define more precisely the difference that exists between the meanings which are familiar to us and the new meanings in another context.

Not only goods produced in the West, but also mutual information and knowledge of each other reach the peripheries of our world via the mass media. In this way, the anthropologist and the subjects of his field research are *a priori* familiar and known at the same time as they are strange to each other (Marcus and Fischer, 1986:112). As already noted, the mass media also affect what we have up to now called ethnographic reality. They deliver pre-formed images to be relived. They create *feedback.* Ethnographic reality can no longer be assumed to be 'authentic'; rather, we anthropologists must consider how it is produced – and what models it imitates.

Since centres and peripheries influence each other, we can no longer speak of independent, self-sufficient cultures, which were long the classic analytical units of ethnology *(ibid)*. And thus the dichotomy, so customary in anthropology, between the 'traditional' and the 'modern' has also lost its validity (cf. Ranger, 1981).

It is already becoming apparent that in future, anthropologists will increasingly be confronted with an (ethnographic) reality that they themselves (together with the subjects of their research) have created. When I talked with Acholi elders in northern Uganda, I could not fail to note that my discussion partners had already read, and were reporting to me from, books and articles that missionaries, anthropologists, and historians had written on their culture and history. Thus I encountered in their answers not so much authentic knowledge as my own colleagues – and, in a sense, myself. I also discovered that a number of local ethnographies and historiographies already existed that had been written by Acholi like Reuben Anywar, Alipayo Latigo, Noah Ochara, Lacito Okech, and R. M. Nono,[5] to mention but a few. The texts of Europeans, especially those by missionaries from the Comboni Mission, by Crazzolara on the history of the Lwo (1937), and by Pelligrini on the history and 'tradition' of the Acholi (1949) found entry into these indigenous texts. So I had to ask myself whether the Acholi elders were telling me their or our story (cf. Bruner, 1986:148f.) and what that meant for distinguishing the interior (emic) from the exterior (etic) view *(ibid)*. Bruner, who sought an answer to these questions in his research on the Pueblo Indians of the United States, assumes that Pueblo Indians and the anthropologists who write about them share the same discourse.

> My position is that both Indian enactment, the story they tell about themselves, and our theory, the story we tell, are transformations of each other; they are retellings of a narrative derived from the discursive practice of our historical era (Foucault 1973), instances of never-ceasing reflexivity. (Bruner, 1986: 149).

I agree only with part of this statement. For one thing, Bruner neglects the historical perspective, which is precisely where we can trace how a dominant discourse takes over. For those ethnographed, the subjects of our field research, do not share our discourse from the beginning. They put up resistance to their colonization and 'invention' (Mudimbe, 1988) and designed counter-discourses, even if (as will be shown in this study) these finally confirmed the hegemony of the European discourse (cf. Comaroff and Comaroff, 1991:18). But it is precisely the history of the hegemony of our discourse which also makes clear the difference that arises from the often original interpretation of the dominant discourse that the ethnographed come up with. In future, noting this difference as precisely as possible may be the ethnographer's primary goal.

From the outbreak of the fighting in May and June 1986, northern Uganda became increasingly isolated from the rest of the country. The NRA government declared the Acholi District a war zone. Roadblocks controlled access. Transport and trade collapsed almost completely towards the end of 1987. As early as March, the NRA forced a large part of the population in Acholi to leave their farms and take 'refuge' in camps or in the city. But, I was told, many fled less from the so-called 'rebels' than from the soldiers of the NRA, who plundered, stole livestock, and burned houses, supplies, and fields.

In November 1989, I was able to visit northern Uganda – Acholi – for the first time. Most of the more than 150,000 refugees the war had created had now returned to their villages and begun to cultivate their fields. Following a government offer of an amnesty and a peace treaty with another resistance movement, the Uganda People's Democratic Army (UPDA), thousands of 'rebels' left the bush, returning to their villages or joining the NRA and militias to fight against their former allies. A few bushfighters who refused to surrender joined up with the Holy Spirit soldiers of Joseph Kony. They conducted a guerrilla war, staging ambushes here and there or daring an occasional attack.

The NRA seldom managed to catch Holy Spirit soldiers, and all too often vented their frustration on the local populace. After each defeat, they took vengeance on innocent people. The result was that the population indeed sympathized more or less with the Holy Spirit

soldiers, though they too degenerated more and more into marauding bands of thieves.

In November 1989, Gulu, the capital of Acholi District, was a city 'occupied' by the NRA. Trucks carrying soldiers and weapons careered down the main street. Soldiers sat in small bars, rode bicycles, or strolled the streets in groups, singing songs. Some had tied chickens they had acquired to the handlebars of their bicycles, carried them in their knapsacks, or strapped them to the counter of the bar while they drank. The traces of the war had not been eliminated. Many houses lining the main street had been destroyed, their facades burned, the pavements torn up, the street signs perforated by bullets and twisted, and the central roundabout, once planted with glowing red bougainvillea, now consisted of nothing but a heap of stones. The scantily covered dead were carried on stretchers through the city followed by weeping relatives. One woman told me there had been too many dead taken by the war and now by AIDS as well.

While the war continued in the territory surrounding Gulu, and distant gunfire could often be heard, in the afternoons, and especially in the evenings, the sound of machine gun fire also emanated from the video halls in town where low-budget American films or karate films from Taiwan staged a reprise of war. These films provided the models avidly imitated by Holy Spirit soldiers and government troops alike. Soldiers I got to know gave themselves names like 'Suicide', 'Karate', '007', and 'James Bond'. And a spirit who liked to introduce himself as 'King Bruce', after the karate hero Bruce Lee, fought in the Holy Spirit Movement of Joseph Kony.

I did not pitch my tent in the middle of an Acholi village, as Malinowski exhorted, but took up my quarters in what had been a luxury hotel in town. I was advised to do this because I was told that the Holy Spirit soldiers still made the territory around Gulu insecure. Especially at night, 'rebels', militiamen, and government soldiers moved about in small groups plundering farms. Since they all wore the same uniforms, one could never be sure who the plunderers were. In the evenings, many people, especially women with children, came to the city to seek protection from such marauders, spending the night there then returning to their villages in the morning. Others, who lived too far from the city, were so afraid of the soldiers that they slept in the bush. The children were wrapped in blankets and hidden separately under certain trees or bushes. They were warned not to make a sound, whatever happened, and not to come back to the house until morning, when it was light again.

The hotel I stayed in had been plundered twice, once by Idi Amin's soldiers, who had fled from the Uganda National Liberation Army (UNLA) in 1979, and a second time by Bazilio Okello's followers, who took flight from the National Resistance Army (NRA) in March 1986. Most of the windows were broken, and all the transportable furniture had been taken away. The doors had been smashed and could no longer be locked; the rooms contained nothing but a bed. In the evening, I was the only guest. The waiter put on livery in my honour and the kitchen boy arranged a bouquet of bougainvillea.

Under the conditions of a continuing war, it was impossible for me to carry out field research in the classic sense. George Devereux has shown that methods are a favoured means of reducing anxiety. Method derives from the Greek *hodos*, i.e. a path or road. Methods are paths one takes together with other scientists. They calm the feeling of insecurity; after all, one is not taking the path alone. But the information I was collecting for my work was not the only frightening thing; there were also the situations in which I had to collect it. I am sure I have not managed to understand what happened without displacements and blind spots (Crapanzano, 1977:69). Speaking of the unspeakable and making it my topic sometimes seemed the only escape. But my wish that everything not be so terrible was also very strong. At some point, I noticed that I tended to conduct discussions mostly with members of the Holy Spirit Movement who had been in its civilian wing and who had not themselves fought and killed.

During my study of anthropology and while conducting field research among the Tugen in northwestern Kenya, I had learned to defend the people on whom and with whom I was working. Here, too, I now wanted to sketch a picture of the HSM which showed them from their own perspective and in correspondence with their self-image, against the discrimination of the mass media. I assumed that the Holy Spirit Movement, like so many others, was a peasant revolt against the state; and I planned to take their side more or less clearly. But I was soon forced to realize that most of the original members of the Holy Spirit Movement were not peasants, but soldiers who had fought in the 1981–5 civil war and who could not or would not pursue any other occupation than waging war and killing. Their goal was to get rich, take their revenge, and regain the share in state power they had lost. I played with the idea of giving up my project, since I saw no possibility of depicting the Holy Spirit Movement and its history except by idealizing it unjustifiably or repeating stereotypes that would have been too close to certain