

“This Woman’s Work: Spirit Mediumship, Resistance, and the Reconstruction of Masculinity in Acholiland in Late Colonial and Post-Colonial Uganda.”

In 1986, the spirit Lakwena possessed Alice Auma, an Acholi woman and self-proclaimed messiah, and instructed her to build an army to combat evil forces in Acholi, located in Northern Uganda. After spending forty days in communion with nature on Mt. Opit, Alice recruited former Acholi soldiers to join her Holy Spirits Mobile Forces in an effort to cleanse Acholiland of evil spirits, overthrow the National Resistance Army, and establish a Christian led global government with the Pope at the helm. While Alice’s movement lasted only a few, this historical moment continues to have an impact on the Acholi and Uganda as a whole.

Amina Mama, Nargo Okazawa, and Alicia Decker argue that one of the products of militarism are militarized versions of femininity and masculinity. This paper explores the intersection of gender, ethnicity, environment, and spiritualism to place this movement within the discourses of women’s resistance to state sanctioned violence and militarized gender performances. My project explores the Holy Spirits Movement as an unrecognized, yet significant aspect of the Ugandan Women’s Movement by highlighting the connection between Alice’s role as a woman leading a resistance movement and her identity as an Acholi woman and spirit medium, which informed her leadership style and practices. I will also analyze the Holy Spirits Mobile Forces’ early usage of nonviolent tactics which incorporated a reverence for the earth that acknowledged its agency in Acholi traditions in an effort to heal both the land and the people that inhabited it.