

# The 1978-79 Akpan Ekwong Anti-Witchcraft Crusade in Nigeria

DANIEL A. OFFIONG

University of Calabar, Calabar, Nigeria

## RÉSUMÉ

La dernière croisade contre la sorcellerie au Nigeria a eu lieu en 1978-79. Elle a été conduite par Akpan Ekwong, et elle a reçu un fort appui populaire. Des confessions obtenues au cours de cette croisade ont révélé que les sorciers font vœu de garder le secret, qu'ils ont des noms secrets pour leurs réunions nocturnes, qu'il y a deux types de sorcellerie – noire et blanche, et que les sorciers sont initiés en avalant une certaine substance. Cette croisade, comme d'autres, a été entreprise parce qu'on blâmait la sorcellerie d'être la cause de difficultés auxquelles les Ibidio faisaient face.

Anti-witchcraft crusades are not strange to Africa. In 1934 there occurred in Nyasaland what had come to be known as the Mcape anti-witchcraft movement, led by Kamwende. Assisted by young men, the Bamucapi (medicine-vendors), the movement swept over Nyasaland, the Rhodesias, and into the Congo colony (Parrinder, 1963; Richards, 1935; and Marwick, 1950). The Bamucapi would go to a village and all the inhabitants would be assembled, given a sermon, and then lined up for a witchfinding exercise. In the process the alleged witches were detected with the aid of small mirrors, and were called upon to yield up their 'horns' or harmful medicines. If they refused to give them up, the crusaders were said to disclose with unfailing perspicacity where these medicines were hidden. Once the witches were detected, the crusaders or Bamucapi proceeded to cure them by giving each one a sip of *mcape* medicine. It was claimed that this medicine would cause any witch who returned to his evil practices to die.

In 1947 there occurred yet another anti-witchcraft crusade in Nyasaland. It was initiated by Bwanali and extended by his disciple,

Mpulumutsi, hence the name the Bwanali-Mpulumutsi anti-witchcraft movement (Marwick, 1950: 101). Like that of 1934, the 1947 movement started in Nyasaland and spread into adjoining territories. This movement also aimed at the annihilation of witchcraft by the systematic destruction or reform of witches and by the protection of their potential victims. This time after witches had been detected the two leaders – Bwanali and Mpulumutsi – made incisions in the witches' skin on various parts of their body and then rubbed medicine into the incisions. Other medicines were also given to the detected witches as well as nonwitches. Like in the 1934 movement, the medicine was believed would lead to death in those who resumed their witch practices. As for the witches who escaped detection, it was believed that in due course a mysterious drum would be beaten which would inexorably attract witches to their death. Of great interest was that all those who had been treated with the medicine had to observe certain rules and taboos. So if the desired results were not obtained it was because the taboos were violated.

In West Africa there occurred a movement of witch-hunters after the Second World War. This movement originated in Ghana, across Togo and Dahomey, and into Nigeria. Known as Nana Torgo, or Anatinga, these men spread excitement into many areas, enriched themselves and their initiates, and yet were supported by a large body of public opinion, even among the educated, as doing good work in checking the destructive deeds of witches. Their activities were held in check, publicly at least, by prohibitive legislation in 1951 (Parrinder, 1963: 130).

Among the Ibibio witch-hunting was a very common practice in pre-colonial and even colonial Nigeria. Each time a prominent person died or some misfortune struck, witchcraft was suspected as the cause. Certain members of the family of the deceased or the person suffering the misfortune would be sent to consult a prognostist or a diviner (*abia idion*) to determine the cause of death and to also name the witch involved. These diviners (*mbia idion*, pl.) claimed to possess the supernatural power to determine the cause of death and to also name the witch involved, if any. Particularly in pre-colonial and early colonial Nigeria any person named to be the witch responsible for the death or misfortune of some other person was summarily dealt with by the traditional bodies in charge

of that department. Among the Efik Nsibidi would do the job while Ekpo would take care of it in other Ibibio areas.

Alternatively, people in the family or village suspected to be the cause of misfortune or death would be asked to swear to an oath (*mbiam*) which was believed to have the power to detect the guilty and innocent. The guilty would be killed by *mbiam*. Or all the suspects would be given an *esere* bean (*Physostigma venenosum*) to chew on the mistaken belief that all the innocent ones would not be killed by the poisonous bean. Few rarely survived. Although *esere* beans are no more given to suspected witches, suspects are made to swear on *mbiam* and occasionally there are newspaper reports of how suspected witches have been murdered by relatives of the deceased.

The purpose of this essay is to describe the events of the 1978-79 anti-witchcraft crusade among the Ibibio of Nigeria. The data for this study were collected during the crusade, led by Edem Edet Akpan (alias Akpan Ekwong). Six assistants were used and two of them were assigned to each crusade meeting. The two took separate notes which were compared after the meeting for the purpose of checking the accuracy of their records. Records of what went on in the meetings in which the crusader and /or his lieutenants detected witches were kept, particularly the confessions of the witches. Apart from these records, the researcher was able to talk to local people about the events of the crusade. During the crusade most of the conversations in the villages affected, bars and markets were about the crusade. Often, the researcher would buy some palm wine in a bar or market stall where people would gather to drink and talk about the anti-witchcraft crusade.

### THE ANTI-WITCHCRAFT CRUSADE OF 1978-79

This crusade took place in Ibibio. The Ibibio who live in the south-eastern part of Nigeria number more than two million according to the 1963 census. They are divided into six sub-cultural groups: Eastern Ibibio or Ibibio Proper; Western Ibibio or Annang; Northern Ibibio or Enyong; Southern Ibibio or Eket; Delta Ibibio or Andoni-Ibino; and Riverine Ibibio or Efik. The Ibibio are predominantly Christians with few Moslems and fewer pagans, that is, those who still espouse the traditional religion. But it is

important to note that both Christians and Moslems still retain many pre-Christian and pre-Moslem practices. Of all unorthodox beliefs witchcraft is of the utmost concern to the Ibibio.

Most Ibibio believe that certain persons are witches (*ifjot*) who impoverish, harm, or kill their fellow beings through some supernatural means. That the Ibibio are overly preoccupied with this belief and its various implications is shown by the regularity with which they attribute death and misfortune to witchcraft, and their related tendency to take precautions against possible attacks by witches, for example, by having their bodies and dwellings magically protected.

From conversations with the Ibibio of all walks of life one gathers that they are not only obsessed with witchcraft but that such beliefs are central to their cosmological ideas. They tend to attribute to witchcraft almost every social evil, political and social backwardness; even personal failures are regularly explained with the idiom and logic of witchcraft. Barren women, people whose children die at birth or in succession, women with irregular menstruation, most accident victims, traders who suffer losses, office workers who fail to get promotion, a political candidate who fails to get elected, a student who fails examinations all suspect witchcraft as the cause. Even the successful ones also fear being bewitched.

The Ibibio see witches as posing a serious threat to the entire community; that witchcraft is an anti-social act that defies collective conscience; that witches are humans with some mysterious or supernatural power with which they can and do harm fellow human beings. They view witchcraft as the psychic act through which supernatural techniques influence events. Thus they conceive of witchcraft as unequivocally evil, as destroying life, primarily through mysterious wasting diseases, and eating the soul of their victims thereby causing the death of the victim. Witches are active at night and cannot be seen or discovered by the uninitiated. They have familiars, flying around at night and the common familiars are owls, fire insects, cats, dogs, rats and frogs. As Nadel (1952: 18-19) has noted, "Everything connected with witchcraft takes place in a fantasy realm which is, almost *ex hypothesi*, intangible and beyond empirical verification. This is shown most clearly in the tenet that it is only the 'shadow souls' of witches which roam about and attack victims, while their bodies remain asleep at home, thus

deceiving any ordinary attempts at proving or disproving, these mystic activities." Having been so overly concerned with the evils of witchcraft, the 1978-79 witch eradication crusade was not much of a surprise.

On November 23, 1978, the *Nigerian Chronicle* (*Chronicle*) reported that an anti-witchcraft crusade led by Akpan Ekwong had started in Uyo, a business centre of the State. A few days later the Commissioner of Police announced: "I have ordered the police in this State (Cross River) to shoot at sight any person or persons found in the act of lynching or torturing in any way or form any persons accused of being witches and wizards." This shoot at sight order did not stop the crusade. In each village young men organized themselves into an organization they named Nka Ukpotio, that is an organization of fearless, determined and dedicated young men. They seized control of their villages from the chiefs and elders and declared them suspected witches who had to be cleared by the leader of the crusade or his lieutenants. All members of Nka Ukpotio received the support of Akpan Ekwong and were innoculated with anti-witchcraft medicine. This would prevent the elders from bewitching them.

The leader of the crusade would advise each village of the date that he or his lieutenants would visit the village. Everybody would be instructed not to leave the village and all those who had left were ordered to return home forthwith. On the appointed day everybody would assemble at Ata Essien (public square) or market place where the crusader would go round detecting witches. Once detected the person would have his or her legs and hands tightly tied together and would remain so until he or she had confessed. Apart from tying the hands and legs red pepper, referred to as "powder" by the Nka Ukpotio, was rubbed all over the body of the suspects. Black ants were also poured over them, along with constant flogging. The witches were interrogated by Nka Ukpotio; they had to tell how long they had been practising the art, how many people they had killed and why they killed them, what office they held in the witch association, end so on.

There were those who voluntarily agreed to being witches by simply presenting themselves to Nka Ukpotio long before the day fixed by the crusader; there were those who readily confessed to being witches once they were detected; still there were those

who confessed after days of torture; and finally, there were those who stuck to their innocence that they were not witches. In this process many people were tortured to death, others maimed for life and at least one person committed suicide, because he could not stand the disgrace of being called a witch. In the following sub-section I proceed to describe some of the highlights of the confessions made at the witch crusade meetings.

### *Some Confessions at the Witch Crusade Meetings*

The Ibibio define witchcraft as some mystical or supernatural power that causes harm, including death. This power is purely psychic. Those involved in the art of witchcraft practice a form of incorporeal vampirism by removing the soul of their victim and transforming it into a goat, a sheep, a cow or any other animal of their choice, and then mysteriously kill, cook and eat it thus causing in the victim a slow, wasting disease. This belief was confirmed by the confessions during the anti-witchcraft crusade. According to the confessed witches, once the animal into which the soul of their victim has been transferred is slaughtered, cooked and eaten in a mysterious manner by the witches, the victim dies instantly. Unlike sorcerers witches do not perform rites and do not use bad medicine. But I hasten to add that among the Ibibio a witch may as well be a sorcerer (*ifot*). The witches confessed that witchcraft is essentially a psychic act that bridges the distance between the person of the witch and the person of his or her victim. Thus even if a son dies in far away Europe or North America Ibibio parents will accuse witchcraft as the cause of death.

From the confessions it was clear that each witch believed that they had witchcraft substance in their body that allows their soul to engage on errands to harm their fellow beings. This is quite similar to the belief of the Azande people (Evans-Pritchard, 1937). Since the substance is organic, its existence can be determined through a postmortem examination. But according to the confessions, even though organic, non-initiates will not see if they cut open the stomach of the witch; a person with some supernatural power will have to neutralize it to make it visible to the ordinary eye. While the Ibibio witches believe they have witchcraft substance wherein lies their mysterious powers, they do not, like their Azande coun-

terparts, believe to have inherited it. According to the confessors during the crusade, every witch must get the substance from an established witch and the person physically swallows the substance. The confessors said that the substance is a special concoction embodying things like red, white and black thread, needles and other ingredients which the witch-to-be swallows. There are local variations in the substance. Once a person takes the substance his or her eyes are "opened", so to speak. He can move about mysteriously and has the ability to perform those things that witches are believed to do.

With the help of this substance the witches said they can change themselves into animals and birds like dogs, cats (particularly black ones), and owls and also give off a glowing light like fireflies. They also said that they leave their physical bodies during sleep to attend their meetings. They can even change into rats and eat up the crops, and can spread diseases among people. Witches claimed to do almost any evil.

The confessed witches went on to say that they are organized in a form of hierarchy – some witches are more powerful than others. One's power depends on the ability of the individual to locate an established witch that can give him or her the most potent type of witchcraft. Once somebody has become a witch he or she can then know those who have the most powerful type and can acquire it in addition to the one he or she already had. Thus starting off as a novice, a witch aspires to a higher position over the years. The highest rank consists of the most powerful witches who, in addition to their power, must have been in practice for quite a considerable number of years, and must have bewitched very many people. It is from this rank that comes the president of the chapter (each village constitutes a chapter, with the clan chapter as the highest body). The second rank consists of witches who have established themselves in the art and who will in due course move into the topmost rank. The third rank consists of new witches, beginners who have just been initiated. Finally comes the fourth rank consisting of witches who may or not know that they are witches; they were given improperly concocted witchcraft substance either with or without their knowledge. Since the substance was not properly constituted their eyes are not opened as in the cases of other witches. This type of witchcraft is called Ikpewib.

They bewitch people quite all right and also attend witch meetings but they are not exactly aware of what they do.

Apart from the witch president who is the ultimate head of the chapter, they have other officers such as clerks who write down names of people to be killed and those who have bewitched them; messengers who summon people to their meetings and run such errands as may be determined by the president; preachers who are really preachers in the physical world; police officers who act as orderlies and also arrest and bring to the meeting souls of stubborn victims. The police are also responsible for the torture of those victims that they do not want to kill immediately.

Another very significant confession was the revelation that witches take oath of secrecy. Once an initiate attends the first meeting he or she is made to swear on an oath never to reveal anything about the witches and witchcraft to noninitiates. Furthermore, at their meetings they do not answer their real names, instead they take on new names. For example, people confessed to answering such names as Ofim (air, suggesting the incomprehensibility of the person's power); Asabo (python, a dreaded snake because of its poison and power); Itiat (stone, suggesting invincibility). These names are among their top secrets. Thus because of the secrecy oath, the president of each chapter had to use certain sacrificial materials like goat, sheep, and so on to neutralize the oath before the witches could make their confessions.

The confessed witches identified two kinds of witchcraft – Black (Obubit) and White (Afia). The purpose of Black witchcraft is to commit evil. Those who possess it are the ones who engage in destructive and diabolical acts, such as bewitching and killing their victims. They can bewitch their victims' money even crops, cause accidents, make women barren, and so on. Witches are the very embodiment of evil.

On the other hand, those who possess the White type are harmless. They are witches to be sure, but they do not kill or harm people. They claim to be more powerful than those who possess Black witchcraft. They attend witch meetings but do not practice the ceremonial cannibalism that their Black counterparts are known for. White witches take to witchcraft simply because they want to protect themselves and loved ones against being



bewitched by Black witches. Since they attend witch meetings they will know when any of their loved ones is to be bewitched and they will stop the move.

One interesting revelation during the crusade was that witches often try their victims as in law courts. The witch who has bewitched the victim plays the role of a prosecutor stating why the victim should be killed. Generally, Black witches go along with the prosecutor while White witches often act as defence lawyers, outlining why the victim should not be killed. During the crusade White witches claimed that they sometimes successfully prevent the killing of a bewitched person. One very crucial thing about White witches is that they remain harmless so long as they do not eat a bewitched victim. Once they do this they automatically turn to Black ones. They (White witches) said during the crusade that they carry their own meat to their meetings so that when Black witches will be eating their victims they (White witches) will be eating their own meat.

People become witches through several ways, as revealed during the crusade. People decide to become witches because of their natural inclination to do evil. They are envious or jealous or may have had some conflict with their relatives or some other persons within the family or community and they want to hurt them or other enemies. Enemies can be co-wives, brothers or sisters, a former husband of a man's wife, somebody with whom a man became involved in a land case, somebody who took away a girlfriend, and so on. In fact the enemy can be just any person, including one's mother or father and vice versa.

A person can turn a witch (Black or White) because he suspects the other person who is in a state of enmity with him is about to bewitch him, or that the person is a witch and that the only way he can prevent being bewitched is to become a witch himself.

One can become a Black witch accidentally. It is accidental because what the person wanted was the White type but instead he got the Black type. People claim to purchase White witchcraft because they seek protection against Black witches. Such protection is not only for themselves but also for members of their families and other loved ones. Since they attend witch meetings their very

presence prevents the Black witches from bewitching them and members of their families. Should any of their loved ones or friends become bewitched, they will fight to see that they are de-bewitched.

There is a third way of becoming a witch that can still be considered accidental. In this case the witch did not seek to become one; instead he approached a traditional doctor who may also be a witch to assist him to ward off witch attacks or give him some medicine that will prevent his being attacked. One might end up finding himself or herself in a meeting with witches where he or she partakes in the symbolic cannibalism. Once this happens the initiate must also must bewitch people so that others may share in the meat.

The fourth way is through gift. A father, a mother, an uncle or even a friend can out of love give the witchcraft substance to a son, a daughter, a niece or nephew or friend. In such a case the giver feels he or she is doing the recipient a great favour: he or she wants him or her to be powerful so that no other person can bewitch or harm the recipient. The person who receives this gift may be unaware of it at the time but with certainty he or she will one day find himself or herself in a meeting with other witches and begins to act as they do. On the other hand, an individual may receive the substance out of hatred. In this case the proper concoctions are not given to him or her; the compounds are not complete so that his or her eyes are not properly opened, as they put it. He or she becomes a very clumsy witch, lacks the proper power, does not eat at the table with other witches and behaves very much like a scavenger. Such witches are referred to as Ikpewib.

Witches admitted that this kind of witchcraft is a form of punishment by the person (witch) who gave the person the substance. Established witches said that the dresses of such scavenger-like witches are used in wiping their hands after eating during their meetings. Further, such witches are very dangerous, according to the other witches. This is so because the powerful ones command them to bring their children and other relatives to be killed and eaten. At times they are not really aware that they are witches except that they dream about their witch activities. In fact during the crusade, the established witches recommended to the communities and Nka Ukpotio not to punish or fine such witches because they were not responsible for their actions. In other words, their

enemies (witches) forced them into becoming what is tantamount to blind witches.

Although these people cannot be said to be witches, it is important to note that witches commandeer drummers, dancers, singers, and other such people to entertain them at their assemblies. Through some supernatural means such people are brought out to entertain witches at their assemblies. The people themselves are not conscious of their role except that they dream about their activities. But in actual fact these people are not witches since they have not swallowed the substance. It is interesting to point out that as soon as the witches made this confession drummers, dancers and singers among the spectators “confirmed” that they had been engaging in long drawn dreams of how they were entertaining people they did not know.

Each confessed witch was required to tell the audience the objects or artifacts in his or her possession that were efficacious in the practice of witchcraft. They were required to surrender these things. Among the objects surrendered were mini-canoes, which they claimed to use in travelling to various places for their meetings and for haunting down those they mark out for extinction; dirty old lanterns, which they claimed to have the mysterious power of operating invisibly so that only they (the witches) see the way; brooms, which they use not only for sweeping their meeting places but also for attracting money from those whose money they want to bewitch; staffs, which are a symbol of authority, generally given to the highest member, president, in each village chapter; a piece of stone (*itiat ison esit*), which they claimed to render witches hartless once they touch their chest with it; padlocks, which they claimed to have the mysterious power of locking women’s womb to render them barren.

Once the witches had surrendered these objects they were asked to pay certain fines for practising witchcraft. Each witch had to give a goat, drinks, and a certain amount of money. Once they did this they were required to swear to an oath that they would not return to the practice of witchcraft. This was quite similar to what took place in the Mcape and Bwanali-Mpulumutsi Movements in that all sought the complete eradication of witchcraft by systematic destruction or reform of witches and by the protection of their potential victims. Apart from getting the people to take

the oath, Akpan Ekwong gave preventive medicines to those who felt they had been bewitched before as well as those who felt they were likely targets. It was believed that the oath, *mbiam*, would kill anybody who even tried to become a witch. So all the confessed witches who died shortly after the crusade were believed to have been killed by the oath because they had tried to return to their witchcraft practice. But despite all that Akpan Ekwong had done to eradicate witchcraft and witches, people were still complaining about them. Because of the confidence they had in Akpan Ekwong people rationalized that witches had successfully neutralized the oath as well as the preventive medicines given to them by Akpan Ekwong and that was why witches were able to operate again. They once again began to dream about the revisit of the crusader.

One other important point about the confessed witches is that they have been banned from occupying positions of importance in their villages. In other words, Nka Ukpotio appointed young men to temporarily fill the positions of all the elders they had suspected of being witches. But where the crusader did not identify an elder to be a witch he was allowed to take back his post. Thus witchcraft is an antisocial behaviour and all those who engage in it must be negatively sanctioned.

### *Other Important Developments*

It was significant that the crusade started at Uyo, a rapidly growing business center of Cross River State and then spread to the semi-urban areas around Uyo and from there to the villages. From Uyo it spread to Oron, another area with rapid development and urbanization. The crusade was a sort of community or mass movement which sought to expose and extirpate all witches in the area. At Uyo Akpan Ekwong identified as a with one Mr. E. E. Inyang, alias Inyangette, a transport magnate. (Inyangette subsequently contested and won election to the Cross River State Assembly and is currently a member of the State House). It was alleged that Inyangette had some witchcraft concoctions at the Uyo round about and that everybody passing through there had to lose some money which ended up in the pocket of Inyangette. Angry and frustrated traders and taxi drivers wasted no time in agreeing that they had been losing money each time they passed through there. They stormed the house of Inyangette at Uyo but the man was

away. They released part of their tension by causing extensive damage to his house. News got to Inyangette who took refuge at the police station in Calabar.

It is significant to note that Inyangette is not a native of Uyo and had been very successfully competing against other transporters who are indigenes of the area. Inyangette reacted by saying that his competitors had engineered his being identified as a witch. The timing of this incident was important. The transport business in previous months had not been going well and now it was holiday season, a highly lucrative period for transporters as schools were closing. So identifying Inyangette as a witch at this time very seriously affected his business. People reacted to the accusation of Inyangette as a witch by spontaneously boycotting his buses. The boycott was very effective, a just punishment for a businessman who used unfair methods to get rich.

For traders in Uyo and the environs, they had been facing all sorts of tensions and frustrations. Because of the very high rate of inflation, the state government, in addition to the federal government measures had introduced stringent economic measures in an effort to contain the alarming rate of inflation. The result was great scarcity of money in the hands of people who normally patronise the traders. As usual, in almost any harsh economic measure it is the low income people who suffer the most; in this instance the traders who depended on the buyers (the low income people) were equally affected. Since all government contracts were frozen, this meant high unemployment rate for those who depended on such jobs. So to these groups of people the witchcraft eradication crusade could not have come at a more appropriate time; they were able to vent their frustrations and tensions on the supposed witches.

For the young taxi and mini bus drivers, Inyangette was a serious threat to their source of livelihood. Inyangette had made the taxi and mini bus drivers unhappy by making their business very bad. These drivers ply the Uyo-Oron, Uyo-Calabar, Uyo-Aba, Uyo-Port Harcourt, and Uyo-Lagos roads, and these are the roads plied by Inyangette buses, among others. Worse still, Inyangette buses charges less fare than the taxi and mini bus drivers. Most people prefer to travel on the big buses for safety reasons. Further, the Suzuki mini buses which carry six passengers had been banned at Uyo in 1978 because the police said they were not safe to be used as taxi.

Since these buses competed with Inyangette's buses, their owners as well as drivers had no difficulty suspecting Inyangette as the one who master-minded the banning of the suzuki buses. Although others own buses that ply the same routes as the taxis and mini buses, the fact that the mini buses (suzuki) were banned shortly after Inyangette had taken in a new set of buses led to his being the key suspect. And other tranporters may have given false information to the drivers that Inyangette was responsible for their problems. This point was alleged by two taxi drivers I talked to. Inyangette was suspected to have bribed the police to declare the suzuki buses unsafe. These activities more than 'confirmed' that Inyangette was a witch; he was accumulating money through nefarious means. They reasoned that in 1970 Inyangette was a poor man but by 1978 he was a millionaire. "He must be a witch" was the general conclusion. The explanation by Inyangette that he borrowed a lot of money from banks to boost his business meant nothing to the irate young men who can now blame their poverty and other problems on some external object. This simply confirms the general notion that witchcraft accusation follows the pattern of tension and conflict in society. Thus, someone who believes that he is the victim of witchcraft will generally suspect as the witch someone else who is in a state of enmity with him, or who is a rival or a possible rival. Inyangette, appeared to have scored a point when he told the *Nigerian Chronicle* (November 23, 1978), that his competitors in the transport business had invented the "imaginary witchcraft story" in order to get him out of the lucrative transport business.

As the crusade advanced, the whole thing was converted into a money making affair and a campaign of smear and calumny. This is not to say that this writer believed what Akpan Ekwong and his lieutenants did by way of identifying or detecting witches. Frustrated young men in Ibibio went to wealthy and rich people – particularly those they suspected to have made their money through nefarious means, e.g. ex-government officials known to have embezzled money before voluntarily retiring to take to private business – and demanded money from them. They asked these people to choose between having opprobrium heaped upon them by publicly identifying them as witches and giving them the money demanded. Many, for fear of being stigmatized, acquiesced and gave them the money but those who refused to succumb to their intrigues and blackmail were among the first to be identified as witches. These were among those who

were most cruelly treated by certain groups of Nka Ukpoto. So while at the initial stage it was Akpan Edwong and his accredited lieutenants who went about identifying or detecting witches, collecting and destroying their artifacts, and administering oath, it was not long before "false" prophets moved to various places exacting money from people in the name of the crusader and venting their frustrations on whoever did not yield to their blackmail. Of importance is the fact that Akpan Ekwong was arrested and charged for murder, torturing people and disturbing the peace. It was after his arrest and detention that the false prophets arose. Equally important is the fact that more than twenty lawyers volunteered to defend Akpan Ekwong free of charge. This overwhelmingly testified to the support the crusader enjoyed, even among the highly educated. He was subsequently tried and was discharged and acquitted.

## CONCLUSION

Like other witch eradication movements, the Akpan Ekwong version aimed at eliminating witches and witchcraft. Obviously Akpan Ekwong benefited financially from the exercise and there were two sources of his funds: one was the anti-witchcraft medicines he sold to people. The second source was money and other things like goats, drinks, and yams that the villages in which he identified witches gave him. This writer interviewed two of Akpan Ekwong's closest deputies one of which was his uncle. It was obvious that the crusader himself did not know of most of the money given to him or collected on his behalf. Akpan Ekwong looked quite dedicated and the following he commanded testified to the popularity of his mission. It was so popular that despite the shoot at sight order by the Commissioner of Police, the crusade meetings continued to hold. Where the police attempted to enforce the order they met with stiff resistance and consequently gave up. Generally, the police despatched to prevent the holding of crusade meetings became spectators. The uproar in the State that followed the Commissioner of Police order was more than enough to convince even the most doubting Thomas that the crusade enjoyed the support of most people in the area. Anybody who spoke against it was quickly branded a witch. On November 29, 1978, the Uyo township chiefs as well as those from the semi urban areas visited the *Nigerian Chronicle* office in Calabar to publicize their support for the crusade.

If we accept the pronouncements of Akpan Ekwong after his release (discharge and acquittance) that he was well taken care off by the police while in detention because the police themselves believed in the righteousness of his cause, then even the police supported the crusade. Akpan Ekwong claimed that he made anti-witchcraft charms for people – including the police – while he was in police custody. All this confirms two things, namely, that the crusade was very popular, and secondly that belief in witchcraft is not declining.

Finally, it is true that witchcraft accusation provides both individuals and communities with a scapegoat. It enables people to believe that their failures are due not to any fault of theirs, but to the machinations of others. But as the Ibibio found out, the problem with this approach of coping with crisis or tension is that relief is never more than temporary. It comes only from belief that the source of stress has been really identified and dealt with. But because witches are, and never were, the actual cause of trouble, hunting them down and punishing them cannot do any lasting good. Despite the temporary cathartic comfort it may bring, witch hunting has no effect on the real causes of frustration and social stress. But it is impossible to get the Ibibio to appreciate this fact.