

New religious movements and the problem of syncretism: A study of Anioma Healing Ministry, Nawgu, Nigeria

**Author:**Emmanuel Anizoba^{1,2} **Affiliations:**¹Department of Religion, Faculty of the Social Sciences, University of Nigeria, Enugu, Nigeria²Department of Religion Studies, Faculty of Theology and Religion, University of Pretoria, Pretoria, South Africa**Project Research Registration:****Project Leader:** Jaco Beyers **Project Number:** 2440237**Description:**

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Corresponding author:

Emmanuel Anizoba, emmanuel.anizoba@unn.edu.ng

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This work studied the Anioma Healing Ministry of the late prophet Eddy Okeke. The aim is to investigate the structure, demography, beliefs and practices of the ministry. The study adopts a qualitative phenomenological research design and historiographical method for data analysis. Personal interviews form a primary source of data collection, whilst the secondary sources include library and Internet resources. The study found that Okeke's ministry was not organised or administratively structured like some of the well-established churches or ministries. Because the ministry was structured after African traditional religion, it also held similar beliefs. The study also found that most of the practices of Okeke's healing ministry were reflected in its belief system, and adherents to the ministry included the rich and the poor, men and women. It was also discovered that overzealous and excessive belief in Okeke's magical and miraculous powers promoted him more than his actual spiritual deeds. Many who became disloyal to him or who opposed his interfused religiocultural practices suffered open attacks from him. Although now dead, this ministry still flourishes and Okeke's spiritual powers continue to be held in high esteem.

Contribution: Okeke's ministry has given the world's independent ministries a new socioreligious mentality and intellectual framework. This is, without a doubt, the only ministry constructed in the same way as African traditional religion (ATR) and Christianity. As a result of the foregoing, the *HTS Teologiese Studies* journal will consider this article worthy of publication in their prestigious journal because it contributes to a greater understanding of the world's emerging religious groups.

Keywords: healing ministry; movement; structure; beliefs; practices.

Introduction

The emergence of Eddy Okeke's Anioma ministry in Nawgu was a turning point in the sociopolitical and religious life of the people of Nawgu and their neighbours. The ministry ushered in a new socioreligious atmosphere and ideological framework to the town (Harnishfegar 2006; Feminmore 1986). The ministry was constituted and established as a healing centre and a city of refuge that brought healing to many sick people in Nawgu and beyond, and it also provided hope and succour for many depressed and oppressed people; however, it later proved to be a thorn in the side of the Nawgu community. Anizoba (2019:4) observed that the ministry affected the general spirit and lifestyle of the people. The large influx of people in Nawgu for the ministry's weekly activities brought many corrupt practices to the town (Gechiere 1997). There were many reported cases of teenage pregnancies amongst young girls who were deceived and exploited by men who came from urban areas. In addition, there were cases of family breakups amongst married women who frequented the healing centre. These women, who were predominantly poor, received advances from rich men and were beguiled like Eve into leaving their husbands for extramarital affairs. Politically, things fell apart between the traditional ruler of Nawgu, the late Igwe G.N. Nwegwu and Okeke. There were disagreements between them on critical issues, particularly on the persecution of widows for nonobservance of traditional rites for their dead husbands. Okeke hijacked the politics and governance of the town union by forcing his candidates to become the executives of the town union.

Religiously, Okeke's ministry favoured the Anglican Communion, especially the one at Nawgu where he worshipped. Okeke brought revival to the church. The Roman Catholic Church suffered stiff opposition from Okeke, as he often terrorised and even detained many of the Roman Catholic

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faithful in police cells. Many people were even afraid to practise their religion. This was an infringement on the fundamental human rights of the people, which include freedom of worship, as stated in the Nigerian Constitution. This was not healthy for the town and the citizens, who should be marching toward progress and development. As a result, the purpose of this research is to assess Eddy Okeke's healing ministry's organisational structure, virtues and flaws in light of the extensive criticism and praise from many sources. New religious movements such as the Aniona Healing Ministry are not uncommon in Nigeria or Africa. This topic has a plethora of literature. In the case of the neo-Pentecostal churches in South Africa, for example, Kgatle (2017:4) investigates such new religious groups as they relate to the weird and unexplained union of magic and Christianity. Similarly, Tsekpoe (2019:15) looks into the current issues that emerging deliverance and prophetic ministries offer for Christianity in Africa. His central point is that the people's fixation on prophetic and deliverance ministry has resulted in the blending of Christian and non-Christian life amongst African Christians. Onyinah (2012:10) looks at the issue of witchcraft in Ghana. He claims that these organisations' belief in exorcism conflates the indigenous worldviews and practices of Ghana's Akans with Christianity, thereby deviating from true and authentic Christian practice amongst the people. According to Onyinah (2012:10), the growth of new religious movements in Nigeria and Africa as a whole is a phenomenon that Africans are dealing with in the current religious environment.

Methodology

The study adopts a qualitative phenomenological research design and historiographical method of data analysis. Personal interviews were used as a primary method of data collection (see Table 1), and secondary sources (which include library resources) comprised of journal articles, reports, Internet materials, newspapers, periodicals and magazines

were also used. For the interviews, 20 informants were chosen at random. Those chosen were diverse in terms of gender, occupation and religious affiliation. These informants were mostly from the Nawgu community where Eddy Okeke practised his ministry, and they were thus well versed in his healing ministry. The interview questions were organised in a semistructured manner. This allowed the researcher to follow up on similar groups of interview questions based on the respondents' responses. All relevant issues guiding the conduct of interviews were followed. It was made known to the informants that the information received from them would be solely used for this research. The period of the research was from 2017 to 2019, when the field work was conducted for the research.

Life history of Eddy Okeke of Nawgu town in Dunukofia local government area of Anambra State Nigeria

According to Anene (1993:10), Eddy Nawgu's real name is 'Edward Onyebuchi Okeke'. In 1957 he was born to Mr and Mrs Nwoye Mgboga in Nawgu, in the Dunukofia local government area (LGA) of Anambra State in Nigeria. Informant 1 confirmed this. However, Anizoba (2019:5) traces the biography of the prophet further by positing that Okeke was not a real indigene of Nawgu but a stranger whose grandfather, Okeke Ogini, committed an abomination in his own town, Ukpo, in the same Dunukofia LGA, and had to run away to Nawgu after he had been banished by his community. He further suggests that it was not Okeke's father, Nwoye Mgboga, that migrated to Nawgu but the prophet's grandfather, Okeke Ogini, who married a Nawgu indigene who gave birth to Nwoye Mgboga, who in turn begot the late prophet, Eddy Nawgu. Informant 2 agreed with this assertion and further stated that Nwoye Mgboga had a total of five children, namely a girl and four boys.

TABLE 1: List of informants.

S/N	Names	Age	Status	Place	Mode	Value	Date
1.	Informant 1	58	Legal practitioner	Nawgu	Direct	Reliable	04 August 2019
2.	Informant 2	80	Traditional doctor	Nawgu	Direct	Reliable	08 August 2019
3.	Informant 3	82	Trader	Nawgu	Direct	Reliable	04 August 2019
4.	Informant 4	70	Farmer	Nawgu	Direct	Reliable	08 August 2019
5.	Informant 5	62	Civil servant	Nawgu	Direct	Reliable	09 September 2019
6.	Informant 6	54	Farmer	Nawgu	Direct	Reliable	08 September 2019
7.	Informant 7	38	Student	Nawgu	Direct	Reliable	22 October 2019
8.	Informant 8	42	Farmer	Nawgu	Direct	Reliable	28 October 2019
9.	Informant 9	60	Trader	Nawgu	Direct	Reliable	01 July 2019
10.	Informant 10	64	Pastor	Nawgu	Direct	Reliable	04 August 2019
11.	Informant 11	78	Trader	Nawgu	Direct	Reliable	30 July 2019
12.	Informant 12	69	Civil servant	Nawgu	Direct	Reliable	05 August 2019
13.	Informant 13	73	Farmer	Nawgu	Direct	Reliable	05 August 2019
14.	Informant 14	59	Catechist	Nawgu	Direct	Reliable	07 August 2019
15.	Informant 15	78	Farmer	Nawgu	Direct	Reliable	08 August 2019
16.	Informant 16	79	Farmer	Nawgu	Direct	Reliable	08 August 2019
17.	Informant 17	70	Farmer	Nawgu	Direct	Reliable	10 September 2019
18.	Informant 18	65	Farmer	Nawgu	Direct	Reliable	08 November 2019
19.	Informant 19	57	Farmer	Nawgu	Direct	Reliable	09 November 2019
20.	Informant 20	46	Farmer	Nawgu	Direct	Reliable	09 November 2019

Education and career

Because of certain geographical and social factors, Okeke did not acquire sufficient formal education (William 1980). According to Informant 3, at the time of Okeke's birth and boyhood, the people of Nawgu did not place much value on Western education, instead stressing trading and commercial activities. Because of this, it was affirmed that Okeke did not even complete his primary education before he began a seven-year apprenticeship in timber and building materials under one Mr Ude. Thereafter, he graduated from his timber apprenticeship and became a timber dealer in Jos, Nigeria. This is why it was (Anene 1993:5-8) posited that Okeke had only a little formal education.

Origin of the healing ministry

According to Anene¹ (1993:9), the healing ministry started in 1985 in Jos through Okeke's connections and contacts with Indian spiritualists. He stated that this contact started initially through letter-writing with or to an Indian occult organisation called 'The Indian Secret Agent'. According to him, Okeke's application for membership was granted during the 1980s, and he was given a handbook entitled *The Indian Secret Agent, First in Africa*, 3rd edition. Anene reveals that in the handbook, the healing home known as Anioma Healing Ministry was instead called 'Professor Eddy's Mystic Home of Wonders'. He suggests that in order to disguise his true identity, the prophet changed the name of the ministry to Anioma Healing Ministry.

He further notes that the catalogue has sections displaying multiple charms with different functions and operations, such as charms for eluding security operations and the police, successfully securing business connections, as well as love potions for attracting and charming the man or woman one desires. According to a civil servant in the area, Informant 4, at that point, Okeke, in a bid to attract followers from the unsuspecting public, pronounced that the source of his power was divine and by divine mandate. He also observed that by late 1984, Okeke started what finally metamorphosed into the world-renowned Prophet Eddy Healing Home or ministry. This ministry initially started gradually in his residence in Jos, where his first clients were his trade union members, the Jos timber traders and dealers.

Informant 4 notes that not long after its inception, the ministry (which he opined was an offshoot or branch of an Indian secret society known as 'Yogism') grew like wildfire in popularity and patronage, so much so that Okeke's Jos residence could no longer contain the membership and activities of the ministry. Because of this, according to Informant 5, Okeke started planning to relocate his ministry in his hometown Nawgu and applied to the Ogbonabo land committee of Nawgu town for land allocation. According to

1. Both Anene and Anizoba are from Nawgu and as such knew so much about the practices of the Anioma Healing Ministry of Okeke.

Anizoba (2019:5), this application was speedily granted because the town expected that the growing ministry would bring accelerated development to the community. According to Informant 6, it was following this development that Okeke left Jos, which was the beginning point of his ministry, and relocated his mystic home to Nawgu, his hometown. Originally, the handbook was brought to Nigeria in 1965 by an Indian secret agent who resided in Lagos. Informant 6 stated that at that time the society used mystic charms and occult candlesticks called 'yoga'.

This was why a student in the area, Informant 7, claimed that Okeke merely pretended to be a Christian because he knew that Christianity was popular and also that the society viewed any person with anti-Christian beliefs or practices as a heathen. Okeke did not want to reveal his true identity as an occult master and hence disguised himself as a prophet with a Christian ministry, Informant 7 added. A trader in the area, Informant 8, supported this view when he described the late Okeke and his ministry as a cheat and modern heresy, falsely claiming to bequeath to people a spirituality or soul salvation it did not possess. A Roman Catholic catechist in the area, Informant 9, highlighted this further when he asserted that Okeke made use of the Holy Bible only to deceive people. He hinted that in public, Okeke would consult the Bible, but in secret he would consult Indian charms and mediums.

Okeke (1989a:2) and Okafor (2001a, b) observed that Okeke, also known as 'the prophet', used more than 32 million talismans related to Hindu gods. With all the above citations, it is likely that the ministry of the late prophet had what seemed to be an occult background linked with an Indian secret organisation called the 'Indian Secret Agent', and operated through the practice of Indian 'yogism'. Informant 10 suggested that Okeke did not even conceal the demonic origin of his ministry, because, according to him, the main administrative building at the prophet's Anioma Healing Ministry had a bold statue of a large python painted in bright colours. The researcher, who comes from the same community as the late prophet, can attest to this. The researcher claimed that the signs of the home's satanic origin were very clear and visible, but lamented that people fell prey to his deceptions because of the pressures of their needs and problems. Informant 9 claimed that this python symbol was enough to reveal the true identity of the false prophet to the public because a python is one of the symbols of Satan. He maintained that in the Garden of Eden, Satan deceived Eve by appearing to her in the form of a serpent. From this premise, he concluded that a serpent cannot represent God and that the representation of his ministry with the symbol of a serpent shows that Okeke had the same ministry as the devil, whom the Bible refers to as 'the old serpent' (Rv 12:9, 20:2) and as the one who came to steal, kill and destroy (Jn 10:10). The symbol implies that the prophet had nothing to offer other than a mission to murder and destroy, and that his primary goal was always to kill and destroy, even when he appeared to do good.

Demography of the healing ministry

Anizoba (2019:4) observed that the estimated number of adherents that worshipped daily in the ministry was about 500 members during Okeke's lifetime. They were mainly Igbo people from across the five eastern states of Nigeria where Igbo people are predominantly located. However, Muslims residing in Anambra State, the home state of the late prophet, also worshipped at the ministry. The followers of Okeke's ministry included mainly the rich and wealthy people in society, politicians who were seeking powers for protection from the late prophet, unemployed youths seeking business charms to succeed in life, unmarried women seeking love rings to help them seduce men into marriage and teenagers seeking protection against the criminals that came around the ministry to take advantage of them. The ethnicities of these attendees were determined through the researcher's observation.

Organisational structure of the Anioma Healing Ministry

The ministry of Eddy Okeke, popularly called the Anioma Healing Home, was not organised or administratively structured like the Episcopal Church government (Episcopalianism), which refers to a church organisation administered by a hierarchy of bishops. The ministry was also not conducted in the manner of a Presbyterian Church government, which is a church administration structure in which decisions are made by a hierarchy of presbyters and church elders (Anizoba 2019).

In contrast, the Anioma Healing Ministry was an entirely one-man affair, administered singlehandedly by Eddy Okeke, the founder and owner of the ministry. His decisions were made without consulting anyone else (Klingarrd 1988; McBirnie 1973). He operated and administered the ministry as a personal business and would do anything that pleased him without due consultation (Marwick 1965). The Anioma Healing Ministry did not have an orthodox church administrative structure in which Christ is seen as the head of the church, and only the Trinity that includes the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit is acknowledged as God and worshipped. Instead, according to Neil (1964), Okeke's Anioma Healing Ministry was structured partly like an African traditional religion (ATR) and partly like the Christian religion. Okeke acknowledged local deities, the cult of ancestors and mediums and necromancers (Beidelman 1986). This is why a Roman Catholic catechist in the area, Informant 11, posited that Okeke made use of the Holy Bible just to deceive the public. He added that privately, Okeke would consult with mediums and traditional doctors, but publicly he would deceive the people by trying to make his traditional church appear to be Christian. Informant 11 was not alone in this view. A farmer in the area, Informant 12, observed that Okeke used tricks and deceptions to trap the unsuspecting public. He further suggested that Okeke's religion was an adulteration that mixed traditional religion

and Christian religion so that it would appeal to the shallow-minded Christians who formed a majority of his membership. Informant 13 affirmed this. He contended that Eddy Okeke was not a prophet but a traditional doctor and that he practised syncretism and not Christianity. Although it showed some similarities to Christianity, his ministry was rather structured like an ATR. Okeke believed in God and angels, practised magic, revered the ancestors, was involved in divination and associated with medicine men (Charles & Hunter 1983).

This is why Informant 14 stated that traditionally, Edward Okeke was able to revive some of the cultural beliefs and practices of the town which were abandoned as a result of the influence of Christianity. Informant 16, who is the chief priest of one of the deities in Nawgu called the Ajana deity, maintained that ancestral worship and traditional activities in the shrine had taken on a new look because ritual activities now boomed in the shrine, which had been abandoned because of the influence of Christianity in the community. He praised Okeke and attributed the revival to the tremendous encouragement and empowerment that they had received in cash and kind from the late prophet. Ekenna (2000:12) even suggested that Okeke had forced some Roman Catholics to worship the Ajana deity, despite their Christian faith.

Religious beliefs and practices of the ministry

It has already been discussed that Okeke's ministry was structured after both ATRs and Christianity. It also held some beliefs and practices similar to those of ATRs. Some of these beliefs and practices are:

Belief in God (the supreme being)

A farmer in the area, Informant 17, observed that the ministry believes in the existence of the Supreme Being commonly referred to as God or Almighty God. She believes that the Supreme Being exists and is above all, as well as being worthy of human worship. The ministry holds that this Supreme Being is creator above all and has the final say over human fate and destiny (Nzeribe 2000).

Belief in divinities

According to Madu (1999:10), divinities are lesser beings regarded as agents and mediums of contact with the Supreme Being. He maintains that they are regarded as mediums or intermediaries between men and the Supreme Being, who is regarded to be so great and awesome that humans cannot approach him directly, because he is a colossus. He posits that the divinities are believed to inhabit natural places like mountains, rivers, trees, rocks, forests and so on. Any object or place that is believed to be inhabited by the divinities is normally worshipped as God, because people believe that they approach the Supreme Being through these intermediaries. This is why the ministry of Eddy Okeke pays homage to such divinities as the Ajana deity in Nawgu.

The ministry believes that through these divinities, they can contact and worship or appease the Supreme Being.

Belief in spiritual forces

The ministry of the Anioma Healing Home believed in such spiritual forces as *Arusi* (Abugu 1990). According to the researcher's observation and Informant 18, Okeke's ministry revived and restructured all the abandoned deities and Arusi in Nawgu, thus creating job opportunities for many young men to become priests and attendants to these deities. Unemployed youths in the area earned their living from the deceptions and superstition of the ministry. Okeke's constant visits to these shrines made the profession a lucrative one in the area.

Belief in ancestors

Like traditionalists, the Anioma Healing Ministry believes in the cult of ancestors. The prophet himself even encouraged the members to pay necessary traditional homage to the souls of their departed ancestors (Azuonye 2000). That is why a student in the area, Informant 19, described the healing home as a den of hypocrites who held the Bible and proclaimed Christ, yet were involved with traditionalists, their beliefs and all other nefarious practices associated with them. He lamented that many Anglicans who patronised the ministry have deviated from the faith and began to practise traditional modes of worship like ancestral worship. He further stated that the Anglican Communion had not mustered the courage to expel the late prophet from its membership.

Belief in charms and amulets

Unlike any Christian church or ministry, the Anioma Healing Ministry believed significantly in the use of charms and amulets. Okeke (1986:2) takes this revelation one step further and mentions the names of some of these Hindu charms and talismans used by the late prophet: the 'Odo' talisman used for inducing signs and wonders, the 'Odo Swam' talisman used for destructive purposes and the 'Lindo' talisman used for a variety of other purposes.

It was evident that not only did the prophet use charms and amulets, he even prepared them for his clients and customers. This is why Ukegbu (2001:12) observes that Okeke's death spelled doom for many businessmen and women who received spiritual support from him, such as 'cultic staffs', spiritual rings and other mystic objects used for many purposes like disappearances, disbursement and even charms for eluding security officers whilst conducting illegal business trips and armed robbery operations. Informant 20 stated that cocaine dealers and Indian hemp carriers used the charms they obtained from Okeke to elude security checks even in the most technologically advanced countries'. He also suggested that the 'staff of power' that Okeke gave to his clients was a connection with the diabolical world. According to Informant 20, Okeke even gave his customers charms with

which to trample on and oppress their enemies. He also prepared medicines that enabled them to intimidate people and snatch possessions from them such as land, wives or other valuable materials.

Belief in philanthropy

Despite all the above weaknesses associated with the beliefs of Okeke's healing ministry, it is worth noting the ministry's belief in and practice of philanthropy. Informant 13 states that at one time, Okeke took responsibility for paying the school fees of all Nawgu indigenes in the community secondary school from JSS 1 to SS 3. According to a traditional *dibia* in the area, Informant 15, the late prophet was so magnanimous that he donated huge sums of money to any launching of community development projects.

Ebekue (2001:12) observes that upon Okeke's death, many building projects that he had undertaken for the benefit of the masses had stopped and were now deteriorating. He cites the examples of those philanthropic projects such as the Anglican parsonage building project at St. Andrew's Anglican Church, Nawgu and the building of the chief priest of the Ajana deity in Nawgu, as well as the cassava milling project and others. In addition, Informant 14 pointed out that despite all the evils that Okeke perpetrated, the benevolent practice of almsgiving was deeply engrained in the philosophy of his ministry. However, at the time of Okeke's untimely death, none of these projects had his name engraved on a plaque of honour or his contributions documented to back up the claim.

The practices of the healing ministry

Many of the practices of Okeke's healing ministry were reflected in its belief system. However, because it is possible for somebody to believe and practice differently, at this juncture the researcher will analyse some of the major practices of the ministry (Uzuakpunwa 1990).

Occultism

One of the farmers in the area, Informant 12, posited that Okeke's healing ministry practised spiritism and occultism. He stated that the late prophet was identified by many who knew him as a sorcerer and necromancer who interacted with mediums, as well as with the spirits of the dead. A trader in the area, Informant 19, confirmed this assertion. He pointed out that Okeke had much communication with spiritual agents, who later empowered him with negative spiritual powers for signs and wonders. Informant 19 added that Okeke could pass for a witch doctor and occult grand master because he practiced occultism and traditional activities but cleverly covered his nefarious activities from the unsuspecting public, such as his use of the Odo talisman, Odo Swam talisman, Hindu talisman and others. In addition, a farmer in the area, Informant 19, suggested that the late Okeke was an ardent occultist who had perfectly mastered the arts of fortune-telling, palmistry and astrology and used these to track down his members.

Witchcraft

A legal practitioner in the area, Informant 18, said that the late prophet was a highly qualified traditional doctor who practised all the secret arts of witchcraft. He observed that Okeke prepared effective charms for many people who had long-standing courtcases. After these people had obtained the charms from Okeke, when they next appeared in court, the trial judge would strike off the case without any just cause. In other instances, their opponents would, surprisingly, plead with the court to strike off the case. Informant 18 further suggested that in some cases where the trial judge seemed stubborn, he would die mysteriously, thus scaring other judges from getting involved in the case. A civil servant in the area, Informant 17, confirmed that some married women collected charms and love potions from Okeke for the purpose of securing the affection of their wayward husbands, whilst promiscuous ladies used the same love potions to seduce other women's husbands. He further suggested that women in polygamous homes used this charm to attract the affection of their husbands away from their mates, whilst men used it to catch any lady of their choice. Informant 20 disclosed that the prophet favoured businessmen and contractors. He stated that these businessmen used Okeke's charms to carry goods without detection, destroying the chances of their competitors in business, as well as gaining undeserved favour in business.

Ritual killing

Adeji (2000) threw further light on the heinous activities and practices of the ministry when they reported the events of the prophet's arrest and execution by the Bakassi Boys team, a group of Nigerian youth vigilantes in the south-eastern region of Nigeria. Their activities include fighting against robberies, ritual killings, kidnapping and so on. They combed through every nook and cranny of the healing centre. They reportedly discovered charms and human skulls. They also recovered many ostentatious cars said to have been stolen and brought to the centre for hiding. Anene further hinted that the late prophet made a shocking revelation when he confessed that he had killed 93 persons and that he used their heads and other body parts for rituals and the preparation of powerful charms for his believers.

Armed robbery

Ekenna (2000:8) states that the Bakassi Boys confronted Okeke with a confession by the late Jekwu, a notorious armed robber from Nawgu town, the same community as the late prophet. The robber was brought to restate his allegations against the prophet. According to Ekenna, Jekwu confessed before the Bakassi Boys that he and his gang had stolen all those recovered expensive cars and other luxurious items found at the healing home. He claimed in front of Okeke that Okeke would normally send them for armed robbery operations and also give them powerful charms for safety. Ekenna added that initially, Okeke refused to admit to these alleged crimes, but he later confessed when the Bakassi Boys used inducements and trickery to secure his cooperation. However,

some of my correspondents disagree with the above claims of Ekenna. For instance, a farmer in the area, Informant 17, said that the late Jekwu's alleged confession was false. Many were of this opinion. Informant 17 maintained that Ekenna was just a journalist and not an indigene of Nawgu where Okeke's ministry is located.

Violence

A farmer and the researcher's father, the late Informant 1, stated that at the inception of his ministry, Okeke showed no signs of violence or forceful intimidation. However, he regretfully observed that over the course of his ministry, Okeke changed dramatically and started showing his true character. He started persecuting widows, intimidating people and getting involved in partisan politics and cases. Ekenna (2001:10) adds that he divided the town into two factions, namely, one that supported him and the other against him, a situation that created much rancor, strife and bitterness amongst the people. According to Ekenna, he hijacked the politics of the town and used the 'Godfatherism' factor to destroy the politics and chieftaincy of the community.

Spiritual healing

Despite all the woes and criminality associated with the ministry, in actuality it brought healing and succour to numerous persons, both within and outside the community. According to a traditional *dibia* [doctor] in the area, Informant 20, Okeke's ministry cured many people and healed many sick people from all over the country. Anene (1993:10) states that inside the healing home, there was a psychiatric section where mentally ill persons were treated and healed of their diseases. There were also treatments using traditional medicines (Steward 1989).

Religious syncretism

Religious syncretism is the tolerance and acceptance of all religions and their worldviews. It is the belief that all religions lead to God and are capable of offering salvation to its adherents (Banfield 1958). The healing ministry of Eddy Nawgu accepted all people; even Muslims and traditional worshippers were made to feel at home. Regarding this, another farmer in the area, Informant 20, observed that Okeke's religion accommodated all religious denominations. To make this possible, his ministry worshipped on Fridays so that people of other religious inclinations and affiliations would be free to worship on a neutral day and time. Subsequently, a trader in the area, Informant 16, confirmed that Okeke's ministry worshipped on Friday because of the following reasons: to make sure that his worship day did not conflict with Sunday, the Christians' common day of worship; to be able to attract even Muslims, who ended their own worship by 14:00 and were ready to embark on other programmes for the weekend; and to accommodate or entice the elites, top civil servants and government officials, who might be interested in enjoying their weekend holidays at the healing ministry. According to one farmer in the area, Informant 8, this method of organising his

worship services helped Okeke's ministry to grow rapidly and attract many people from all over the country.

The last days of Eddy Nawgu

The series of events that eventually culminated in the death of Eddy Nawgu started in the early 1990s when it became clear to everybody that the prophet had deviated completely from the path of faith and godliness (Ibegbu 2001). Consequently, there was widespread dissatisfaction and complaints from the entire people of Nawgu and its environs against the nefarious activities of the prophet and his healing home. According to Informant 1, Okeke deviated from the path of truth and justice and started committing all sorts of evil acts. He slipped from the path of decency and became uncontrollable in doing evil. The late former catechist of the Roman Catholic Church in Nawgu, Informant 1, claimed that at this point, the prophet perpetrated all kinds of malicious crimes, ranging from armed robbery, ritual killing and beating of widows to violent acts against the people, and the people could no longer feel secure having the prophet and his ministry, which had virtually become a den of thieves, around them. It was this deplorable state of the community of Nawgu that finally attracted the attention and visitation of the erstwhile state vigilante service popularly known as the Bakassi Boys to the prophet's healing home on 04 November 2000, following a tip-off from the dissatisfied and oppressed indigenes of Nawgu. According to a farmer in the area, Informant 20, that same day the Bakassi Boys succeeded in capturing and arresting Eddy Okeke, along with his father and his elder brother, John Okeke. Informant 20 further stated that they were consequently taken to the Bakassi Headquarters in Onitsha for interrogation. Okeke was eventually found guilty, condemned and executed on 09 November 2000, whilst his aged father and elder brother were released on 11 and 12 November 2000 respectively.

Concerning the capture and trial of the late prophet, his wife Okeke (2001) has this to say:

[I]t was on the 4th November 2000, at about 4:00 AM. I was asleep, suddenly I heard a loud bang on the bedroom door. Someone said, 'Open this door or I will break it down!' I ran to the door, my husband was sleeping. (p. 10)

She further stated that there was a second bang at the door, and she opened the door and saw many men, about 40, with angry expressions and pump-action guns and machetes. She stated that these men asked where her husband was, and as she asked them who they were, they pushed her aside and went and violently pulled her husband up from out of bed. According to her, on waking up, her husband queried who they were, and to this they thundered that they were 'Bakassi Boys' on government order or assignment. As Okeke asked them what they wanted, they started beating him, dragged him outside and whisked him away to their headquarters. According to Ekenna (2000), on 09 November 2000, the Bakassi Boys led Okeke out of confinement and brought him to a market place in Onitsha, where some 20 000 onlookers sang songs enthusiastically as the Bakassi Boys hacked the

sorcerer to pieces with their machetes. Concerning the arrest and final execution of the prophet, his 80-year-old father had this to say, according to Ekenna (2000a, b):

The Bakassi Boys would bring him out of the cell from time to time a day or two, and then bring him back. He was tortured and had machete and gun belt wounds all over. The sight of him alone was enough to make one cry. When he was taken out, we didn't know where they were taking him to. Some of the Bakassi Boys had a radio and we heard on the radio that he had been killed. (p. 8)

Maduemesi (2000) also further reports on the trial and execution of the prophet through an eyewitness account of one of the inmates who shared Okeke's cell at the time of his detention:

A man who shared the same cell with Eddy said that the Bakassi Boys kicked Okeke in the stomach and hit him with their machetes and guns. They accused him of killing people. Eddy Okeke denied this and said the Bakassi Boys should test him to prove his innocence. The Bakassi Boys hit him again with machetes and stabbed him all over. (p. 12)

Thus, what started as a mere harassment and arrest of Eddy Nawgu on 04 November 2000 finally culminated in his public execution on 09 November at the Ochanja Market in Onitsha.

Conclusion

Prophet Eddy Okeke's Anioma Healing Ministry had positive and negative effects on the general lifestyle of the people of Nawgu and its environs. Okeke's ministry activities favoured a selected class and impoverished the other group. It brought stiff persecution of the Christian faithful and the highest form of revival of traditional religious worship. The ministry improved the socioeconomic life of the people whilst at the same time spreading an incurable state of moral decadence, which has remained with the people years after his demise. Many undoubtedly benefited from his large but ill-intentioned generosity and benevolence, which in the long run turned out to be their worst undoing. Many who sang his praises and rolled out their drums at the beginning of his ministry later saw the demon behind his ministry and opted out, though not without some sorry tales and unsavoury experiences. Okeke highlighted Nawgu town and brought it popularity but purely on the negative side. In terms of the tangible measurable indices of development like power supply, tarred roads, water, hospitals and so on, Okeke's over 15 years of operation did not reward his host community by providing basic amenities like running water, electricity, access roads and so on in the area. This ministry does not seem to have any bright prospects now that the founder and sole administrator is dead; this is because of its organisational structure. As was indicated in its beliefs and practices, the ministry was built solely on the vision and person of the late prophet. He ran or managed the ministry singlehandedly. There was no real constitution that reflected policies on the continuation of his ministry. Likewise, because the ministry thrived on power and miracles and only the prophet had this power, now that he is no more, all the people that patronised

the ministry for his charisma and powers will most likely withdraw their patronage.

In conclusion, Okeke's undoing was his deviation from what he was originally called to do. He ventured into village politics and became drunk with power. Had Okeke concentrated on his initial calling and ministry, he would not have ended up in the hands of the Bakassi Boys, who were instruments of the then-governor of Anambra State, Dr Chinwoke Mbadinuju. However, it is said that some shallow and scanty prayer activities still manage to thrive in the centre, which has long since come under strict government surveillance. Now that Okeke is dead, in order for the ministry to thrive and pass the test of time, it must undergo a very serious revival.

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