



Research Paper

Manifestations Of Identity Crisis Amongst Descendants Of Enslaved In Contemporary Banyang Communities 1960-2000

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ABSTRACT

This work examines the manifestation of identity crisis of Banyang slave descendants caused by slavery in contemporary Banyang communities in the South West Region in the Republic of Cameroon. It argues that slavery that existed in Banyang communities centuries ago caused identity crisis which indeed manifested itself in the lives of the freed slave descendants in contemporary time. The recruitment of slaves, practice of slavery and the birth of slave descendants were the first steps towards the origin of identity problems in Banyang communities. This work seeks to find out the origin of slavery in the Banyang communities, the practice and origin of slave descendants and how these all caused the issues of identity dilemmas amongst this group of people which caused a division between them and the Banyang freeborn. The researched and presentation of the data of this study was carried out through an investigative, descriptive, explanatory and analytical approaches and added was a qualitative instrument of analysis that was made use of. The researchers consulted and made use of primary and secondary sources including archival materials, interviews, a questionnaire, articles and books. These were helpful in providing us with the material needed to defend our argument that slavery caused the manifestation of identity crisis amongst the slave descendants in the Banyang community in contemporary times.

KEYWORDS: *Banyang, Slavery, Slave descendants, Identity, Conflicts*

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I. INTRODUCTION

Slavery has been an old institution and practice which occurred in almost every continent in the world. It had existed before the dawn of human history right down to the 21st century, and all communities had one time been slaves or slave holders/masters.¹ Slavery is a topic that has attracted the attention of many scholars all around the world and there has been a debate about it that is still ongoing. This activity which varied from one society to the other has been subjected to plural definitions. Slavery according to Paul E. Lovejoy was a form of exploitation. Its special characteristics included the idea that; slaves were properties and outsiders who were alien by origin. Also, that their labour power was at complete disposal of a master and they did not have the right to their sexuality and by extension to their own reproductive capacities. This meant that; the masters were in charge of deciding how and when the enslaved/slaves could have intercourse which could eventually lead to child birth as well as, their productive capacities. This was a process of creating descendants which was beneficial to the slave masters as it was an addition to their labour force in the Banyang communities. Added was the fact that, slave status was inherited by slave descendants unless provisions were made to ameliorate that status.² To precede, Slavery as stated by Okon Uya, involved persons known as slaves who were vigorously taken from their home/place of origin through sale, related transactions, kidnapping or wars to a new home. He

¹Perbi Akosua, Slavery and the slave trade in pre-colonial Africa, (Indiana U.S.A: Manchester College, 2001), 1-2

² Paul E. Lovejoy, Transformations in slavery: A History of Slavery in Africa (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 2

further asserted that; slaves were consequently not considered as citizens in their new found homes but were seen ascertained as aliens/outsideers that were to be exploited economically and in any way humanly possible.³

A slavery system was determined by the societal norms of the said community and in this case was the Banyang communities. However, it is important to note that, Victor Ngoh and Fomin advanced that, indigenous servitude from which slavery emanated from in some African societies was unknown to the Banyang before they got involved in the trans-Atlantic slave trade.⁴ In other words, the Banyangs involvement in slavery seemed to have been prompted by the Trans-Atlantic slave trade. As a result, due to their geographical location, they became active middlemen in the system that transmitted slaves from the distant grass fields to the Atlantic coast, along the Bight of Benin and Biafra. Geographically, the Banyang community is pinpointed in the western portion of Cameroon's equatorial rainforest region. It lies between latitude 5 27 North of the equator and longitude 9 11 and 9 51 East of the Greenwich Meridian. The Banyang were divided as two fairly differentiated groups; the Upper Banyang (Manyang 'Nfai) and the Lower Banyang (Manyang 'Antem).⁵ The total land surface area of the Banyang country is 1640km² and it shares boundary with the Widikum people to the North East, Nweh and Mudani people to the East and the Mbo and Obang peoples to the South West.⁶

The Banyang were very strict when it concerned their moral values, kinship or descent and as result could not imagine integrating the slaves to become kins. Indigenous slavery to the Banyang was the exercise that involved the acquisition, use and exploitation of non-members of their family or host society in involuntary servitude.⁷ This was in line with the words of Jennifer and Olatunji when they said "enslavement/slavery involved 'denial of kinship' and 'de-socialization' or the rupturing of ties between captives and their homelands and their insertion into new societies as slaves".⁸

Slave descendants were and are people who were not sold into slavery but born into it hence their slave status which was associated with a stigmatized identity was an inheritance from their grand-parents and parents (ancestors). Added to this, it is imperative to bear in mind that; the term "slave descendants" or "Freeborn" which emerged from the practice of slavery was meant to describe and differentiate the past/current socio-cultural status of individuals and families which were assigned and accustomed to them based on the origin of their ancestors during the slavery and slave trade era.⁹ Banyang slave descendants were people born of slave parents or enslaved parents. This group of people were born into slavery and not brought in through warfare, sales or acquisition like their great grandparents. Due to this, the slave descendants were seen as a people without a homeland with what Paolo Gaibazzi described as people with poor knowledge of their migratory past.¹⁰ Orlando Patterson in his work also advanced that; "Enslavement by birth was naturally, the consequence of earlier forms of enslavement, but in all societies where the institution acquired more than marginal significance and persisted for more than a couple of generations, birth became the single most important source of slaves. Of the great majority of slave holding societies, the stronger claim maybe made that birth during most periods was the source of most slaves".¹¹

The Banyang slave descendants were not identified as a people without their Masters, that is to say they were under or a reflection of their master but with the end of slavery, they gained and took control of their identity which made them belong and powerful as a group.¹² Manumitted and emancipated slaves became free people, where previously they had been un-free people, making manumission or emancipation a change in status rather than state.¹³ The abolishing of slavery was more theoretical than practical amongst the Banyang people of South West Cameroon. That is to say, slave descendants after the abolition of slavery still suffered identity crisis though they were free. Lotte Pelckams agreed with this when he stated that, most aspects of slavery as an activity had been abolished just legally and economically but not socially/culturally. And that was why, people

³ Okon Uya, Contemporary issues on slavery and the Black world (Calabar, Cats Publishers, 2003), 6

⁴ E.S.D Fomin and Victor Julius Ngoh, Slave settlements in the Banyang country 1800–1950 (Limbe: Pressbook, 1998), 16

⁵ Emmanuel, Ntufa Aka Agbor, "Ekpe Society and Manyu People" *Focus on the Manyu Woman on the Threshold of the Third Millennium*, (Yaoundé: CRTV Yaoundé, nd), 4-5.

⁶ Richard Agbor Ayukndang, "Slave routes, markets and prices in an integrated Banyang Community, South west Cameroon: A historical appraisal". *African Journal of humanities and society*, Vol 13, No 1, (2013), 13

⁷ E.S.D. Fomin, A Comparative of Societal Influences on Indigenous Slavery in Two types of Societies in Africa (Edwin Mellen Press, New York, 2002), 13

⁸ Jennifer Lofkrantz and Olatunji Ojo, "Slavery, Freedom and failed ransom negotiations in West Africa 1739-1900". *The Journal of African History* Vol 53, No 1, (2012), 29

⁹ Lotte Pelckams, "Moving memories of Slavery among West African Migrants in Urban Contexts (Bamako, Paris)", *Revue Europeenne des migrations internationales* Vol 29, No.4 (2013), 48

¹⁰ Paolo Gaibazzi, "Diaspora without homeland: Slave descendants and the cultural politics of Ancestry in the Upper Gambia River Valley", *Revue Europeenne des migrations internationales* Vol 29, No 1, (2013), 24

¹¹ Orlando Patterson, Slavery and Social death: A Comparative study, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1940), 132

¹² Vickie M. Mays, Identity Development of Black Americans: The role of History and the Importance of Ethnicity, *American Journal of Psychotherapy*, Vol XL, No. 4, (1986), 586

¹³ Katarina Schwarz and Andrea Nicolson, "Collapsing the Boundaries between De Jure and De Facto Slavery: The Foundations of Slavery beyond a Transatlantic Frame", *Human Rights Review*, (2020), 13

in former slave communities (such as Banyang which is our focus) most especially practiced and are still practicing slavery socio-culturally and politically which is based on the ideology of slavery.¹⁴ This ideology is a construct which influenced the actions of the freeborn Banyang group towards the freed slave descent/Slave descendant group and vice versa. Below, we examine the significance of the study, the origin of slavery in Banyang communities, the practice of slavery, the manifestations of identity crisis amongst the Banyang slave descendants and the Banyang freeborn, ways in which the slave descendants overcame the identity crisis and conclusion.

II. SIGNIFICANCE

The work is significant because it will serve as a guide for researchers interested in this field of study to pick out and comprehend the historical significance of slavery that occurred amongst the Banyang people. It will therefore bring forth information on how this activity called slavery caused an identity crisis which affected the people of slave descent even after slavery was abolished.

This study is equally significant in that; it will serve as a roadmap for other communities nationally and internationally to research and see how the practice of slavery outlived itself and still exist and also bring forth recommendations on how to solve some of the problems slavery caused which is still ongoing. By so doing, it will contribute to knowledge; create new perspectives in research, societal growth and development.

III. ORIGIN OF SLAVERY IN BANYANG COMMUNITIES

The institution of slavery originated and developed in various parts of West Africa differently under diverged circumstances. Kwabena Adu-Boahen attested that; the earliest reference to the origin of slavery and slave trade was related to Fezzan in the Maghreb and dates back to the 7th century AD. Sub-Saharan Africa later became the major source of slave supply to the Maghreb and the Mediterranean world.¹⁵ By the 15th century, the Europeans came and established their presence on the West African coast and slavery thus became the most used activity in the forest and coastal zones.

As reported by Chem-Langhee and E.S.D Fomin, the local slave trade which was part of the long-distance trade in Cameroon began around 1620. Slaves were transported mainly from the Eastern Grassfields through Yabassi to Duala where they entered the sphere of the Atlantic Slave Trade. By 1650, this slave route had been well developed and in about 1820 a new slave route, which then involved the Banyang as middlemen, developed. This new route transported slaves from the Central Grassfields through Mamfe (now Manyu) Division to the west and to Calabar where there was a high demand and the necessary cash and where the slaves also entered the main stream of the Atlantic Slave Trade. It was the longest and busiest slave route east of the Cross River while Mamfe Division (Banyang) as a whole was the entrepot of the slaves it transported. Located at the centre of Mamfe division, the Banyang being at this strategic position controlled the gateways of the slave routes in and out of Mamfe. The Banyang were dimensionally well placed and this promoted their role as middlemen in the active and lucrative business. Until the early 20th century, there was always a steady demand for adult male slaves, slave boys and girls in the lower reaches of the Cross River and a steady supply of them from the Central Grassfields.¹⁶ As such, the Banyang did not just act as middlemen in the sales of slaves but they also decided to buy and keep some of the slaves for themselves to use.

IV. PRACTICE OF SLAVERY IN BANYANG COMMUNITIES

Banyang Slavery was the maintenance of acquired aliens for the purpose of extracting services from them. The criteria of persons who were used as slaves were persons sold from other communities who were law breakers, criminals, thieves, adulterers, debtors, Pawns, victims of witchcraft and war captives.¹⁷

The Banyang slave descendants were also considered aliens who were kept and maintained at the margin of the society of the freeborn Banyang. They were treated and perceived quite differently and this was seen in the activities which they performed and how they were administered in separate settlements. The notion of slave descendants amongst the Banyang was deeply rooted in their expendability and dispensability, as they were used to accomplished risky and laborious tasks such as harvesting of nuts from tall palm trees which eventually gave them the name “climbers”, domestic chores, procreation, sacrifice, security and farm cultivation amongst others.¹⁸ To the Banyang, slaves descendants were highly objectionable people with dangerous psychic

¹⁴ Lotte Pelckams, *Moving memories of slavery*, 45

¹⁵ Kwabena Adu-Boahen, “The Impact of European Presence on Slavery in the Sixteenth to Eighteenth-Century Gold Coast”, *Transactions Of The Historical Society of Ghana No. 14*, (2014), 169

¹⁶ Chem-Langhee and E.S.D Fomin, “Slavery and slave trade among the Banyang in the Nineteenth and early Twentieth Centuries”, *Paideuma: Frobenius Institute Bd 41*, (1995), 193

¹⁷ Perry Felton, “Kidnapping: An Underreported aspect of African agency during the slave trade era 1440-1886”. *A journal of African studies, Vol 35, No 2*, (2009), 5

¹⁸E. S. D Fomin and Victor Julius Ngoh, *Slave settlements in the Banyang country*, 2

powers inherited from their parents and grandparents¹⁹ and as result, they were kept in separate settlements from the freeborn indigenes of the Banyang communities. This gave the slaves a *de facto* freedom and this aspect made the Banyang slavery system amongst other things different from other slavery systems.²⁰ Despite the huge population of slave descendants that was present in the Banyang communities, the Banyang never changed or adjusted their notions/feelings about slavery which meant they never could allow the descendants to become part of them (integration). To the Banyang, the slave descendants were outsiders and not blood related in every sense of the word and as such they could not be accepted to be part of them or have their citizenship or even become a kin.²¹ They were regarded as aliens without kinsmen and their descendants no matter the generation, remained slaves and aliens.²² This is in line with the words of Ute Rosenthaler were she said “slave descendants were perceived as trans-local individuals of different origin with different culture and history”.²³

It is also important to note that, the Banyang slave system was at the same time benign. The Banyang permitted their slave descendants to own properties and they were allowed to pass it on to their children and grandchildren. These were rewards to the descendants for being on their good behaviors and having a good relationship with their masters. They provided their slave descendants with wives and, although they often kept the dowry derived from the female offspring, they also used the dowry to get wives for the male offspring. That is to say, the slaves could also build and own a house of their own in which they lived in with their family though and under the authority of their master. It is however obvious that; the treatment and activities carried out by the Banyang masters towards their slave descendants led to the manifestation of their identity crisis as would be seen below.

V. MANIFESTATIONS OF IDENTITY CRISIS

Nomenclature

This aspect had to do with the new names that were given to the slaves by the Banyang masters which were what they used in identifying them. Just like under normal circumstances in life, these names moved from one enslaved generation to another (slave descendants). The Banyang masters achieved the above because one of the aims was actually to extinguish the memories of the slave descendants about their home of origin, culture, families, gods and Lineages which was represented to an extent by those names. This was a way of informing the enslaved and their descendants that; they were now a part of the Banyang community and there was no going back. To the Banyang masters, their former names meant the culture of these people were still very much alive and if they were to maintain those names, that meant their culture would be maintained and this could have led to a clash of cultures and a possible conflict. This was something the Banyang did not want and as a result, they had to make the slave descendants to be acquainted and stick to the Banyang culture.²⁴ All they had for their various original cultures were stories/tales which they heard from their parents and grand-parents and on the other hand, they were present in and witnessed the Banyang culture.²⁵ Some of the Banyang names were *Boh Chi*, *Awonkwa* meaning left hand, *Ekerhentop* meaning mud house, *Ehbini* meaning hair ticks, *Nyakwa* meaning plantain and meat and so on.²⁶ The Banyang also used names such as climbers, our other brothers as a label to identify the slave descendants. Katarina in this regard articulated that; “the dehumanization which the Slave masters needed and used to justify the enslavement of people was achieved in a variety of ways. One of which she mentioned was othering and that this was achieved through the renaming, shaming, and labeling of enslaved persons and their descendants with their status and value entrenched in the discourse of the time”. This is proof that; words or better still language is a very powerful tool which the Banyang used in enslaving the descendants psychologically in contemporary times.²⁷ This tainted their identity because those names were given before slavery was abolished for the reasons explained above and after its abolition; they were still maintained hence creating issues for the free slave descendants.

Character Traits

These characters were a manifestation of identity issues among the slave descendants. According to the Banyang, the slave descendants were people who were very mischievous and associated with witchcraft. Ute argued that; slaves from the Grassfields were known for their knowledge of strong medicines and powerful

¹⁹ Chem-Langhee and E.S.D Fomin. “Slavery and slave trade among the Banyang, 196

²⁰ E.S.D Fomin and Victor Julius Ngoh, Slave settlements in the Banyang country, 2

²¹ Interview with Egbe William, retired cook, 75 years old, Mamfe town, 14 September 2015

²² Ibid

²³ Ute Rosenthaler, “Translocal Cultures: The slave trade and cultural transfer in the Cross River Region”, *Social Anthropology*, Vol 14, No.1, (2006),71

²⁴ Interview with Sesekou Joe Mbu, Enterprise software Architect, 70years old, Online, 12th August 2021.

²⁵ Chem Langhee and E.S.D Fomin, Slavery and Slave trade among the Banyang, 198

²⁶ Interview with Sesekou Joe Mbu, Enterprise software Architect, 70years old, Online, 12th August 2021

²⁷ Katarina Schwarz and Andrea Nicolson, “Collapsing the Boundaries between De Jure and De Facto Slavery, 11

magic.²⁸ This was proof to them that the enslaved and their descendants were strong witches and wizards. An example was cited by informants about a late chief (name withheld for sensitive reasons) whose mother was a slave descendant and as such he was too. Looking at his way of life when he was alive, it was confirmed by informants that, he was very wicked and could kill anyone who got in his way knowingly and unknowingly. He was also known for always picking fights with elders and the people as well as having sexual relations with the wives of other people.²⁹ To the Banyang people, these were behavioral characteristics of slave descendants because the Banyang did not have such blood and there was no way a crowned chief of Banyang ancestry would act that way.

The informants also advocated that; slave descendants were known for their suicidal nature, nuisance, problematic, what they call in local parlance “show show”, too familiar (Brotherly) and too argumentative. According to them, the exaggerated familiarity from the slave descendants towards the Banyang was so they would feel they belong, not left out and wouldn't be notice by others that they people of slave descent. Meanwhile on the part of the Banyang, they saw this attitude and others as disturbance and problematic.³⁰ All this had to do with the tainted identity of the slave descendants which emanated from slavery and followed them to contemporary times. These were not normal behaviors according to the Banyang and this only entered/prevailed in the Banyang community when the slaves came in. The Banyang freeborn argued that, all these was brought up because of how they saw the descendants behaving and on the other hand, they behaved that way because they knew they deserved equal rights, respect and participation 100% as the freeborn did.³¹ The descendants on the other hand, saw these characters of theirs as actually one which is found everywhere that is among other ethnic groups and even the Banyang. Also that; these behaviors were brought forth from them due to the cold treatment meted out by the Banyang indigenes.³²

These characters, though the Banyang strongly believe was valid are also somewhat generalized. That is, there were/are also some Banyang indigenes with the same criteria such as familiarity, problematic, mouthy, proud and egoistic amongst others and they believe were brought by the descendants. But it however does not tarnish their identity in this regard and so it shouldn't have been for the freed slave descendants because every ethnic group has such characteristics among them. So in effect, I believe these characteristics are looked upon so much by the Banyang indigenes because from origin, these people were and are slave descendants (slave ancestry) and that automatically means they were inferior and sub-humans. According to the Banyang, from these behaviors, in the words of Etchu Richard “A slave is a slave period; this condition was passed down to their children as if it were part of their DNA”.³³ Meaning, characters/behaviors could also have been passed down through the DNA which is a normal proven believed phenomenon in the society. This led to a maintained psychological separation between the freeborn and the people of slave descent and this shows how discriminating the institution of slavery was before and after its demise.

Nyankpe Association

When people participate in their hometown associations, it then reveals a deep sense of belonging to their home place.³⁴ Martin Evans stipulates that, hometown associations bring together indigenes of a place living at or away from their perceived common home.³⁵ There were many associations that existed amongst the Banyang such as *Nyankpe*³⁶ also known as *Ekpe*, *Obassinjom*, *Angbu* etc. They were all vital as each played a significant role in the community, however the *Nyankpe* association was the highest of them all given that it was the most renowned, prestigious and served as a governing institution. It was an all-male association which literally means ‘leopard’.³⁷ It was that association which made the men so proud to be part of because according to some informants, all the men who were part of *Nyankpe* were considered as real Banyang men in and out of the Banyang society.³⁸ Another term for it was the gentleman's club.³⁹

²⁸ Ute Rosenthaler, “Translocal Cultures: The Slave Trade and cultural transfer in the Cross River Region”, *Social Anthropology*, Vol 14, No.1, (2006), 78

²⁹ Informants agreed with this

³⁰ Interview with Enow Ntui, Retired Business man, 79 years old, Douala, 19th August 2021; Tanyi Daniel, Traditionalist, 95 years old, Kumba, 19th August 2021, Tanyi Daniel is part of the prestigious *Nyankpe* association; Atem Lucas, Retired Civil servant and farmer, 78years old, Kumba, 18th August 2021; Agbor Clavis Adamu, Caterer/Freelance Sociologists and traditionalist, 64 years old, Kumba, 20th August 2021; John Ndiba, retired teacher, 72 years old, Kumba, 12th August 2021.

³¹ Ibid

³² Interview with Ayuk Nkwa Pascal, Teacher/Business personnel, 54 years old, Douala, 19th August 2021

³³ [https://www.cambridge.org/core/Etchu Richard Ayuk's Manuscript on the Slave Trade and Social Segregation](https://www.cambridge.org/core/Etchu%20Richard%20Ayuk's%20Manuscript%20on%20the%20Slave%20Trade%20and%20Social%20Segregation). Assesed on 6th October2021.

³⁴ Tabe James Takor, “The chieftaincy institution among the Banyang and Ejagham ethnic groups of Cameroon (1884-1990): An intersection of flexibility, partially and interference”, *International journal of Advanced research and publications*, Vol 1, issue 2, (2017), 76

³⁵ Martin Evans, “Primary Patriotism, Shifting identity: Hometown associations in Manyu division, South West Cameroon”, *Africa Vol 80, No.1*, (2010), 397

³⁶ *Nyankpe* is synonym to *Ekpe* and *Mgbe* depending on the community involved. *Nyankpe* is the appellation of the Banyang communities.

³⁷ Malcolm Ruel, *Leopards and Leaders: Constitutional Politics Among a Cross River People* (London: Tavistock publications, 1969), 216

³⁸ Interview with Bessong George, Famer, 68 years, Kumba, 25th August 2021

Each village/community had its own *Nyankpe* association, with a lodge, shrine, several grades and various masquerades. The *Nyankpe* network had its members who had certain rights and duties, and its secret sign language was understood by other member lodges.⁴⁰ The *Nyankpe association* helped to govern the village, facilitated trade, performed other services relevant and instrumental to the community. Before the abolition of slavery and the introduction of European colonialism, the Banyang slave descendants were not admitted nor accepted into the *Nyankpe* association. This however slightly changed after the abolition as the descendants were then allowed to be a part of the association but it was strictly on their terms. This means that; the slave descendants could not attain leadership positions and as such were given the least positions with no choice in the matter.⁴¹

However, only the lowest positions/grades were assigned to them meanwhile the higher grades/positions were meant for the freeborn.⁴² *Nyankpe's* ranks were/are *Seseku/Sessekou, Etementi, Tatas, Manyangalaw* and *Esenewas* and the slave descendants occupied the position of *Esenewas* which is the last and the rest was occupied by the Banyang freeborn.⁴³ These highly esteemed and prestigious grades/positions were usually hereditary and this aspect legitimized the ownership of the society.⁴⁴ Even though they occupy the lowest positions of the *Nyankpe* institution, they were still minimized.

The fact that the slave descendants were prevented from owning completely *Nyankpe* except for the lower positions made them feel like they were not part of the community or did not belong and that was because of their stigmatized identity which they were aware of. This created a lot of sentiments associated with anger, resentment and illegitimacy which made some of them to fight back. Some of them retaliated and addressed the issues by taking it to court. An example described by Fomin and Ngoh stated that

“In December 1978, Solomon Ekong of Defang village, a descendant of a slave couple, euphemistically described as a person of uncertain origin, sued Chief Taberem of Fotabe village for preventing him from buying all the stages of ekpe society and claimed 5,000,000 francs CFA in "damages for deprivation of the right of citizenship." During the trial, the lawyer of the defendant, E.E.Ebai, himself a freeborn Manyang, described Chief Taberem as "a Custodian and Trustee of the ancient customs and traditions of his people." In January 1981, Justice Francis Monekosso found Ekong's claim "premature and frivolous" and dismissed the case with a fine of 30,000 francs CFA against Ekong".⁴⁵ The Ekong was not satisfied with the verdict and thus appealed the case on the grounds that the judgement was unreasonable and unwarranted. The appeal is still pending....⁴⁶

Consequently, slave descendants went ahead and created their own association synonymous to the *Nyankpe* association known as *Obhon/Ebhon*.⁴⁷ This manifestation of identity problem here is very obvious because their identity as slave descendants prevented the Banyang from welcoming them with open arms into their prestigious *Nyankpe* which was/is seen as a Kinsmen association.

Marriages

This was another domain where the manifestation of identity problems was evident. It was forbidden during and after slavery for a Banyang freeborn to have sexual intercourse or get married to an enslaved or a slave descendant. This was because, the Banyang saw the slave descendants as people with strange and bad blood and going close to them in this regard meant their blood which was pure would be stained. The Banyang freeborn attested that; children born of slave descendants were usually fools, handicapped and worse. According to them, they hardly ever had such children in their midst till the enslaved and their slave descendants were brought in during slavery. This as they said affected only stubborn freeborn who went ahead to marry slave descendants after the abolition in contemporary time.⁴⁸

In life, there are always exceptions to the rule in every case though the exception doesn't make the rule. In this case, the exceptions were a few freeborn (in hiding) who got married to slave descendants. This was usually achieved when the people involved were very stubborn and claimed that what they felt was stronger than any cultural prohibition. Children born of this union were considered normally part freeborn and part slave decent looking at the history of both ancestry but to the Banyang, they were totally seen as descendants of a slave.⁴⁹ This shows that the status and identity stigma of slavery continued to flourish despite its end.

³⁹ Ibid

⁴⁰ Ibid

⁴¹ Ernest Lalah Effim, "Slavery among the Ejagham of the Cross-River Area of Cameroon 1900-2015" (PhD History Thesis, University of Bamenda, 2020), 207

⁴² Interview with Obennayiang Dennis, Accountant, 61 years old, Kumba, 26th August 2021

⁴³ This was highlighted by all informants

⁴⁴ Ute Rosenthaler, *Translocal Cultures*, 83

⁴⁵ Chem-Langhee and E.S.D Fomin, *Slavery and slave trade among the Banyang*, 198

⁴⁶ Ibid, 199

⁴⁷ Interview with Obennayiang Dennis, Accountant, 61 years old, Kumba, 26th August 2021

⁴⁸ Interview with Sessekou Mbong Abane, Civil servant, 48 years old, Kumba, 31st August 2021.

⁴⁹ Ibid

Cultural Dances

Cultural dances in the Banyang communities were tied or linked to their associations. They were also very protective of their cultural dances and participated in them prestigiously. One of the cultural dances which the slave descendants participated in but at lower levels was *Nyankpe*. Some aspects of *Nyankpe* were transformed into a dance association and its features were songs, rhythms, masks and dances diffused disconnectedly and by imitation.⁵⁰ That is to say, *Nyankpe* was a governing association and was characterized with cultural a dance which was performed by its members and indigenes of the community usually joined them depending on the occasion. The slave descendants just like their position in *Nyankpe* always danced in that regard usually at the background.⁵¹

Another important dance which showed the stigmatization of the identity of slave descendants was *Etokobi*. *Etokobi* was a warrior's dance associated with songs about war and bravery. *Etokobi* was characterized with properties of a ritual dance than of an association as it rarely had regular meetings and initiation rituals. An *Etokobi* dance/ritual usually consisted of day and night performances which occurred in a day and only on stated days assigned for *Etokobi* which also depended on the occasion. All male descendants of first-comer lineages were members through birth and entitled to participate in the important night performances. However, only the freeborn male indigenes were allowed to participate in the night performances of *Etokobi* as it was considered more sacred than that of the day.⁵²

In order to completely keep the slave descendants away from this dance, if a family wanted to celebrate the *Etokobi* for a respected deceased member, the family first of all applied for an official permission before the celebration can take place. It would be then be verified to ensure that the deceased had no slave ancestors because if he did, the request would be denied totally and completely and this was something they were all aware of. The next phase is that invitations would be sent out to the Patrilineal villages involved.⁵³ The police sometimes were involved in this by the family concerned for the sake of a peaceful celebration. This was to prevent any disturbance and nuisance from anyone not found in the group and in this case was most especially the slave descendants. Even if the deceased family had slave descendants they had assimilated into their family after the abolition of slavery, the males were still excluded as long as they were of slave ancestry.⁵⁴ Fomin and Ngoh agreed to this when they ascertained that; "the descendants of slaves are still being excluded from this war dance *Etokobi* whose climax was once marked by the slaughter of a slave at midnight".⁵⁵ Slave descendants were allowed to participate at a very limited scale in the *Etokobi's* activities and strictly in the day performance where they participated on one leg only or with one stick of bamboo performances.⁵⁶ The heart and most important part of the *Etokobi* dance was at night and that means being a part of it, also meant you were a full fledge Banyang citizen. In this regard, the slave descendants weren't regarded as such and as a result, they could not be part of the dance. This was an identity problem being manifested because of the stigma associated with being a slave descendant, the Banyang freeborn could not look past that and incorporate them into the legitimate dance. This further turned into a conflict which caused heated disputes and clashes between the freeborn and the descendants of slaves.⁵⁷ An example was quoted by an informant who talked about a certain slave descendant who retaliated when he was forbidden to join the *Etokobi* night ritual. He did so by open confrontation and challenged the leader for a fight during preparations for the ritual. He argued that, he was a Banyang indigene as well regardless of how he got here and as such deserves to be part of the ritual without discrimination. He made so much noise it brought out indigenes of that community who came to see what was going on. The case however landed in a case-solving session with the Banyang elders. The slave descent was reprimanded severely and he was fined with items that cost almost 100.000.⁵⁸ This was to serve as a warning to the people of slave descent who tried to act that way again. It also showcased the open discrimination and preferential treatment that was going on between the freeborn and slave descendants.⁵⁹

⁵⁰ Ute Rosenthaler, *Translocal Cultures*, 76

⁵¹ Interview with Sessekou Mbong Abane, Civil servant, 48 years old, Kumba, 31st August 2021; Sessekou Ashukem Moses, traditional consultant, 86years old, Kumba, 25th August 2021; Obennaying Dennis, Accountant, 61 years old, Kumba, 26th August 2021.

⁵² Ute Rosenthaler, , *Purchasing culture: The dissemination of Associations in the Cross River Region of Cameroon and Nigeria*, (New Jersey: Africa World Press, 2011), 53

⁵³ *Ibid*, 57

⁵⁴ Ute Rosenthaler, *Translocal Cultures*, 86

⁵⁵ Chem-Langhee and E.S.D Fomin, *Slavery and slave trade among the Banyang*, 199

⁵⁶ Ute Rosenthaler, *Purchasing culture*, 65

⁵⁷ Interview with Sessekou Joe Mbu, Enterprise software Architect, 70years old, Online, 12th August 2021, Obennaying Dennis, Accountant, 61 years old, Kumba, 26th August 2021.

⁵⁸ Interview with Sessekou Joe Mbu, Enterprise software Architect, 70years old, Online, 12th August 2021.

⁵⁹ Ralph R. Premdas, "Identity, Ethnicity and the Caribbean homeland in an era of globalization", *Social Identities Vol 17, No.6*, (2011), 813

Communalism

Etta Emanuel, Esowe Dimgba and Asukwo Offiong advocated that the concept of “Communalism meant a strong allegiance limited to one’s own ethnic group which is usually based on its cultures, shared history and characterized by collective cooperation and ownership by the members of the said community”.⁶⁰ The Banyang people had a very strong spirit of communalism in their community.

In terms of communalism, the identity issues of Banyang slave descendants were manifested and brought to light. In the words of Marcel Ngbwana;

“The social life of the people of Cameroon was and still is centered on the community. Life is considered worthless unless it is lived within the community. There is an African saying, not only in Cameroon, but also in other parts of Africa: “I am because we are; and since we are therefore I am.” Community life is valued over individualism”.⁶¹

The Banyang are people who lived and practice communalism over individualism. They were united in all that they did, carry out activities in the cultural, economic and political milieu. In effect, with the presence of enslaved and now slave descendants in their midst, their communalism was shaken. This is in a sense that, they had to adjust their lifestyle to suit the presence of the slave descendants and this adjustment was to create a psychological division/separation from the descendants which in turn was portrayed through their actions physically. This was obviously as a result of their stigmatized identity as slave descendants.

Political Instruments

The Banyang aside from socio-cultural associations also had political instruments that emulated and symbolized political authority in the community. One of which was the large wooden slit gong also known as *Eruk* in *Kenyang*⁶²/Banyang. This gong was a symbol of local political autonomy in the Banyang communities. This gong was associated and had connections with *Nyankpe*’s authority as well. The presence of two slit gongs in a village was an indication of two different *Nyankpe* groups in that village and it also meant, there were two *Nyankpe* halls belonging to each. This gong was usually located at an accessible and nearby place where it could easily be seen by the indigenes and also beaten quickly when the need aroused. For example, it was usually beaten as a means of communication to assemble the indigenes in times of danger. It was also beaten and used in the village when events that included bloodshed/blood sacrifice was done to strengthen the emotional bonds of the community, and to ensure its protection, power, and peace. The gong was usually kept with trophies of war, hunting (such as hippopotamus or elephant jaw bones) and trade around it. This brought the Banyang indigenes closer to each other under an authority in one spirit and action to appreciate the past, act in the present and prepare for the future.

It would be significant to know that the people of slave descent or descendants of slaves were not allowed to own a slit gong neither were they allowed to own a *Nyankpe* hall that was associated with it.⁶³ This was simply because they were not kinsmen of the Banyang community, as such they were outsiders considered as out caste. Being an out caste meant they were not qualified to be Banyang indigenes even though by birth, that was their home. This exclusion was a clear demarcation and manifestation of identity issues amongst them in contemporary time (after abolition). This I can say led to a clash of identity for the slave descendants as they juggled between their past and present. The slave descendants past which was slavery, led to their present of stigmatized identity which has made the Banyang to exclude and limit them from events which they termed events of Kinsmen.

Chieftaincy/Leadership

Leadership in traditional societies is based on inheritance and other criteria which are like added bonuses. The source of legitimacy for traditional authorities is historical and dates back to the pre-colonial period. They were/are usually not only regarded as political leaders, but also as spiritual leaders of the society.⁶⁴ The culture of a community plays an important role in the process of a choice of a traditional ruler. In the Banyang and Ejagham communities respectively, Tabe James attests that; culture was the backbone of the society and the indigenes of the Banyang paid much attention to their culture. He further explained, it therefore had to be respected and practiced by all. This explains a local say in the Banyang and Ejagham communities, “he who does not know the culture of the land is not a complete man”.⁶⁵

The first criteria that was to be examined before someone could become chief or a leader amongst the Banyang was his moral and family background. He had to be respectful of his elders and younger people, have

⁶⁰ Etta Emmanuel et al, “African Communalism and Globalization”, *African Research Review*, Vol 10, No.3, (2016), 303

⁶¹ Marcel Ngbwa Oyono, colonization and ethnic rivalries in Cameroon since 1884, (postgraduate thesis, university of Memphis, 2004), 7

⁶² Kenyang is the traditional language of Banyang

⁶³ Ute Rosenthaler, *Purchasing culture*, 43-44

⁶⁴ Tabe James Takor, *The chieftaincy institution among the Banyang and Ejagham*, 76

⁶⁵ *Ibid*, 77

charismatic qualities, full of wisdom, obedient, eloquent, an orator, good listener, and kind and generous..⁶⁶ To crown it all, for a person to become chief, he had to first be a member of *Nyankpe* and precisely a *Sesekou*.⁶⁷ Participation in *Etokobi* dance/ritual was also proof of eligibility and readiness for chieftaincy. This was so because; participants of *Etokobi* had their own *Nyankpe* hall, and were acknowledged as a community by the government.⁶⁸ So it was an added bonus in been chosen as chief of the said community. From the above, it is very obvious how much the Banyang culture meant to the indigenes and how highly they regarded it. We then get to understand why they had to ensure the slave descendants didn't raise to such leadership positions. They knew the slave descendants given their historical background and identity did not possess any of the above criteria and as a result they were automatically not qualified for such positions.

This exclusion sparked anger as the slave descendants wanted to fight back what they thought they deserved to be part of but were not allowed to be. Fomin and Ngoh again illustrated an example here where they stated that;

“In 1981 in a Cameroon law court, thus sanctioned the determination of the Banyang to deny their 'citizenship' to people of slave origin in their society and prevent them from acquiring leadership position in their important associations, despite the fact that these people belonged to the society by birth and residence”.⁶⁹

Despite fighting back, it was obvious that they were going loose because they wanted to fight something that was never going to change (a least not immediately in contemporary times) especially in the Banyang communities.

VI. HOW SLAVE DESCENDANTS OVERCAME THE IDENTITY CRISIS

Increased Migration

Today, many inhabitants that are descendants from slaves who were owned by freeborn people in the past are found in both the Banyang communities and elsewhere/everywhere. The former slaves had died and majority of their offspring did not wish to maintain this culture and to explore their own non-local origins.⁷⁰ This led to migration which increased overtime from local to urban centers by the slave descendants and this has been one of the ways in which the slave descendants have used after the abolition to overcome the identity crisis they were facing and forge new identities/images/new lives. Descendants of slaves had moved to urban centers which were characterized with a larger population of strangers and better job opportunities. Lotte Pelckams argued that; before the abolition of slavery, it was very obvious that the enslaved could not migrate or move around freely without the permission of their masters unless they were being sold or resold. However, after the abolition of slavery, there was a significant change in that aspect of migration as there was now freedom of movement for the slave descendants who migrated nationally and internationally.⁷¹ The abolition of slavery indeed paved the way for freedom for the slave descendants and also acted as an escape from the stigmatization in the Banyang communities. This was an act which led to the decline of the construct of slave descendants amongst the freeborn and the slave descendants as well in their new settled home/area. Pelckams went ahead to give reasons for this form of migration; firstly that slave descendants migrate so they can exit and disappear, secondly that slave descendants try to benefit from a loyal attitude by migrating or thirdly, they stay back and voice their concerns.⁷²

The Banyang slave descendants immediately after abolition identified with the first and third option as some migrated and some stayed back. This change I can say led to a decline in the stigmatization of slave descendants in the urban centers as compared to rural centers (Banyang communities) nationally.⁷³ This was a movement away from the stigmatized identity into a new territory, way of life, ideologies about life and new ethnic and cultural identity. The urban sectors offered and delivered better chance/chances for the integration of Banyang slave descendants as their cultural identity and descent was much easier to hide there.⁷⁴ This way things changed about their identity as the marginalization reduced and they could live the lives they chose too.

⁶⁶ Tabe James Takor, The chieftaincy institution among the Banyang and Ejagham, 77

⁶⁷ Ibid

⁶⁸ Ute Rosenthaler, Purchasing culture, 43-44

⁶⁹ Chem-Langhee and E.S.D Fomin, Slavery and slave trade among the Banyang, 18

⁷⁰ Ute Rosenthaler, Trans-local Cultures, 72

⁷¹ Lotte Pelckams, Moving memories of Slavery, 50.

⁷² Ibid, 46

⁷³ Interview with Enow Ntui, Retired Business man, 79 years old, Douala, 19th August 2021; Esther Enow, retired teacher, 84years old, Douala, 9th September 2021.

⁷⁴ Susanne Epple, “Craftworkers, Hunters and Slave Descendants in Ethiopia: New Perspectives on the dynamics of social categories” in Documenting Southern Ethiopia: Recognizing past legacies and forgoing the way, ed Sophia Thubauville, Elias Alemu (Frobenius-Institut, Frankfurt am main and Mekelle University, 2017), 35

Leadership positions

In terms of leadership, there has also been a considerable change in recent times. Many slave descendants nationally and internationally have risen to leadership positions. Some informants claim that; for leadership positions in the Banyang community, only a rich descendant could attain a leadership position and that would be because he/she bought it with money and aside that, it was never possible. An example was quoted of positions such as Mayor. They elaborated that, such positions were bought in different communities and not from the one he comes from. There was another example of a man who is of late who was a part slave descendant and was fighting for chieftaincy position in one of the Banyang communities. He however used a lot of money to ensure he became crowned as chief to the extent he became popularly known by his followers as chief even though he had not being crowned. He died before ever been crowned as chief. Despite his riches, he had many opponents amongst the Banyang people who opposed him countless times saying he could never become chief.⁷⁵ In effect, only the rich slave descendants could rise to leadership positions meaning at the end of the day, they had a shot in recent times nationally and internationally. This was a positive change in their identity.

Change of Names

One way in which the slave descendants coped from the crisis of identity was to change their names and this usually occurred in the urban centers nationally and internationally. This change of name was seen as an escape temporarily and permanently for some people from the crisis of identity. Temporarily here means that, if the person or persons in question one day decide to go back home (Banyang community), his/her traditional name would be once again used to identify him/her. While for a person or persons who may never plan of going back home, the change of name would stick permanently as there would probably be no reason why their traditional name would pop up or be used anywhere or anytime.⁷⁶ Joana spoke on this when she said “many other African slave descendants had healed from a little part of the trauma of slavery by creating a new identity after theirs”.⁷⁷ This was an opportunity for them to run away from the crisis of identity that had befallen them from their ancestors which they had no control over. This was however very effective for those who lived and remain in the urban centers nationally and internationally as explained above. This was also made possible as it is evident that; nowadays, so many parents with the parents of slave descent inclusive do not want their children growing up in the Banyang communities (villages) as they have seen that there are more opportunities to be exploited out there. This was one of the ways in which the slave descendants overcome their identity crisis.

VII. CONCLUSION

Luke freeman describes the stigmatization of people of slave descent as being a sensitive and precarious process which is characterized with micro-politics.⁷⁸ Tannenbaum on the other hand instructs, slavery only ended legally but morally it did not and that the only way to achieve complete freedom for the former enslaved is to acknowledge their freedom morally.⁷⁹ Slaves were not and could never become Banyang citizens, no matter their generation or length of stay in the society. There was thus a clear differentiation between freeborn persons and slave descendants when it came to socio-cultural and political matters. Nevertheless, voicing their opinions about how they were being treated was a move against slavery treatment in contemporary times. The identity of a people as Banyang slave descendants led to a biased and discriminatory way of life for them. It is imperative to record that; the slave descendants as seen above were marginalized, stigmatized and discriminated against because of their slave identity and this was manifested mostly in the socio-cultural and political spheres of life in contemporary times.

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⁷⁵ Interview with Sessekou Joe Mbu, Enterprise software Architect, 70years old, Online, 12th August 2021; Sessekou Ashukem Moses, traditional consultant, 86years old, Kumba, 25th August 2021.

⁷⁶ Interview with Mbu Enow John, Hardware engineer, 66 years old, Online, 12th August 2021; Sessekou Joe Mbu, Enterprise software Architect, 70years old, Online, 12th August 2021.

⁷⁷ Joana Maria Canellas, “Taking Away your Name is the First step: The Transgenerational Trauma of slavery and the shaping of identity in Yaa Gyasi’s Homegoing”, *Memoria del Treball de Fi de Grau*, (2018), 10.

⁷⁸ Luke Freeman, “Speech, Silence and slave descent in highland Madagascar”, *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological institute Vol 19, No.3*, (2013), 601

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