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The Nyankpe and Justice in Pre-colonial Banyang country

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ABSTRACT

This work examines the role of Nyankpe institution in dispensing justice in pre-colonial Banyang country in the Republic of Cameroon. It argues that Nyankpe played a significant role in establishing truth and dispensing justice among the Banyang. The recruitment of those who administered justice was carefully done taking certain things into consideration. The efficiency and satisfaction in the delivery of justice promoted unity, peace, tranquility and sustainable development in the Banyang country. In carrying out this research, a historical method was applied and a qualitative instrument of analysis was made use of. We 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 claim that Nyankpe effectively administered justice in Banyang country in pre-colonial times.

Keywords— Nyankpe, Obassinjom, Nfam, Banyang, Truth, Justice.

1. INTRODUCTION

The topic *Nyankpe*¹ and Justice in Pre-colonial Banyang Country entails the role of *Nyankpe* as an arm of justice in this polity. This work is relevant because it will showcase the role and importance of *Nyankpe* in establishing truth and dispensing justice in pre-colonial Banyang country. According to Marilyn Warren in her study what is justice; she said justice can be seen in two ways: first in the eyes of an ordinary person which to him/her meant due punishment when a criminal is sentenced for a crime. Secondly, in the eyes of the popular media which meant harsh punishment primarily focused on strong retribution and deterrence.² It is also important to note that justice in simple terms means getting what you deserve and, in this case, Banyang indigenes that were recalcitrant or disobeyed the law in the community were trialed by *Nyankpe* and got what they deserved.³

The *Nyankpe* institution served as a traditional system of justice. It was not only meant for social and economic governance purposes as it is widely known but also for judicial purposes which was a very important aspect in pre-colonial Banyang country. This aspect promoted and ensured reconciliation and peace in the society which was a prerequisite for good governance and development. The Banyang country which is our focus of study is found in the western portion of Cameroon's equatorial rain forest precisely in the Cross-River Region along the Cameroon Nigeria boarder. It lays between latitude 5 degree and 6 degree 30 north and longitudes 8 degree 6 and 9 degree 55 east of the equator.⁴ It is well-watered, forested country and the Banyang themselves are a scattered people who lived in small hamlets or groups of hamlets often separated from each other by three to six miles of hilly bush path of road running through tropical forest.⁵ This area/field of study was chosen because of how influential, instrumental and prestigious the institution of *Nyankpe* was amongst them. This was a two way program in a sense that: as *Nyankpe* served justice, the Banyang indigenes to a greater extent supported the ruling/decisions of *Nyankpe*. Even those who disobeyed eventually gave in and respected *Nyankpe* as a result of the sanctions that was meted out to them as will be seen below.

Nyankpe literally means 'leopard'. It was and is an all-male society which included specifically elderly men who took part in sessions that were meant for administering justice. However, *Nyankpe* also involved a few young boys/men but they were considered half members and that is because, given their age, they were not ready for the responsibilities of *Nyankpe*. In effect,

¹ *Nyankpe* is in Kenyang language, it's synonym is *Ekpe, Ngbe* depending on the community involved.

² Marilyn Warren, What is justice. (Mannix college, 2014) P.2

³ Interview with Arrey Princewill, Farmer, 90 years old, Mamfe. 07th May 2016

⁴ E.S.D Fomin and Victor Julius Ngoh. Slave settlements in the Banyang country (University of Buea publications, Pressbook Limbe, 1998) P.6

⁵ Malcolm Ruel, The Family structure of Banyang society. *Proceedings of the Third Annual conference of the West African Institute of Social and Economic Research*, University college, Ibadan, 1956, P.66

when they got older, they were then ready to become full members of *Nyankpe*. As a result, they would no longer be initiated since they had already been initiated when they were younger.⁶ *Nyankpe* was used as an institution to administer justice, settle disputes and promote peace and reconciliation in the Banyang society.⁷ The Banyang traditionally had local laws that were unwritten but drawn from their culture which they honored and respected.⁸ This was also based on the good and bad happenings in the community which brought forth positive or negative outcomes. *Nyankpe* was therefore the main institution that investigated and established the truth and dispensed justice in respect to violations of their laws. This had to do with indigenes that violated the laws of the Banyang society and committed crimes which ranged from theft, witchcraft, treason, land conflicts, adultery, and family issues amongst others. *Nyankpe* was used as an instrument to enforce law and order and to ensure the decisions reached by the *Nyankpe*'s court which was known as the *Okwa* court was respected.⁹ This was effectively carried out through the application of several approaches to ensure success. For example, an offender could be forced to comply with the demands of the *Okwa* court by the threat of ostracism.¹⁰

On the other hand, there were other traditional methods used to seek truth and establish justice which included a person swearing in *Nyankpe*'s shrine.¹¹ *Nyankpe* which was a legislative arm of the community council assisted the chief in administration and maintenance of law and order in the community. It made public the decisions of the council and defaulters were fined to pay in livestock, palm wine, food crops, textiles just to name a few depending on the crime. Although this was generally not disputed by the victims for fear of further reprisals, some defaulters found difficulties in paying these fines in livestock and others felt humiliated and were prepared to eventually challenge the authority of *Nyankpe* in the dispensation of justice. Yet, the public in many instances was in support of the actions of *Nyankpe*. One of the reasons was because leading members of this society were also leading members of the community and their lineages.¹²

Similarly to other parts of Africa, institutions such as *Poro* and *Sande* amongst others in Sierra Leone and Liberia carried out ritual ceremonies for good neighborliness and peaceful co-existence. They also served as local tribunals, settled disputes and other matters among their people which created a congenial environment for socio-economic activities to thrive.¹³ Below, we examine the significance of the study, other institutions and Justice in Banyang country, criteria and recruitment of *Nyankpe* members, role of *Nyankpe* in dispensing justice and conclusion.

2. SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS STUDY

The first significance of this study would be to guide researchers interested in this field of study to see and understand the historical significance of *Nyankpe*'s involvement in serving justice in the Banyang country. It will bring forth information about the existence of other regulatory societies in the Banyang country that assisted the *Nyankpe* in one way or the other.

This study will equally help other communities in Cameroon, the African continent and the world as a whole to go into research to discover the role of their own socio-cultural institutions in the past and how they served as instruments of justice and also if they have survived till date. By so doing, it will contribute to knowledge; create new perspectives in research, societal growth and development.

Also, this work will be significant because *Nyankpe* was and is one of the cultural institutions that have continuously played an important role in the socio-cultural, politico-economic, and judiciary aspects amongst many Cameroonian ethnic groups in general and those of the Cross River region in particular. Their continuous relevance to this day attests and exposes their importance in dispensing justice, regulating the excesses of their communities and promoting development.¹⁴

3. INSTITUTIONS AND JUSTICE IN BANYANG COUNTRY

Apart from the *Nyankpe* institution which is our case study (main focus), other institutions such as *Obassinjom* and *Nfam* also had judicial roles they played in the Banyang country. Their roles will be examined so it becomes clear how peace and tranquillity was promoted through them as well.

3.1 The OBASSINJOM Institution

The word *Obassinjom* literally means "Gods Medicine" i.e. *Obassi*-God and *Njom*-Medicine. This was also an institution that was found in the Banyang country. The *Obassinjom* comprised of a carved semblance of an alligator's head, a free flowing garment and a special designed knife called *Isim*.¹⁵ It also had attendants in whose possession a rattle, horn, wooden drum and crab laws were common place. It had a hierarchy of authority in ascending order of power namely *Atimibi*, *Ebunijom* and *Anechi Njom*. When the offender and victim was brought forth with their complaint/problem, the cult operated by means of a masquerade which in the heat of its gyrations was transported into higher realms of spiritual ecstasy from where it mirrored society's transgressors. At the peak of the spiritual excitement, the masquerade stopped dancing in order to convey information through an interpreter called

⁶Malcolm Ruel. *Leopards and Leaders: constitutional politics among a cross river people* (London, Tavistock publications, 1969) P.216

⁷ Elliott Leib and Renee Romano. *Reign of the Leopard: Ngbe Ritual. UCLA James. S. Coleman African studies centre, African Arts Vol 18, No 1, 1984, P.48*

⁸Martin Ndeh Sango, *Traditional justice system and conflict resolution: exploring the pre- colonial institutional frameworks in Mamfe and Bakweri lands of Cameroon. European centre for Research Training and Development UK, Vol 5, No 5, 2017, P.34*

⁹ *Ibid*, P.103

¹⁰ Interview with Agbor Elias, *Ekpe* member, 79 years old, Mamfe, 24th December 2015

¹¹ Henry Kam Kah, *Regulatory societies, Peace building and Maintenance in the Cross River Region of Nigeria and Cameroon. African Conflict and Peacebuilding Review, Vol.1, No.2, Indiana university press, 2009, P.68*

¹² *Ibid*, P.58

¹³ *Ibid*, P.56

¹⁴ *Ibid*, P.68

¹⁵ Interview with Orock Pascal, A farmer, 78 years old, Kumba, 15th February 2016

Esame Njom. Those who were found guilty as a result of the information usually admitted guilty truthfully and were asked to publicly pay fines depending on the act/conflict. This was even considered a religious institution in the community.¹⁶

3.2 The *NFAM* Institution

The *Nfam* (also *Afam* or *Mfam*) institution was again used as an instrument of justice on disputes over farmland, death of an individual in doubtful circumstances, or cause of crop failure. Suspects swore by the herbs and other forms of traditional medicine presented by the *Nfam* to either prove their innocence or guilt. The *Nfam* was usually recognizable by two horns filled with a concoction of herbs and other material. For example, disputes over a piece of land between two people or two villages, the *Nfam* medicines were brought and the people or elders of the two villages involved swore by it. Those who refused to swear were considered guilty and swearing by *Nfam* medicines prevented people from telling lies. The *Nfam* checked the activities of witches and sorcerers and punished misdeeds. The *Nfam* was a complementary institution to the *Nyankpe*.¹⁷

3.3 Criteria and recruitment of *NYANKPE* Members

The criteria of members who were part of *Nyankpe* and as result part of the justice system of the Banyang country were elderly men (as seen above). The men had to be upright, respectful, from loyal and respectable families and have the community at heart. This was because justice was an important part of the Banyang country like every other community which promoted peace, unity and reconciliation which are very vital for development and expansion. This can be seen in work of Sarah Kinyanjui titled "Restorative Justice in Traditional Pre-colonial Criminal Justice systems in Kenya" where she argued that; the spirit of *ubuntu* which connotes solidarity and humanity fosters restorative justice which is aimed at promoting and sustaining community cohesiveness.¹⁸

In respect to the recruitment of *Nyankpe* members (justice members),

- Entering *Nyankpe* through buying of rights which was usually paid in forms of money, food, drinks and goats.
- Knowing the voice which meant the initiate became exposed to the voice secrets of *Nyankpe*.
- Mastering the communication skills which entailed knowing the language of *Nyankpe* as well as the secrets around that. As a result the initiate becomes a respected member.
- The fourth stage included the initiate's visit to *Nyankpe*'s secret forest where he was introduced into the secrets/rituals thereof.
- The last stage was known as rising to the height of a *Nyankpe* chief. This was optional and depended on the initiate who could be apply to become one if he wanted to. However, not all *Nyankpe* members were chiefs as only *Sesekous* which was the highest rank in authority could be chief.¹⁹

These were the processes that interested elderly men had to go through before becoming full *Nyankpe* members.

3.4 Role of *NYANKPE* in dispensing justice

The *Nyankpe* institution was an institution that was established for the purpose of governing which also meant providing justice and taking care of the Banyang country. It made laws to ensure conformity in matters of accepted community interest and to enforce the authority in a community when this had been challenged. The circumstances covered by law varied from the control of everyday activities to more general offences that were matters of public concern.²⁰ It was highly respected and honoured by the Banyang people (due to its punishments by the *Nyankpe* masquerade for disobeying the laws which one of was flogging amongst others) and this made it easy for *Nyankpe* to carry out its functions.

Nyankpe was able to hear cases amongst Banyang community members. Cases aroused from interpersonal disputes over issues such as debt, trespass, and damage to property, injury to person, divorce, adultery, unnecessary disputes, witchcraft, insults, and theft amongst others.²¹ There were also cases that aroused from offences against the community like violation of a community law, instituted by the community authority *Nyankpe*. However, a case arising from interpersonal dispute for example, must first initiate a formal complaint made to the leader of the *Nyankpe* council or a senior *Nyankpe* elder or elders. The elders would later sit and deliberate and it would then be decided if the case would be heard, if accepted the necessary arrangements would be made. Such arrangements varied and for example, with interpersonal disputes, a "suing fee" (*nkap nte*) was paid either when the complaint was made or when it was laid down before the *Nyankpe* council and this amount varied slightly. In 1954 in Tali and Bara, it was two shillings.²² However, any member of the community had the right to have a case reported to the *Nyankpe* council and he/she would be the one to conduct the case with support from others in the meeting either as witnesses, spokesmen, family members, friends and the community who was always present. Also if a woman or a younger person was a defendant, he/she was likely to be represented by a senior person, relative or husband.²³

During a case session, an *Ekipiri* drum was placed on the ground as a sign that *Nyankpe*'s meeting was in session and it remained there until the matter was settled and during that time no one was supposed to leave the meeting. Leaving was a huge blow to the *Nyankpe* institution as it meant disrespect and as such, the culprit was later trailed on an agreed date and fined too. Formal respect

¹⁶ Sandy Ojong Onor, The Ejagham nation in the Cross River Region of Nigeria, (University of Ibadan, Verity printers Ltd 1994), pp.108

¹⁷ Henry Kam Kah, Regulatory societies, Peace building and Maintenance in the Cross River Region of Nigeria and Cameroon. *African Conflict and Peacebuilding Review*, Vol.1, No.2, Indiana university press, 2009, pp.277

¹⁸ Sarah Kinyanjui, Restorative Justice in Traditional Pre-colonial Criminal Justice Systems in Kenya. *Tribal Law Journal*, Vol 10, No 1, 2009, P.3

¹⁹ Ute Rosenthaler, Purchasing culture: The dissemination of Associations in the Cross River Region of Cameroon and Nigeria, (New Jersey, Africa World Press, 2011), P.117-118

²⁰ Malcolm Ruel, Leopards and leaders: Constitutional politics among a cross river people, (New York, Tavistock publications, 1969), P.179

²¹ Interview with John Ndiba, A retired inspector of police and *Nyankpe* member, 88years old, Kumba, 15 February 2016

²² Malcolm Ruel, Leopards and leaders: Constitutional politics among a cross river people (New York, Tavistock publications, 1969), pp.157

²³ Interview with Paul Egbe, retired photographer and *Nyankpe* member, 84 years old, Mamfe, 22 May 2016

was always shown by the spokesman when the *Nyankpe* council was in session, as he addressed the meeting by standing and anyone who had something to say was given the time and opportunity to say it. This was usually applied to the plaintiff and defendant who were allowed to speak without interruptions in presenting their case individually. Others spoke only when they had something to contribute that was to help the case and the judicial conduct of the case depended mainly on the *Nyankpe* elders and other senior elders present. Meanwhile in the actual hearing, the plaintiff stood facing the jury (that is the *Nyankpe* elders and other senior elders present) at the meeting to state briefly why he was accusing the defendant. The latter stood by the side of the plaintiff on the meetings left hand and he/she was left to answer the accusation to the best of he's/her knowledge. This ushered in further questions in which the plaintiff and the defendant were usually required to answer.

During this process, it became visible whether, the defendant had acknowledged his/her guilt, plead special circumstances or stood strictly on his/her innocence. Sometimes, an investigation was carried in the community ordered by the *Nyankpe* to prove the innocent and guilty individuals. In some cases such as land conflicts for example, *Nyankpe* carried out investigations through sending out some trusted members of the community to find out and see if the person who claimed ownership of the land was honest or not. When a complaint like this was made, a "*Nyankpe* sign" was placed on the land (property) to prevent trespassing by the defendant and the plaintiff or anyone until the problem was solved. Any misuse of the *Nyankpe* sign or trespassing was punishable by *Nyankpe*.²⁴



Figure 1: Sign showing that *Nyankpe* has confiscated the Land (coffee trees) in the background. Kembong village, 1998.

Source: Ute, Roschenthaler. Translocal cultures: The slave trade and cultural transfer in the Cross river region, (Cambridge University Press, 2006), P.85

In concluding the case, many contributions were made as to the suitable judgment but the final judgments were left to the *Nyankpe* elders and senior elders of the community, hearing the case. If the evidence was against the defendant, he would then be asked to pay back the suing fee to the plaintiff.²⁵ Then a decision was taken which was to be announced to him by either a leading representative, a senior elder or the Leader during the session. Just as Malcolm Ruel stated; 'the community has sat' and the judgment of the case is made in the name of the community: 'the community has spoken'.²⁶

On the other hand, cases of offence against the community followed the same procedure; except for the fact that the defendant stood singly before the council and community to answer the case put to him. If the defendant was guilty, it was advised that he confessed and sought what concession he could from the terms of the judgment against him. This was because failure to acknowledge his offence was likely to provoke stronger actions against him and usually a heavier fine.²⁷ An example can be seen when a man from the Bara community called Tanyi Ashu was asked to do something for the community and he failed to. He was asked by the village leader who was a *Nyankpe* leader to undertake an errand to the neighbouring Bangwa chiefdom of Fossung. The errand was fruitless and Tanyi returned to Bara and failed to report the lack of success of his mission to the leader. After two days a village council meeting was held and they questioned Tanyi that had he not been sent by the community? Why then did he not report the feedback when he got back? Tanyi Ashu on his part admitted his error and pleaded that it was unintentional. Nevertheless, the offence had been committed and Tanyi Ashu was required to pay a fine in kind that is a goat. This shows the effectiveness of *Nyankpe* in Banyang country as an administrator of justice as well showcasing the equality of all men. No man was above the law as all could be trailed for misconduct.²⁸

The aim of *Nyankpe* in judicial matters entailed reconciliation of the disputants and seeking an agreed settlement. The administration and direction of a case here was to isolate the offence and the offender; thereby making the offender to submit to the authority by payment of a fine.²⁹ The case discussed above describes a pattern that is typical of many that is a movement in the actionable grounds of a dispute from an issue, which ranged from interpersonal relations to one in which the community was involved. This showed the effect of the use of any institution sanction and an example can be seen when the *Nyankpe* sign was

²⁴ Interview with Dennis Obennayiang, an Accountant and *Nyankpe* member, 68 years old, Kumba, 16th May 2017

²⁵ Malcolm Ruel, *Leopards and leaders: Constitutional politics among a cross river people*, (New York, Tavistock publications, 1969), P.158

²⁶ *Ibid*, P.158

²⁷ Interview with Ekwen Tanyi, a Sub chief and farmer, 85 years old, Takwai village, 23rd January 2016

²⁸ Malcolm Ruel, *Leopards and leaders: Constitutional politics among a cross river people* (New York, Tavistock publications, 1969), pp.164

²⁹ Interview with Tambi Lawrence, ex marine and farmer, 71 years old, Takwai village, 24th January 2016

being placed upon a disputed land; the trespasser was answerable not to its private owner but to the institution (*Nyankpe*) whose authority he had ignored.³⁰ When one was found guilty of disobeying the laws stated by *Nyankpe*, he/she was fined and punished in a way he/she would not want to be an offender again. Added to the fact that one of the punishments that involved the *Nyankpe* masquerade was that it arrested the law breakers for prosecution at the village level and lashed them severely (the lashing stick was believed to have magical powers that could harm the culprit and generations unborn severely).³¹ Another was the payment of fines, banning from a particular property, ostracism, dancing round the village naked just to name a few. These acts of punishments prevented people from committing crimes in the Banyang country and instead cooperated in the course of the law.³² The figure below will illustrate a photo of the wall painting of a *Nyankpe* masquerade masked.



Figure 2: Wall painting of an *Ekpe* Mask

Source: Ute Roschenthaler, *Purchasing culture: The dissemination of Associations in the Cross River Region of Cameroon and Nigeria*, (New Jersey, Africa World Press, 2011), P.103

Figure 2 as seen above, illustrates a picture of the *Nyankpe* masked masquerade and his whip in the Banyang country. This was the masquerade who administered the punishments instituted by the *Okwa* court on the indigenes by having them flogged. They did so through chasing indigenes that ran away, they were caught and brought to the village square and were publicly flogged.

Furthermore, *Nyankpe* in matters of justice in the Banyang community manifested itself through the prevention of undue molestation of the weak by the strong. An example to show how this was done was it acted as an instrument that prevented the trespass on people's property especially when it involved younger (weak) and elderly (strong) persons. This was done after an individual been young or elderly had paid a recommended fee to members of the *Nyankpe*, where after an announcement will be passed to the general public. To this effect, anyone including the young person or elder in question caught violating or trespassing on the property in question was incurring the wrath of *Nyankpe*'s dreaded sanctions. The punishment was usually payment of fines most especially a jug of palm wine (from a jug of palm wine to ten jugs depending on the gravity of the crime that was committed) and an instruction never to trespass again. With this, everyone was seen as an equal and entitled to build and create whatever they wished in the community for themselves with no fear of being molested by others especially those they considered stronger than them. This promoted development through the increase in agricultural productivity, trade just to name a few. Added to this, *Nyankpe* also ensured that debtor's especially dubious ones met their obligations to pay their debts.³³ This can be seen in the words of Talbot:

“One great advantage gained from membership in the old days was the facility offered for the recovery of debts. A creditor brought his case before the *Ekpe* lodge in the debtor's town. The council considered the matter and if the claim was considered justified, the club drum will be beaten through the streets and the defaulter ordered to pay. He was also bound to provide a ‘dash’ for the *Ekpe* society. Should he be unable to comply with both demands, his goods were seized or members of his family reduced to slaves”³⁴

This shows how the issues of debts reduced drastically amongst the Banyang and this also served as an instrument which promoted development. Hence, it is safe to say that, the attainment of justice promotes development.

³⁰ Ibid, pp.164

³¹ Interview with Arrey Joseph, sub quarter head and *Ekpe* member, 69 years old, Kumba, 29th December 2018

³² Terence Onang Egute, *Modern law and local tradition in forest heritage conservation in Cameroon: the case of Korup*, (Universitat Cottbus, Ph.D Thesis, 2012), pp.125

³³ Malcolm Ruel, *Leopards and leaders: Constitutional politics among a cross river people*, (New York, Tavistock publications, 1969), pp.107

³⁴ Talbot. P. Amaury, *In the Shadow of the Bush*, (New York: George H. Doran, 1912), pp.46

Also, the *Nyankpe* as an administrator of justice maintained social order in the Banyang country and this was highly exercised and effective during celebrations and occasions of significance, where order and discipline were entirely necessary. During periods like this, the image of *Nyankpe* personified in a 'wailing leopard' inside the *Nyankpe* hall called *Ocham* was invoked. In this situation it was believed that anyone who caused a breach of the peace frightened *Nyankpe* and as such caused it to flee to the bush. This act was considered very disrespectful and also was characterized with excruciating penalty which could be instituting an order which completely alienated the obstinate offender from every form of association whatsoever with the members of the society. As a result, the people displayed peace and a sense of responsibility each time an occasion or a celebration took place which *Nyankpe* was involved.³⁵

Also, *Nyankpe* served as vital justice machinery for the stimulation of healthy trade and commercial intercourse amongst individuals and groups in Banyang country. *Nyankpe* did this by providing an acceptable level of security for trade items, market places and commercial highways.³⁶ All of these encouraged the free movement of traders, goods and services from one Banyang indigene to another and also their neighbours. With the belief amongst the people that the *Nyankpe* institution had a strong cult power as well as the fact that anyone who disobeyed would be flogged by the *Nyankpe* masquerade (as seen in figure 2 above), it largely accounted for the influence it commanded. As a result, it had a strong power over the people whereby they could not disobey the laws *Nyankpe* instituted. This promoted law, order and peace in the Banyang country. The effectiveness of *Nyankpe* attracted neighbours far and near whom later adopted it; amongst which were the Ododop, Efut, etc.³⁷.

In addition to the above mentioned facts, the *Nyankpe* as an administrator of Justice also regulated the activities of community members. Drunkenness and misbehaviour in the Banyang country which was common among the young people, was forbidden. Those who failed to obey this were brought before the *Nyankpe* to answer for the crime and justice was dispensed to them. The *Nyankpe* elders advised themselves to avoid drunkenness so as not to disturb public peace and tranquillity. Defaulters were punished and this created a love-hate relationship between the elders and some recalcitrant youths whose parents were fined to pay for their children's recalcitrance.³⁸ The *Nyankpe* society taught many people the right way to live and keep the peace in the community. These teachings were passed down from generation to generation, in the form of philosophical insight, moral values, and aesthetic mastery. Through the *Nyankpe*, even slaves were made to obey their masters, though grudgingly, and recognize the social stratification of society as normal.³⁹

Also, *Nyankpe* institution in the Banyang country regulated farming activities for an acceptable redistribution of community wealth. Instructions were given prohibiting people from picking up fruits before they were ripe, and those who defaulted were trailed and paid a fine of four legs of meat and a goat to *Nyankpe*.⁴⁰ Farmland uses were also regulated for the entire communities through the erection of a palm-leaf lattice or a piece of rope twisted into a loop. When community members saw this, they knew that this section of the bush was reserved for other activities. This regulation also preserved the virgin bush from trespassers and other intruders. Through this method, peace was maintained, but only as long as the authority of the regulatory society was not contested.⁴¹

4. CONCLUSION

This work undertook an examination of the role of the *Nyankpe* institution in the aspect of Justice in pre-colonial Banyang country. It did so through the rules it instituted and the activities it played and as a result, promoted peace, unity, community building and development to crown it all. The *Nyankpe* society was an institution that had a strong influence on the Banyang country in judicial matters and acted as an administrative arm of governance. The people respected the governing laws of *Nyankpe* to make the community a better place; especially as the penalty/punishment for disobeying the laws were very devastating according to the people. As seen above, apart from the *Nyankpe* institution, there were also *Obassinjom* and *Nfam* institutions that also had judicial roles they played in the Banyang country. The involvement of the families of the accused and the defendant and the community was great and this reaffirmed communal ties hence promoting development. Their involvement, participation and compliance also proved that, the whole community loved, trusted, supported and respected the institution of *Nyankpe* and all that was associated with it (as a whole).

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³⁵ Interview with Tambi Paul, retired teacher and *Ekpe* member, 89 years old, Mamfe, 22nd May 2016

³⁶ Interview with Ayuk Gregory, security personnel, 62 years old, Yaoundé, 12th April 2019

³⁷ Sandy Ojong Onor, *The Ejagham nation in the Cross River Region of Nigeria*, (University of Ibadan, Verity printers Ltd, 1994), P.105

³⁸ Ibid, P.103-104

³⁹ Interview with Bessong Baiye, business man/*Ekpe* member, 60 years old, Mamfe, 20th February 2016

⁴⁰ Henry Kam Kah, *Regulatory societies, Peace building and Maintenance in the Cross River Region of Nigeria and Cameroon. African Conflict and Peacebuilding Review, Vol 1, N. 2*, Indiana university press, 2009, P.60

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