

## Review Article

## The Role of Death, Burial Rituals, and Ghost Spirits in the Banyang Traditional Political System: An Anthropological Investigation

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**Abstract:** The implications of ghost stories are deeply embedded in the thoughts of the Banyang people. The epistemology of *ngu'h-menem* (ghost or *die comot*) in Banyang Country is passed down to youths as a living culture, narrated by parents and grandparents around the three-stone fireside. This oral tradition begins when someone dies, with rituals performed before burial to either prevent or encourage the appearance of ghost spirits. Ghosts are believed to possess continued influence over the living, playing crucial roles in governance, conflict resolution, and maintaining order within families and the community. This paper examines the implications of ghosts in Banyang Country, an ethnic group in the Southwest Region of Cameroon, arguing that ghost manifestations are not mythical phenomena from an anthropological perspective. Data were collected from primary and secondary sources and analyzed using descriptive methods. The findings reveal that ghost phenomena are integral to the spiritual beliefs and socio-political system of the Banyang people, highlighting the intersection of spirituality and politics in African traditional societies and the complexities of ritual power on social organization.

**Keywords:** Death, Burial, Rituals, Ghost Spirits, Banyang, Traditional Political Systems.

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## INTRODUCTION

In Banyang traditional societies, the people are associated to their customs, values, norms, belief systems, and views on death. This focus has allowed them to preserve these aspects of immaterial culture for future generations due to their historical and cultural significance. In African societies, including the Banyang, the deceased are invoked before burial rites are performed. The intersection of death, burial rituals, and spiritual beliefs within a society offers deep insights into its cultural fabric and belief systems (Eller, 2021). The understanding of death, burial rituals, and spirits (ghosts) in Banyang societies remains an open area of anthropological inquiry. This exploration provides insights into the traditional political organization of the Banyang people while shedding light on their customs and beliefs surrounding death, burial ceremonies, and spirits. Historically, the traditions of the Banyang people have been linked to nuanced perspectives on death and the afterlife. According to (Metcalf 2010, 276) argues

that their philosophical system intricately combines ideas of mortality, spirituality, and communal values, providing a unique viewpoint for understanding their worldview. Through their burial rituals, we see a solemn and reverent approach to honouring the deceased, a practice that transcends physicality and enters the metaphysical realm.

In Banyang society, beliefs about death are continuously refined, giving meaning to the concept of life after death. Their burial ceremonies demonstrate shows respect for the deceased and emphasize a strong bond between the living and the spirits (ghosts). These rituals are not just acts of remembrance but also symbolize the continuation of life beyond the physical world. More so, the concept of ghosts is attached to cultural beliefs. These spirits are thought to exist in the spaces between the physical and spiritual worlds. The variety of ghostly phenomena observed reflects the complex and intertwined nature of these realms in Banyang tradition (Eyong, 2024). Also, the belief in

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ghosts represents a deep connection to ancestral heritage rather than mere superstition (Mark, 2014). Through rituals and offerings, the living attempt to connect with the spirits of the departed, seeking justice, closure, or comfort. However, a ghostly appearance can also signify a disturbance in the cosmic order, prompting actions to restore balance (Mark, 2014).

In consultative of the sacred landscapes of Banyang Country, there is a link between ghosts and the living revealed by the ethnic or “primitive” memory of mysteries of the afterlife. This is a collective memory of people without writing (Le Goff, 1992, 55). These histories of remembrance and redemption blur the boundaries between worlds, urging researchers to explore the unknown and understand the connections that bind people to the spiritual realm. This anthropological investigation of the ghost phenomenon in Banyang society raises a fundamental argument on the implications of ghost spirits in Banyang society. This paper examined the cultural beliefs and practices that form the foundation of ghost spirits of the Banyang society.

### Conceptualization and Contextualization of Ghost Phenomenon

The mysterious realm of ghost phenomena transcends cultural boundaries and has fascinated human imagination across different traditions and landscapes. In this complex web of beliefs, Willey describes ghosts as the lingering remnants of deceased witches and wizards, who remain connected to the mortal world due to unresolved emotions and unfulfilled desires. It is not merely wisdom but the yearning of the heart that draws these spectral beings back, reflecting the enduring bond between the living and the dead (Gordon, 1962, 69). Similarly, Mark’s study of Ancient Greek beliefs reveals a world where departed spirits return to the realm of the living, driven by unspoken desires or unfinished business. In such cultures, the afterlife is not viewed as a distant concept but as a continuation of existence, influenced by one’s actions and memories. The journey after death is shaped by how well a person lived their life or by unresolved regrets (Mark, 2014). Looking further into other civilizations, such as the Aztecs and Mississippians, ghostly tales emerge of protectors and avengers, where the deceased safeguard their loved ones and seek justice for wrongdoings. In diverse African communities, ghost phenomena are deeply embedded in traditions and spirituality, presenting a rich array of interpretations influenced by factors such as migration and globalization (Mitchell, 2014). In discussing the ghost phenomenon, the paper references the Banyang society, where the concept of ghost “*die comot*” is

preserved through the collective memory of the community. This captures the society’s understanding and interpretation of ghostly experiences and the enduring presence of the departed in the social and cultural consciousness.

### The Anthropological Society of the Banyang People

The Banyang people are located (Map 1.1) in the southwestern part of the Cameroon Equatorial Rainforest, specifically in the Cross River Basin along the Cameroon-Nigerian border (N.A.B File No. 63/29, 1929, p.1). They occupy an area of approximately 1,025 square miles, between latitudes 5°27' and 9°56' North, and longitudes 9°11' and 9°51' East (N.A.B File No. Af 19, 1930, pp. 5-9). The Banyang territory shares boundaries with the Menka Clan to the north, Ejagham Clans to the south, Widikum and Fontem to the east, Mbo and Obang Clans to the southeast, and Boki and Anyang Clans to the west (N.A.B File No. Af 19, 1930, pp. 5-9). The Banyang land is accessible via four main routes; the Kumba-Mamfe road, Mamfe-Ekok road, Mamfe-Bamenda road, and Mamfe-Akwaya road. The longest distance across Banyang territory is approximately 61 miles (64.5 km) from Eyanchang in the west to Sabes in the east (Ojong, Anja, Tambi, 2010, p. 12).

Geographically, the scope lies in the central area of the Basin of the Upper Cross River [1]. From 1885 to 1914, they were administered under the Ossindinge division during Germans administration. In 1921, following the expulsion of the Germans from Cameroon, the British administration renamed Ossindinge Division to Mamfe Division, a name it retained until 1969 (N.A.B File No 315/21, 1921, 8). After Cameroon gained independence in 1961, the division’s name was changed to Cross River Division. Today the Banyang people are part of the Manyu division [2]. Oral testimonies suggest that before the Banyang people came under colonial rule, their communities were scattered across the forest in small settlements, with two dominant clans: The Upper Banyang and the Lower Banyang. The largest recognized political grouping at that time consisted of about 2,000 people, sometimes fewer. According to Egbe (2019), what united and set the Banyang apart from other Bantu migratory groups was their language, Kenyang, their belief in ghost spirits, their traditional foods like *Evai ne Eru* and *Nnoko Tanchot ne Ebvai*, and their traditional regulatory societies such as Mgbe and Mawo (Chinyere and Lequome, 2010, p. 330).

The Banyang people are an integral part of the Bantu group, sharing cultural features related to both the living and ghost spirits, and they speak the Bantu

<sup>1</sup> An extended social group having a distinctive cultural and economic organization or A formal association of people with similar interests.

<sup>2</sup> In February 1969 the names of Divisions: in West Cameroon were changed, Mamfe Division became Cross

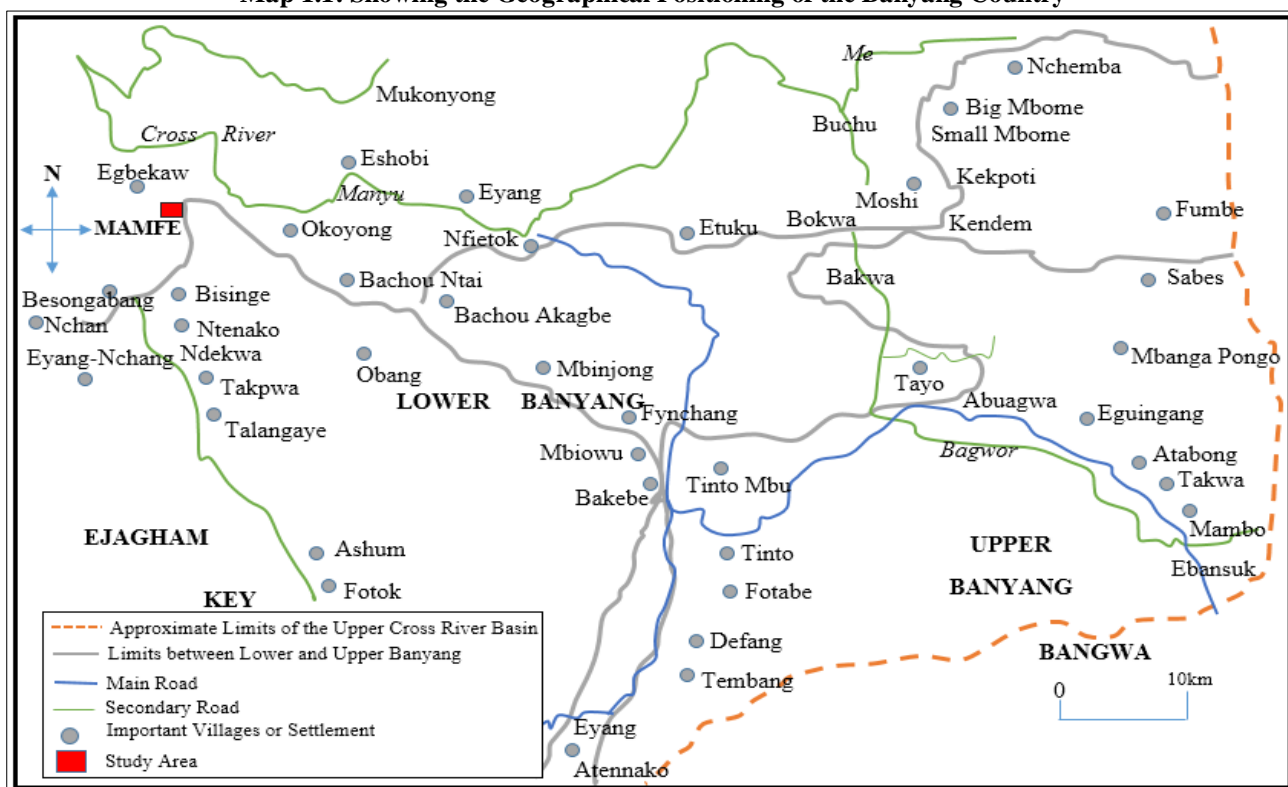
River Division with Mamfe as its head quarter. Victoria Division was renamed Fako, and Rumba Division was renamed Meme Division.

language known as Kenyang (Abangma, 1987; Mbuagbaw, 1998; Watters, 2012). Linguistically, Kenyang is a prominent language that has developed potential future auxiliaries, which may indicate grammatical markings (Mbuagbaw, 1998). The question remains whether these future auxiliaries truly mark tense or are simply adverbs positioned between the subject marker and the verb root. There was no evidence that "past tense" was marked in these languages. Abangma (1987) describes the forms of Denya as aspectual, noting that neither Denya nor Kenyang has a complex tense system, with the major focus being on aspect. Mamfe Bantu and the Cross River languages were found in the Cross Sanaga-Bioko coastal forests, primarily in the inland areas of the forest. Watters (2012) further notes that not only was Mamfe Bantu aspect-prominent, but

this was also a characteristic of all languages in the upper regions of the Manyu River.

It is worth noting that the Banyang people are located in the upper course of the Manyu River, or to the north as it flows toward Mount Cameroon. In contrast, the Lower Banyang people are situated in the south of the Manyu River, along its lower course, particularly around the tributaries in Mamfe, as the river flows down to meet the boundaries with the Ejagham and the Cross River. Talbot (1912) notes that the Upper and Lower Banyang communities share Mamfe as their cultural and administrative headquarters. This community had numerous lineage structures, each represented by a lineage head. Additionally, there were clans with their clan councils, comprised of the heads of various communities (Willie, 2013, p. 10; Pemunta, Tabenyang, & Alubafi, 2014, p. 34).

**Map 1.1: Showing the Geographical Positioning of the Banyang Country**



**Source:** Kennedy Eyong Tabe “Banyang socio-cultural history: from the pre-colonial period to the development of Banyang Quarters” post graduate Dissertation in History, university of Yaoundé, 1991.

The Banyang people have unique characteristics and styles in displaying their cultural values and belief systems. They believed in the nucleus family called *Etok* a group of houses, a settlement, or a place of common residence, especially where the settlement stood by itself. Closely related to this primary meaning of the term, an *Etok* in its most general sense was a community or residential community. Also, an *Etok* was not confined to a single settlement but referred to any residentially based group whose members shared a common identity and a sense of solidarity as a

community. According to (Patrick, 1989, 49) communities like Banyang traditional society, such communities numbered at most one to two thousand persons and occupied an area of perhaps ten to forty square miles. According to Patrick (1989, p. 49), communities within traditional Banyang society typically numbered between one to two thousand people and occupied areas ranging from ten to forty square miles. The Banyang language is Kenyang which describes a political or territorial grouping. The Whiteman’s’ country was called *Etok-Barek*, the land of

the ghost spirits, and the permanent resting place of the ghost was called *Etok-Barem*. Eyong (2022) holds that the term *Etok* was used in a more restrictive sense to describe a body or group of persons who collectively represent a residential community that carved out land either for settlement or for cultivation.

### **Philosophical Thoughts of Rites and Death among Banyang People**

Rite is a representation of cultural performances and rituals of passage that mark a people's lifestyle experience. This expresses the people's thoughts, emotions, social organization, and cultural identities and is regarded as a viable scientific method of dialogue considered by guardians of tradition. Baloyi (2008) posits that rituals were forms of expressions and connections performed by individuals, groups of people, or communities in communication with the living-dead and the Supreme Being (Eyong, 2022), 11-20).

In Banyang society, the thought of death, and grieving was characterized by rituals practiced such as the bereaved members shaving their hair, and the slaughtering of a domestic animal (goat, pig). Other rituals were performed based nature of the death and the personality of the deceased. It was believed that, when a married man died, his widow was forbidden from arriving home after sunset, visiting neighbours, attending family and community functions, and wearing black clothes. The black symbolized the dark cloud that had befallen the family. In the case of the wife, the widower was forbidden from having an intimate affair before a stipulated period, usually six months to one year depending on the community concerned. He was barred from arriving home after sunset. The performance of these rituals was important in maintaining balance and harmony between the living and dead (ghosts). This forms the basis connecting the physical and spiritual ontologies in enhancing cultural practices (Baloyi, 2008).

Death was a natural transition from the visible to the invisible or spiritual ontology where the spirit was not destroyed but moved to live in the spirit ancestors' realm (King, 2013). Thus, death was consistent with the Africans' cultural, historical epistemological, and methodological conceptions of being in the world and were premised on these dimensions. Perceptions and conceptions about death in any cultural system were based on certain philosophical presuppositions and worldviews. Similarly, conceptions of death particularly with the people of Sub-Saharan Africa were understood on diverse beliefs. In this light, cultural differences and thoughts of the person varied across cultures (Mbiti, 1990).

The variation of cultures made Africans conceive death differently based on rites. This system was influenced by their epistemological paradigms consistent with cultural context. According to Mbiti

(1990), the understanding of African philosophy leverages the attitude of mind, logic, and perceptions behind how African people think, act, or speak in different situations of life. Africa does not exclude the spiritual connectedness with the world of the living dead rather they are the spiritual presence in the affairs of the living or becoming a member in the form of spirits Mbiti (1990) while (Nobles, 2006) considers death a state of personal immortality. Nsamenang (1992, 2006) states that an African worldview envisions the human life cycle in three phases of selfhood. There was a spiritual selfhood, which began at conception, or perhaps earlier in an ancestral spirit that reincarnates. Second was a social or experiential selfhood which began at conception the cycle from rite of incorporation or introduction of the child into the human community through to death, third; ancestral selfhood which follows biological death (Menkiti, 1984 171-182).

To the indigenous African worldview, these selfhoods never existed as autonomous, independent, or isolated. They were interdependent, interrelated, and co-existed collaboratively and collectively, the concept of collective or interdependent self (Mkhize, 2004). The self gets defined and understood by others and gets meaning from its relational connectedness to other cosmic life forces. The meaning attributed to the self was based on the meaningful contribution the self makes to the well-being of others and the environment. Life experiences and developmental phases, death included, were not viewed as separate from each other, outside of their encompassing context. When people die, they transcend to the spirit world to be in the company of the living dead or ancestors. Ancestors protected and guided those in the material realm and therefore were highly respected, venerated, and very important to the community of the living (King, 2013).

The continuous communication and connectedness between the living and the ghosts among the Banyang people enabled the deceased to accept the ontology of the invisible intangible beings, dynamically engaging in an evolving state of existence in the world of the animated being (Baloyi, 2008). The belief presence influenced the deceased about the living dead in the lives of the living often referred to as spiritual disposition according to Banyang people. This aspect forms part of cosmic unity because the living members constitute part of it. That is the totality of all beings, animate and inanimate. In this light, Africans did not conceive of death and life as two separate phases, instead, there was a harmonious and interdependent coexistence between the two life forces (Ramose, 2002a). This approach fits the African person in his/her religious understanding of the two dimensions of the living and the living dead (Bujo, 1998). It is noted that the belief in the afterlife shares various opinions between the traditional Western religious and indigenous cultures.



## The Concept of Death and Hereafter in Banyang Land

From the Euro-American perspective, life consists of discrete stages that end with death. Death marks the end stage of life or dying, the dead person ceases to exist. According to (Ekore & Lanre-Abase, 2026), death is considered a rite of passage for those who die at an acceptable (old) age (Ilemona Ekore and Lanre-Abase, 2016, 369-372). The Banyang understand death as an integrated and continuous life process inseparable from the interwoven connections between the visible and invisible ontologies. People did not cease to exist once they were physically dead, instead, they transcended to the spiritual world to live in the community of the living dead (Mbiti, 1990; Bujo, 1998). In the Banyang philosophy, death was not separated from life processes and stages because death was a transition to, or 'growing' to a different phase of being. The dead transcend to the state of collective immortality and exist in the company of the spirits (Nobles, 2006), Motsei (2004) supports that spiritual connectedness reminds us that when we die, we transcend to heaven.

Just like birth, death was characterised by a series of cultural rituals and rites of passage which at times continued for the duration of the mourning period, as long as the living dead were remembered and continued to influence the actions of the living. The mourning or grieving process could not be linked or limited to some period in a discrete sense. It was for this reason that Banyang people took time off from work when their loved ones were dead, to perform rituals that eternally connected them to the deceased. Therefore, from an indigenous Banyang ontological viewpoint, death did not imply an end to life, instead, it marked the beginning of another phase of being (King, 2013). The Banyang believed in reincarnation that is life after death. To an extent, dreams united communication with the life after. Dreams facilitate communication and maintain an unbreakable connection between the living and the deceased, who remain a part of our existence. Through dreams, individuals perceive interactions with the deceased as they are conversing directly with their father, mother, or grandfather not merely the spirit or body of their deceased loved ones. This perspective emphasizes that the deceased continue to live authentically among the living, exerting influence on them (King, 2013).

The Banyang people believed that as the individual got older, he moved gradually from the state of life (*nepem*) to death (*newu'h*). His birth was a slow process finalized long after the person was physically born. A person is not considered a full human being until he has gone through the whole process of physical birth, naming ceremonies, puberty and initiation rites, marriage, and procreation. When the person had gone through these stages, such was referred to as *etangti mbakanem* or *etangti ngore* or he or she was fully 'born', he or she was a complete person (Eyong, Ngwa & Talla, 2020, 39-47). Similarly, death in the Banyang

communities was a process that removed a person gradually from *nepem* to *newu'h*. According to the Banyang belief system, after the physical death of a person, the individual continued to exist in the spirit world and was referred to as *ngu'h-menem*. Such an individual could be seen in the community if the family desired in most circumstances, the dead person was advised and conducted with spiritual herbs to move to a distant town or city to make money for the family (Eyong, 2024).

During this period, the dead person was remembered by relatives and friends who knew him in this life and who have survived him. They recalled him by name, though not necessarily mentioning it, they remembered his personality, his character, his words, and incidents of his life. In the Banyang belief system, if he 'appeared', he was recognized by his birth name. The departed appeared mainly to the older members of their surviving families, and rarely or never to children (Eyong, 2024). This recognition by name was important and he was recognized by name for up to four or five generations, so long as people knew the departed personally and by name. However, when the last person who knew the departed also died, then the former passed out of the horizon of the leaving period; and in effect, he became completely dead as far as family ties were concerned (Eyong, 2024).

So long as the living dead was remembered, he was in the state of personal immortality. This personal immortality was externalised in the physical continuation of the individual through procreation so that the children bear the traits of their parents or progenitors. Survivor's views hold that personal immortality was expressed in acts like respecting the dead, giving bits of food to them, pouring out libation, and carrying out instructions given by them either while they lived or when they appeared (Nürnberg, 2007). This concept of personal immortality helps people to get married if a man had no children or only daughters, he was compelled to get another wife so that through her, sons may be born who would survive him and keep him in personal immortality. Procreation was the absolute way of ensuring that a person was not cut off from personal immortality. In the Banyang Country, the death of a person proclaimed the formal conflict between the forces of life and death. As soon as a person dies, he becomes a living person. He became a "spirit" in the sense that he was no longer in the body, and yet he retained features that described him in physical terms. He still retained his name, so that when he appeared to human members of his family, they recognized him as Enow, Eyong, Ayuk, or Taku (Thomas, Routledge, 2020, 123-143, Chëm-Langhëë, and Fomin, 1995, 191-206).

When the living dead appeared often in some communities, it was to those within his household or family, and rarely if ever, to people not immediately related to him. The living dead appeared to a family

member but no exchange of greetings is recognised. In most cases, the living dead appeared to demand something or give instructions, enquire about the family, and or make requests to be given something. To some extent, they threaten to punish members of the family for not carrying out particular instructions or for not caring sufficiently for the living dead. In the Banyang Country, people were keen to do their ‘best’ for the living-dead, chiefly because these were in a position of need just as little children had to be cared for by adults. At the same time, the living-dead was in the intermediary position between man and God, and between man and the spirits. People in the Banyang Country therefore keep the relationship going between them and their living dead (Van, 2001, 33-62).

### Burial Ceremony in the Banyang Country

Banyang customs did not permit keeping a corpse for more than twenty-four hours after death; the body was buried after the grave was dug at night. Women would sit around the corpse, crying and wailing while expressing phrases like “*onkosairi ohh*” (safe journey ohh), “*petipeti ohh*” (move gradually ohh), “*woh kenem mbi ohh*” (don’t miss your way), “*untek voveh ohh*” (do not forget your children ohh), “*untek nmerket ohh*” (do not forget the family), and “*untek etok ohh*” (do not forget your community ohh) (Etchi, 2018). However, just like the sudden demise of a young man, the expressing phrases changed to “*kero voh ven va wai woh*” (fight those who kill you), “*keme newoh neh*” (retaliate); “*sot voh ne who epoko neh woh ohrong*” (take them also to where you are going). In this light, the corpse is buried with harmful objects like a knife or razor with the purpose that the deceased should revenge for his/her killing through the spirit (ghost). The digging of the grave was done by youths (*tem enem*), while the elites supervised. After when the grave was dug, a few selected elites entered the room where the corpse was laid for public viewing to prepare the corpse for burial. These elites gave instructions and directives on what was to be done. This was a stage where the departed member of the society was about to be sent to meet the ancestors. The dead body was carefully fixed inside the coffin with his essential documents, especially certificates and money. According to tradition, they believe the deceased will make him or herself comfortable and feel less burdensome. These items fascinate the departed to be less dependent when he moves to the country of the dead “*etok varem*” as a ghost. The coffin was followed by a more solemn procession to the grave. After lowering the coffin into the grave, it was covered and a heap of red earth was made. This signifies preparation for the next stage in the rite of burial (Ayuketta, 2023).

After the burial, the immediate family received support from the community, including fetching water, hewing wood, and cooking food brought from the farms. Also, the cooking was done by members of the

community, and during the fourteen to twenty-one days of mourning, food and drinks were mainly provided by other families. This stage of the funeral rite concluded with the head of the bereaved family informing the community chiefs of their intention to fold the mats in the *ekere newoh* (mourning house) (Etchu, 2019). At the final celebration, the eldest in the family of the departed informed the chief of the community of their plan to bid their dear one fare well. The family in conjunction with the elders of the community agreed on the time and take into communal events. Also, they informed the elders and presented some items like alligator pepper, punch whisky or locally made *afufop*, palm wine, and some quantity of fufu and eru prescribed by the traditional council. Keeping to time, the bereaved family and the entire community informed the neighbouring communities of the intention of the family to bid farewell to the departed one which takes either days or weekends (Ayuk, 2020). To an extent, it was done in under three days, and on the eve of the first day, visitors began to arrive through the different entrances into the community. As you arrive you sound a note of your presence by an outcry, with this notifying of the arrival of a visitor, some members of the mourning community approached the wailing visitor. Should they delay in approaching him or her, such began to ask for somebody to do so by saying “*yee muh apuh ve nneck meh.*”<sup>3</sup>. If one or two persons did so, and the visiting mourner entered the mourning community. Such a person was free to stay in any household until the funeral was over (Taku, 2018).

### Historical Justification of Ghost Manifestation across the Continent

The concept of ghost refers to as spectre was the ancient idea that a person’s spirit exists separately from his or her body and according to the Banyang anthropology, continue to exist after that person dies. This ideological philosophy made societies used funeral rituals as a way to ensure that the dead person’s spirit would not return to “haunt” the living. In the Banyang anthropological system, and other parts of the world, ghost stories have continued to exist from the earliest to the contemporary period. Historically, the stories of ghosts were first recorded in the first century A.D. The great Roman author and statesman Pliny the Younger recorded one of the first notable ghost stories in his letters, which became famous for their vivid account of life during the heyday of the Roman Empire (Ogden, 2002). Pliny reported that the spectre of an old man with a long beard, and rattling chains, was haunting his house in Athens (Neumann, 2024). Centuries later, in A.D. 856, the first poltergeist a ghost that caused physical disturbances such as loud noises or objects falling or being thrown around was reported at a farmhouse in Germany (Clark, 2012). The poltergeist tormented the family living there by throwing stones and starting fires. Similarly, in England, the spirit of ghosts was noted and

<sup>3</sup> was there one here to stop me from crying?

reported in the sixteenth century. For instance, Anne Boleyn, the second wife of King Henry VIII and mother of Queen Elizabeth I, was executed at the Tower of London in May 1536 after being accused of witchcraft, treason, incest, and adultery. Boleyn's ghost was reported at the tower and in locations like her childhood home, and Hever Castle in Kent (Archer, 2014).

In America, the experiences of ghosts began with one of its illustrious founding fathers Benjamin Franklin. In the late nineteenth century, Franklin's ghost was seen near the American Philosophical Society in Philadelphia and the Pennsylvania library. Evidence of reports supports that the ghost of Franklin often appeared and danced in the streets (Erkkila, 2000, 717-741). Other reports align that ghost sightings have been noticeable at the White House in Washington, D.C. For instance, the ghost of Abraham Lincoln (16th president) of the United States was killed by an assassin's bullet in April 1865 (Spiegel, 2002). Lincoln's ghost was seen wandering near the old Springfield capitol building and around his nearby law offices (Spiegel, 2002). Additionally, reports justified the ghost of Honest Abe who guided the country through a time of great upheaval and war in the administration of Franklin D. Roosevelt (Spiegel, 2002).

More so, in New York City the storytelling of ghosts was common. The spirit of Peter Stuyvesant, the city's last Dutch colonial governor, was seen stomping around the East Village on his wooden leg shortly after he died in 1672 (Welmers, 1949, 208-243). Mark Twain is believed to haunt the stairwell of his onetime Village apartment building where the ghost of poet Dylan Thomas was said to sometimes occupy his usual corner table at the West Village's White Horse Tavern, where he drank a fatal 18 shot of scotch in 1953. However, the famous recount ghost story in New York was Aaron Burr, who served as vice president under Thomas Jefferson and is remembered for killing Alexander Hamilton in a duel in 1804. Burr's ghost roams the streets of his old neighbourhood especially around a restaurant called *one if by land, two if by sea*, which was located in a Barrow Street building Burr's carriage house (Welmers, 1949, 208-243).

In Africa particularly Liberia, ghost stories were heard in the village of Jawajai close to the border of Sierra Leone. In Liberia, *sande* (female) and *poro* (male) association rituals were carried out as initiation ceremonies and rites of passage attached to the Marvov River. This River was around the *sande* bush site used for prayers and ancestral worship (Welmers, 1949, 208-243). A story was told when a young man was told not to fish in a section of the Marvov River but decided to fish. When he cast his line and something took the bait while he tried to land it, the creature became mighty, coming out of the water and over the head of the fisherman (Carey, 1999). Fearfully, he let go of the line and went mad because the customary laws do not permit fishing the section of the river. Also, the site of Old Jawajai

referred to as a ghost village was a dense forest. This site was believed to be the ancestral homeland of the people of Jawajai, who settled there a hundred years ago but later abandoned. The founder of the Jawajai, relocated his people closer to the Marvov River, on the banks of which the present settlement lies (Thompson, 2013). Within the forest, the vestiges of ancient graves could be seen, and considered to be those of ancestral elephant hunters where sacrifices are made in honour of the dead (Thompson, 2013).

Equally, the Mulanje Mountain Forest Reserve lies in the South of Malawi, close to the border with Mozambique, and is a popular tourist destination, especially with walkers. The spiritual aspect of the mountain includes oral reports of local people disappearing and reappearing several hours or days later with no knowledge of where they have been. Those visiting the area were cautioned and advised not to upset the spirits or they may be vengeful (Malekano, 1999). One day, when a group of students visited the pool, some decided to cool themselves off and went for a swim. One had a camera and decided to go up at the head of the waterfall to take pictures of his friends in the pool. To this effect, his feet lost grip (believed to have been caused by the spirits) and he fell into the pool from the full height of the waterfall. One swimmer reacted quickly to the incident and grabbed his friend to pull him out of the water. Although he was one of the strongest boys in the group, he felt a force pulling against him, which he attributed to spirits. Consequently, he left the friend to save himself despite efforts made. Thus, he disappeared into the pool even though the local police sought the help of professional scuba divers from Mangochi but his body was untraceable. Three weeks later, the body was found on the edge of the pool after it had been 'released' by the spirits (Nso, 2018).

In Cameroon, the awful stories of ghost manifestations are often associated with Banyang Country in Manyu Division. The death of a person marked the beginning of a formal conflict between the forces of life and death. Upon dying, an individual became a living dead, a 'spirit' who was no longer in the body but retained physical features and their name, allowing family members to recognize them when they appeared. The living dead usually appeared only to immediate family members, often to convey a message, demand something, or inquire about the family's well-being. They could also threaten punishment if their instructions were not followed or if they felt neglected (Nso, 2018). In Banyang Country, people were eager to care for the living dead, much like caring for children, as the living dead held an intermediary position between humans, God, and other spirits. The Banyang people maintained this relationship as if the dead were still alive.

#### **Ghost Forms Occurrence in the Banyang Country**

Ghost forms in the Banyang Country were linked to the people's superstition, ancestral past,

appearance, and traditional belief systems (Etchu, 2021). Some families had a history of ghost manifestations and their implications. This is because the family members were initiated by birth through traditional rituals which force them to manifest as ghosts after death. The ghost was treated and catered with the aid of ancestral methods that were handed down from one generation to the other. These ghosts manifested themselves mostly to family members (Etchu, 2021).

Another form of ghost phenomenon in Banyang Country was linked to the community's belief in the existence of ghosts. An informant explains that most persons in the village communities such as Ntenako, Kembong, and Bachuo-Ntai believed that ghosts existed because some people (death) came back as ghosts after being buried. He stressed that these ghosts lived only for about 1-5 years and brought either wealth or misfortunes to family members and friends (Eyong, 2021). Though science and logic have not proven ghosts' existence, oral tradition delves into ghost occurrence through eyewitness accounts. In Africa, cultures believed in the spirits that survived death to live in another realm. Ghosts were among the most widely believed paranormal phenomena (Mark, 2014). Also, passion and love for deceased loved ones made several people believe that their dead loved ones were still alive as ghosts. This belief gave people comfort as they did not want to think that their beloved deceased family members were not protecting them and providing for their needs. For this reason, they attributed most happenings in their lives to the ghosts of their loved ones (Betek, 2018; Etchiakpa Ojong, 2018).

In continuation of the previous discussion, persons who believed in the presence of ghosts, confirmed their existence when a door closed on its own, missing keys of a particular door, sudden and abnormal quiet moments (Ayongi Mbi, 2021). In addition, the people believed in life after death. Generally, these were common manifestations of ghosts that allude to people's thoughts as all dead persons were spirits resting in a vast place. (Nyakwa, 2022). In some instances, ghosts or spirits of the dead are "lost" on their way and abruptly have contact with the living looking their way out (Nyakwa, 2022). These ghosts became aggressive and destructive to the community because they could not locate their resting side of the land of death (Nyakwa, 2022). The forms in which ghosts appeared to individuals were often described diversely. Some individuals purported that ghosts were telepathic entities projected into the physical realm from our minds. This manifestation takes the shape of shadows, clouds, or physical entities, or even appears in dreams, assuming diverse forms. It was believed that ghosts could materialize as any living creature. Consequently, the appearances of ghosts varied significantly from one person to another (Nyakwa, 2022).

In addition, ghosts appeared like human beings and could not be differentiated from real humans (Nyakwa, 2022). They could be transparent, appear without legs or bodies, and manifest themselves as ectoplasms, vapours, and mists. These ghostly visions appeared as cloud-like mist or fog with a swirling effect. They were normally spotted a few feet from the ground and sometimes found just hovering in one spot or moving very quickly. These forms of ghosts were usually warned to be touched except using a waxy substance like ground or dust thrown on their body. They (ghosts) could appear as spherical and usually transparent light forms and can be spotted hovering erratically or in one position above the ground. Sometimes they were noted to have a lingering trail of light (Nyakwa, 2022). Another form of manifestation was apparitions. This type of ghost appeared in a cloud-like form or solid form very weak or pale. They were usually seen wearing the same clothing from a particular period and could appear disfigured or imperfect. Also, they appear in crisis moments to other family members for assistance (Nyakwa, 2022). The last form of ghost in the Banyang Country was shadow ghosts spotted out of the corner of your eye and frequently appeared in mirrors. Sometimes they can be seen wandering hallways and stairwells and can even go through walls (Nyakwa, 2022).

### **Ghost's Implications in the Banyang Country**

Ghost phenomena remain a major spiritual and social aspect of the Banyang people's history and way of life. Its continuous manifestations have had positive and negative implications on people, based on their shared experiences. These occurrences of spirits among the Banyang people have reinforced the concept of ghost phenomena in Manyu Division. In Cameroon, the growing term '*die comot*' or *ngu'h-menem* (ghost) is often associated with the Banyang clan. The epistemology of *ngu'h-menem* "ghost" or "*die comot*" described the cultural heritage of Banyang people while other societies look towards them with derogatory thoughts. However, it is important to examine ghost implications attributed to the Banyang Country grouped under positive and negative.

### **Positive Implications**

In Banyang Country, ghost instils peace and justice in the community. This is because the wider knowledge of ghosts' beliefs helps people to show reverence for them by the concerned families. For instance, ghost-made families handle deceased properties and groom the children based on the instructions left behind to avoid befall calamities from the ghost reaction. (Nyakwa, 2022). According to Betek, the effects posed by the ghosts have helped to restate peace, end the long-time family conflict, and help to manage deceased properties in their absence Betek (2018).

Ghosts were believed to alleviate hardship in Banyang families. According to an informant, ghosts



helped solve poverty by sending money to their loved ones for developmental projects. Banyang people, especially those suspected of being killed, were often buried with traditional herbs or had herbs inserted into their mouths to regain consciousness and function as ghosts. These ghosts were sent to distant towns like Douala, and Yaoundé, and abroad to countries like Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Ghana, Nigeria, and the United States to 'hustle' for money. The money, known as 'ghost remittances,' was for family development. Ghosts increased family wealth, particularly when funds were invested positively in businesses like agriculture, provision shops, cosmetics, or real estate. Ghosts brought wealth, fame, and prosperity, granting spiritual favours such as locating hidden money, boosting farm production, redirecting wealth from others, opening new opportunities, and protecting against misfortune in daily business (Nyakwa, 2022).

The interconnectedness between ghosts and ancestral wisdom, spiritual guidance, and protection benefited the traditional setting of the Banyang Country. The people's affirmative belief in ghost spirits maintains a relationship connected to the sorcerer's wisdom, consulting ancestors seeking guidance and protection, especially those who believed in keeping their communication with the spirits. According to Taku (2024), interacting with ghost spirits was sometimes viewed as a means of seeking spiritual guidance, blessings, or protection from the ancestors as confirmed by some families. Ghost appearances in Banyang societies are common at night because they survey and monitor their initiated activities in the compound and seek assistance when necessary. Betek (2018), supports that some ghosts reinforce cultural identity, continuing lineage, and tradition. Their presence rejuvenates cultural traditions, values, and beliefs, strengthening the community identity of the Banyang people between the living and the dead, and helping to preserve cultural knowledge, customs, and the integrity of lineages. Though other societies look towards them with derogatory thoughts on this epistemology of '*die comot*' or *ngu'h-menem*, it is considered the Banyang folks and their way of life passed down from one generation to another through the web cycle of oral discussion and needs to be preserved (Tambe, 2019).

Ghost recognition is more pronounced in societies where beliefs are deeply rooted in tradition. When ghosts treat their loved ones well, they are nurtured, respected, and treated as fellow human beings to encourage continued benevolence. Conversely, when ghosts cause harm or destruction to family members or the community, native doctors and spiritualists are consulted to drive them away. The violent behaviour is often attributed to the poor treatment they received (Eyong, 2018). Another positive impact of ghost phenomena in Banyang Country is their role in avenging their deaths by punishing or inflicting pain on those responsible, often forcing them to confess. This deterred

potential perpetrators and helped reduce crime in the community (Tambe, 2019). The spirits of the ghost spirits were positively recognised among African societies, including the Banyang people, due to their significant contributions.

### Negative Implications

The spirit of the ghosts equally posed complexities among the families and the entire community. These lead to harsh consequence and turbulence on the concerned. Their anger can be alleging to disrespect shown to them or not doing what they want. In the Banyang society, the spirit of the ghosts has disastrous consequence which affirms that ghost's existence is reality and visible as proven by the oral tradition. Ghosts' visibility creates panicking and fear between family members and community. According to his words whenever there is a rumour of ghosts in the village community, particular destructive ghosts, it brought uncertainty and fear to the people while avoiding night movement and sitting at frightful sites of the village (Tambe, 2019). Consequently, this made people in the community to be disturbed, arose fear within them, reduced their nightly activities like business, events to name a few.

The growing tendency of ghost's manifestations was used as an opportunity by witches and wizards in the community. These are people who carried out hidden activities from public scrutiny. These people used opportunities to disguise as ghost and caused a lot of uncertainties in the village. From the interviewed conducted people testified that it was a common phenomenon across the Banyang communities where people's crops, livestock and other valuable properties lost to these pretentious secretive and mysterious individuals. The uncertainty caused by these people, forced parents to pronounce cursed to the death and their ancestors but later discovered they were not attributed to these crimes (Betek, 2019).

The plight of misery among the people caused by the ghosts have brought negative consequence in Banyang Country. Their misery can be related to poor harvesting, and outbreak of epidemics attributed to the anger of ghost spirits. These have brought suffering to the people while consulting spiritualist or native doctors. In this light, the people spent human amount for consultation, pouring of libation and buying objects used for rituals performances demanded by the native doctors (Betek, 2019). An informant explains that there pouring of libation involved the chief or a high traditional personality who sprinkling food stuffs to the graveside of the deceased for appeasement. Also, roasted plantains, water and palm wine that were sprinkled on the ground. They believed that the essence was to appease the *varem* and the ancestors known as *vohta* (Ebai, 2022). This enabled them to intercede for the community and protect them against any impending danger from destructive ghost particular unfamiliar illness such as

small pox and yellow fever were attributed to an angry ghost who thinks his name has been neglected by his people. Consequently, children of the family were inflicted these mentioned illnesses until the child was named after the ghost (surname) they get well. This circumstance brought fear and disharmony among the people who accused one another for this misfortune (Ebai, 2022).

Another version of ghost exploitation was linked individuals such as traditional religious healers who exhort money from individuals and families to drive or calm ghost spirit for further negative implications. Some families explained that these healers claimed they have potential ability to communicate with or calm the spirits but there still continuous threat from the ghosts (Guiley, 1992). Another negative impact of ghost spirits in Banyang Country was the resistance to change and progress and the reinforcement of patriarchal structures. The strong focus on ancestral traditions and ghost spirits often hindered the acceptance of new ideas, technologies, or ways of life, causing reluctance to adapt to changing circumstances. In some societies, belief in ghost spirits reinforced existing power structures, such as the dominance of elders and the marginalization of women and younger community members (Olupona, 2014).

Modernism, with features such as globalization, has influenced traditional African societies, particularly their belief systems and practices. The belief in ghost spirits often conflicted with scientific and secular worldviews, leading to tensions and potential social or cultural fragmentation. Christians and preachers who did not adhere to these beliefs were often subjected to social stigma, exclusion, or ostracization from their communities (Olupona, 2014). Belief in malevolent or vengeful ghost spirits could also cause psychological distress, anxiety, or mental health issues among community members. These challenges varied across African cultural contexts and evolved as societies underwent social, economic, and cultural transformations. In Banyang Country, traditional beliefs in ghosts have been significantly affected by modernization, Christianity, and globalization, weakening their original strength. Many, especially Christians, view ghost-related activities as evil and attribute them to the devil (Arnold, 2009).

## CONCLUSION

This paper explores the role of death, burial rituals, and ghost spirits in the Banyang traditional political system, highlighting the interconnectedness of physical and spiritual realms that influence social norms, political structures, and daily life. The Banyang view of death and the afterlife is central to their cosmology, influencing leadership, succession, and conflict resolution. Burial ceremonies reinforce social bonds and hierarchies, playing a crucial role in political stability and underscoring the connection between spiritual

beliefs and governance. The findings reveal that ghost phenomena in Banyang Country highlights a belief system that shapes decision-making, social control, and power dynamics. These beliefs influence individual and collective behaviours, preserving cultural heritage and providing a framework for understanding community events. This study shows that death, burial rituals, and ghost spirits are central to the Banyang political system, shaping governance and social order. It emphasises the importance of understanding these cultural beliefs for engaging with Banyang society and highlights the need for culturally sensitive approaches in cross-cultural interactions. Though some people believe in the reality of ghost spirits, other consider it a mythical phenomenon in the Banyang Country.

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