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## Orature and Peace Building in Bafut Ritual-Incantations

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### ABSTRACT

This paper sets out to investigate the different conflicts inherent in our societies as X-rayed in incantations from Bafut, North West Region of Cameroon. It contends that the language used by performers of incantations in general is geared towards peace-building and it is an embodiment of culture. This language usage is brought out through the diction of the performers as pacifiers, their usage of euphemisms and other diminutive aspects of the language. The work proceeds to highlight other techniques of peace-building employed by the performers during performance including the idea of avoidance of hate speech. The paper submits further that the performer of incantations from Bafut is a whistle blower to early warnings for dispute settlement in order to prevent further conflicts. It concludes that traditional peace-building techniques using incantations are effective in building peace in our societies by first of all identifying the elements that hinder peace in the society, bringing the people and various groups together, and preaching the merits of living as a peace loving people both from within and without.

**KEYWORDS:** Orature, peace, building, ritual-incantations

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The bases of oral literature, culture, religious dialogues and mutual understanding are to foster and build peace among people and communities. Literature must actively serve the purpose of peace building. Traditionally, many people focus on social, religious and other interactions among peers that can settle differences and conflicts to foster peace in their societies. Following many conferences on the culture of peace organized by many local, national and multi-national Non-Governmental Organizations, this paper will focus on how peace preached or propagated through ritual-incantations can promote a culture of peace and create a more peaceful world.

Defining orature and paying attention to poetry, Alembong (2011, p 57) states that, "... orature is an integral part of the oral culture of African peoples. In terms of its spread and usage, however, it permeates every section and segment of society more than other art forms". Alembong sees orature as an integral part of the life of Africans and it touches on every segment and section of human life including peace building. If orature can be seen in this light, it means one can conclude that it is literature. Literature has served humanity in all facets of life including conflict resolution and peace building. Although the definition of some critics limit the existence of orature to preliterate societies, its effects go beyond its mode of expression: it affects both preliterate and literate societies and even moves into contemporary modern scientifically sophisticated societies. This essay investigates the role ritual-incantations from Bafut can play in conflict resolution and fostering peace in our societies.

### **Conceptualizing Peace-Building and Incantations**

Many societies yearn for peace each society has put in place some measures that they can easily use to build peace or promote a culture peace among their people. The International Alert sees peace as "The employment of measures to consolidate peaceful relations and create an environment which deters the emergence or escalation of tensions which may lead to conflict", (16). Peace is an occurrence of harmony or cohesion defined by solving problems/crimes or lack of violence and punishment whether physical or psychological. Peace is commonly understood as the absence of antagonism or bitterness and retribution, the existence of a healthy or newly healed personal, interpersonal and communal relationships in matters of personal, family or social welfare. It is the establishment of a cohesive society for a people's collective commonwealth.

Critics have come up with varied definitions of what an incantation is. On this note, Alembong defines incantation as

*... a verse form, the words of which are believed to have a magical effect when spoken or chanted during the performance of rituals or any other occasion that calls for the intervention of the supernatural in human affairs. This verse form manifests itself in such categories as blessings, curses, invocations, prayers and spells. (7-8)*

In line with the preceding argument, Kashim Ibrahim Tala adds, "an incantation is a curse or a spell recited as part of a ritual and addresses to supernatural forces", (21). In another instance, he posits that, "Incantations are magically oriented formulaic expressions... saturated with mystical powers and laded with word images that are highly mythopoetic. They are used to ward off evil, to evoke evil on enemies, to curse offenders and to boast one's personality". (1999:52). To this definition, one can add the avoidance or waving of disasters (diseases, natural and man-made) since Tala focuses on the functions of incantations. Tala once more submits that "they are used by man

to solve the spiritual, economic and social problems confronting him... they constitute a vital force in the survival of men” (p. 52). The New World Dictionary of the American Language informs us that an incantation is “the chanting of magical words or formulas that are supposed to cast a spell or perform other magic” (p. 52).

J.S Mbiti defines an incantation as “the most used form of communication with the supernatural” (129). Here, we see that they are mostly used to communicate with the ancestors, the gods and the spirits who are the supernatural and inhabit the supernatural realm. Mbiti goes further to define an incantation by saying that it is “A verse or formula believed to be magically effective in manipulating people or things” (182). According to him, incantations are used to manipulate people and this suits this study as their performance among the Bafut people always have an impact on the psychology of the audience. They are manipulated by the performer to shun evil and other societal vices which may break up peace and unity, which are (the societal vices) and dangerous to social integration.

T. Ngeh and Dzekem contend that, “... incantations... gives the performer and the audience the channel to respond to social, political, cultural and economic concerns of the ...society...”, (127) thus promoting peace and building a harmonious society.

What is common in all these definitions is the fact while Alembong and Tala reiterate that incantations are words and actions imbued with magical powers during specific occasions and specific purposes in the presence of an audience, Tala later joins Ngeh and Dzekem by submitting that, “they are used by man to solve the spiritual, political, economic and social problems confronting him... they constitute a vital force in the survival of men”. (p. 52).

This study is in line with the preceding submissions and contends that the performance of Bafut incantations gives the performer and the audience the opportunity to respond to the individual and communal concerns of the Bafut people and the society in general which include the moral, social, political, economic and cultural concerns of the society. Thus, all these concerns find expression in Bafut incantations which give the people a sense of unity and the vital force for survival as they strive to build a peaceful and cohesive society. From this premise, it becomes evident that an incantation is a chant chanted by a performer in the midst of an audience with the aim of having a particular or desired effect, especially magical either on an individual or members of a particular group. These magical words can be aimed at solving the health, spiritual, economic, social, cultural or political problems of one of the group’s members, or the entire group following a set of rules set by the group or the community. These performances of incantations can be carried out at particular intervals, periods of the year or as the need arises.

### **Situation of Study Area**

Bafut is one of the kingdoms of the North West Region of Cameroon. It covers an area of 340 square kilometers with an approximate population of over 100,000 inhabitants. The kingdom is situated 16 kilometers northwest of Bamenda, the North West Regional capital. The people speak a common language, Nighaa ni Bifii (the Bafut language), which has different varieties. According to Village Community Project (V.C.P.) documents, the kingdom has an impact settlement made up of twenty six villages and is boarded by Menchum Division in the North, the Kom kingdom, Big Babanki and Bambui to the east, the Menemo (Metta) ethnic group to the west and Mankon (Bande) to the south. Looking at the history of Bafut, Pat and Robert Ritzenthaler say “Bafut can be traced from about three or four hundred years to a large group of people called the Tikari who had migrated

into the grassland from what is called Northern Nigeria and Sudan” (20). Tabuwe Michael Aletum adds that the Bafut people came from Sudan and entered Cameroon through the Chad district not as Bafut people but as the Tikari race and halted at Ndobbo (11). He (Aletum) concludes that they were “a wondering people in search of a settlement area” (1974: 20). The group finally arrived Bafut under the leadership of Prince Afoo-Afum or Firloo and settled at Mbebilli. Here, they met the aborigines who were being led by Nebachi. There were equally the Bawum people, the Alante group which was is believed to have come from Bamenda up station or Bamendakwe and settled at Bawum led by Ntoh. In the early epoch (of the arrival of the Bafut people), a chieftaincy coup d’état took place and leadership was changed from Nebachi to the Bafut family. This coup d’état was organized in the palace by Nebachi’s brothers and kinsmen because he was selfish and had lost popularity among his people. With the political, social and economic evolution of the country, Bafut was elevated to a local council are by a presidential decree on the 23dr of November 1993. Since 2017, Bafut has become one f the battlegrounds of the Anglophone Crisis, with one of the Southern Cameroons militia groups known as the Seven Karta, setting bases in the area. “Operation free Bafut” in April 2020 saw heavy fighting in and around the entire kingdom.

### **Literature Review and Critical Approach**

Looking at some ideas already proposed by other critics on this domain of peace building is of importance in an exercise of this nature. Nol Alembong (2011:57) says orature is “... an integral part of the oral culture of African peoples. In terms of spread and usage, however, it permeates every section and segment of society.” If orature can “permeate every section of society”, it can, therefore, be used to handle a lot of issues in the society including peace resolving problems and building peace measures. Paraphrasing Dahrendorf (1968), Onucha remarks:

*“... the functioning of society means that norms regulate human conduct. This regulation is guaranteed by the incentive or threat of sanctions; and the possibility of imposing sanctions is the abstract core of all power. He goes on to tell on to add that established norms are nothing but ruling norms, that is norms defended by sanctioning agencies of society and those who control them”. (13)*

The stress here is on the power to resolve conflicts. If sanctions are meted on defaulters in every community, it is in a bid by the “sanctioning agencies” to use established norms to ensure that peace reigns in the society. This critic falls short of mentioning the origin of these established norms and how they are implemented. The present article uses incantations to prove the sources of these norms, how they are transmitted and used to reinforce peace in the society.

Isike and Uzodike argue that women have always been at the center of peace processes across different pre-colonial African societies (36). But they stress that the positive human factor values which defined womanhood in pre-colonial Africa have been corrupted over time by colonial interruption of African socio-cultural existence “...leading to the marginalization, tokenization and de-feminization of women in political and peace processes in the post-colonial Africa”. Quoting an example of the role women played in maintaining peace and harmony in their societies during this pre-colonial period, they state that, “... among the Beti, Mangisa and Eton in Cameroon, the Mbabi was a common purification rite aimed at restoring peace, and women frequently engaged in it both for peace, community building and development”. (P 44) They continue to argue that “women participated firmly in inculcating the culture of peace in the children and in the practice of conflict

mediation among warring factions within the family and community”(p. 45). This paper takes on the stance that these peace building measures by women did not end during the colonial period. Their activities continue to have a positive impact even in contemporary traditional and modern societies as is X-rayed in Bafut incantations especially within the family which is the smallest administrative unit of a nation.

As a theory to be used, this paper anchors on cultural criticism to analyze the data. The cultural approach is apt in this paper because of the role it plays in exposing the culture of a people through incantations. This approach is very apt for this study because one of the main functions of incantations among the Bafut people is that they are used to resolve conflicts and to reinforce the culture of peace among the people and the society at large through culture.

Culture has played a great deal in the interpretation of texts as well as doing a thorough analysis of texts, be they political, social, religious, historical and cultural among others. This is because culture is seen as the life wire of every human society. To confirm the multiplicity of the role that culture plays, Clifford Geertz argues;

*The term "culture" has by now acquired a certain aura of ill-repute in social anthropological circles because of the multiplicity of its referents and the studied vagueness with which it has all too often been invoked.... In any case, the culture concept to which I adhere has neither multiple referents nor, so far as I can see, any unusual ambiguity: it denotes a historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes toward life. Of course, terms such as "meaning," "symbol," and "conception" cry out for explication. (89)*

Geertz makes the point very clear that culture has not been well utilized because at this moment it is mostly used only to analyze anthropological documents. Therefore, culture is supposed to cover more than what it was covering at the time of his writing. He goes ahead to look at religion as a cultural system. He states “So far as religious activities are concerned, (and learning a myth by heart is as much as religious activity is detaching one’s finger at the knuckle) to somewhat different sorts if disposition are induced by them: moods and motivations” (p. 109). Since myths are part of orature, one can conclude that cultural religious activities are connected to folklore in orature.

### **Literature and Peace**

Before settling on peace which is our main concern in this write up, it is good one starts by looking at the notion of justice. This is because there can be no peace without justice among a people. Justice in traditional African societies, just as in modern societies is a means of correcting evil either committed by man on fellow man, nature or some other forces. To this end, people consider “evil” as a link with cosmic and esoteric activities, and its interference in human relationship must be tackled through the same experience using the known “traditional” means of adjudication. The wellbeing of a people depends on not only the form of government and governance, but also on ordinary laws of the land. Among the Bafut people, just as in many African societies, all the laws of the land are dictated by the ancestors, the gods and Nwingong who are the real rulers of the human world. J. S Mbiti (1996, pp 263-264) tells us that the acceptance of Islam and Christianity by Africans does not remove traditional African religiosity from them. And this holds true when we see Bafut people, (Africans) still very much believing in the efficacy of deities, divinities, family

and society's leaders and "jujus" in settling judicial matters among themselves. These bodies are always involved in settling disputes. They come in to avoid vengeance meted by human beings. They (the gods and the spirits) always intervene in crimes, especially crimes that will affect a cross section of the community, which can threaten the peace and subsequently socio-religious cohesion or integration of the community mostly indirectly.

Looking at the etymology of the word "justice", it is derived from the Latin word "Justicia" which means "righteousness" or "just". In this light, one can contend that justice is concerned with putting people, things and practices in order within a community or society. According to Idumwonyi et al (2013, p 125), "It is an essential element that helps to engender respect and equity in society". To confirm this assertion, John Rawls (1993, p 3) posits that, "'justice' is the first virtue of social institution as truth is of the system of thought". He goes further to observe that since it may not be possible to prevent all wrongs before they are committed, there is a need to put in place a system of compensation to the various individuals and groups for these wrongs after they have been committed. From the foregoing ideas raised by these critics, it can be said that a justice or judiciary system are rules and regulations put in place by both human and "supernatural forces" (spirits) to protect individuals or groups in a society from the wrongful acts of its deviant or recalcitrant members. To support this claim, Durkheim (2001, p xxxii) states very clearly that "law functions not principally to penalize the criminal but to articulate and fortify a community's social sentiments". It is meant to mend rifts among and between humans and spirits so as to build a culture of peace in the society. It is for this reason that one has decided to treat the idea of justice before delving into the real issue at hand which is peace. An example of one of such instances where the gods and ancestors are called upon to intervene when a crime has been committed by performing an incantation is seen in the following scene;

*We the fathers of kwifor,  
The fathers of this Bafut fondom,  
Stand here today to cleanse this land  
Of this abomination that some of us  
Have committed on this our land.  
This shrine of Ndieala Mbwe  
Was instituted by our forethers,  
To communicate with their own forefathers  
So as to maintain peace and love  
Between the living and their ancestors,  
And the rest of the society.  
We came and followed in their footsteps  
This tree that has been cut down,  
Has been standing here for hundreds of years.  
Whoever knew of plans to cut down this tree,  
And never informed the palace,  
Whoever participated in the desecration of this shrine,  
May they be struck to death by our ancestors.  
We are calling on the ancestors of this fondom,  
To protect this fondom  
From such abominable acts in the future.*

Here, one notices that the performer starts by telling us who they (the performers of the incantation) are. He follows by giving the importance of the tree, or the shrine that they are about to reinstate to the Bafut people, appease the ancestors so as to maintain peace and love between the living and the living dead. He then goes on to pronounce punishment or justice on those who desecrated the shrine. This punishment is not only going to those who cut down the tree, but also to those who knew of the plan to destroy the shrine, but never informed the authorities of the kingdom. The ancestors and the gods are those responsible to mete out justice and not even the humans. He ends by calling on these same bodies to protect the entire kingdom from such abominable acts in the future so that peace can always reign among the people.

Peace is a virtue and it is one of the ideas or aspects that every community or society must strive to gain if really it wants to stay intact and remain an integrated community or society.. Conflict prevention to build peace in the society comprises measures taken and efforts made to prevent the breakdown of peaceful conditions. It aims at preventing existing tensions from escalating into violence and to contain the spread of conflict when it occurs. All this is aimed at building an environment of peace within and among individuals, the family and communities. Johan Gultang in *Transcend and Transformation: An Introduction to Conflict Work* comes with three types of conflict that exist in human societies which he names as follows; Micro-Conflicts, within and between persons, Meso-Conflicts, within societies, and Macro-Conflicts, among and within states.

Our societies are all beset by problems in many ways as a result of differences in behaviours, groups and “nations”. Since the village is one of the smallest units that will always reflect the national character of a nation, social problems at the smallest level of community must be avoided to ensure peace. Therefore, when our attitudes towards each other in our families and immediate communities are always self-centered and backed by egoistic tendencies, hatred, greed and jealousy, there are bound to be a lot of emotional, physical and psychological problems in our immediate communities. People should avoid such conditions if we truly strive to live in a peaceful and socially cohesive nation.

### **Micro-Conflicts**

When people interact with others, conflict may occur because we have different needs, interests and goals. Stress is frequently caused by conflict and this stress can be within the self or/ and with others. Gultang stresses that personalities are different, and some people are loved because they never challenge others. But when pushed to the wall, the individual can be forced into an ugly reaction inside oneself. When faced with such a situation, the individual may voluntarily or involuntarily express his/her inner feelings privately or publicly to relieve the stress within. Taking an example from the incantation below, one sees how internal stress for a missing child forces a mother to express the conflict that has been brewing in her mind for years.

*Ambe, you left this compound without a quarrel.*

*And just disappeared without a trace.*

*If truly you are my son,*

*That I carried in my womb for nine months,*

*As I lift my breast towards the sun this morning,*

*The breast that you sucked for two years.*

*Wherever you are,*

*You will remember this breast,*

*Pack your things and return home,  
To this compound where Kinge Ambe is lying,  
Where your umbilical cord is buried.  
The family is devastated with your absence,  
The entire family is worried.  
Come back my child,  
Let peace and harmony reign in this family.*

In the above incantation, the mother calls on nature, the womb in which she carried her son, Ambe, for nine months, the breast which the son sucked, the sun, the umbilical cord and the soil in which it was buried and her ancestor, Kinge Ambe to cause the missing child to return home so that she can inner peace and the rest of the family too will be in peace. This mother performs a solo incantation with no human audience. She addresses nature and the spirits of her family. In another incantation where the performer makes a solo address to the ancestors, gods and spirits, he expresses himself in public in the form of a vindication for a wrongful accusation.

*I stand on this grave,  
To vindicate myself,  
To speak out my heart.  
This child lying in this grave,  
If I know anything concerning his death,  
Then a week will not meet,  
Without ghosts of the underworld getting up to take me away,  
Without our forefathers getting up to take me away.  
If I know anything concerning this child's death,  
Then the whole of my family will perish.  
An empty stomach pays no fine.  
I am not a pig,  
That I will bring forth children and eat them up again.  
This kind of thing has never happened in this family.*

This man, an uncle to the dead son stands out to vindicate himself from the inner stress that he has been going for being accused of being responsible for the death of his nephew. The death of the nephew and the subsequent accusation levelled against him for being responsible for the death of the young man has caused internal conflict within the man and in the entire family. He expresses himself in public, to the hearing of all and sundry so that he can have peace from within himself. This vindication will also build peace within the family.

In these two preceding incantations, these two individuals will have peace only when justice is served. In the first incantation, the mother will be at peace when nature and the ancestors will do her good by bringing her missing son. In the second incantation, the accused uncle will inner peace only when the real killer of the young man is discovered and punished or when the real cause of the death of the nephew would have been discovered.

### **Meso-Conflict**

Gultang states that Meso-Conflicts are those that deal with social, sociological, economic,  
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philosophical and economic issues. These type of conflicts focus on categories, groups of persons and their contradictions with other groups of people. Our focus here is how different groups relate in the society. Individuals in the society belong to different groups and they have different characteristics. In most Western, when there is conflict between individuals or groups of people, they always call on for dialogue, either by themselves or a third party. But in most traditional African societies, with Bafut inclusive, the people always resort to gods, spirits and ancestors for solutions or to mete justice, especially to the group that is accused of wrong doing. A good example of such a scenario can be seen in the following incantation:

*We, the fathers of kwifor,  
The fathers of this Bafut kingdom,  
Stand here today to cleanse this land  
Of this abomination that some of us  
Have committed on this our land.  
This shrine of Ndieala Mbwe  
Was instituted by our forefathers,  
To communicate with their own forefathers  
So as to maintain peace and love  
Between the living and their ancestors,  
And the rest of the society.  
We came and followed in their footsteps  
This tree that has been cut down,  
Has been standing here for hundreds of years.  
Whoever knew of plans to cut down this tree,  
And never informed the palace,  
Whoever participated in the desecration of this shrine,  
May they be struck to death by our ancestors.  
We are calling on the ancestors of this kingdom,  
To protect this kingdom  
From such abominable acts in the future.*

The performer of this incantation reminds the audience that the desecration on this shrine by cutting down the sacred tree has broken the peace of the society, both in the human and the spirit worlds. The only way to rebuild this broken peace is the punishment of the perpetrators of the act, the group that planned the desecration and anybody who knew of the evil plan and never informed the traditional authorities. This punishment is not to be meted out by humans, but by the ancestors and spirits of the land. Therefore, the responsibility of building peace in the society is not supposed to be carried out only by the living, but the living dead come in when the situation is beyond human handling. Peace can only be built in this society when perpetrators of the heinous crime must have been purged out. The responsibility of life and death (especially of criminals) is not in the hands of the humans, but that of the ancestors, other spirits and the gods.

### **Macro-Conflicts**

Another category of conflicts handled by Gultang is Macro-conflicts. According to him, these are conflicts which exist among nations or states. Trying to clarify what a state is, he says,  
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“states are geographically defined countries and nations are culturally (historically, linguistically and religiously) defined groups with an attachment to some piece of geography” (45). Going by the above definition and characteristics of a nation outlined by Gultang, we will agree that African villages are states because each of these entities occupies a geographical space with well-defined cultural, historical, linguistic and religious entities. This phenomenon is clearly reflected in the Bafut language whereby someone from Wum, Kom, Nkwen, Mankon, Babanki Tungoh etc, all neighbouring villages to Bafut is called *nu atoo*, meaning foreigner.

As already mentioned, in a bid to build peace in the society, the performer of Bafut incantations is a whistle blower. He gives early warnings of the consequences of engaging in certain activities which hurt others in the societies. The grass cutting ritual among the Bafut people can be considered a national ritual. In this ritual, which is carried out at the beginning of the farming season, we see the quarter heads, leaders of villages and chief priests of the kingdom come out to protect the entire kingdom from any evil that may come from within or without, directed towards their crops. These people collect all sorts of medicinal herbs, put them together and chop into small pieces, casting a spell, and using it (the chopped grass) to protect their farms and the entire kingdom from any evil that may befall the land during the farming season, especially directed to destroying their crops in the farms. This chopped grass is later placed at the various roads and footpaths, leading in and out of the various quarters and villages of the kingdom, especially those leading to neighbouring kingdoms. It is believed that any person who comes into the Bafut kingdom, or from another quarter or village, or into someone’s farm with an evil mind and crosses this grass along the paths will automatically be afflicted with a terrible illness and in extreme cases with death. An excerpt from one of such incantations goes thus:

*We reject people with hatred,  
We reject people with jealousy,  
We reject sorcerers.  
Be it someone who has transformed into a bird or an animal  
Or a strong wing wind, coming from another country,  
To come and destroy our crops,  
I Will he not meet his demise?  
Ch. He will meet his demise.  
Even only amongst us,  
If someone looks at the farm  
Of his brethren with double eyes,  
Is this not his head? (he cuts the grass into pieces)  
Ch. It is his head.*

This exercise is very important to this people because it does not only protect the people of the kingdom and their crops from internal enemies, it warns and protects even foreign enemies who may want to enter the kingdom mysteriously through heavy rains, floods, strong winds to destroy their crops and other properties. Anyone who attempts to cause any harm to the people, be he/she from the Bafut kingdom or another kingdom is warned to desist from the act, else will “Meet his/her demise”, or will have the head chopped off (by the gods and spirits), just like the grass the chief priest is chopping off.

The harmony of a community or society as a whole can be broken down, frustrated and

completely destroyed by social strife especially among members of its community. On the other hand, the absence of socio-politico-cultural tensions promote peace. One can note at this point that where there is real peace, there is cohesion, integration and a sense of belonging which is felt by members of the community. Aware of the fact that strife will always exist where human beings come together, be it as a family, a social gathering, a community or a cultural entity, most incantators among the Bafut people always pass across messages that seek to restrain or curb open conflicts that may hurt some individuals or the entire community. The Bafut incantation performer and his audience view the entire incantation exercise as an occasion where traditional wisdom can be used to solve problems among the living, and the living dead, to promote peace-building and ensure harmony and cohesion in the society.

The whistleblowing incantations are those that are used to settle disputes and they carry advice and warnings to the people. Some of these incantations stress on peace with the living dead as seen in this one below:

*Here we are,  
Standing at this crossroads,  
To wash off these curses  
That have afflicted this family.  
Sickness, pain and death,  
Have troubled us for too long.  
We know that we have done wrong,  
Because we paid respect in this family  
To the wrong direction and people.  
Now that we have known the right thing,  
Here we are today at this crossroads,  
With this food, wine, money and this fowl.  
He who is lucky will get all these things.  
Our ancestors are watching us here and now,  
They are witnesses to what we have done.  
We have washed off every bad thing in this family.  
From today going forward,  
There will be no more death in this family,  
There will be no more sickness in this family,  
There will be no more suffering in this family.  
Our children shall come back with heavy harvests,  
And we will live in peace with our ancestors,  
Because we have done the right thing.*

In this incantation, we notice that the performer acknowledges that they have breached the peace that existed between them and the living dead by paying respect in the family to the wrong people and the wrong direction. Now that they have returned to their ancestors, they will have peace and the entire family will be free from death, sickness and suffering. He prays that now that they have done the right thing, their children will return with good harvests and they will live in peace with their ancestors.

One of the key elements that the performer of ritual-incantations uses to send across his/  
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message of peace-building is the diction he/she adopts during performance. The manner of passing across a message to a people matters a lot during performance. The performers always try as much as possible to use euphemisms and other diminutive aspects of language during performance. Euphemism which is the use of mild or subtle words to present something unpleasant is always employed by the performer of incantations during performance so as to build peace among conflicting parties. An example is seen in the words below, uttered by a performer during a peace and reconciliation family meeting.

*I see and I'm happy that we have resolved everything today.*

*Let's tie ourselves in one bundle,*

*And call on our ancestors*

*To pour blessings in this family,*

*Give us good health.*

*We know that the shoulder cannot go above the head,*

*And an empty stomach does not pay a debt.*

The “shoulder going above the head” mentioned in this excerpt is referring to pride, arrogance and disrespect for one another especially the elders.

Ensuring and building peace is the pacesetter for prosperity, harmony and social cohesion in every human society. Humanity has constantly strayed away from the core values that hold our societies together by indulging in the activities that hurt fellow man, spirits, the supernatural and forces of nature, and thus, society as whole. Man has engaged in these hurting ventures either knowingly or unknowingly. Literature in general and folklore in particular have played great roles in enhancing peace in many families, groups, communities and societies. Situating the place of literature in peace building, Bayo Ogunjami (86) posits; “Literature organizes the psychic environment that exposes factors of mystification and at the same time beauty”. The beauty here is the beauty of society, a society relatively free or void of ugliness (evil). This is one of the preoccupations of the ritual incantation performer in Bafut. He/she struggles to build a society where we live for each other and not for ourselves. The Ubuntu philosophy says “I am because I belong”. This means I am somebody because I belong to group or society. This brings out the spirit of togetherness or interdependence. The Bafut people have a saying which is in line with the Ubuntu ideology which goes thus, faa tswi bi'i, kaa asi mə bæ (here it is us, not me). This is the beauty of living together. Culture is the basis of living together, and in the absence of peace, humanity cannot live together. We have to promote a culture of peace if we want to enjoy the beauty of living together, living happily.

## **Conclusion**

In this write up, we have discussed how orature in general and incantations in particular can be used to promote peace and build a harmonious society. Incantations enhance peace building processes and sustainable cultural diversity because they have a direct bearing on the psyche of the Bafut people. If well implemented, these oral pieces will not only foster peace within this society and used as a means of cultural valorization in the Bafut society, the practices preached by these people can be extended to outside or wider communities to achieve the much desired peace we need in our societies.

As recommendations, we wish to propose that orature in general and incantations or religious poetry in particular should be included in the secondary school curriculum so as to use orature as a

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means to inculcate the culture of peace and building of harmony in the society to our people from tender ages. Other genres of orature like folktales, legends, myths, proverbs and songs can also be researched into, bring out aspects which can foster conflict resolution and peace building in our societies.

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