The Force of Argument and the Argument of Force: A Study of the Rhetoric of Achamba and Abaago in Shadrach Ambanasom’s *Son of the Native Soil*

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Although Shadrach Ambanasom’s *Son of the Native Soil* is centred on the clan Dudum (Ngie), the society recreated in the novel can be perceived as a microcosm of Cameroon as the novelist interrogates larger concerns – of a nation riddled with numerous abuses like corruption (the Divisional Officer in Mbambe), misuse of power or authority (the humiliation of the magistrate in the front seat of the car by gendarmes), insecurity (the assassins of Achamba), cavalier public service (Achamba’s trip to the archives in Yaoundé), and perpetual conflicts (the Anjong-Akan land dispute). Through Achamba and Abaago, Ambanasom depicts a representative picture of contemporary Cameroon or even, on a large scale, Africa: its social, cultural, political, and economic landscape in its splendour as well as its sordidness; its resourcefulness as well as its ruthlessness. In this essay, I intend to demonstrate that whereas Achamba makes good distinction between the force of argument and the argument of force and privileges the former over the latter in his communication of unity and development for Dudum, Abaago conflates both types of argument as he pursues his objective, which is making Akan the political headquarters of Dudum even if it implies disposing of Achamba through force. Abaago essentially engages in partisan disputation, always intending to win, as opposed to Achamba, who tends to embrace protreptic argumentation, or striving to teach. At the macro level, Ambanasom seems to embed, in the rhetoric of Achamba and Abaago, commentary on minority rights, statehood, and governance in Cameroon or Africa with attendant ills such as suppression of freedoms, torture, and other abuses. The novelist interrogates these issues by engaging Achamba and Abaago in dialectic argumentation as both of them seek to know the truth about the history of Dudum.

More importantly, beyond the characterisation of Achamba and Abaago, Ambanasom frames an ideological vision about how respect for minority rights and democracy can function in Cameroon or Africa. He persuades the reader to buy into his vision of politics by partly constructing his characters along the continuum of virtue and vice and by making the argument of Achamba more convincing than that of Abaago. Interestingly, the relationship between Achamba and Abaago somehow plays out like the one between Southern Cameroon and La République du Cameroun as the former seeks its autonomy from the latter. The independence bid for Southern Cameroon is led by the Southern Cameroon National Council (SCNC) from whose motto – the force of argument and not the argument of force – this essay derives its title.

The rhetoric of Achamba and Abaago can also allegorise the competing interests of Dr John Ngu Foncha (1916–99) and Dr Emmanuel Endeley (1916–88), as both politicians debated whether Southern Cameroon should gain independence through unification with La République du Cameroun or be absorbed by Nigeria. The UN had given Southern Cameroon only these two choices, ignoring the option of statehood partly on grounds that the territory was considered then economically weak to be autonomous. In reality, Foncha successively campaigned and subordinated the interest of Southern Cameroon (Akan) to that of La République du Cameroun (Anjong). This historical event is famously referred to in Cameroon as the Plebiscite of 1961.
At the Berlin Conference of 1884-85, Cameroon was colonised by Germany. After the defeat of Germany in World War I, Cameroon was administered as a UN trust territory by France and Britain. Today, Cameroon essentially has a bicultural heritage, excluding numerous other ethnic cultures. While 80 percent of the country has a deep-rooted French colonial heritage (language, culture, administration), 20 percent is Anglo-Saxon. The latter section of the country feels politically, economically, and culturally oppressed by the French speaking majority. In other words, the relationship between these two groups translates as one between the dominant and the dominated as evidenced in the constant use of French in Anglophone sectors of the country. We notice Ambanasom’s apparent allusion to this in the conversation between Achamba and a guard as the former makes enquiries about the fate of Akan detainees in the Gendarmerie headquarters at Mbambe: “Qui êtes-vous Monsieur? et où allez-vous?”[Who are you, Sir? And where are you going?] barked the officer in French.”1 The imperious tone of the guard is not only a simulation of the authoritarianism of one linguistic group over the other in Cameroon, but also a questioning of the Anglophone identity.

The novel, Son of the Native Soil, is the story of Achamba and Abaago from the village of Akan, which considers Anjong its political rival because the latter village is naturally better endowed to host an administrative unit for Dudum. While Achamba envisions politics from a unifying and conciliatory perspective, argues that Anjong is better suited than Akan to be the administrative headquarters of Dudum, and even weds Echunjei from the opposing village of Anjong in his endeavour to reconcile these two villages, Abaago perceives Achamba’s actions as detrimental to the interest of Akan. As a result, Abaago arranges for murderers to kill Achamba; Abaago later commits suicide when he is about to be exposed as a villain.

My analysis of the rhetoric of Achamba and Abaago is informed by both Afrocentric and Western theories of communication. By adopting Afrocentric and Western theories of discourse as a theoretical framework, my study of the rhetoric of Ambanasom’s protagonists will be enriched because this critical lens will bring to my argument a dynamic interplay, rather than an essentialist attitude, as I further explore the multifaceted nature of Achamba and Abaago. Moreover, there is a marked link between Afrocentric and Western theories of discourse as exemplified, for example, by the emphasis on style, audience, and the moral character of the speaker.

Afrocentric rhetoric insists on, among other things, the ability of the speaker to integrate rhetorical questions, rhythmic patterns, song, dance, metaphors, proverbs, spontaneity, and audience participation in his or her communication. Molefi Asante sums up Afrocentric communication in these telling words:

How we say what it is that we say and what we do with our own values in the saying of what we say dictates the alignment with cultural and personal beliefs. This means that communication derives from a cultural place, it becomes cultural only in the sense that it is based upon some lived experiences of people.2

1 Shadrach A. Ambanasom, Son of the Native Soil (Bamenda: Langaa Research & Publishing, 1999; 2009) 65. Further references to this novel will be included in parentheses in the text.
For his part, Arthur Smith posits that effective Black rhetoric is a combination of the rhetor’s reputation, the good elaboration of his or her ideas, as well as elocution skills: ‘The degree and intensity of the generating response to the speaker largely depend on the speaker’s reputation, style, and development of his ideas, as well as on his manner of delivery.’

Western philosophers such as Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, and Erasmus have all stressed the importance of ethos, logos, and pathos to rhetors who intend to convince an audience of a particular point of view. Rhetors are expected to command moral authority, presenting their argument in a systematic and compelling way with the objective of emotionally and intellectually connecting with their audience. Put differently, rhetoric embodies both persuasion and informing, as an effective rhetor is constantly aware of the need to establish a convivial relationship with his or her audience.

Ambanasom’s Son of the Native Soil is revealing about discourse in Dudum (Ngie) in that it shows how rhetoric could be used to forge unity and also how it could bring about dissension. This is particularly evident in the utterances of Achamba and his staunch rival, Abaago. Each, in his own way, uses rhetoric to plead for his cause. On the one hand, Achamba is portrayed as an admirable rhetor that excels in persuasive language and uses this attribute to bring about social and political cohesion within his community of Dudum. On the other, Abaago is depicted as generally polemical, as interested only in the welfare of Akan to the exclusion of the rest of Dudum: ‘He was extremely partisan, very uncompromising and decidedly vocal as far as the cause of his village was concerned’ (35). He lacks the proper ethos and pathos that could persuade his audience to accept his point of view. Overall, the rhetoric of both Achamba and Abaago is generally couched in the social and cultural values of Ngie, the community recreated in Ambanasom’s novel. In the same vein, the Anjong–Akan rivalry in Ambanasom’s novel translates into the protracted struggle between the villages of Andek and Teze to be the political headquarters of Ngie (Dudum). At the metaphorical level, the Anjong–Akan conflict over an administrative unit mirrors the independence struggle of Southern Cameroon in the 1950s and 60s.

The differences in temperament between Achamba and Abaago are first seen during preparations for the visit of the D.O. (Divisional Officer) of Mbambe to Dudum. As Abaago and Ubeno work respectively on the behalf of Akan and Anjong towards writing separate welcome addresses to the D.O., Achamba strives to cast a vision that would pull together the disparate ideologies of Akan and Anjong. Achamba espouses a vision of elaborating a common platform that would reflect the commonalities of, not only both rival villages, but also the entire clan. As a result, he ‘appealed to Akaya to lift the so-called economic sanctions against Akan and to both chiefs to drop their belligerent exchanges. At a trying time in the nation’s history, he said, the government could not stand by and watch with a smile such a potentially explosive situation’ (98). Achamba here appears to be speaking to Cameroonians (both Anglophones and Francophones) to strive to resolve political differences that are rocking the country, particularly at a time when Anglophones are clamouring for statehood.

In an attempt to stem the animosity between Abaago and Ubeno, Achamba proposes that the welcome address to the D.O. should focus on social amenities such as a hospital, a post office, a


good road for Dudum, and the government should be given the free hand to determine the site of an administrative unit: ‘It was that the Dudum people as a whole should ask the government to provide them with a hospital and a Post Office. But that it would be left to the government to choose the location of these’ (120). The idea of the government determining an administrative centre echoes how the United Nations used a plebiscite in 1961 to decide whether Southern Cameroon should achieve independence with La République du Cameroun or Nigeria. Unfortunately Achamba’s proposal does not satisfy Abaago, who sees in Achamba’s neutral stance covert support for Anjong, considering that it seems more conducive to hosting an administrative unit than Akan: ‘Abaago tried to raise an objection against the compromise, but he was voted down by the majority’ (120). The objection to Abaago’s proposal demonstrates how Dudum is more interested in a unified clan rather than separate political entities.

Another issue that puts Abaago, Ubeno, and Achamba at loggerheads is determining who should read the welcome address to the D.O. Abaago claims that it is his legitimate right to read the welcome address because he has often done so throughout his political career and also given his position as a former administrator in Mbambe: ‘As a former administrator; I’ve worked with the people in Mbambe, and I’ve been reading newspapers’ (121). Abaago’s claim to legitimacy and literacy is reminiscent of that of some long serving leaders or politicians in Africa who do not believe that they have outlived their usefulness and need to hand over governance to a more enlightened and freely elected generation. Ubeno scoffs at Abaago’s de facto claim to authority in the following words: ‘Look here, Abaago, you know that I know who you are. And you yourself know who I am. Are you speaking of foreign newspapers or just those produced locally?’ (121).

Faced with the possibility of the rivalry between Ubeno and Abaago degenerating into an argument of force, Achamba proposes that Mr Anagho, the headmaster of Anjong School, be chosen to read the welcome address: ‘Since none of you is satisfied to see the other read except yourself, I’d like to suggest that the address be read by a neutral person’ (122). While Ubeno accepts this compromise, Abaago objects to the proposal of Achamba and instead suggests that Mr Abuma, the headmaster of Akan School, should be the one to read the welcome address. This incident demonstrates how uncompromising Abaago can be; if he does not have his way in an argument, nothing can be considered settled.

In the face of the intransigence of Abaago, Achamba resorts to casting lots (or a mimicry of democratic and transparent elections) between Abaago and Ubeno in order to resolve the issue of who has to read the welcome address to the D.O.: ‘Achamba picked up the pieces of paper again and shook them in his closed fist several times and then cast them on the table’ (123). The result favours Abaago at the expense of Ubeno, who accepts the decision. The incident of casting lots recalls the outcome of the 1961 plebiscite in Southern Cameroon that fused it with of La République du Cameroun.

Granted that a rhetor should seamlessly combine wisdom and eloquence in his or her discourse, both qualities appear to be disproportionately shared by Achamba and Abaago. However, it should be stated that when we first encounter Abaago, we are captivated by his apparently pleasant personality. Abaago is an
ebullient man with an attractive voice and an intelligent face ... Generally a jovial person Abaago often put on an enticing smile when in good mood. A man of taste in matters of clothes he was fond of jumpers worn over trousers and low-heeled shoes. (35)

Because of his sojourn in Mpundu (South West Region of Cameroon) as a timekeeper, Abaago has acquired some sophistication through his contact with foreigners, an attribute that enhances his image within Akan. His historical counterpart, Endeley, studied in Nigeria and enjoyed considerable respect as a politician in the South West Region.

Unfortunately, Abaago’s major weakness is his subjectivity, his partisan approach to issues which makes him prone to sophistry and violence and diminishes his stature as a leader. Ambanasom adds that Abaago is ‘very uncompromising and decidedly vocal as far as the cause of his village was concerned’ (35). Like Nwaka in Chinua Achebe’s Arrow of God, Abaago is also portrayed as contentious, a war monger, as evidenced in his encouragement to Chief Umeitoh and the Akan people to fight Anjong over ownership of a parcel of land, Ukob: ‘it was Abaago who had fanned the whole land affair, coaxing them onto the attack on Abang’ (99). By embracing force as a solution to conflict, Abaago ignores the point that violence, as Martin Luther King affirms, instead works against wholeness and creativity; it ‘destroys community and makes brotherhood impossible.’ In fact, Abaago seems lacking in ethos as an effective rhetor within Dudum given his tendentious rhetoric on behalf of Akan to the detriment of Dudum. This is how he intends to promote the cause of Akan against Anjong: ‘What we need is just a little work ... Our village will outstrip Anjong in terms of development’ (133-4). The stultification of the growth of the cocoa that he encourages his people to grow is a symbolic reminder of his rhetorical inadequacies.

For his part, Achamba, like his historical counterpart Foncha, is a soft-spoken and articulate teacher, qualities that enhance his standing within Dudum. Moreover, Achamba is described as a ‘dashing gentleman with a certain romantic air about him, Achamba was a dandy, always smartly dressed ... His wardrobe contained well-tailored suits for special occasions’ (52). He is extremely self-disciplined even in times of crises. Ambanasom conceives Achamba as the prince of democracy or good governance. When Achamba learns about the attack on Anjong by his compatriots, he goes about educating his people to refrain from violence, and the need for peaceful co-existence within Dudum (65). Achamba clearly embraces the non-confrontational type of rhetoric, which explains why he is a pragmatic and more successful politician than Abaago. As one who understands the belligerent inclination of Akan, he writes a letter to Chief Akaya of Anjong, expressing regret for the behaviour of Akan and praising the restraint of Anjong in the face of Akan provocation. Achamba pursues this line of thought because of his conviction, as he states to his friend, Neba, that a ‘community, like a nation, can only progress very well when its inhabitants are fully mobilised and united behind their leader; when they live in a state of peace devoid of mutual distrust and suspicion, petty rivalries and jealousies’ (110). Achamba laments that politics has polarised Dudum, transforming the clan into two distinct blocs: ‘In Dudum you belong to either of two geographical zones, and this natural division has


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helped to nurture the political differences’ (109). This scenario can allegorise the cultural or linguistic division of Cameroon into Anglophones and Francophones.

Achamba elaborates on the theme of peaceful co-existence among diverse peoples by appealing to the elites of Dudum resident in Yaoundé: ‘In the evening he paid a visit to the Dudum people in Yaoundé, persuading them to save money for the development of their area ... Achamba also exhorted the younger generation working outside the clan to unite for the common good of the area’ (140). Again, this episode recreates how some Anglophone politicians like John Foncha and S.T. Muna campaigned for Southern Cameroon to unite with La République du Cameroun.

Achamba’s flair for lofty language, which also showcases his persuasive ability, can be discerned in his poetry. In his billet-doux to Echunjei, Achamba draws upon classical mythology to represent his romantic feelings towards his beloved. By alluding to Venus, the Roman goddess of love, beauty and fertility, and by intimating that he is vulnerable to the amorous slings of Cupid, the Roman god of desire, affection and erotic love, Achamba clearly celebrates his supreme love for adorable Echunjei, a relationship which he envisions as genuine and unshakable:

On this very romantic day
When Venus the goddess of love
Is moving in hearts bound together
By her son’s arrows,
By arrows from Cupid’s bow. (152)

On this score, he is able to win the love of Echunjei.

In another poem, ‘Elemental Fury’, Achamba demonstrates the evocative power of his language; he is able to describe, in a compelling manner, the fury of the storm and its destructive effect on humans and the environment:

When I hear in the howling of the wind
And in the drumming of Dudum Falls
The wailing of bereaved mothers,
And the groan of separated lovers,
I fear the agents of doom are at large. (216)

This section of the poem describes the potent effects of the forces of nature as they unleash havoc on the physical environment and also how they instill a sense of the forlorn in humans. This poem is particularly memorable in that it indicates an interconnection between human beings and the physical environment; it also demonstrates Achamba’s prescience as he obliquely hints at his murder, which will be undertaken, at the instigation of Abaago, under the cover of the storm. Culturally, among the Dudum (Ngie) people, it is not uncommon for the deaths of important people to be presaged by certain unnatural phenomena. At the metaphorical level, the storm can represent the threat posed to democracy by dictatorship throughout the entire continent of Africa.
Unlike Achamba, Abaago’s rhetoric generally appears fruitless. We see this when he affirms that the construction of more houses at Ugum would ensure greater development – precisely an administrative centre and its attendant benefits – in Akan. This is how he prods Akan: ‘As soon as this little patch of road is completed, cars will be flowing to Akan market. I assure you. Work, watch and see. The Post Office, the maternity centre, the court hall and the civil registration centre which we desperately need will just follow’ (87). Abaago even arranges for a commercial land rover to drive down to Akan for the first time. He sits conspicuously in the front seat of the land rover in order to draw the admiration of his people to himself. Moreover, Abaago is determined, as earlier pointed out, to outstrip Anjong in development and he uses the incident of the land rover as a pointer to his belief that Akan will be granted an administrative unit by the government.

While Achamba works towards the development of Dudum and is aware that Akan does not present itself strategically as an administrative headquarters for the clan, Abaago is unrelenting in his subjectivity, placing the interest of Akan above any other consideration. Listen to what he says about the history of Dudum, which is contrary to findings of Achamba in the archives in Yaoundé: ‘Haven’t you heard that Ngiekmum first settled in Akan from Widikum? Haven’t you heard that at the time of the Germans Akan was their headquarters? These are my reasons’ (144). Abaago’s attitude towards the historical facts presented by Achamba reflects that of Gorgias of Leontini in Plato’s Gorgias, who is more concerned with form rather than content, appearance rather than reality. His terministic screen or perspective, recalling Edmund Burke’s nomenclature in Language as Symbolic Action, is that development and peace can only come to Dudum through Akan.

Commenting on Anjong as a viable administrative headquarters, Ambanasom says that ‘Places cleared up and the horizon appeared in the distance, an inviting openness that was all the more attractive for its sharp contrast with the bottle-neck aspect of Akan’ (143). The author’s submission reflects the argument of Foncha to his Anglophone electorate about the advantages of uniting with La République du Cameroun rather than Nigeria. One possible reason why Foncha’s message won support among Southern Cameroonians was because of the harassment they often experienced at the hands of some Igbo traders at the Bamenda main market. Some indigenes saw this harassment as a foretaste of what awaited them if they achieved independence with Nigeria, an option which Endeley favoured.

Questioned by Abaago about Achamba’s preference for development in Anjong rather than Akan, Achamba refutes the charge of his apparent support for Anjong, arguing instead that, ‘we should bury our individual differences when we think at the level of the clan’ (144). Such an ideological vision earns Achamba more admiration within Dudum and shows him as a more effective rhetorician than Abaago. While Achamba often speaks with a certain gravitas, Abaago’s discourse is generally confrontational, raising doubt about the sincerity of his declarations and diminishing his credibility as demonstrated in his unsuccessful bid to persuade Akan youths to accept that Achamba’s influence is detrimental to Akan. He pooh-poohs, in front of the youths, the contribution of Achamba towards development in Akan by challenging them to stand up in defence of the village: ‘What is this I see and hear? Is this what you as the young torchbearers would be to Akan?’ (196). Abaago’s call for hatred towards Achamba is ignored mainly because of his moral deficiency: ‘But the meeting only ended up with the young people
split into two camps, with the minority adhering to Abaago’s philosophy, and the majority espousing Achamba’s ideas’ (196).

Abaago even accuses Achamba of ingratiating himself to Chief Akaya and the Anjong cause by marrying Echunjei, whom he qualifies as a mere girl, a common woman. Yet Echunjei is the first Dudum girl to attend college. Abaago’s disdainful appreciation of her instantiates his deep-seated jealous state of mind and partly explains why many Dudum people do not welcome his ideas. His rhetoric is so hurtful that he proposes the exclusion of Achamba from Akan, including Achamba’s father: ‘Let us avoid even his one-legged father, for is it not said that a kid nibbles only the blade of grass eaten by its mother?’ (160). Abaago fails to understand, as Chaim Perelman and Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca intimate, that for argumentation to exist, an effective communion of minds must be realised. And that, when it is a question of arguing, a rhetor, intent on using discourse to influence the opinion of the audience, should be aware that it is ‘no longer possible to neglect completely, as irrelevancies, the psychological and social conditions in the absence of which argumentation would be pointless and without result.’

In the eyes of Abaago, Achamba is treacherous and dangerous to Abaago’s vision of Akan and so must be stopped. This is how Abaago denounces Achamba before Akan councillors in a typical Ngie simile loaded with repugnance: ‘I suggest that we from today declare Achamba the enemy of Akan. We should have nothing to do with him anymore. Being polite to Achamba is like incubating a rotten egg; it will come to soil you’ (159-60). Unfortunately for Abaago, he is lacking in dialectical analysis because his words and actions stem from envy, which is shunned by the youths that he is attempting to convince. He is unable to contract any Dudum youth to undertake the killing of Achamba because his ideas and methods are considered repugnant, totally in dissonance with democratic precepts; Abaago’s only recourse is to engage assassins from Nkoman.

In a speech to an assembly of students and teachers of Dudum, Achamba cautions them to avoid politicking and to refrain from negatively influencing the clan. His speech is punctuated with the maxim: ‘united we stand, divided we fall’ (147), an oblique reminder about Foncha’s role in the 1961 plebiscite in Southern Cameroon, as he connects emotionally with his audience. He implores his listeners to be development oriented and to eschew ills that may further polarise the clan: ‘You should avoid discrimination among yourselves because this will only help to pull us apart to our own disadvantage’ (147). As he delivers his speech, one can imagine how he holds his audience spellbound through his gestures and aphorisms, a clear indication of his rhetorical savoir-faire. At the end of his speech, Achamba earns a sustained burst of applause from his audience. His behaviour on this occasion ties in with George Campbell’s proposition that it is necessary for speakers to use arguments that are comprehensible, and to employ lively language. Campbell further states that a rhetor should adopt a form of repetition, like Achamba’s united we stand, divided we fall, that can arouse emotions in the audience. This device can be effective, granted that the rhetor is aware of the educational levels, moral culture, habits, occupations, political leanings, and religious affiliations of the audience. For example, according to Campbell, in addressing an audience of soldiers, the rhetor should emphasise military glory while an audience composed of industrialists necessitates a focus on wealth in the discourse of


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On the occasion of the meeting of Dudum students and teachers, Achamba, the teacher, acquits himself admirably by stressing the merits of education in his speech to an audience made up of learners and dispensers of knowledge.

Abaago’s response to Achamba’s speech in the Dudum students’ and teachers’ meeting underlies his rhetorical ineptitude. Instead of foregrounding his vision for this unique body, in particular, or for Dudum, in general, he engages in covertly attacking Achamba for stirring up political sentiments in youths: ‘A students’ meeting is not the right place for political indoctrination. The job of these young men and women is to learn, to study in school. Book and not politics is their concern’ (148). Abaago’s speech is drab, concise, and receives no applause. It echoes the rhetoric of some leaders on the continent of Africa that are scared of any form of demonstration, political discussion, or challenge to their rule, emanating particularly from a young generation. Some students even feel slighted by Abaago’s remarks, especially when he alludes to some of the students as irresponsible youths. According to Abaago, Achamba is involved in the political indoctrination of youths. Not only are Abaago’s remarks disingenuous, but they also spring from malice and undergird his propensity for confrontation. In the words of Ambanasom, Abaago’s discourse was ‘marked at every turn by personal sentiments’ (148). Undoubtedly, Abaago’s speech clearly undercuts what one should expect from a rhetor: grace in gestures, persuasion, and logical appeal. Indeed, on this occasion, he portrays himself as the antithesis of an effective rhetorician by instead rousing the antipathy of his audience towards him.

Blinded by jealousy following the rising popularity of Achamba, Abaago engineers the summoning of his rival before the Akan traditional council on the scurrilous charge of conspiring against Akan:

Councillors and Elders of Akan, since our main aim of meeting here today is to decide on what to do in the wake of this unholy alliance Achamba is attempting to form with our avowed enemy ... I suggest that we from today declare Achamba the enemy of Akan. (159)

This is a popular ruse often undertaken by tyrants to stifle any opposition or threat to their authority. Abaago also exploits the coincidence that because Achamba’s would-be in-laws are from Anjong, Achamba is working in the interest of Anjong. Consequently, Achamba is instructed, by the village council, to give up his intended marriage to Echunjei.

Commenting on the proposed marriage of Achamba to Echunjei, Ambanasom avers that ‘a projected marriage that in a different community might have served as a unifying factor, in Dudum only threatened the unity of the clan’ (160). However, Achamba argues that his wedding to Echunjei ought to be a personal affair that should not concern the village. Moreover, Achamba denies the charge of working against the interest of Akan and bluntly admits that, although he has not told the government, he believes that Anjong is better adapted than Akan to host an administrative unit for Dudum. This admission on the part of Achamba symbolises the strong argument of Foncha in 1961 to Southern Cameroonians about the merits of uniting with La République du Cameroun.

6 George Campbell, The Philosophy of Rhetoric (Boston: Charles Ewe, 1823).
Abaago also falsely charges Achamba with not having shown concern towards the Akan detainees in Mbambe, an accusation which Achamba unequivocally refutes: ‘Not long ago our men were imprisoned in Mbambe, and I was of some help to them. The released prisoners are my witnesses. Do all these efforts show that I am uncooperative?’ (171). Indeed, Achamba’s insightful defence of himself, through rhetorical questions among other devices reminiscent of Mark Antony’s speech during Caesar’s funeral in William Shakespeare’s *Julius Caesar*, throws the council into disarray: ‘But none of you can justly say that each time I am at home, I have failed to turn up for any group work ... Do all these efforts show that I am uncooperative? Yet the councillors say I am’ (171). While some traditional councillors advocate for sanctions against him, others (including Abaago) favour a softer response to him. One reason for Abaago’s reluctance to support tough sanctions against Achamba could be that Abaago is contemplating another scheme – the argument of force – to get rid of Achamba. On the occasion of his trial, Achamba’s rhetorical skills are displayed as the council, rather than accept defeat, instead resolves to give him more time: ‘But they arrived at the consensus that Achamba had not yet given them a satisfactory response; so he should be given more time to reconsider the charges and frame a better reply’ (173). It is a subtle strategy on the part of the council to save its face knowing that its argument has been soundly defeated by Achamba, or that the accusations against him are frivolous.

The animosity that Abaago nurses towards Achamba is further compounded by the news that the administrative unit which both Anjong and Akan have been fighting for is instead given to Buja. Both Akan (under the instigation of Abaago) and Anjong find more reasons to question the integrity of Achamba: while one group argues that he decidedly manipulated against the granting of this cherished administrative unit to his people out of sheer selfishness, the other insists that Achamba could not accept the giving of an administrative unit to his enemies and so fought for strangers to have it. Achamba’s ethos now hinges on how he handles this crisis. His fate reflects the backlash that Foncha, as the architect of the unification of Southern Cameroon with La République du Cameroun, is exposed to from many Anglophones who are still critical of the merits of merging both states.

Unknown or ignored by both Akan and Anjong is the fact that the D.O. of Mbambe, a morally bankrupt administrator, is exploiting the conflict between both villages to his financial advantage. Emboldened by his moral authority, Achamba, and not Abaago, rebukes the D.O. for his highhandedness and for deriving financial benefits from both bellicose villages:

But while the D.O. was mentally shaping Achamba’s fate, the latter got home and set about writing a secret report on the D.O.’s activities in Mbambe. In it he exposed the weaknesses of the D.O. in all his dealings with the people he had been called upon to serve. (164)

Achamba’s discrediting of the authority of the D.O. restores Achamba’s moral integrity within Dudum. This situation is similar to Foncha’s rekindled popularity among Anglophones following his resignation from the position of vice-chairman of the ruling Cameroon People’s Democratic Movement (CPDM) because of what he considered the shabby and discriminatory attitude of the government towards Anglophones.
Perhaps nowhere else than the meeting of Dudum elites in Anjong can we best see the oratorical skills of Achamba. On this occasion, Achamba’s dress – white agbada, grey felt-cap on luxuriant hair – attests to his ethos as an educator and one who can lead an assembly of contentious individuals. As a humbled person, he plays down his importance, hinting that he feels unqualified to lead such an impressive group of Dudum elites. Achamba may, however, be subtly assuaging possible feelings of frustration in people like Abaago or Ubeno, who nurse ambitions of heading this newly born association. By toning down his influence: ‘I find myself in many ways unqualified for the great responsibilities placed on my shoulders’ (189), Achamba is telling his rivals that, even though he has been unanimously (or democratically) chosen as the president of this association, he is aware of the leadership potential of others. It is an indirect invitation from Achamba to his compatriots for them to suppress their differences and harness their energy towards the greater good of Dudum, or abide by democratic principles. Achamba’s speech constitutes an olive branch to all of Dudum to jump from battleground to higher ground in search for common ground.

Achamba’s speech to this august assembly is interspersed with proverbs such as ‘the voice of the people is the voice of wisdom’, alluding to his election as president of the group. His ethos, logos, and pathos are manifest in that not only does he speak as a teacher but he also presents his argument in a compelling manner, earning him applause from his audience. Emphasising the metaphor of the Dudum Falls, Achamba explains that ‘It is the voice of morality, calling us to order, calling on us to shun evil ways and promote worthwhile pursuits. It is the conscience of the thief at night, asking him some disturbing questions’ (189). By referring to Dudum, believed to be the birthplace of Dudum (Ngie) people, Achamba demonstrates his insightful analysis of issues. He also engages the participation of the audience in his rhetoric through the use of indigenous words like Amumba! Amumba! (It’s us). Through a series of rhetorical questions: ‘If not us, who? If not now, when? If not here, where?’ (190), he probes the conscience of his audience on their commitment to development. The audience is won over by the brilliance of Achamba’s speech as evidenced in the sustained applause that welcomes his speech and the excitement in the audience, which culminates in the repeated chanting of his name: ‘ACHA-MBA ACHA-MBA’ (190). At this juncture, in line with typical Afrocentric rhetoric, you would imagine the women ululating while stamping their feet on the floor and pushing out their posteriors, and the men punching the air with clenched fists – a clear indication that Achamba’s message has struck the emotional chord of his audience.

Achamba’s successful convening of the Dudum Cultural and Development Association in Anjong, where he attempts to lay down democratic principles as reflected in the divergent issues debated or opinions expressed by the delegates, marks the tipping point in his relationship with Abaago. According to Abaago, Achamba, ‘like the ungrateful child in the fable, has bitten the finger that fed him and also stabbed in the back the foster mother to whom he owes his very existence’ (170). In other words, Abaago is stating that, in spite of the contribution of Akan in making Achamba the person that Achamba is today, he is instead working against the interest of Akan. Abaago soon realises that his vision for Akan cannot be accomplished unless he aborts Achamba’s dream for Dudum. In other words, it is time for Abaago to set in motion the

7 Jesse Jackson, the American preacher, used an expression like this one in a speech he delivered in Yaoundé, Cameroon, that I attended in 1993.
argument of force. In this regard, he attempts in vain to fan hatred towards Achamba from a group of young people: ‘Are you going to sell your birthright to Anjong as your traitorous brother Achamba has done?’ (196).

Abaago will later contract assassins in Nkoman to murder Achamba. Thus, in killing Achamba, Abaago endorses violence as the way towards making Akan the political headquarters of Dudum. Unfortunately for him, his dream for Akan soon turns into a nightmare resulting in his suicide. The argument of force which he embraces not only shows his limitations as a rhetorician, but also undermines him. This is how Ambanasom describes Abaago’s tragedy: ‘But he would rather settle for the peril of his own making. Suicide would be the only way to die’ (275). Through Abaago’s death, Ambanasom envisions the kind of fate that awaits leaders, especially in Africa, who thrive on violence and oppression as a way of governance.

The differences between these two rhetors are glaring: whereas Achamba embodies laudable ethos, which leads him to be open-minded, to reflect on his words before speaking out, and to listen to his audience and accommodate various value systems, Abaago is tendentious in his world view. If only he had foregrounded argument over force, and aside from his criminal motives, Abaago would have been a successful rhetor. There is no doubt that he is development oriented, but Dudum is more interested in unifying the clan than creating multiple administrative units. Highlighting the merits of Achamba over Abaago, Ambanasom states that Achamba ‘was the first President of DCDa, first potential sub-section elections candidate from the new Dudum constituency, first university graduate from Dudum, and the lucky husband of the first Dudum girl to have graduated from college’ (195). In fact, whereas Achamba has a first degree in English, Abaago did not complete Standard Six. This partly accounts for their divergent political visions for Dudum.

Achamba envisions Dudum from a holistic perspective, as can be seen from his tireless contribution to the foundation of Dudum Cultural and Development Association and his wedding to Echunjei from the rival village of Anjong. He says to her: ‘An idea occurred to me a few days ago, a happy coincidence indeed, in which our love might turn out to be a positive contribution to the situation back home’ (167). On the other hand, Abaago is concerned only with how Akan would benefit through the new association. As a result, he indulges in scapegoating, attempting to convince Akan youths that Achamba is the stumbling block to Akan being chosen, by the government, as the administrative headquarters of Dudum. While Achamba employs rhetoric to foster harmony, peace, and development in Dudum, Abaago uses it to feed his ego and the cause of Akan.

Within Ambanasom’s imaginative universe, he problematises politics in Africa through the rhetoric of Achamba and Abaago, placing before the reader two ideological approaches to governance: one that seeks to win the audience through an insightful presentation of ideas in a democratic manner as represented by Achamba and the other that aligns with dictatorship or the subversion of popular will through violence as typified by Abaago. It would seem that by allowing the ideas of Achamba to resonate in the audience and to the detriment of Abaago’s, Ambanasom subtly vituperates a dictatorial approach to politics by foregrounding a democratic debate of issues, in a way that would enable people to freely decide their destiny. Through Achamba, Ambanasom entreats African intellectuals or elites to be genuine in their views, eclectic in mind, selfless in service, and catholic in vision in the struggle for democracy in their localities and across the continent.

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The killing of Achamba or the attempt to crush the will of the majority, according to Ambanasom, is pointless; it is a futile endeavour because human life is transient, whereas ideas outlive human beings. Abaago may have succeeded in eliminating Achamba, but the latter’s revolution, encapsulated in the Dudum Cultural and Development Association, shall not perish. The democratic principles that Achamba encouraged through a free exchange of ideas within this association remain an invaluable legacy. On the one hand, Abaago symbolises tyrannical regimes rife on the continent of Africa, with tyrants who have embraced crude force or employed repressive strategies in order to foist their ideas on people, or ensure their political longevity as leaders. On the other, Achamba typifies the tendril of democracy as it has come under perpetual assault in Africa by ruthless leaders or politicians.

*Son of the Native Soil*, then, is a powerful allegory of politics in Africa; it constitutes an indictment of dictatorship as Ambanasom prescribes government by popular consent and not through the whims and caprices of a few people. In fact, Ambanasom’s proleptic vision of the fate of tyranny and oppression in Africa is symbolised in the demise of Abaago. In a sense, judging by Afrocentric and Western rhetorical typologies, Abaago is perceived as a man who lacks logos, ethos, and pathos, and this deficiency impairs his ability to speak well. This, according to Chinwe Okechukwu, is a serious deficiency, in behalf of Abaago, in a society like Dudum, which privileges oratorical skills. Abaago’s eloquence appears limited to reading drafted speeches like when he reads the welcome address to the D.O.; only at such moments is he regarded by his local community as the speaker of *Ukara* (English). Conversely, within Dudum, Achamba is presented as one possessing great communicative skills and unlike Abaago, who is lacking in dialectical analysis because his actions always veer towards conflict or force.

Abaago’s predilection for force is, as earlier remarked, evinced when he engineers the attack on Anjong women at Ukob, seizing their farm tools. This line of action boomerangs, resulting in the arrest and detention in Mbambe, by the government, of the Akan aggressors. Unlike Abaago, Achamba is a man of good intentions, but he has the misfortune to see his great vision for Dudum subverted by Abaago. Achamba exemplifies progressive rhetoric, one that embodies conviction and persuasion. In this regard, Chief Akaya of the rival village of Anjong underscores Achamba’s admirable rhetorical skills in an eulogy. He observes that Achamba had “the capacity to bring people together, to assemble enemies so that they could begin to exploit ways to bridge the gap between them” (249). Achamba’s charm, selflessness, and generous mind mark him out in Dudum as a man of the people, but not in the pejorative sense of Chief Nanga in Achebe’s *A Man of the People*, who is preoccupied with personal gratification.

Achamba is also seen as a consummate exemplar of different types of rhetoric – deliberative as attested to in his contribution towards an administrative unit for Dudum, forensic (when he investigates the history of Dudum in the archives in Yaoundé), and epideictic (when he addresses the union of Dudum students and teachers on issues such as girl education, obedience, and politics). Although Ambanasom presents Achamba and Abaago as representative of the kind of political rhetoric one would find among Ngie and other Anglophone politicians like Z.A.

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Abendong, T.E. Enokoh, Jethro Echobei, Ruben Mbang, John Foncha, and Emmanuel Endeley, beyond this consideration, the novelist takes satirical jabs at governance in Africa by portraying Abaga as symptomatic of a rigid and repressive central government, and by favourably depicting Achamba as a symbol of democracy or good governance.

Granted that Ambanasom’s novel is mainly concerned with portraying the aspirations and frustrations of Dudum people in their quest for an administrative centre, the novelist also broaches issues of rights and statehood. Thus, his fictional Dudum can as well represent Cameroon and other nations that grapple with problems of domination, oppression, and justice. One way of overcoming some of these impediments, Ambanasom seems to suggest, is by embracing a political ideology that foregrounds frank and open discussion with everybody, regardless of social, linguistic, or political affiliation.

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