

VIOLENCE, ARGUMENT AND RHETORIC AS NARRATIVE STRATEGIES: A PERSPECTIVE ON TAH PROTUS' *THE IMMORTAL SEED*

BY

TEM EDWIN NJI (DIPES II, MA)

TEL: 237675076949

CAMEROON

Email: njitem105@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This paper studies the narrative strategies in Tah Protus' *The Immortal Seed*. Of the many narrative techniques employed; violence, argument and rhetoric are explored in this paper. Violence as a means of asserting views, but also of physical confrontation in the clash between good and evil, between democratic principles and dictatorship, is a narrative strategy examined in this paper. Similarly, arguments and rhetoric are used to engage the reader in ways that show suspense and wit. These aspects help to underscore the overall themes of political repression, corruption and greed as well as the struggle for the birth of a new society. In sum, *The Immortal Seed* is a fascinating text but, the story comes alive through verbal and physical confrontations and also through succinct rhetorical postures.

Key Words: Violence, Argument, Rhetoric

Getting the people on their feet tells with cryptic clarity where the people are, weighed down as they have been – and continue to be – by age-old stories of exploitation, first by others, then by their own, and now by both. It is the novelist’s duty to lift the African out of these difficult conditions. And he can only do so by making proposals, by charting a course for the African to follow into future cultural freedom and pride- George Nymandi

PREAMBLE

The words above are culled from George Nymandi’s 2004 publication: *Prospective Commitment in African Literature* in which the scholar makes a case for the arduous task that lies in wait for the African novelist (writer); that of charting a way forward rather than the overbeaten track of the romantic pursuit of dreams of a bygone cultural Eldorado. In this “enriching but yet to be adequately known literary tradition, Cameroon Anglophone literature” (Teke 2013:128) Tah Protus definitely occupies an incontestable position. Author of *The Immortal Seed*, (2015), Tah Protus until his death on 23rd February 2018, had established a reputation not only as leading literary pamphleteer, but also as a creative writer, winning the 2011 Eko Price for Emerging Anglophone Cameroon writers for his novel *The Immortal Seed*. One does not need to stretch the imagination too far, then, to understand why this award-winning novel has become a course book for Cameroonian secondary schools, tested at the Cameroon General Certificate of Education (GCE), Ordinary Level Literature in English.

While the foregoing observation may be true, leading scholars of Anglophone Cameroon Literature in English of the ilk of Teke Charles, George Nymandi and Andrew Ngeh are yet to undertake full-length studies of Tah Protus’ prodigious talent as evinced in *The Immortal Seed*. In this paper, I examine the use of violence, argument and rhetoric as strategies of innovative creativity which the author employs to drive home his message. Though on the larger scale one could classify him along with liberal humanist authors, “who write ... generally expressing a whole range of different emotions on all types of topics that catch (his) fancy” (Ambanasom, 6), it is a label that one can’t wholly bring to bear on this novelist for while he is at once a combative cultural personality, he has equally charged his novel with socio-political concerns in ways that the novel becomes a mirror image of his Cameroonian homeland and post-colonial Africa as a whole. It is from a postcolonial perspective then, with such aspects in mind like language, hybridity and Achille Mbembe’s “aesthetics of vulgarity” (102-141), that one shall read Assi Jude’s behavior in postcolonial terms, as a product of the “commandement”, an arm of the “distinctive regime of violence” (ibid,102)

The Immortal Seed tells the story of Assi Jude, who recalls, 28 years earlier, his life-changing experience at the Mutegene Police Academy. A man from Dik, in the “Grass Fields” (5), Assi recalls the tortuous journey that got him, along with other forty-five recruits to the Police Academy, in Mutegene, –“a little neighborhood perched upon a small hill overlooking Tiko town...”(5). Arriving from humble beginnings and background, and still unscathed by the corrupting influence of Cameroonian public life, evidenced in him surrendering to the authorities upon arrival, naively the “18.500frs which his family ...had contributed on the eve of his hasty departure and given him for upkeep during his fifteen months of training” (9), Assi undergoes rapid psychological transformation, indulging in high level crime. Once a full-blown adult, lulled by the desire for material gain and personal comfort, Assi goes for a wife, ready to have as many children as possible in order to, as he swore, “to fill the names of twenty-one children on his salary documents, (11), to benefit from family allowance. No sooner is his mind made up on Akwen, his childhood crush, than the realization that Tembi, the young Prince, is his rival in love. He knocks out Tembi with a death blow and simulates a suicide. But, Tembi’s courtship of Akwen has not been wholly improvident. Akwen is in the early stage of pregnancy when Assi takes her to wife, a thing the latter is totally oblivious of. The passenger-woman’s reminder to Assi that “your wife is pregnant...don’t let anyone know it” (35), strikes a false note of self satisfaction on Assi who concludes that the “afternoon Akwen spent with him had thus been fruitful” (ibid). Thus, Akwen and Assi live in a marriage built on falsehood: the one not aware that his hands are blood-soaked, the other living in the illusion that he is the author of a growing pregnancy. Tebene, the “product” of the union grows to an adult. But back home, in Dik, it is the story of dubious Mbaku, who outsmarts Tebo, momentarily over land involving Agwe, the business magnate. This does not escape the attention of Chief Jiggang, the authoritarian chief. No sooner does Tebene arrive than the real drama unfolds, resulting in physical combat. In the end, Assi and Jiggang die ignominiously, Tebene becomes Fon and Bi is queen ushering in a new dawn for Dik.

While the novel may appear inscribed within the tradition of cultural (mis)representation, it speaks volumes of the totality of contemporary Cameroonian/African society: its sordidness, greatness, corruption, lofty ideals of cultural magnanimity and grace, betrayal and marginalization but also its hope and drive towards collective fulfillment. In handling this ambivalence, the author displays a mastery of craft often using creatively, aspects of violence, argument and rhetoric to drive home a socio-political and cultural message.

DISCUSSION

i) The Language Problem

“They wondered why all their teachers appeared to be French speaking while they, students, were English-speaking. Were there no English speaking Police Officers who could train them?” (9) - Assi

The concept of violence has been extensively theorized in literature. It suffices then to illustrate with a few instances. Ngugi Wa Thiongo’o is of the opinion that “violence in order to change an

intolerable, unjust oppressive social order is not savagery; it purifies man. Violence to protect and preserve an unjust, oppressive social order is criminal and diminishes man” (28). Ngugi, a radical anti-imperial writer, is often noted for his Marxist view of society where he perceives only two groups of people in society, The Haves and Have Nots both locked in the never-ending combat of class struggle. Ngugi is not exclusively in a class of his own. Wole Soyinka has argued that “Now, nothing can be more proletarian than violence: violence, we know is one of the few commodities: unlike rice, it cannot be placed under license. Even so, I wish to stress that violence has to be produced” (98). It comes then as no surprise that scholars of literature have made recourse to this, sometimes necessary evil, in literary analysis. Ngeh and Jick captioned their article “The Moral Concept of Violence in African Literature...,” (2002) while Ngeh’s “Anger and Rejection- the rhetoric and dialectics of violence in Anglophone Cameroonian poetry”, argues the case that “change and development are embodied in the principle of dialectics and the aesthetics of violence” (2015: 43). It is a view amplified by Bate Besong when he writes that “we can construct a Cameroonian reconnaissance out of the cultural survivals of our curfewed mentality of inferiority and thereby free ourselves from habit, explode rationality and create a cathartic kind of rejuvenation through a psychology of violence and revolt”(5). These writers/scholars have internalized violence as a justifiable response to a society built on repression of dissent, linguistic subjugation and moral corruption. Political science reminds us that “violence is built into unequal, unjust and unrepresentative social structures (imperialism, capitalism, caste society, patriarchy, racism, colonialism) and should hence be defined as a situation in which actual realizations of human beings are below their potential realizations”(3).

Assi’s observation above, that he, like other recruits, wondered aloud why they wouldn’t be trained in the Police Academy in a language other than French constituted for him the first form of linguistic/culture shock, the beginning of a journey towards a superiority syndrome such as is the case in his Cameroonian homeland for which *The Immortal Seed* is a microcosm. One chuckles, as the Police officer’s rendition of English takes on humorous undertones. Assi registers with disdain how Superintendent Essono, the man with an “Americanized attitude of the English Language” (8) speaks to the recruits:

Recruits!...from *zissimpol* operation, you can see how *diszonest* you are. For *zis* reason, you shall lose all *zismani*. As *zecitizens* about to be trained for *ze* sacred duty of *ze* maintenance of *ze* law and *ze* order, *ze* protection of *ze* property and *ze* human lives, it is *obligatoire* for you to be honest and obedient all *ze* times. *Ze* lesson one, repeat after me: a police officer *alwez* be *ze* most honest citizen in *ze* country.” (9)

The language question has constituted one of the contentious issues of debate in African literature. From the Ngugi-Achebe epoch of the 60s, to the emergence of young literary scholars, language has remained central as the carrier of the postcolonial experience. In what he considers

as the prospective role of the writer in Africa, Nyamndi draws inspiration from the Achebe – Ngugi linguistic debate and submits that “cultural independence passes necessarily through linguistic authority. Culture is therefore subsumed in language and there can be no cultural independence outside linguistic independence. ‘No man can understand another whose language he does not speak’, says Achebe, “and ‘language here does not mean simply words, but a man’s entire world view’...” (Achebe 1978: 7). It is a message clearly brought home, only in other words, by Teke Charles when he writes that “Imperialist languages such as English, French, Spanish and Portuguese carried imprints of Western epistemologies of dominance, but were paradoxically dominated within the matrix of anti-colonialist struggles which used these same languages as strategic assets in quite different communicative and discursive contexts. This linguistic susceptibility disrupts imperial language as unique cultural capital and repositions the language in a myriad of cultural, anthropological, philosophical and ideological contexts.” (72) The thrust of Teke’s article is the ability of the African writer to domesticate the language to local realities in line with Achebe and Jean-Paul Sartre’s view that the postcolonial writer must strip French/English words of their original meaning and do “violence to it” (1948: xx).

At issue here, though, is not Tah Protus’ ability to domesticate the local idiom to suit the French, English and Dik communities that he straddles. It is the idea that the languages; English and French, are one of the sources of psychological violence in the text and one of the leading sources of home grown terror¹ in present day Cameroon. Assi Jude expresses this dissatisfaction with the monolingual background of his trainers. “Were there no English speaking Police officers who could train them” (9), the recruits ponder. The French language, with its world-view, transforms Assi completely that he begins, like Achebe says, to think and dream in the language of his training, lending credence to George Ngwane’s observation of the Cameroonian syndrome that “the military officer insists on speaking French, types his reports in French, does his military maneuvers in French thus giving the impression that lectures in the military school are delivered only by Voltaire, Moliere...” (24). Assi later becomes corrupt, contemptuous of others and resorts to “Prime Survival Stratagems”, a means of blatant extortion.

Cameroon’s French and English bilingual status, the product of its dual(and triple) colonial tutelage, rather than be extolled as one of the strengths in its colonial encounter, has unfortunately degenerated into rancor, hate and recrimination. This is a view equally shared by Kenneth Usongo in his study of Shadrach Ambanasom’s *Son of the Native Soil*. He writes: “... the relationship between these two groups (Francophones and Anglophones) translates as one between the dominant and the dominated as evidenced in the constant use of French in Anglophone sectors of the country...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

¹ Anglophone Separatist leaders arrested in Nigeria and deported to Cameroon in 2017 were tried on terrorism charges. One of their lawyers, Christopher Ndong, said “ten charges have been brought against them, including terrorism, secession, civil war and revolution”, courtesy of Reuters. Since then, the term terrorism has loosely been used to label separatist fighters who in turn label government security forces as terrorist soldiers.

the Anglophone identity” (2). The Police Academy in Assi’s case is more symbolic of a wide ranging phenomenon of linguistic and cultural domination which, in 2016, degenerated into public acrimony, protest and violence. Earlier, in 2012, George Ngwane, an essayist and public intellectual, had mourned the fate of the bilingualism experience in Cameroon when he distinguished between what he termed “Social bilingualism” and executive bilingualism” (23). While Ngwane went at length to expose some of the linguistic atrocities in officialdom that could blow into violence, he ended in wishful thinking by arguing that “let the Anglophone not deceive himself that because English Language is more universal, Cameroon should become an Anglophone state or because Francophones are the majority, therefore this country must be Francophonised”(22). Now a member of the Commission on the promotion of Bilingualism and Multiculturalism², his much elaborated bilingual thinking is yet to yield much-needed fruit in the public space.

ii) *Violence begets violence*

Once Assi gets through with Police training, he becomes what Achille Mbembe calls agents of the “Commandement. (14)” Of the *commandement*, in the *Aesthetics of Vulgarly*, Mbembe talks about “the generalized instrumentalization of human existence and the material destruction of human bodies”. (14) Mbembe’s view is that the postcolony is characterized by agents of death of which the Police core constitutes part. They are agents of the claustrophobic existence that is part of daily reality. Assi, for one, is now of a superior class and finds inward gratification with the scare caused by his sheer appearance. On his return home to get a wife, his appearance at Yeseb Andang’s compound sends shock waves. We read that, “as soon as the child looked up and saw a uniformed officer in their compound, he dived into the mother’s compound crying, ‘Those bad people have come again’. The boy’s mother hurried out to see who the bad people were. She stood mortified as her eyes fell on the officer. She remembered how uniformed people arrested her husband...ever since Yeseb Andang returned from the Gwofon guardroom and recounted the cruelty of the officers, the entire household dreaded any human being in military wear!” (21) Hence, Assi incarnates an institution that thrives on violence. No doubt, the entire household is scared beyond comprehension. More importantly, though, Assi has imbibed a very high degree of combative ardor. Inflicting psychological and physical violence on others becomes part of his routine. For example, after the “tumultuous aftermath of a national political event in hinterlands of Bande” (165), Inspector Assi is in charge of the investigations, and this becomes an opportunity for him to “make extra money” (ibid). Assi intimidates and extorts with impunity, forcing men to sign blank sheets of paper which he later doctors for private gain. Such injustice, in the position of power, is brought home in clear terms:

²Amidst rising protest in Anglophone Cameroon, President Paul Biya signed the decree creating the Commission on the Promotion of Bilingualism and Multiculturalism on the 23rd of January, 2017. This was followed on the 15th of March 2017, by the decree appointing the members of the commission, amongst them, Ngwane George Esambe

The signed declarations were later published in government newspapers and over national radio and TV. The culprits were thus moved to high security prisons where they awaited trial. Six months later, news filtered that the men had died in detention. Assi could remember the detail graphically. Ever since the men died, Assi had stiffened his feelings. (166)

Assi's propensity to violence, as exemplified above, is in many ways a metonymy of his Cameroonian topography hence lending credence to the views of J. Bronowski and Bruce Mazlish in *The Western Intellectual Tradition*, (1970) that "the style of a period is a vivid expression of its totality, in which we read as it were, the thumbprint of history – or to change the metaphor, we discover the character of an age from its handwriting" (1970:150). Assi's violence is oppressive and not redemptive.

Nowhere is Assi's violence more glaring than in his realization that his rival in love, Tembi is about to get married to Akwen such that he devises a means to eliminate Tembi and win his prize. Though Tembi's elimination by his love rival is from the backdrop of a childhood love contest over Ijang, where Assi felt slighted, killing Tembi is particularly exacted with complete grossness. We read that: "as Tembi leaned his back against Assi's chest to listen, Assi suddenly gripped him firmly from the neck in a calculated tight strangulating angle formed by the inside of his left elbow. At the same time, he punched him viciously hard, thrice, around the diaphragm with his right fist. Taken thus unaware, Tembi was such easy prey that he lost consciousness without the least noise of resistance." (29) With such a vindictive sensibility, Assi has delivered the death blow that knocks out the rightful heir to the throne of Dik, hitherto denied his inheritance by a violent and usurping Fon Jiggang. What is also fascinating, though, is that Assi has just laid the foundation of what will be a most violent mud-soaked exit for him. Assi's mode of death, after his violent escapades, is particularly telling of the purification power of violence for all the injustices and pains he has so far inflicted on others. When events turn against him at the end, Assi takes to his heels, diving straight into mud! Once he is pulled out of the physical and metaphorical mud in which he had soaked his entire life, he is left with nothing but a lament: "Yes, breathed out Assi...I should have known that. Mbobog said it! ...the hair and the fingernails were right by me. Oh, oh, he lamented, knowing that the ingredients he needed for his survival had all been so near to him" (231). Hence, while Assi's violence has always been repressive, that against him is wholly an act of purification.

iii) *Fon Jiggang and the Megwe: a Metaphor of Repressive Violence*

Protected by the grand portrait of the President of the Republic that hangs on every wall, marks the junctions of the main avenues, and graces the jails and the torture chambers, an undisciplined army of dishonest police, informers, identity-card inspectors, gendarmes, men in khaki, and

impoverished soldiery coerce the common people blatantly, seizing what they have no right to seize. They practice raw violence. It is not simply a matter of whippings and beatings, which... are the lot of ordinary people in the prisons, police stations, and other houses of detention. (Mbembe: 124)

Fon Jiggang, the authoritarian Fon of Dik, encapsulates a brutal regime of violence, much in resonance with Achille Mbembe's portrait of the postcolony as adumbrated in *On the Postcolony*. The Fon's quest for power pushes him to forcefully take the throne from the rightful heir, Tembi forcefully. There begins his reign of terror. Quite curiously, he adopts the "Lion" image (the same animal image often associated to the Cameroonian President, Paul Biya), a totemic reference to the high affinity for power, strength and dominance. Quite genteel in comparison to Africa's "strong men" leaders, no one questions the Fon's authoritarian diktat. His sheer appearance causes panic and adulation. When he first encounters Tebene at the river Juajua, where the latter is oblivious of the cultural dictate of leaving the river while the "lion" crosses, everyone else reads Tebene's actions to be evident signs of "banga" (122). Everyone watching in disbelief, measures in the mind what punishment lies in wait for the cultural miscreant, and indeed the "Lion King" pronounces it: "I pronounce that that boy be killed by whoever has the first opportunity. He is a danger to the clan! And that she-traitor going with him is food for the Lion!" (123). The "food" so referred is a euphemism for his sexual escapades.

The *megwe* are the Fon's foot soldiers. They are ready to do his bidding without question. They are synonymous to Mbembe's "impoverished soldiery who coerced the people blatantly" (ibid). Once they are unleashed behind the fleeing Tebene and Bi, we find them giving updates to the Fon: "there are over one hundred and fifty *megwe* out now, Mbeh, the leader explained. That boy and girl cannot escape the dragnet we've laid out for them." (130). It is amazing, paradoxically though, how these soldiers after a period of searching, suddenly turn to sloth and self-aggrandizement, putting on a lot of weight and forgetting the task for which they were assigned- to capture the fugitives. Their action is perhaps a palpable warning that even the most loyal foot soldiers can sometimes reverse their loyalty.

In the land question pitting the dubious Mbaku and gullible Tebo, Fon Jiggang sets in, projecting a full measure of impudence and ruthlessness. Mbaku has dubbed Tebo of Assi's land, consenting to a deal of 6 million and accepting an advanced pay. But this is done without the consent of the Fon, Jiggang. Land, in this case, becomes a symbol of his power and authority. Asoh's report about the land deal makes "Fon Jiggang to get up and listen to a story about a secret land sale in his dominion, a daring affront against his royal prerogatives" (117). When he fails to have things done his way, Fon Jiggang resorts to violence against the land dealers, hoping to reap, in the most crooked way from Agwe. One of such ways is to subject Mbaku, Tebo and

Mbayam to claustrophobic existence by locking them up in the Palace despite the warnings of Tegum. His prisoners are described in the following graphic terms:

The men looked ragged, sleepy and weary, not having a bath for over a week. Their eyes were red and coated with conjunctivitis. Their feet arched and smarted from the pain of several sessions of lashing. They felt their nerves shrink as they saw the Fon himself loom into the view. Why another session of beating when the morning dose still smarted...it was always at night when the Fon and his thugs came to beat confessions out of them. (216)

The Fon, like any authoritarian that Africa is awash with, subjects citizens to the most callous abuse of basic civil rights: beating to extract confessions, and repeatedly too. His justification of “raw violence” (Mbembe, *ibid*) is simply that he feels slighted and does not get the necessary financial gain he would have loved to. Like any dictatorship, though, the end is always messy. When, in a hasty judgment he fleetingly refers to Mbayam as a “cockroach” (155), the authorial voice laments “that threat was typical of the vector that fallen leaders followed, describing their opponents as cockroaches and other inimical creatures but ending up as such” (*ibid*).

At the end of the day, The *Teken*, a group of octogenarian elders who take weighty decisions meet to “consider Jiggang’s way of life” (213). Jiggang remains intransigent to the very end, trying to extort money from Agwe and fighting his way in the grip of law enforcement officers but finally dying, ignominiously, in the process. Many are the Jiggangs of the world who end their reign of official violence in ignominy. One reads Jiggang’s personality and actions as a satirical jab at bad leadership and punitive violence, which often ends, in the words of Ngugi, with the people’s purification of evil through the imperatives of struggle. It is worthy of note that at the moment of writing this article, former Sudanese strong man President, Omar al Bashir, was appearing in court behind a cage, for orchestrated violence and corruption in officialdom, after his 30 years tenure as President of Sudan.

iv) Argument and Rhetoric in the service of the fight between Good and Evil

One of the remarkable aspects of *The Immortal Seed*, a testimony to the author’s mastery of craft, is his ability to play with simple logical arguments and rhetorical devices. These involve an often high sense of wit, mastery of anecdotes with the overall impact that there is suspense, ironical twists, humor, heightened conflict and eventual resolution. The actions of Mbaku, Fon Jiggang and Tebene’s closing speech particularly elucidate this view.

In Lane Cooper’s introductory remarks to his study of *The Rhetoric of Aristotle*, the scholar writes that “...a narrative poem or a drama is entirely made up of speeches; in the act of composition, then, the epic or dramatic writer, or the novelist, must constantly use the art of

rhetoric” (xviii). Seen in this way, the creative writer is constantly in the process of using speeches, arguments to frame dialogues in ways that slant opinions and shape views. This could be to win the heart of an individual or shape general public opinion as in the case of public speaking where the power of rhetoric can whip up, admonish or calm sentiments. In Western epistemology, Aristotle is generally credited as the father of the argument and rhetoric. He defined rhetoric as “the faculty, (power), of discovering in the particular case what are the available means of persuasion” (6). Taken this way, Aristotle considered that the end product of rhetoric was to persuade a listener or a group of listeners to see with the speaker. He distinguished three aspects of the Rhetoric, namely:

deliberative, forensic, and epideictic. (*Respectively*)... i) speeches of counsel or advice (deliberation)- as political speeches addressed to an assembly or to the public on questions of State, but also a speech addressed to an individual ii), judicial speeches used in prosecution and defense iii) panegerical or declamatory speeches in the nature of an exhibition or display, - eulogies in general, speeches of praise. (160)

These distinctions have often been used by writers to achieve different rhetorical objectives. Mark Antony’s funeral oration in *Julius Caesar* is an obvious example of an epideictic speech, one that praised the fallen Caesar but ended in arousing the Plebeians in radical protest and revolt. These three forms of rhetoric often overlap, however.

The Afrocentric scholar, Molefi Kete Asante, has made a distinction between Western rhetorical and communicative acts and those typically African. In *The Afrocentric Idea*, Asante writes that

...conventional rhetorical theory is not universal; in practice and evaluation, traditional rhetoric is bound to Western Society. For example, Cicero’s *De Inventione* and Aristotle’s *Rhetoric* create a special perspective on discourse that in and of itself is no problem. The problem arises when those products are seen as a standard for the rest of the world. ...Humans who interact vocally with others for purposes of achieving cooperation have certainly existed in Africa much longer than in Europe or Asia. (62)

Asante’s study of the African speech act is elaborate and succinct, conceived from the background of black liberation struggle. That is why the scholar lengthily challenges the aspects of “rhetorical dictatorship” (32), often challenging the people who feel oppressed by rhetorical captivity to rise in protest. It is with this blend, of Western and African communicative speech acts that Kenneth Usongo, in his article: “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*” adopts a complementary strategy by using both Western and African communicative

speech acts. In his words: “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.” (2)

A similar picture is visible in *The Immortal Seed*.

Mbaku, a retired “CDC Misselele Rubber Plantation” (39) worker, is generally cunning and corrupt, but he is endowed with a flair for logical arguments and oral presentation that gets his listener/audience lured to his evil agenda. Once the idea of the sale of Assi’s abandoned land dawns on him, for which Tebo has custody and needs to be convinced, Mbaku slips into Tebo’s house in the early hours of dawn and summons his witty rhetorical skills to play on Tebo’s gullible psyche. He claims to have more sympathy for Tebo over the intractable land case than his friend can understand. Hear him: “I have not slept since the last time we were in court. This land is like frontal headache to your brother. He doesn’t want it; so he is transferring it onto you. Should family inheritance become headache?” (42). Worthy to note is that he ends his sympathy for Tebo with a rhetorical question, wondering why his bosom friend should pine over what the owner, Assi, certainly doesn’t care about. What is more, he tells Tebo that “I have not been sleeping. I have been working for you and your brother. If you don’t thank me for the tiger I have startled into your trap, you’ll never have anything all your lives to be grateful for...” (43). Mbaku knows he has a bargain worked out with Agwe, but at the same time must not show over indulgence to Tebo. It is just this approach that pushes Tebo to pronounce just what Mbaku wanted to hear: “bring me one million and do whatever you like with the land” (46). This is just where Mbaku pounces, having played on the begrimed psyche of the gullible listener, Tebo. A deal reached at 6 million with Agwe has now been worked out for one million. This is a show of wit, tact and logical presentation albeit for evil motives.

But no sooner has Mbaku settled down to enjoying his booty than the deal flops. Tebo’s family is no longer interested in the land sale! And behold Agwe has been aroused to hostility with Fon Jiggang’s confrontation. Frantically, he now wants a legal document for money he earlier handed to Tebo concerning the land deal. When he confronts Tebo, infuriated, the latter once again summons his rhetorical gift, thanks in part to “...his many hours spent in the Gwofon courtroom” (148). It is in these court rooms that he learned the skills of prosecution and defense, and is able to find his way out of many legal tight corners doggedly. Agwe asks him: “Can we sign the papers now?” His response: “Yes, it will be alright...but you can see that the neighbors will not be there to make the document look genuine. ...he had seen many people, like Agwe lose cases because of many omissions...he could clearly see himself gaining the upper hand over Agwe if he continued to blunder in like manner” (149). Tebo is a master in the manipulation and distortion of facts while Agwe, the rich business man is tactless. When Agwe insists that a legal document be established as proof of money earlier paid, Tebo knows that logical arguments may

be running out of sight for him, but again he presses his point: “why don’t you call one of your people outside to be witness to what you want us to do...it is not good to do things without witnesses” (149). This strategic thinking gets to conceivable limits; even for him and this is where he momentarily conceives the argument of force rather than the force of argument. Mbaku momentarily raises the false alarm and creates the picture of a victim under attack by a “nyongo man” (151), from Mankon. “You come from Mankon to beat an innocent man in his house?” (150), Mbaku asks, rousing his entire household to confront Agwe who later flees. Hence where his verbal tactical skills fail him, Mbaku turns to the argument of force turning the hunter to the hunted.

With Fon Jiggang, however, his tactical flair soon hits the rocks. Jiggang’s rhetorical postures rest mostly on dictatorial edicts, lending credence to Molifi Kete Asante’s view that “rhetorical condition, therefore, is not an illusionary concept; it is the source of subtle machinations of power and manipulations of words.” (24) When Jiggang summons the beleaguered Mbaku over the land question, his rhetorical pronouncements are cut and dried. This brief interlocution elucidates:

Mbaku, the Fon called...it is your secret dubious land pact that has generated this chaos. I give you one last chance: did you or did you not go into negotiation to sell land to Agwe whose car your wife and children battered the other day? ...You may choose not to speak; refusing to choose is a choice! The Fon said after waiting briefly for Mbaku to speak in vain. Mbeh: ‘...Agwe’s car was battered for a reason different from the one you are suggesting.’ Yes, Mr. Lawyer of Gwofon, the Fon commented derisively. Sentence: You will sign a paper, declaring how much money you received from Agwe, if not; I shall transfer you to the government Guard Room in Gwofon, first thing in the morning! (156)

This threat, compounded with beatings, produces an immediate effect on Mbaku. These are two malevolent individuals at play; the one using his distinctive skills of speech to defraud, the other using his position of traditional high authority and power to extort and punish. These dark forces of evil manipulation, Jiggang, and Mbaku in this case, all die ignominiously.

The person, who best taps into his budding rhetorical skills to unite and build, is Tebene who becomes Fon Mbezuboh II following the death of Jiggang after fist fighting in the Palace. Arthur L Smith has noted that “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” (63). Young Tebene, the erstwhile rebellious individual, has warmed the hearts and minds of Dik, post-Jiggang whose era reduced the people to live in permanent fear, characteristic of a dictatorship. When, on the day he is officially made Fon, Tebene rises to speak, “...he greeted the people in Menemo. Then he addressed them in English. His tempo was

calculatedly slow, drawing attention to his statements and gestures” (243). By this approach, he psychologically rallies the people to his speech, his paralinguistic features all playing to lure his audience to his message. Tebene shows a mastery of his audience, a remarkable feature in rhetorical delivery. From the various delegations sent in, the “Mbororo Brethren”, “all the Medik”, as well as the “white friends” (224), everyone feels summoned to the task of building a new community; one of freedom, peace and unity. When he delves into the anecdote of a family that was careless with its inheritance, and had to pick back its broken-self image, he is displaying an understanding of the lore of the land, buttressing his message so eloquently. No doubt, “the elders nodded at the young man’s encapsulation of wisdom and inwardly congratulated themselves on the fortunate turn of events” (246). Thanks to this mastery of rhetorical skills, Tebene succeeds in setting the atmosphere that recreates the history and the democratic principles of Dik.

CONCLUSION

This paper set out to demonstrate that Tah Protus, in *The Immortal Seed*, employs varied narrative strategies to tell the story of Dik, a community the paper suggests could be a microcosm of nascent African democracies, of which Cameroon, the author’s background, is a good example. Of this “blend of stylistic sophistication” (Alembong: 2015, xx), violence, argument and rhetoric are used to engage the reader. It is through these narrative strategies, among others, that the themes of political repression, corruption and greed are made visible. Through these aspects, also, a new society is ushered in.

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