

Reviewed by Dibussi Tande

**Ewumbue-Monono, Churchill. 2001. *Indigenous minorities and the future of good governance in Cameroon: An inquiry into the politics of local governance in the local councils of Fako Division, 1866-2001*. Buea, Cameroon: Center for Research on Democracy and Development in Africa. 345 pages (5000 francs CFA)**

With municipal and legislative elections barely a few weeks away a review of Ewumbue-Monono's, *Indigenous minorities and the future of good governance in Cameroon* is timely. It is, without doubt, the most comprehensive and most detailed book ever written on the political history of Fako division in the Southwest province of Cameroon. Not only does it give a detailed chronology of local politics in Fako in the past century - with a detailed list of all councilors in Fako since 1935 - it also tackles head-on, the native-settler problem which has bedeviled ethnic relations and politics in the division for close to a century – a snapshot at the problem of indigenous minorities which has bedeviled politics in many coastal and urban regions of the country (Fako, Wouri, and Mfoundi divisions, for example) since the reinstatement of multipartyism in 1991.

Ewumbue-Monono painstakingly explains how the political dynamics of native - settler relations in Fako division during the Southern Cameroons and West Cameroon eras has ultimately shaped the present-day political perceptions and actions in Fako division - today's political clashes between the CPDM and the SDF with the underlying disagreements over the levels of native-settler representation in local political institutions are merely a new chapter in a decades-long battle for the control of local councils and local resources in Fako.

Using rare archival material from the national archives in Buea and other primary sources, Ewumbue-Monono demonstrates how various governments, from the British colonialists to the Biya regime, have either helped to attenuate or worsen the marginalization of Fako indigenes within the Fako political system. The British tried to control the problem by giving special protection to the indigenous population; the Foncha government accentuated the problem by actively promoting settler domination with its policy of "Nativization" of settlers; the more moderate Jua government tried to mitigate the problem by reversing some of the radical policies of the Foncha government; the one-party system helped control the problem thanks to a certain measure of party discipline and consensus; and multiparty politics burst the lid wide open as the SDF and CPDM battled for political – and ethnic - supremacy in the division.

Although Ewumbue-Monono convincingly demonstrates that the settler political machine has tried to use its numbers and solid ethnic organization to dominate local politics in Fako, he is also crystal clear in his contention that the political marginalization of Fako natives in Fako division is largely due to the failures of the Fako elite to live up to their historic responsibility. According to the author, the Fako elite are more concerned with personal and class/bourgeois interests rather than with the general interest of the people of Fako. As a result, they have always dealt with political challenges in dispersed ranks. And, when it has suited their narrow interests, these same elite who complain about "graffi domination" have not hesitated to team up with settler ethnic lobbies to sideline other Fako natives whom they see as threats to their political aspirations. Because of this war of attrition, the number of Fako natives with national political profiles has whittled down considerably.

In the last chapter of the book, Ewumbue-Monono's proposes a series of solutions aimed at giving indigenous minorities adequate protection and representation in Fako division. These range from the institution of quotas in local councils to the territorial reorganization of Fako councils and the creation of a list-ward system. It should be noted that most of the recommendations that give special protection to the indigenous minorities are at odds with what a number of scholars on Cameroon have proposed in recent years. In fact, most of these scholars have argued that the inclusion of minority protection clauses in the 1996 constitution accentuated, if not set the stage for the

stranger-native dichotomy in Cameroonian politics in the 1990s. These scholars are proponents of the one-man-one vote democratic system where the majority always carries the vote.

However, after reading Ewumbue-Monono's book, it is impossible not to hold the view that majority rule without some sort of minority protection is a subversion of the very democracy that majority rule is supposed to incarnate. Also, this work clearly shows that the native-settler problem, particularly in present-day Southwest province, is not a recent phenomenon but one that is as old as Southern Cameroons itself.

Unlike many other books and articles dealing with the issue of indigenous minorities in Cameroon, this is not an invective-filled, emotional "anti-graffi" rant. Ewumbue-Monono has produced a well-researched scholarly work where even the most controversial data speaks clearly to the issue and steers clear of ad hominem attacks and ethnic baiting.

This book is not just about "local" Fako politics. It is about the broader issue of political representation in a democratic polity; it is about that perennial conflict between majority rule and minority rights; it is about the age-old question of who is a native of a particular region and who is not; and it also about the reasons behind the continued dominance of the CPDM in those areas of Fako division where the native population is still in the majority and the SDF's dominance in areas with a settler majority.

All of these issues will once again burst to the surface of the local and national political scene as municipal and legislative elections with the July 22 twin elections in Cameroon. This book is therefore a must-read for anyone even remotely interested in the politics of Fako division in particular, and in the internal dynamics of Cameroon's democratization process in general. It is an even greater asset to those individuals who intend to run for office in Fako division.

**Churchill Ewumbue-Monono is also the author of *MEN OF COURAGE: The Participation of Independent and Civil Society Candidates in the Electoral Process in Cameroon. A Historical Perspective, 1945-2004*. Limbe, Cameroon; Design House, 2006. 237 pages.**

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