

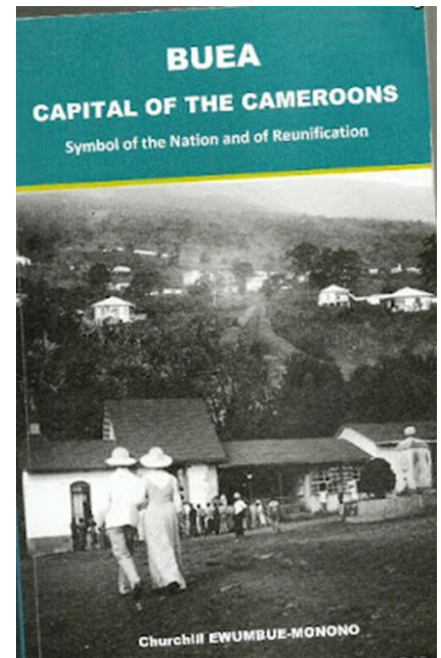
Book Review- “Buea: Capital of the Cameroons”: Churchill Monono’s reply to misguided zealots

By Douglas A. Achingale*

Even before President Paul Biya announced that Buea would host the golden jubilee celebration of Cameroon’s reunification, it was clear to all right-thinking Cameroonians that the South West regional headquarters, which had once been the capital of all of Kamerun, was naturally best suited for that purpose. However, some misguided policy makers of this country preferred that the choice of host of the celebration be made amongst towns with “greater credentials” such as Kumba, Bamenda, Douala, Foumban, Mamfe and Mundemba.

And when the 20 February 2014 event came and went, with its major public investment projects that gave the city a new facelift, the selfsame insensate administrators told whoever cared to listen that the said projects had transformed the “village” of Buea into a modern city.

All of which left Churchill Ewumbue-Monono, a son of the soil and prince of the city, tight-lipped but not indifferent. While the pre-celebration debate raged on and the unfair post-celebration comments about Buea were made, the passionate researcher and prodigious writer rather chose to put his facts quietly together with the ultimate aim of coming up with this enthralling document titled, “Buea: Capital of the Cameroons (Symbol of the Nation and of Reunification)”. This beautifully bound 305-page book is thus the author’s honest yet authoritative reply to those whose view of Buea had been misjudged or antipathetic.



He sees President Biya, whom he officially serves as Adviser, as one who has a profound understanding of the powerful symbols and historical significance of Buea as the custodian of Mount Cameroon and the spirit of the nation, and who, on account of this fact, steered clear of the machinations of those misguided administrators and chose the city as the host of the landmark event.

Both the introduction and Part One of the three-part book present the geo-politico-historic and socio-cultural details of what is today the headquarters of the South West region of Cameroon. In fact, everything you want to know about Buea up till the end of 2014, is contained in this section which constitutes the bulk of the work: from the 870 km² surface area that it covers on the slopes of Mount Cameroon, through its founding in the 17th century by Eyie Tama Lifanje, to its place and challenges in the scramble for Cameroon and eventually its transformation in the colonial as well as the Ahidjo and Biya administrations. Even the enormous contributions of the remittances of Cameroonians in the Diaspora in giving Buea a new face are highlighted in this section of Monono’s chef d’oeuvre.

Still in this first part of the book, the author celebrates some illustrious sons of Buea such as P. M. Kale, Motomby-Woletta, Dr. E. M. L. Endeley, Prof. M. Z. Mondinde Njeuma, Chief S. M. L. Endeley, etc., alongside other prominent actors in the reunification drive who served in Buea, such as J. N. Foncha, S. T. Muna, A. N. Jua, etc. He also blithely presents Buea as a citadel of learning, a city of civilization and cultural diversity, a beacon of common law and civil liberties in Cameroon, a city with an international character, and so on and on.

Far from being mealy-mouthed therefore, Monono paints a true and authentic picture of Buea with utmost fervour. The authenticity of his myriads of facts contained in the book shows him as having an encyclopedic knowledge of the past and present happenings in his native Buea, and his lucid and masterly narrative style confirms the author as a virtuoso story teller with a predilection for minute details. This is hardly surprising, given his lineal descent from some of the most renowned historians in Bakweriland, two of whom furnished him with ample information documented in this work. It was therefore a moral obligation for him to dedicate the book to these two, namely Paul Woloa Esaso-Woletae, his granduncle, and Joseph Evakisse Burnley Luma, his grandfather.

Part Two is a snappy and chronological presentation of the major events that took place in the Buea Municipality from 1841 to 2014, and Part Three a display of historic pictures that tacitly tell the story of Buea. Other such pictures, it should be noted, are equally found in Part One of the work.

Brimful of historical facts and spiced with memorable quotes from seasoned writers, historians and politicians like Mwalimu George Ngwane, Tande Dibussi Jabea, Prof. Willibroad Dze-Ngwa, Kwame Nkrumah, etc., the book provokes in the reader – and particularly past and present inhabitants of Buea – exploding feelings of likeness of and nostalgia for the lovely city. This gives the work an undisputed place in the realm of Arts, in keeping with the view of Nobel Laureate Wole Soyinka who posits that, “there is no other human preoccupation that so readily provokes either suppressed or exploding feelings than this singular expression of the human imagination and inventiveness that we call the Arts.”

On account of what Buea is and what it stands for, there is no doubt in Monono’s mind that this “city on a hill” will play host to the 100th anniversary celebration of Cameroon’s reunification. Hear how the author cuddles the reader’s ears with warm words about the future: “As Buea marches towards celebrating the centenary of the country’s reunification in 2061, or its by-centenary in 2094, the greatest challenge to the town’s destiny will be to preserve its very rich historic heritage alluded to by President Biya in April 1983.” (P. 229)

All in all, “Buea: Capital of the Cameroons” reveals Monono as the veritable fount of all knowledge on his hometown and the incontestable spokesperson of Buea. As he himself hopes, “this book will be useful to tourists, students of history and political science as well as any person interested in uncovering the myths and marvels of this town...”

Frank Lloyd Wright once said: “I know the price of success: dedication, hard work and an unremitting devotion to the things you want to see happen.” Churchill Ewumbue-Monono was certainly devoted to the task of putting the story of Buea in one authoritative and seminal volume. That is the price he paid to achieve this groundbreaking and mammoth success.