

Book Review: MEN OF COURAGE

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The burning issue facing Cameroonians today is the quest and promotion of a veritable democratic culture and society.

A growing number of Cameroonian scholars invariably seem to lead the way in fostering new methods and fields of analysing Cameroon's failure or slowness in setting up democratic institutions to address the myriad of problems associated with the lack of good governance, and transparency as well as proposing solutions. Ewumbe-Monono is one of such scholars.

Monono's study of the participation of independent and civil society candidates in Cameroon's democratic drama provides a thought provoking analysis relating to the *raison d'être* of the numerous laws and decrees that ushered in the return to multiparty politics and democracy in Cameroon.

The author's volume reflects serious intellectual and scholarship discipline as he has artfully brought to play his training as a journalist and diplomat with an incredible knack of the historian and political scientist.

In thirteen well-structured chapters written in excellent English, the author traces the role of independent candidates in elections in the French-speaking (Francophone) and English-speaking (Anglophone) Cameroon from 1946 to 1966, and the various legal frameworks that made the participation possible (Chapters Three to Seven).

In what I take the liberty to qualify as Part II, the author takes a critical look at the place of independent and civil society candidates in Cameroon's electoral process from 1966 to 2004 (Chapters Eight to Ten). This splendid and well-researched volume ends with a profile of some independent candidates who were actors on Cameroon's political playground (Chapters Eleven to Thirteen) and the "The Way Forward."

A volume which is hard to put aside, until the reader has completed reading it, brings to light, amongst others, the often misconstrued conception that the electoral process in Francophone Cameroon during the territory's existence as a French-administered trust territory was far from acceptable.

In fact, the author has demonstrated that although the electoral system in Francophone Cameroon "was a list proportional representation ... this list-centred dispensation did not, in any way, make the electoral system partisan as the various electoral laws ... made provisions for the participation of independent and civil society candidates like in Anglophone Cameroon" (p.47).

There is no doubt that in Anglophone Cameroon, independent and civil society-friendly electoral laws were an accepted way of political life in the territory's electoral chessboard. However, the situation changed in both Anglophone and Francophone Cameroon in 1967 when Law 66/LF/17 of 21 December 1966 made nominations party-centred (p. 44).

The failure of the Biya regime to be independent-candidate friendly in the laws and decrees governing Cameroon's electoral process is evidenced in the conditions to be fulfilled by a candidate for municipal and/or legislative elections (p.179; P.208) as it is much easier to form political parties, given that the need for national appeal and/or sensitivity is grossly downplayed (p. 208) in forming political parties.

In a successful academic endeavour to bring home to the reader some of the prominent independent candidates, the author has included a collection of 41 photographs of some of these courageous Anglophone and Francophone independent candidates; some of these photographs are very scarce to come by.

What the reader gets from this very fine written volume is a wealth of information on how to re-focus Cameroon's continuous search for a truly functional and acceptable democratic society.

And with Cameroon called upon to play a key role in Africa's democratic process given that she was among the first African countries to accept the African Peer Review Mechanism, APRM, Cameroon's legislators, politically-oriented NGOs, the National Election Observatory, NEO, and politicians of all political colours should put all hands on deck to steer the ship of democracy successfully through Cameroon's turbulent sea.

In order to make the task possible, no library, jurist, politician, scholar or interested civil society member should be without a copy of this highly recommended volume.