

Delicate Negotiations For Reunification: A Tribute to Cameroon's Budding Diplomacy: 1959-1963.

Book Review By Douglas A. Achingale

Hardly would anyone who knows journalist/diplomat Churchill Ewumbue-Monono be befuddled by the endless flow of a flurry of fine literature from his fecund and faithful pen. His unalloyed commitment to passionately tell the Cameroonian story, which started decades ago, has been given renewed verve, with the publication of his umpteenth book, *Delicate Negotiations For Reunification: A Tribute to Cameroon's Budding Diplomacy: 1959-1963*.

Prefaced by his mentor and former Minister of External Relations, Dr. Jacques Roger Booh-Booh, and published in January 2018 by The Centre for Research on Democracy and Development in Africa (CEREDDA), the 425-page document with alluringly glossy immaculate white covers provides an authentic insight into the invaluable contributions of the early birds of Cameroon's diplomacy to the reunification process. Amongst other issues, of course.

Ewumbue-Monono clearly sets his goals in his introduction. Rather than focus exclusively on the outcome of reunification, as many political observers have done over the years, he pays considerable attention to the process, the technicalities and the way business was conducted in general during that period.

These are the contents of the 13 chapters and epilogue that follow, contained in two sections, in which the author, in his trademark journalistic style, cogently rolls out the context of the negotiations, the ins and outs of the establishment of what he calls "diplomatic machines" to channel these dialogues, and the issues under negotiation such as the termination of trusteeship, plebiscite results, constitutional arrangement, transfer of sovereignty, etc.

The author does not fail to enunciate the overall importance and scope of his chef d'oeuvre. Says he:

"The study's significance lies in its attempts to reconstitute the diplomatic setting, principles, procedures and exigencies under which the reunification negotiations were taking place. It examines the anatomy of influence among the various negotiators and delegations and the strategies used to obtain their desired outcomes."

All of which, he avouches, attempts to give a more practical understanding and interpretation of the outcomes of these negotiations than has so far been provided by historians, political scientists and political activists.

Ahidjo and Foncha: A world of contrast!

The historical picture that emerges from the unfolding reunification drama, as elucidated by Churchill Ewumbue-Monono, reveals many images, the most prominent being those of the main protagonists of reunification, Ahmadou Ahidjo and John Ngu Foncha. Between 1959 when the two men first met in New York and agreed to launch official negotiations, and 1963 when the ICJ sealed the fate of the Northern British Cameroons in the clamour to reunite the three parts of the German colony of Kamerun, their mannerisms and approach to the slimy game of politics are presented, overtly or covertly, as being dolefully contrasting. While the one proved to be sophisticated, tactful and manipulative, the other exhibited naivety, malleability and shortsightedness.

To give backing to what is generally known to be Foncha's shortcomings, the author avows that his KNDP party had no clear position on and agenda for reunification. Foncha's blind insistence on reunification ignited a splint of miasmic feeling in Southern Cameroonian politicians of the opposition such as Dr. E. M. L. Endeley, P. M. Kale, Motomby-Woleta, Gorji Dinka, Albert Mukong, etc. who supported either a federation with Nigeria or the Third Option, that is, an independent state of Southern Cameroons.

These politicians did not mince their words in openly fulminating Foncha for his bovine stance and sheepish approach. Hear Gorji Dinka, former President of the Cameroon Bar Association and leader of the self-proclaimed "Republic of Ambazonia", as quoted by Ewumbue-Monono:

"The British saw that we were already ripe for independence. Unfortunately, when the opportunity came, Foncha dashed it to the winds. At that time, I was the President of the National Union of Cameroon Students in the UK, and Mukong was the President of the Cameroon Students in Nigeria, so the two of us were on the Southern Cameroons delegation to the UN."

Foncha's standpoint was so peevish as to actuate Mukong to challenge him to a duel. Again, the author quotes Dinka, saying:

"It was so annoying that Mukong even took on Foncha in a fight along the corridors of the UN. It was I who separated them and told Mukong not here at the UN."

Francis Nkwain was later to assail Foncha with the following words: "Indeed, Foncha became an error of history...History made an error when it reposed undue confidence in Foncha and made him play the roles of both Moses and Joshua when, in fact, his talents could not carry him beyond the plebiscite."

Diplomacy makes the difference

To a large extent, Ewumbue-Monono attributes Foncha's tactlessness in dealing with Ahidjo to the absence of career diplomats from the Southern Cameroons delegations that took part in the reunification negotiations at different levels. Conversely, the more politically astute Ahidjo, knowing too well that diplomats could be the fulcrums of such delicate negotiations, had seen the need to train and use them when the time was right. And so he did.

The author is clear on this point when he quips: "By involving diplomats with a sound understanding of the leadership's political vision, President Ahidjo was able to put their professional expertise at the service of his political expediency."

In the words of Dr. Booh-Booh, Ahidjo "succeeded in putting up a team of responsible and united negotiators who executed his instructions strictly. Since 1958, he had trained a generation of top diplomats in the French universities and professional schools. And in fact, it was the Ministry of Foreign Affairs that constituted the kingpin of the negotiations."

Come to think of it, the strategic job of the early diplomats was discernible at all levels of the negotiations, and was noticed to always favour the delegations from La Republique du Cameroun (LRC). With the complicity of Charles Okala, his Foreign Minister, and a galaxy of diplomats in the background, for instance, Ahidjo made sure Foncha and his delegations revelled in luxurious treatment each time they were on LRC soil for negotiations. The effect of this manipulation was that

Foncha, S. T. Muna and the other “reunificationists” who went along with them tended to always lose focus.

Even the sitting arrangements for the delegates at the Fouban Constitutional Conference of July 1961 were made to presage bad business for the Southern Cameroons delegation there. In fact, this and other wielding actions caused the latter delegation to be able to negotiate only what Dr. Simon Munzu calls “a raw deal”.

Ahidjo and Foncha are equally said to have agreed on 24 December 1960, in an official Note to the British Administrative Authority, that in the event of reunification both territories “Would unite as equals in a Federal United Cameroon Republic, each continuing to conduct its affairs consistently with its inherited state culture, with only a limited number of subject matters conceded to the Central government.” However, Ewumbue-Monono views Ahidjo’s eventual violation of this republican pact made through diplomatic channels as not necessarily constituting diplomatic morality. Rather, the writer posits, it was a glaring breach of good faith enshrined in the diplomatic doctrine of “Pacta Sunt Servanda.”

All in all, *Delicate Negotiations for Reunification...* is incontestably a glorification of Cameroon’s diplomacy, especially at its developmental stages. In it, Churchill Ewumbue-Monono acknowledges the unequivocally significant role of diplomacy in nation-building; he literally raises Cameroon’s diplomatic flag, so to speak. This is perhaps the first time that effulgent light is being shed on the job of diplomats in this regard, in a book. As he himself puts it, the work “has demonstrated that the country’s pioneer diplomats were nationalists in their own right, who contributed significantly in laying the foundations for the new nation, and therefore, should be given due attention by historians in the country’s independence and reunification narratives.”

There is no question that Ewumbue-Monono tapped the inspiration to craft these luscious lines from President Paul Biya’s address to the nation during the 50th anniversary celebration of the reunification of Cameroon in Buea, on 20 February 2014. On that occasion the President said: “The march towards reunification was a risky odyssey. It was a journey with challenges, delicate negotiations for our budding diplomacy and, at times, internal opposition to be reckoned with.” This can hardly evoke questions in the minds of readers given that the author has been Technical Adviser in the Cabinet of the President since 2010.

In masterly fashion, Ewumbue-Monono weaves his story with a bewitching historical thread and spices it with countless minute details and anecdotes which are devoid of his personal emotions and which render his artistic broth all the more palatable.

The publication of this work is timely as it lays bare the true story of reunification at a time when dissenting Anglophone voices in Cameroon are loudly calling for either a return to a federal state or outright separation, owing to what they say was a bogus reunification in 1961 and an Ahidjo-led constitutional coup d’état of a referendum in 1972. The work could just be insinuating a good case for the Anglophones, that is, if some of them are willing to part with the grossly irresponsible manner in which they are going about their demands. At the same time, the book could also augur well for the powers that be who insist on the oneness and indivisibility of Cameroon, as it is suffused with facts that rubbish the claim of “Ambazonians”.