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Gender gap in theatre: exploring the dearth of women scientists in Cameroon theatre

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ABSTRACT

The history of theatre, both as performance and academic discipline is also the history of gender exclusion. In Cameroon, though a good number of women have succeeded as playwrights and performers, the socio-political atmosphere and structural barriers have made it difficult for many to pursue a career in theatre practice or academia. This paper explores the conspicuous underrepresentation of women scientists, here defined as female scholars and researchers, in Cameroon's theatre academia and institutional leadership. Drawing from the Social Cognitive Career Theory, the African Feminist Thought, and using a qualitative, theory-driven case study approach, the paper examines how women in Cameroon's theatre landscape develop agency amidst cultural expectations, gender biases, and institutional barriers. It centres on the lived experiences of Emelda Ngufor Samba, the most prominent Cameroonian female theatre academic. Data were got through observation, interviews, analysis of Samba's scientific works, published works about her, and review of her CV. These were analysed thematically and interpretively. The study found that resilience, self-empowerment, mentorship and networking, as exemplified by Samba, are some of the strategies needed to overcome systemic and gender and cultural barriers militating against women in theatre and theatre academia in Cameroon. These qualities are needed to emerge as distinguished practitioners, scholars, and leaders in Cameroon's theatre industry. Also, to promote professionalism and encourage more women in academia, outstanding female Theatre students should be encouraged to pursue postgraduate studies, while experienced female academics should establish mentorship networks to guide and support them and junior practitioners towards success.

KEYWORDS:

African Feminist Thought, Cameroon theatre, Emelda Ngufor Samba, Gender bias, Gender gap, mentorship, networking, Social Cognitive Career Theory, systemic gender and cultural barriers, Theatre academia

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INTRODUCTION

Theatre has always been more than mere performance. It is a transformative space where stories are embodied, cultures affirmed, and collective consciousness awakened. As a collaborative art form, theatre unites in a shared space, writers, performers, technicians, and audiences to re-enact real or imagined experiences. While Western narratives often trace theatre's origins to 5th century BCE Greek rituals honouring Dionysus, the god of wine, vegetation, and fertility, African narratives position theatre as predating written history. It is rooted in oral traditions, masquerades, dances, and community rituals that pulse through African cultural life practices "quintessentially connected to universal human experiences: birth, death, rites of passage, marriage, naming, and even funerals".^{1,2}

Theatre, which began as an oral tradition, has evolved to incorporate literary and technical dimensions. Today, its immersive power relies on a synthesis of speech, gesture, sound, dance, costume, lighting, and visual design. However, beyond spectacle, theatre remains a mirror held up to society, a forum where people confront their realities, fears, and aspirations; a space to validate all that is religious, social, economic, and political as well as negotiate conflict, seek healing, and imagine change without resorting to the violence that unresolved tensions might otherwise provoke.³

Yet, the history of theatre is also a history of gendered exclusion. In Ancient Greece, women initially participated in ritual performances, but later, in keeping with "Attic morality", they were systematically pushed out of public life and relegated to the domestic realm⁴. In contrast, African traditions positioned women at the heart of performative life. They were "the storytellers, the humour-artisans, the word-spinners whose grease moved the wheels of society".⁵ Unfortunately, this legacy has been reduced and women's contributions are limited to the lyrical or ceremonial, to enliven life's transitions.⁶

Historical Context of Gender Representation in Theatre

Formal theatre does not just happen. As a complex collaborative art form, it requires the input of writers, performers, technicians, directors, and numerous other creative agents. Unfortunately, over the years, there has been an unequal representation of women in the field. Gender biases and institutional barriers excluded them from performing publicly or authoring theatrical works.^{7,8} Historically in the West, women's involvement in theatre was more an exception than a norm. Being constrained to domestic responsibilities, their appearance on stage or in the theatre was considered inappropriate, unacceptable, dangerous, or indecent.^{9,4,7,10,11} This absence equally meant their underrepresentation in playwriting and theatre leadership roles. A notable exception was the poet Praxilla who wrote and performed her own works¹². However, in the 19th century women began working in the theatre as actors, managers, directors, playwrights, and performer trainers. Their efforts, unfortunately, were invisible and diminished in status by the "collision between sex-based stereotypes of femininity and the perception of the actress as a 'public woman' who earned her living through the 'unfeminine' display of her body. Ideal femininity valorised women's domesticity, privacy, and silence; work in the theatre did not".¹³ In Africa, the European colonizers introduced many cultural changes to the indigenous people and their theatrical practices. These included scripted performances, proscenium stages, professionalized actors, gender biases, and the exclusion of women from performing roles, in contrast with the more communal and participatory indigenous theatrical forms infused with ritualistic elements. This limited female participation and reshaped African theatre to conform to Eurocentric gender roles.^{14,15} Evidently, historically, women have faced barriers in accessing opportunities in various aspects of theatre, including playwriting, directing, producing, and technical roles.^{12,8}

While Western women got into theatre leadership roles in the 17th century, it was not until mid-20th century that women in Sub-Saharan Africa started gaining leadership roles.⁶ Prominent among these were Efua Sutherland and Ama Ata Aidoo of Ghana, and Juliana John of Sierra Leon, and Zulu Sofola of Nigeria, who became established playwrights in the 1960s. Like their

male counterparts, most of them negotiated the Western theatrical forms by adapting and blending them with indigenous performance traditions, incorporating indigenous storytelling elements, as well as writing in their local languages and English. Sutherland did not only become a theatre director, she also founded the Ghana Drama Studio in Accra, where she explored traditional performance spaces and styles.¹⁶ Since then, many women have attempted to gain access to leadership positions in the theatre.

Despite the persistent gender imbalance in theatre, it is essential to acknowledge the discipline's evolution into a vibrant academic field that fuses artistic practice with rigorous intellectual inquiry, involving a critical and systematic study of live performance, dramatic literature, and their cultural, political, and historical contexts. It encompasses disciplines such as acting, directing, playwriting, scenography, stage design, dramaturgy, and technical theatre, each demanding specialized training and reflective scholarship. As a knowledge-producing domain, theatre necessitates analytical depth, research, and theoretical engagement that interrogate its form, function, and impacts.

Against this backdrop, this paper has as objectives to fill the gap in literature on the representation of women in Cameroon theatre, underscore the dearth of women scientists, here defined as female scholars and researchers, in Cameroon's theatre academia, and advocate for greater inclusion, representation and recognition of women within this scholarly and creative community.

METHODS

The study adopted a qualitative, theory-driven case study approach. It centres on the lived experiences of Emelda Ngufor Samba, the most prominent living female theatre academic in Cameroon, an exemplar whose career trajectory embodies the gender disparities this research investigates. Data were got through observation, interviews, analysis of Samba's scientific works, review of her Curriculum Vitae and published works about her. Everyone interviewed was informed about the study and they all consented to the research.

The data were analysed thematically and interpretively, guided by the Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) as developed by Lent, Brown, and Hackett,¹⁷ and the African feminist thought as articulated by Omolara Ogundipe-Leslie¹⁸ and Amina Mama^{19,20}.

SCCT highlights how the interplay of individual cognitive factors like self-efficacy beliefs, outcome expectations and career goals, alongside environmental or contextual variables influence career development. Environmental/contextual variables include family/community, patriarchy, culture, financial worth, etc. African feminists focus on the lived experiences of African women, how they navigate patriarchy, colonial legacies and inequality. While recognizing the intersectionality of gender within historical, cultural and socio-political contexts, they advocate for issues like women's agency and empowerment, community-based activism and social justice. The integration of SCCT and African feminist thought enables a holistic understanding of both internal psychological processes and external structural conditions that contribute to the dearth of women in theatre leadership in Cameroon.

Historical and Socio-Political Foundations of Cameroon Theatre

Cameroon is predominantly French-speaking but has a strong English-Language theatre.¹⁶ Between the 1840s and the 1940s, missionaries in the country used theatre to communicate the Christian religion to natives. Later when schools were created, theatre was used as a teaching tool. As literacy increased, the works of European playwrights began to be staged, both in the received and home languages. The goal of most of the productions during this period was to "inculcate European values and attitudes among the colonised as part of the cultural domination crucial to the colonisation process".²¹

During the period of nationalism to independence and after, there was an upsurge in dramatic productions characterized by artistically oriented scripts, the use of standard French/English, and well-educated publics. Playwrights were especially encouraged with the establishment of radio drama by the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) and Radio France

Internationale (RFI). The French Cultural Centres also encouraged play productions by putting their halls at the disposal of theatre troupes alongside financial and material support²². The sixties through the eighties should have been boon years for writing, but the state did everything to prevent writers from writing freely. These years following Independence were bloody and led to the conservation of power and the setting up of the secret police with its chain of torture chambers located all over the national territory, ready to pounce on anyone on the barest suspicion. A writer was either pro-French and/or pro-Government, or faced the wrath of the state. Most thus resorted to comedy to sweeten the pill of social criticism.^{23,24}

The first known Cameroonian playwright was the English-speaking Sankie Maimo who wrote *I am Vindicated* in 1959 while living and working in Nigeria. The second playwright was the Francophone Guillaume Oyono-Mbia. He wrote *Three Suitors: One Husband* in 1964. A third playwright was the Anglophone Victor Elame Musinga. He wrote *The Tragedy of Mr. No Balance* in 1965. Following these were French-speaking women. Marie-Charlotte Mbarga Kouma was the pioneer female playwright. She began writing in 1966 followed by Rabiataou Njoya in 1972 and Wéré Wéré Liking in 1979. It was not until 1982 that the prolific and most famous Cameroonian playwright and dramatist, Bole Butake, came onto the scene with *Betrothal without Libation* in 1981 and *The Rape of Michelle* in 1984. He began writing political plays in 1986.

Kouma wrote on social aspects of life such as early marriages and the conflict between tradition and modernity. Her play *La Famille africaine* won first prize at the 1973 Inter-African Theatre Competition. Njoya wrote on politics and power, cultural traditions and social issues. Writing from Ivory Coast, Liking drew inspiration from the sacred *Ki Yi* initiation ritual of her Bassa tribe in Cameroon. Most of her works, which are avant-garde, explore African identity, feminism, and postcolonial themes, and denounce the abuses of power and degradations that are part of African contemporary realities. A core idea of her theatre is human self-consciousness, which she believes arises through ritual. To her, rituals help individuals to take control of themselves before the universe and the divine, comparing this to a puppet and puppeteer.²⁵

A more contemporary and prolific Cameroonian female playwright was the Anglophone Anne Tanyi Tang, known for her significant contributions to Anglophone Cameroon drama. Her distinctly gendered plays portray women in various socio-cultural and economic roles within contemporary Cameroonian society. They highlight the struggles and resilience of ordinary people through issues like patriarchy, corruption, and neo-colonial oppression. Tang's female characters are self-willed, independent, and rely on their intellect to fight familial and social challenges²⁶. This contrasts with Butake's portrayal of women resorting to sexual favours or ritual to achieve set goals²⁷. Other female playwrights with at least one publication each are Marie Claire Dati Sabze, Angeline Solange Bonono, Pat T. Nkweteyim, Pochi Tamba Nsoh, and Sophia Kwachuh Mempuh. If other published female playwrights of Cameroon exist, they are not documented.

While Cameroon's historical and socio-political landscape shaped thematic concerns and literary voices, theatre can only be considered theatre when it is produced or re-enacted before an audience. Production entails technical and performance aspects.

Technical theatre or stagecraft concerns the visual, auditory, and mechanical elements in theatrical production. Technical roles encompass a wide range of backstage responsibilities like managing lighting, sound, scenery, props, costumes, make-up, and stage mechanics. Due to stereotypical gender biases, of all the theatrical disciplines excepting costuming, the fields of design, production, and technical theatre are the most male-dominated.²⁸ Despite being trained, most females in Cameroon shy away from stagecraft. The few who have ventured in this domain end up as stage managers (e.g. Patricia Nkweteyim in Ndumbe Eyoh's *Munyenge*, Ebad Carine in Nde Zama's *Malingo*), costume designers or costumers, or make-up artists. It is rare to find them in the more technical lighting or sound domains. A rare case is Rosine Nkem, lighting technician, set designer, and scenographer at OTHNI – Laboratoire de Théâtre de Yaoundé. Although Chelsea Monjoa ventured into sound, she was just an assistant to Alemsuh Junior, the sound director of Ideal Theatre Troupe (ITT) Buea. Melvis Ndifor of ITT has tried her hand at directing and set designing while Fox Camille of the

same troupe directed Ade Oru's *Sanctuary*. There is equally Lisette Malung Nange who is a writer, actress, director, producer for theatre and cinema, and co-founder and president of the Visionary Theatre Troupe (VTT). Besides writing, Liking, Nkweteyim, and Samba, are the directors of their plays and trainers of their troupes. Most female theatre enthusiasts are performers.

Despite being performers, very few women end on the stage as opposed to the screen. In the early days, before network television became popular, the theatre troupes that were widely known in Cameroon included the Musinga Drama Group of Buea, the Yaounde University Theatre and its Francophone counterpart, Le Théâtre Universitaire, the Master Key Theatre, and the Flame Players, all based in Yaounde. The prominent female performers of the only semi-professional troupe were Vanessa Sona, Joyce Ashuntangtang, Rita Kum Konglim, Tangye Lydia, Ma Arrah Bate, Caroline Ngala, Maimo Mary, Julie Tala, Judith Bi Suh, Pamela Kisob, Agnes Akwo, Emelda Ngufor, Patricia (Pat) Nkweteyim, Ernestine Ngringeh, Mary Madeka, Atemkeng Juliet, and Balbina Mesue, among 14 men²⁹. Abety Gwandi noted: "Pat and her stage colleagues have thrilled the Cameroonian public for many years, reaching back to the late eighties and early nineties when she was a student at the University of Yaounde."³⁰

The high representation of women in Cameroon theatre performances was short-lived. The country's tense socio-political atmosphere led to the ban of all theatre performances on the then lone university campus. This stalled theatre productions in the country especially as halls outside the university were either unavailable or too expensive to rent. The situation was compounded by the emigration or *bush falling* of many performers. Tangwa noted: "The Flame Bush Fallers who might have moved things forward, were they at home, include Joyce Ashuntangtang, Vennessa Sona, Benn Bongang, Kumengisa Pius Deghe, Ma Arrah Bate, Maimo Mary, Pamela Kisob, Bannavti Joe Kumu, Kehbama Langmia".²⁹ Others who *fell bush* later are Ernestine Ngringeh and Judith Bih Suh. Curiously, Emelda Samba stayed.

With the birth of the Cameroon film industry, most rising stars preferred screen to stage acting. Also, of the

hundreds of females who have graduated with a B.A or M.A in the Performing Arts, only an insignificant few have pursued the PhD or become Theatre academics and researchers. These include Anne Tanyi Tang (Professor, deceased in 2019), Asheri Kilo (Lecturer, called to other duties since 2008), Emelda Ngufor Samba (Associate Professor, Cameroon), Patricia Nkweteyim (Lecturer, Cameroon), Pepetual Mforbe Chiangong (Lecturer, Germany) Lizette Malung (PhD candidate, Cameroon). It is in the light of this acute dearth of women scientists in Cameroon Theatre that this paper focuses on Samba, a woman who has successfully navigated the various challenges of a male-dominated industry to become "the face of Theatre Arts in Cameroon".³¹

Emelda Ngufor Samba

Her academic and career trajectory

Samba's interest in theatre began in childhood. As a Young Presbyterian, she acted during Sunday school rallies. In primary and secondary school theatre performances, she played key roles. She later joined the University of Yaounde Theatre, playing key roles.³¹ After obtaining a B.A in English Modern Letters in 1990 from the Faculty of Arts of the University of Yaounde, Samba enrolled for the postgraduate Diplôme de Maîtrise in Theatre in 1991. In 1993, she enrolled for the Diplôme d'Études Approfondies (DEA), another postgraduate diploma that was typically pursued in the Francophone Higher Education system, after the Diplôme de Maîtrise as a preparatory step for doctoral studies, and became a graduate assistant. She simultaneously enrolled in the Ecole Normal Supérieure (ENS) Yaounde to become a secondary school teacher. She completed both the DEA and ENS in 1995. The DEA changed her university status to part-time, while her teacher's diploma made her a fulltime government-employed English teacher, a position she occupied until 2008. She obtained her PhD in 2003 from University of Bayreuth, Germany. In 2008, she was officially recruited by Government as Assistant Lecturer of Performing Arts and Cinematography. She got promoted to the rank of Lecturer in 2011, and in 2013, she was appointed head of the Performing Arts and Cinematography Section in the Department of Arts and Archaeology. She became Associate Professor in 2019. In 2022, she was appointed coordinator of the Professional Masters in Cinema and Audio-visual in the University of Yaounde I. Besides teaching, Samba

currently serves as Examiner for the Consultative Committee of University Institutions, charged with the examination of files of academics wishing to change grades. She was a one-time examiner for the International English Language Testing System (IELTS). She is also an anonymous reviewer for *Matatu Journal for African Culture and Society*, and *Annals of the Faculty of Arts, Letters and Social Sciences*.

In addition to academics, Samba is First Assistant Coordinator of the Theatre Pole of the Ministry of Arts and Culture. In 2022, she became Knight (*grade de chevalier*) for valorising arts and culture in Cameroon. In 2023, she was made President of the Association of Former DAAD Scholarship Holders of Cameroon. She is the Secretary General of Cameroon Professional Research-Oriented Women Network (CaPROWN) and Founder and Coordinator of People Theatre and Cinema for Social Change. Additionally, she is the Coordinator of the Yaoundé University Theatre Alumni. She equally has membership in various organisations including National Association of Theatre Troupes in Cameroon, the Disability and Inclusion Africa Network where she is the Cameroon lead, Frontiers Research Group, Cameroon, and Africa Network for Solar Energy (ANSOLE). She also belongs to the University of Bayreuth Alumni, the DAAD Alumni, and the Anglophone Cameroon Writers Association. Finally, she is one of twelve DAAD research ambassadors for West Africa, with the assignment of disseminating research/scholarship and fellowship opportunities as well as pilot collaboration between higher institutions of Cameroon and Germany.

Artistically, Samba has written and/or directed a few plays for stage and television. She has severally coordinated U.S. Embassy-sponsored theatre projects in schools and other communities to celebrate U.S. Black History and Women's History Months, or democracy and women's empowerment. When mainstream theatre productions stalled in the nineties, she joined her mentor, Professor Bole Butake, in Theatre for Development projects and quickly learned the trade. Since 1997, she has been involved in theatre for social change in and out of Cameroon.

Her challenges

Despite Samba's brilliant academic and career story, she faced and continues to face several significant challenges. Notably, during a critical recruitment phase at her university, she was overlooked in favour of a male PhD candidate. She was told that as a woman, it was not certain that she would pursue the PhD to the end. After obtaining the PhD, a male older than her was preferred because he "needed" the recruitment more. On yet another recruitment opportunity, she was told to be content with her secondary school teaching job and give room for a jobless male to be employed. Furthermore, she has had to juggle the considerable responsibilities of parenting and family life, obligations that drain the time and energy needed for her professional development and research endeavours. Such challenges are enormous and definitely reflect the reasons why many women have not pursued careers in theatre and theatre academia in Cameroon, justifying the use of SCCT, which portrays how personal, behavioural, and environmental factors influence career choice and development. It also justifies the use of African feminist thought which focuses on the intersectional challenges women must navigate in order to gain agency. Samba's experience is similar to that of Patricia Nkweteyim who taught part-time in the university for over 20 years with more than 10 years in her department before eventually being recruited on a permanent basis.

Her impact

Samba has not only taught but also mentored and shaped the careers of the next generation of theatre practitioners and scholars. By developing curricula that integrate theory with practice, as well as theatre with development studies, she fosters critical thinking and socially responsive arts, thereby inspiring them to become responsible professionals. Among these are several male lecturers in various universities across the country, and two females: Lisette Malung Nange, currently teaching Theatre part-time while pursuing a PhD in the Performing Arts and Cinematography Section of the University of Yaounde I, and Nalowa Fominyen, an Assistant Lecturer in the Performing and Visual Arts Department of the University of Buea. Samba loves to teach and see people grow. Her past students commend her for her training and technical mentorship. Many others credit her with instilling in

them essential skills in public speaking, directing, and stage management.³¹

Samba has equally impacted the scientific community in Cameroon and beyond. As a scholar, she has enriched academic discourse by presenting or publishing insightful papers in conferences, peer-reviewed journals, and books, exploring the intersection of theatre and social issues to highlight its role in community empowerment and cultural expression. She has authored one academic book and served as editor in several others. As a theatre practitioner, she has demonstrated a commitment to using performance as a tool for social change, particularly through participatory methods that engage communities in identifying, analysing, and proposing solutions to pressing issues such as disability, HIV/AIDS, farmer-grazier conflicts, climate change, racism, and identity. Her grassroots initiatives have had a tangible impact on marginalized groups, including persons with disabilities, internally displaced youths, and rural communities, empowering them to dramatize and address social realities while fostering behavioral change. Her pioneering work with persons with disabilities has challenged stereotypes and transformed them from passive victims into agents of change.^{32,33} In 2023, she facilitated a UNESCO Arts and Peace Building Workshop in Dibombari in Cameroon's Littoral Region. She worked with internally displaced youths and their host communities to create artistic expressions that addressed the psychosocial effects of the ongoing Anglophone crisis.³⁴ Also, her interventions, especially in the Northwest Region, have tackled women's empowerment, land-use management, and environmental protection.³⁵ Her influence extends internationally. She led workshops on African Theatre and Racism at the University of Chemnitz in Germany, and trained students at the International Water-Climate Summer School in South Africa on how to use theatre to communicate research findings to indigenous communities³⁶. She has also contributed to a Pan-African initiative promoting SDG7 through theatre.³⁷ Additionally, her work with the US Embassy in Cameroon has fostered cross-cultural understanding through educational collaborations. Through her multifaceted contributions in mentoring, publications, and community-engaged research, Samba has positioned herself as a pivotal figure in

theatre and development studies, bridging theory and practice to create lasting social impact.^{31,33}

RESULTS

A number of factors account for Samba's outstanding success in Cameroon's theatre academia. These include her resilience, self-empowerment, mentorship, and networking.

Resilience

Generally, women are more pressured by societal expectations and demanding family and parenting responsibilities. The performing arts sector is notoriously time-intensive and participation there is often very public, exposing women more acutely to any existing social stigma.³⁸ This makes it difficult for them to achieve work-life balance, causing many to give up on their professional development. Additionally, most Cameroonians do not yet understand the transformational power of theatre and its role in community empowerment, and so do not patronize it, making it difficult for people to pursue theatre as a career. These challenges, together with patriarchal and institutional barriers notwithstanding, Samba stayed focused on her chosen career path. Her self-efficacy fuelled her resilience and choice of theatre over English Language teaching.

Self-empowerment

Samba fuelled her passion for theatre by acting as opportunities presented themselves and by pursuing postgraduate studies in theatre. These performances and academic attainments have empowered her with agency to transform theatre into a tool for social justice as well as create her own space. Today, through participatory theatre approaches, which amplify her voice, she challenges cultural norms, questions societal irregularities, uses indigenous knowledge, and engages in grassroots activism to influence and cause social and cultural transformations.

Mentorship

A mentor is an experienced adult who guides, advises, and supports an inexperienced protégé with the purpose of furthering his or her career.³⁹ Mentorship

aids in professional growth, skills development, and career navigation. Samba was fortunate to have been mentored by Hansel Ndumbe Eyoh, Bole Butake, and Gilbert Doho, Cameroon's most prominent theatre practitioners and academics in the 1980s and 1990s. It was under their guidance that she enrolled for postgraduate studies and got a DAAD scholarship to pursue her PhD, as well as grants to run some of her projects.

Networking

Samba has a wide network. Her membership in many organisations is social capital and opens her up to diverse opportunities, visibility, and influence. As Maguire et al. observed, "empowering interpersonal relationships with other women and supportive environments are crucial in overcoming challenges and developing personally and professionally in higher education institutions".⁴⁰

DISCUSSION

In an industry dominated by men, Emelda Ngufor Samba stands tall, not just as a successful woman, but as one who has reshaped the landscape of Cameroon theatre. Her story can be interpreted through the SCCT and African feminist thought frameworks. SCCT emphasizes self-efficacy beliefs, outcome expectations, goals setting, and environmental factors as relevant to career development. These elements enhance or constrain agency. Samba's belief in her abilities (self-efficacy), nurtured by her environment (church, academic institution, mentors), gave her the needed confidence and resilience to set and achieve educational and career goals amidst cultural and institutional barriers. Like a true African feminists, she sought self-empowerment and has emerged not just as an agent of change and social transformation, but also as one whose contributions have been vital to theatre's sustainability, vitality and viability, especially in educational and developmental contexts. Her work, which cuts across mentoring students, leading theatre-for-development initiatives, and producing scholarly research, symbolize what is possible when women lead with vision.

Her story equally underscores the importance of networking and mentorship in career development. This

is a key component in SCCT and African feminist thought. Due to gender biases and institutional barriers, there is need for women to network, mentor one another, and build together. The dearth of women scientists in theatre academia in Cameroon is mostly perpetuated by the lack of mentorship, female role models and support/encouragement, institutional biases, and discrimination. Samba can be contrasted with Patricia Nkweteyim, who, despite her passion for theatre and academics, and the fact that her university was in dire need of Theatre lecturers, could only function as a part-time Theatre instructor for 13 years before her formal and official recruitment as Assistant Lecturer in 2020. Even when she negotiated a contract with the national television to record and broadcast theatre pieces by students, it was turned down because she was only a part-timer. A mentor or female role model would have helped her better navigate her career as a scientist. Such systemic barriers only scare women from pursuing careers in the field.

CONCLUSION

This paper has analysed Samba's profile and impacts, and then thematically and interpretively present and discussed them in the light of SCCT and African feminist thought. It has also presented the intersecting pressures of gender biases and institutional barriers rooted in Cameroon's academic and artistic sectors, together with family obligations, systemic and personal hurdles women have to surmount to emerge as distinguished practitioners, scholars, and leaders in the theatre industry. Unfortunately, not every woman has the patience or resilience to surmount these barriers, or the luck to have a job while struggling to get into the theatre career. Therefore, to promote professionalism and encourage more women in academia, outstanding female Theatre students should be encouraged (especially through scholarships) to pursue postgraduate studies, while experienced female academics should establish mentorship networks to guide and support them and junior practitioners towards success. The industry needs women and urgently too.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

None declared.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

PNN is the principal investigator. She conceived and designed the study. PNN and PNF contributed to the writing, revision and approval of the final manuscript.

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