

Cameroonian women's empowerment through higher education: an African-feminist and Capability Approach

By

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Declaration

I, Monique Eleanor Kwachou Tangah, declare the following:

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Dedication

For African women.

Women who have feared being labelled as 'too much', because 'too much' is just another version of 'not enough'; still an allegation of our inadequacy.

Women who are committing to unlearning inculcated ideas and behaviours that keep us all from living truly empowered lives.

Women who are multidimensional, whose beings cannot be simply boxed.

This is for you.

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Abstract

The concerted efforts of scholars, development agents and governments have established the idea that education is both intrinsically and instrumentally good, life-changing, has direct returns, and is particularly empowering for women. The cumulation of these ideas has resulted in the development of societal assumptions that an educated woman is an empowered woman, and the more educated a woman is, the more empowered she will be. In Cameroon this assumption has bred some antagonism directed at ‘over-educated’ women on account of their presumed empowerment. The commonplace use of the Pidgin-English phrase ‘too much book’ or French-slang epithet ‘long crayon’ are often directed at higher-educated women to suggest their being educated is to their detriment. These expressions demonstrate the belief that a certain level of education is deemed sufficiently empowering for women in Cameroon and they risk becoming “too much” if they proceed further. In this way, education for women in Cameroon is seen as acceptable and adding value up to graduate level, at which point it succumbs to a law of diminishing returns.

Thus the widespread assumption of higher education being sufficiently empowering for Cameroonian women generates two problems: 1) it promotes the limitation of young women’s aspirations and, 2) advances an incomplete informational basis for government (and public) judgement of higher education as a response to Cameroonian women’s oppressions.

In response to this problematic assumption of women’s empowerment through higher education and the corresponding fear of higher-educated Cameroonian women, this study offers a two-pronged approach. It presents both a theoretical and empirical re-conceptualization of empowerment for women in the Cameroonian context, from which assessments are made as to whether the women of whom empowered is assumed can consider themselves and be considered as empowered based on their higher education.

The theoretical re-conceptualization of empowerment here is effected by an original Capabilitarian application- the African-feminist Capability Approach- developed in the course of the research to address inadequacies in existing frames for the conceptualization and investigation of empowerment in African contexts. The empirical re-conceptualization is the product of engaging the sample of 20 Cameroonian women graduate students in individual life-story interviews and a participatory analysis workshop befitting of a participatory narrative inquiry.

The data - which is presented and analysed sequentially by way of narrative analysis and analysis-of-narratives - suggests that the assumption of Cameroonian women’s empowerment through higher education is a misconception as the higher education offered to these women lacks the capacity to adequately address the empowerment needs of these women in the face of their multivariate oppressions. The study’s findings point to: the conditionality of higher education’s potential for women’s empowerment; the need for examining intersections in evaluations of African women’s empowerment; and the ways that Cameroon’s higher education can be improved to better enable the plural aspects of empowerment which Cameroonian women have reason to value.

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Glossary

Anglophone (noun): A sociocultural and political identity in Cameroon by which one is recognised as belonging to the linguistic minority and hailing from regions which were previously British Southern Cameroons.

Anglophone Crisis (noun): Used to refer to the ongoing socio-political conflict in the Northwest and Southwest regions of Cameroon born out of the Cameroonian government's mishandling of the long-standing Anglophone marginalisation problem and separationist fighters and guerilla tactics.

Francophone (noun): A sociocultural and political identity in Cameroon by which one is recognised as belonging to the linguistic majority and hailing from regions which were previously French Cameroun.

“Long Crayon” (noun): A French epithet which literally means ‘long pencil’. It is used to describe someone who has spent a long time in school hence their writing or word skill, illustrated by a ‘pencil’, is longer than average.

“Too much book” (phrase): A Pidgin-English phrase used to denote having an ‘overdose’ of knowledge which is unappealing. The phrase is typically directed at women and is synonymous with the Pidgin-English moniker **“Mary-book”**.

PREFACE

"I began writing about power because I had so little"

-Octavia Butler

I first encountered the notion of being 'overeducated' whilst in the final year of my undergraduate studies at the University of Buea in Cameroon. As we casually dined during an extended family meeting, an uncle asked me about my plans after graduation. I mentioned wanting to work and to further my studies part-time through distance learning with a university outside Cameroon. As he nodded and questioned the credibility of distance-learning programmes, an aunt interrupted us to share her own opinion, which was that I should think about work and marriage before acquiring more educational credentials. In a mixture of Pidgin-English she said, *"School will always be there, but you need to get married and too much book no fine, especially in that thing you are learning."* What she implied was that as a woman furthering studies, particularly in my field of gender studies, could be detrimental to my marriageability.

I was not expected to respond, and did not. Nevertheless, I noted a few nods of agreement. The uncle who sparked the conversation did not object and closed the topic by laughingly adding that finding a job was paramount – any job, because marriage was not easy for unemployed women. Only should I not find employment, would I have his blessings to further my studies, as that was better than to idly wait on marriage. His concluding remark captured the common view of further education as a secondary option to escape idleness from unemployment while waiting for something else to manifest, like gaining public service recruitment, securing visas for travel abroad, or, especially in the case of women, marriage and family.

That was the first of many experiences that imparted the looming threat of "too much book". In later experiences I noted that my male course-mates cited higher pay and better positions for their academic aspirations, my female course-mates would see no need to further their education unless it was to escape their homes and restrictive parents, content

with whatever average-paying job they may be able to secure with their first degree and weary of both becoming and being branded as 'too much'.

By the time I began my PhD at age 28, my personal status as unmarried and childless was often used as evidence that I proved to be the fulfilment of the prophecy of 'too much book'. In this way, this research is definitely motivated by my personal experiences, and my need to tell our side of the story, that is the women perceived as 'intimidating' based on the power their educational qualifications presumably gives them. Aside from being inspired by my own experiences with society's fear of supposedly 'overeducated women', this research inquiry is equally motivated by curiosity as to the impact of the sociocultural assumption that higher education begets empowerment. As African countries in general and Cameroon in particular, increasingly prioritise higher education with the goal of developing knowledge economies (see Doh 2012), it is necessary to question the assumptions surrounding higher education and to enable thorough assessments of the desired and real returns of higher education to women. That is what this study and the stories I share within it sets out to do.

PART I

...Research design is a carefully thought through narrative of preliminary decisions that harmonize and provide initial guidance for the investigator's fieldwork.

(Saldana 2011, pp. 87)

...paradigms encompass interpretive frameworks...that are used to explain social phenomena. Methodology refers to the broad principles of how to conduct research and how interpretive paradigms are to be applied. The level of epistemology is important because it determines which questions merit investigation, which interpretive frameworks will be used to analyse findings, and to what use any ensuing knowledge will be put...Epistemological choices about whom to trust, what to believe, and why something is true are not benign academic issues. Instead, these concerns tap the fundamental question of which versions of truth will prevail.

(Collins 2000, pp. 252)

In August of 2019, halfway through my doctoral programme, I found myself reading through old Patter blog-posts where Professor Pat Thomson – renowned for her research and academic writing knowledge - generously shares her thoughts on research and academic writing. While I found two blog-posts on writing the thesis introduction to be particularly helpful¹; it is another Patter blog-post poignantly titled '*Methodology isn't what goes in the Methods Chapter*'² and a particularly interesting Research Gate discussion board³ which influenced my idea of how my thesis should begin. As Thomson (2013) and the commentators on that forum noted, the methodological section presents what is most important for the reader to understand in order to appreciate/comprehend the research that is about to be reported and the research methodology ought to be perceptible as underpinning the entire research and not merely found midway into the thesis as the contents of a 'methodology chapter'.

In agreement with this reasoning I decided to offer readers of the thesis a more comprehensive entry into the study, in the form of Part I. As this thesis presents a work of narrative inquiry it is not merely a study, but a study of stories; it would be rude to interrupt the reader and the participants' stories at certain junctures to rattle off the set of academic jargon required to present the blueprint of the research. Foregrounding the research design, methodological choices and the context of the study along with the introduction in the first part of the thesis, thus makes a great deal clear from the start.

¹ Patter blog-posts of 21 March 2013 and 2 June 2014

² Patter blog-post of 18 [February 2013](#)

³ ResearchGate link:

https://www.researchgate.net/post/What_is_the_difference_between_narrative_analysis_and_thematic_analysis_Is_thematic_analysis_an_approach_of_narrative_analysis

1.0 ABOUT THE STUDY

1.1 Statement of the problem: the fear of overeducated women and assumptions of empowerment

In Cameroon, assumptions of women's empowerment through education is illustrated by common usage of the Pidgin-English phrase '*too much book*' or French-slang epithet '*Long Crayon*' often directed at higher-educated women to capture the notion of being overeducated to one's detriment. In addition to these linguistic manifestations, national statistics (see Stiftung 2018) indicate that although basic education is valued for both men and women in most of the country, Cameroonian women soon meet with an invisible line that suggests that they have had 'enough' education. This line typically falls at the end of a woman's first tertiary qualification. This line is best captured by a controversial Nigerian digital application which calculates a woman's brideprice.⁴ The app calculates levels of education as an increase in the woman's worth until postgraduate level, after which it deducts from the woman's worth; the value of her education at that point succumbs to the law of diminishing returns. The takeaway is that education adds to a woman's worth-status and power, but a woman with 'too much' of these becomes a threat and loses desirability (Atanga et al. 2013, pp.10).

Such assumptions of women's empowerment through education in general and higher education particularly are not limited to Cameroon. Scholarship from various countries reports the antagonisation of educated women on grounds of their presumed empowerment (see Kamau 1999; Kuo 2014; Montique 2017). Ideas advanced by international development agencies in the promotion of initiatives to meet global education targets have branded education as both intrinsically and instrumentally good, life-changing, having direct returns, and empowering for women worldwide (Switzer 2018). It follows then, that an educated woman is assumed to be an empowered woman and the more educated a woman is, the more empowered she is presumed to be.

⁴ Cameroon and Nigeria share similar Brideprice practices which makes this app applicable here. Brideprice is an assortment of cash or goods to be paid to the bride's family as appreciation of her worth.

As patriarchy perceives women with exceptional power as a threat, empowered women are generally labelled as ungovernable, having lost cultural values, unwomanly, unsubmitive, unsuitable for marriage and antagonised for it (Montique 2017; Kuo 2014; Atanga et al. 2013; Kamau 1999). In this way, assumptions of women's empowerment through higher education put women with (or seeking) exceptional levels of education at risk as it is presumed that they will gain exceptional power along with it.

It can therefore be construed that at the heart of it, the fear of 'overeducated' women is really the fear of powerful women ignited by the aggrandisement of arguments put forward by scholars, development agents and governments on the empowering potential of education for women. Also, phrases such as 'too much book' or 'long crayon' are therefore symptomatic of an assumption-based fear which has developed a stereotype of educated women as empowered.

I am not suggesting that the assumption of women's empowerment through higher education ought to be summarily dismissed; I acknowledge that the assumption is not completely unfounded. There is evidence which associates women's attainment of higher education with a number of commonly identified characteristics of empowerment (see Bhatti 2013; Spark 2011; Mejuini 2013; Malik & Courtney 2011; Walker 2018; Kinge 2014; Adelabu & Adepoju 2007; Fonkeng & Ntembe 2009). However, as Adichie (2009) has noted, the problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue but that they are incomplete. There is corresponding research (see Kamau 1999; Swai 2010; Chisale 2017) which lends credence to a questioning of the empowering potential of higher education as we know it for women, specifically African women. Similarly, existing scholarship discourages conceptualisations and assumptions made of women's empowerment without contextualisation as empowerment itself is a fluid concept and suggests the inadequacy of existing theoretical framings (Parpart, Connelly & Bariteau 2000; Endeley 2001; Duisters 2015).

Thus, with this study, I identify the assumption of Cameroonian women's empowerment through higher education as problematic, posing a danger to women, and by extension Cameroon's human development in at least two ways:

- i. For one, Cameroonian assumptions that women are empowered by virtue of higher education breeds fears of presumably 'overeducated' women. Such fears not only results in antagonism to higher-educated women, but equally fuels limitations of women's academic aspirations for fear of being branded as 'long crayon' or crossing the threshold into 'too much book' and being considered intimidating.
- ii. Next, the unchecked assumption that women are empowered by virtue of their higher education enables an inadequate assessment of higher education outcomes to women. It is as a result of such an incomplete informational basis that the Cameroonian government makes claims of addressing gender inequalities merely by churning out more higher-educated women (Yeba 2015).

This research is thus rationalised by these identified dangers, the value of utilising the right informational base for public judgement/policy formulation (Sen 1999) and the recognised necessity for better theoretical framing and participant engagement for African research and contextually-relevant evaluations of empowerment (Endeley 2001; Nnaemeka 2004; Swai 2010; Mama 2011; Guinée 2014).

1.2 Research aims and questions

In response to the above-outlined problems, this study aims to: ***Unearth a more nuanced and empirically-based conceptualisation of empowerment by and for Cameroonian women informed by the African-feminist Capability Approach for use in investigating if and how higher education enables what is necessary for these women to consider themselves and be considered empowered as society assumes they are.***

To meet the above objective, the following research questions guide the study:

1. How do diverse Cameroonian women graduates conceptualise empowerment and how do they (if at all) consider themselves empowered on account of their higher education?

2. What does an original African-feminist and Capability Approach (AfCA) theorisation contribute to the understanding of Cameroonian women's empowerment and how does this theorisation consider the empowerment of these women by their higher education?
3. What factors serve to enhance or hinder the empowerment of Cameroonian women through higher education and how would higher education need to improve to foster Cameroonian women's empowerment?

1.3 Scope of the study

At this point, it is necessary to delineate the boundaries and focus of this research. The study presented in this thesis is delimited to disinterring an empirically and theoretically grounded conceptualisation of women's empowerment by Cameroonian women and for Cameroonian women based on an integrated African-feminist Capability Approach. The study's boundaries extend only so far as to include the appraisal of higher education's empowering potential for the participants of this study based on the conceptualisations disinterring.

Given this demarcation, this study clearly does not attempt a quantitative evaluation of empowerment nor comparison between participants' empowerment levels, nor a comparative review of the higher education institutions.

1.4 Structure of the thesis

With this thesis I attempt to capture the spirit of narrative inquiry by presenting both the story of my research and a study of stories. Although the thesis opens with a brief preface and closes with a concluding chapter, the main body of work is divided into three parts and ten chapters.

Part I consists of four chapters and tells the story of the research design. The research design has been likened to the blueprint (Mouton 2001, pp. 55) or GPS guiding the research and is said to commence from the selection of the topic to composing the project's statement of purpose, drafting a central question and related research questions (Saldana 2011, pp. 82). It is expected that one would present the blueprint of a building before the ground is broken and foundation laid and as such, this first part of the thesis presents the research blueprint by introducing the study alongside the ontological, epistemological, theoretical, and methodological premises which frame the research with justifications for decisions made.

Part II is comprised of three chapters; the first two consecutively review established literature on the main research variables of women's empowerment and higher education, and the final chapter presents (re-storied) participant narratives as a form of reviewed primary literature. In so doing, Part II narrates the perspective of scholarship alongside

the reality of Cameroonian women who are presumed to be empowered through higher education.

Part III submits and analyses the study's empirical findings over three chapters, which respond sequentially to the guiding research questions to achieve the overarching research aim.

2.0 RESEARCH DESIGN: OVERARCHING PARADIGM

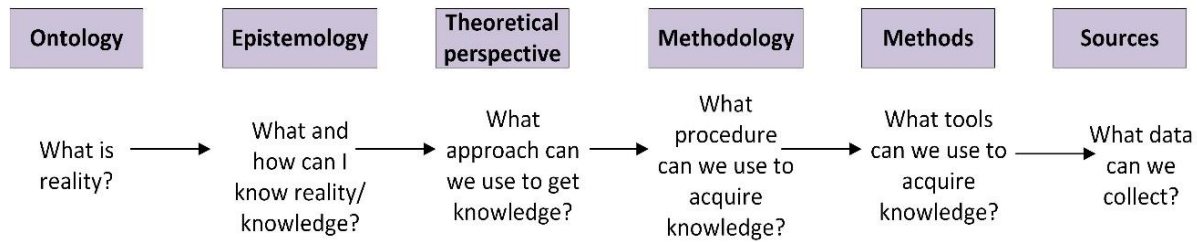


Figure 1: Parts of the research design (Patel 2015)

The figure above illustrates the parts of the research design, which this chapter and the subsequent two will present and elaborate on. This chapter begins by presenting the paradigmatic commitments of the study given my agreement with Saldana (2011) that it should be the first element of the research design discussed because all aspects about the qualitative research project flow from it.

Research paradigms are a set of common beliefs and agreements shared by researchers regarding how problems should be understood and addressed (Kuhn 1962). A paradigm set is comprised of the researcher's ontological, epistemological, theoretical and methodological dispositions/assumptions. To avoid vagueness, each of these subsets will be defined. To begin, ontology can be understood literally as "the study of being" and is concerned with "what kind of world we are investigating, with the nature of existence, with the structure of reality as such" (Crotty 2003, pp. 10). A researcher's ontological disposition, therefore, is their worldview and a response to the questions "what is there that can be known?" or "what is the nature of reality?" (Guba & Lincoln 1989, pp. 83). Epistemology on the other hand, is defined as the "theory of knowledge construction" (Saldana 2011, pp. 82) and is concerned with the work of knowledge production. A researcher's epistemological assumptions refer to their stance on what counts as knowledge, their ideas regarding the creation of knowledge, the ways of knowing, interpreting and analysing. With regards to theory, Saldana (2011, pp. 83), describes it as a "statement with an accompanying narrative" which "predicts and controls action

through logic, explains how and/or why something happens by stating its cause(s), and provides insights/guidance for improving social life”. The theoretical assumptions of a researcher therefore entail the researcher’s lens which provides guidance and insight and enables understanding of that which is being examined. Finally, methodology can be understood as the research’s own philosophy (Almalki 2016) and this subset is concerned with the procedures by which researchers go about the research investigation. A researcher’s methodological disposition entails their reasoning as to how best to address the research problem. The methodology describes their reasoning behind the strategy of enquiry as seen in choices of data collection and analytic methods and their strategy of inquiry (Saldana 2011).

The importance of the research paradigm and the researcher’s philosophical assumptions can be understood as follows: The way a researcher sees the world (ontology) influences the topic they choose to research - that they see that topic as a real problem with the possibility of being researched. Similarly, their theory of knowledge (epistemology) determines what sources they draw from in constructing new knowledge, what they consider worth citing in their review of literature etc. The theoretical framing underscores their understanding of causation regarding the problem, the angle from which they perceive the problem, determines what questions they ask, and more. The researcher’s methodological values and assumptions in turn define the standards that will be utilised for the interpretation of information and the drawing of conclusions (Saldana, 2011) and the structure, breadth and depth of the research process. For this reason, it is necessary to present these aspects clearly.

Given the objectives and driving research questions and informed by literature on the shaping of contemporary and alternative [educational] research, this study situates itself within both the transformative and Afrocentric paradigms (see Taylor & Medina 2019; Romm 2015; Ntseane 2011). In essence, the ontological, epistemological theoretical and methodological suppositions I make as the researcher are intentionally grounded in principles of both the transformative and Afrocentric paradigms. In so doing, I illustrate as Romm (2015, pp. 424) notes, that certain studies underscore “the permeability of paradigms and need for creating space for additions”. The following sections shall

expound on the paradigms which the research straddles and the ontological and epistemological assumptions they make.

2.1 The transformative and Afrocentric paradigms

The transformative paradigm was presented by Donna Mertens as an alternative to the positivist/post-positivist and interpretivist/constructivist paradigmatic binary. Mertens (1999, pp. 4) uses transformative research as an umbrella term to encompass paradigmatic perspectives that are meant to be emancipatory, participatory, and inclusive. She differentiates the transformative paradigm from others purposively, ontologically, epistemologically and methodologically. With regards to purpose, this paradigm upholds that “research and evaluation can and should play an explicit role in identifying and alleviating discrimination and marginalisation based on factors such as race, ethnicity, religion, gender, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, age, and disability” (Jewiss 2018, pp. 2). In this paradigm, the ontological question ‘what is the nature of reality and by extension, truth?’ is answered by “placing various viewpoints within a political, cultural, and economic value system so as to understand how certain perspectives on reality become privileged over others” (Mertens 1999, pp. 5). Romm (2015) elucidates this, stating that the transformative researcher is predisposed to be concerned about how specific constructions of reality come to be given more weight in society and how researchers can serve to undercut the undue privileging of views. With regards to epistemology, Mertens (1999) argues that in the transformative paradigm, the theory of knowledge goes beyond the constructionist perspective to underscore the need to check power imbalances between researchers and participants and to ensure that there is a fair understanding of key viewpoints such that the researcher does not overpower the ‘results’. Moreover, the transformative paradigm is distinguished methodologically as it stipulates that the community most impacted by the research needs to be involved to some degree in the methodological decisions. Hence transformative researchers are required to “confer with key participants in defining which method(s) to use...” (Romm 2015, pp. 414). As with other paradigms, the transformative paradigm cannot lay claim to only one theoretical perspective. McKenzie & Knipe (2006, pp. 195), however, tabulated theories associated with the transformative paradigm include; critical

race theory, feminist theories, Neo-Marxist theory, critical consciousness, queer theory and more.

The Afrocentric paradigm, otherwise termed “Afrocentricity”, presents an alternative set of philosophical and theoretical perspectives to be applied as essential to the research idea (Mkabela 2005). This paradigm posits that “Africans have been moved off of social, political, philosophical, and economic terms for half a millennium and consequently it becomes necessary to re-examine all data from the standpoint of Africans as subjects and human agents rather than as objects in a European frame of reference” (Mkabela 2005, pp. 179). Ontologically, this paradigm argues that there has been the “dislocation” of African human thought and experience from what constitutes as fact over time. Therefore it purports that interpretations and explanations of being where African people are centred, located, oriented, and grounded as subjects are most consistent with reality. As to epistemological suppositions, the Afrocentric paradigm opposes the notion of scientific distance and objectivity in the understanding of African phenomena, arguing for “cultural and social immersion as the researcher must have some familiarity with history, language, philosophy, and myths of the people under study” (Mkabela 2005, pp. 180). Not only does this paradigm’s underlying epistemology reject the production of value-free scientific knowledge, the Afrocentric paradigm equally purports that “knowledge can never be produced just for the sake of it but always for the sake of our liberation” (Mazama 2001, pp. 392). This paradigm therefore underscores the purpose of knowledge production, and deems it necessary that it be of practical use to African people. Like the transformative paradigm, Afrocentricity is also not limited to a single theoretical disposition. Mazama (2001) notes that there is a multiplicity of Afrocentric theories applicable to a wide range of topics. However, all theories associated with it (ranging from African-feminisms to post-colonial theory) emphasise the need to foreground African indigenous knowledge, centring and engaging Africans themselves in the researching of African issues. In terms of methodological principles, the Afrocentric paradigm posits that self-knowledge (and the spiritual) plays a special role and for this reason, Afrocentric inquiry must begin with self-knowledge, conducted through an interaction between the examiner and the subject (Mazama 2001, pp. 399).

From the above explications, it can be inferred that there are similarities between both the transformative and Afrocentric paradigms. By describing this research as grounded in both the transformative and Afrocentric paradigms, I am mindful of these similarities as well as the unique benefits each paradigm offers to the framing of this study. To ensure clarification, the specific worldviews (ontological and epistemological disposition of the researcher) will be outlined in the following sections, and followed by subsequent chapters on the theoretical framing, and methodology of the study.

2.2 This research(er)'s worldview and positionality

As has been earlier outlined, inspiration for this study stems from my own personal experiences with the notion of 'too much book' in Cameroonian society. Thus, the ontological perspective that I, as the researcher, hold in this study is essentially one of reality being comprised of political, cultural, and economic systems and viewpoints constructed to secure the privileges of some over others (in line with the transformative paradigm). In this world, unequal privilege is particularly manifested against Africans, resulting in the "dislocation" of African thought and experience (in line with the Afrocentric paradigm). It follows from this ontological perspective that my investigation of this world and any production of knowledge within it (epistemology) ought to identify and alleviate power imbalances which have historically 'dislocated' African thoughts and experiences (in line with both the transformative and Afrocentric paradigms). I take up this epistemological position beginning with the recognition of the power imbalances which exists between researcher and participants; then endeavouring to make knowledge production here a more mutual sharing process by engaging both the examiner and the subject being examined (Mazama 2001).

This chapter has outlined the research paradigms and noted how they influence my worldview as a researcher, which subsequently colours what I see as a problem and how I go about investigating, understanding and explaining what I know and find in the course of this research. The next chapter will present and explicate the theoretical choices made for this study on the basis of these paradigms.

3.0 RESEARCH DESIGN: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

Neither the transformative nor Afrocentric paradigms are limited to specific theoretical applications. However, both paradigms advance the need for theory to adequately identify, explain and propose how to address inequalities. While transformative research theories typically focus on factors such as race, sexual orientation and socioeconomic status, Afrocentric theories focus on foregrounding and locating African thought and experiences in the examination of African subjects.

Based on these stipulations, both the Capability Approach and African feminisms are acceptable theoretical frameworks for this study's paradigmatic outlook. Nonetheless, this study proposes an integrated African-feminist Capability Approach for an even more suitable theoretical framing given this study's need for nuance in reconceptualising empowerment and evaluating its delivery to Cameroonian women by and through higher education.

This chapter has three aims; it will introduce the theoretical perspectives of the Capability Approach and African feminisms individually, it will then make a case for the merging of the Capability Approach and African-feminist theory for the theoretical disposition of this study, and finally it delineates what this novel African-feminist application of the Capability Approach entails.

3.1 An introduction to the Capability Approach

The Capability Approach is a framework introduced by Nobel-prize winner Amartya Sen (Sen 1999; Robeyns 2017) to criticise the resource-focused perspectives of international development theory and practice, offering a more subjective assessment of development based on the real freedoms an individual has to be and do that which they value. Sen's (2009 pp. 16) definition of the Capability Approach states that it "is an intellectual discipline that gives a central role to the evaluation of a person's achievements and freedoms in terms of his or her actual ability to do the different things a person has reason to value doing or being".

The Capability Approach is often mistakenly considered as having different ‘versions’; one attributed to Sen and another to North-American philosopher Martha Nussbaum. This misconception is corrected by Robeyns (2017) who explains that although the approach has been considerably developed by Nussbaum and several other scholars who apply the framework to their various fields of interest, the original presentation of the framework can be traced to Amartyr Sen’s 1979 Tanner Lectures. This clarification is particularly valuable to this study as it affirms the Capability Approach as an open-ended, broad and underspecified framework (Robeyns 2017, pp. 14), which can be ‘closed’ in various ways and used for multiple purposes. As per Robeyns’ (2017) clarification, what is known as Nussbaum’s version is actually one of many Capability theories/applications; with hers being a theory of social justice.

The Capability Approach is most often used as a normative framework for the evaluation of a range of individual or institutional values or problems (Robeyns 2017), be it children’s wellbeing, quality of education, a specific community’s development or women’s empowerment, as proposed here. Robeyns (2017, pp. 9) notes that:

For all these endeavours, the capability approach asks: What are people really able to do and what kind of person are they able to be? It asks what people can do and be (their capabilities) and what they are actually achieving in terms of beings and doings (their functionings). Do the envisioned institutions, practices and policies focus on people’s capabilities, that is, their opportunities to do what they value and be the kind of person they want to be? Do people have the same capabilities in life? Or do global economic structures, domestic policies or brute bad luck make people’s capabilities unequal, and if so, is that unfair and should we do something about that? Do development projects focus on expanding people’s capabilities, or do they have another public policy goal (such as economic growth), or are they merely serving the interests of a dominant group?

In this way, Sen and scholars after him have situated the real opportunities/freedoms one has to be and do what is of value to them as the most pertinent indicators for quality of life and the expansion of opportunities or substantive freedoms as the main determinant

of development as opposed to resource-based assessments (Nussbaum 2011; Kibona 2019).

As a broad framework, the Capability Approach has been applied and developed across a range of fields. Within the field of [higher] education, the interdisciplinary framework has been employed to interpret the broader purpose, quality, intrinsic value of education as an expander of capabilities and instrument of development and social justice (Robeyns 2006; Boni and Walker 2013; Kibona 2019). Work by Robeyns (2006) comparing the Capability Approach to the Human Capital and Human Rights frameworks, demonstrates the superiority of the Capability Approach as an alternative to the frameworks predominantly used to underpin educational policies and assessments. In later work Robeyns (2017, pp. 15) asserts that the advantage of this framework - such as the evaluation of women's empowerment through higher education - lies in its ability to:

...impede policy-makers from using mistaken assumptions about human beings in their policies, including how we live together and interact in society and communities, what is valuable in our lives and what kind of governmental and societal support is needed in order for people (and in particular the disadvantaged) to flourish.

Aside from being different in what it prioritises in evaluating quality of life and developmental value, the Capability Approach is able to proffer a better account by virtue of the rich core concepts and the distinctions the framework makes. A few of these will be presented here.

3.1.1 Core capabilitarian concepts and distinctions

Given the underspecified nature of the Capability Approach, it is helpful to present elements that are core to all Capabilitarian framings. According to Robeyns (2017) there are two key distinctions made by the Capability Approach. First, the distinction between one's freedom to achieve something and one's actual achievement; next is the means-ends distinction which underscores the difference between one valuing something as an end in itself and their desiring it as a means to some other end which they value. In the following paragraphs, the core Capabilitarian concepts of 'functionings', 'capabilities',

‘conversion factors’, ‘structural constraints’, ‘agency’, and ‘aspirations’ are used to illustrate these distinctions and better explicate the framework.

Capabilities. In the Capability Approach, capabilities refer to the opportunities and freedoms available to a person to achieve certain functionings. One’s capabilities denote the liberty to be and do certain things without restrictions.

Functionings. Functionings refer to one’s achieved beings and doings. Although there are different types of functionings, functionings are generally constitutive of human life (Robeyns 2017). That is to say, one cannot be human without having functionings. The very fact that one breathes, thinks, and feels is an achievement - a being and a doing.

With these two core concepts, the Capability Approach illustrates the first distinction presented earlier on; capabilities and functionings mark the difference between what one is presumably able to be/do and one’s achievement of that. Otherwise put: a functioning is the effective realisation of what was a possibility (capabilities), therefore for every functioning there was at least one corresponding capability. It is worth noting that though scholarship (see Ongera 2016) often presents capabilities and functionings in a positive light, this is because researchers are typically presenting those opportunities/beings and doings which individuals have *chosen based on what they reason to value*. However, the concepts of capabilities and functionings are in themselves value-neutral. Scholars (see Robeyns 2017; Nussbaum 2011) strongly object to value-laden definitions of the concepts of functionings and capabilities. Nussbaum (2011) bases her objection on the need to acknowledge the freedoms (capabilities), which lead to negative functionings (like self-harm). Alternatively, Robeyns’ (2017) explanation suggests that if these concepts are regarded as generally good and valuable, researchers go to the field with bias as to what would be relevant and recognised as an opportunity/freedom or being/doing, hence making a normative decision for the participants. In the case of this research, prescribing positivity to functionings and capabilities would be prescribing what can be deemed empowering, whereas the participants of the study may consider a being/doing with a ‘negative’ connotation as empowering, e.g. being a second wife in a polygamous

relationship. The value-neutral conceptual framing of capabilities and functionings is thus a matter of principle.

In addition to the concepts of capabilities and functionings, the Capability Approach offers the notions of conversion factors, agency and aspirations, all significant concepts for this research.

Conversion Factors vs Structural Constraints. The Capability Approach posits that one's ability to convert capabilities into functionings and move from freedoms to achieving beings and doings differs from one person to another on account of a range of influential factors termed conversion factors and structural constraints. Robeyns (2017) defines and distinguishes between these in ways other scholars have not. According to Robeyns (2017), conversion factors (she identifies three types - personal, social and environmental) are a range of personal and contextual factors which negatively or positively influence the individual's decision to choose between and act on available resources, freedoms, and/or opportunities (see also Höppener 2017). Alternatively, structural constraints are differentiated and more specifically defined as constraining influences which are legal, normative, systemic and/or institutionalised (Robeyns 2017).

By way of these notions of conversion factors and structural constraints, the Capability Approach is uniquely perceptive to inequalities in and between people's lived experiences. By way of these concepts, the framework is able to disinter the constraining and enhancing elements which make for variations in people's abilities to be and do despite being seemingly equal. For instance, two Cameroonian women may be considered equal in circumstances as they are both recently widowed housewives who must now fend for (work being a functioning) or make a living off the only resource (cars) their husbands left. However, these women with seemingly equal circumstances and resources may display degrees of difference when their conversion factors and structural constraints are taken into consideration. Despite both having the desire and resource to earn an income through driving; one may lack the capacity to drive because she had never had a chance to learn to drive prior to her husband's death (limited personal conversion factor) while the other may be resident in a conservative community where

social norms are a structural constraint to her ability to convert the resource of a car into a taxi for income generation. Recognising conversion factors is of importance in looking at what limits and or enhances the power of Cameroonian women, therefore shaping what they conceptualise as empowerment.

Aspirations. Within the Capability Approach aspirations are a subset of capabilities. They are freedoms by which people express what opportunities and functionings are of value to them. Aspirations are shaped by socialisation through culture and interactions with other people and have thus been described by Appadurai (2004, cited in Walker 2018, pp. 128) as a “cultural capacity”. The Capabilitarian concepts of aspirations, conversion factors and structural constraints are all interconnected. Take the following demonstration of the nexus between these concepts:

Personal aspirations underscore what each of us value becoming as an end (such as what we perceive to be empowered). Yet, aspirations are shaped by culture and interaction, and as such they may be products of social conversion factors (hence what one perceives to be empowering may be predisposed to suit the context). Conversely, certain structural constraints limit or serve to hinder aspirations (such as negative stereotyping of highly educated and empowered women).

The interconnections between these concepts make them useful in demonstrating the second Capabilitarian distinction between means and ends. For instance, because aspirations are shaped by conversion factors and can be limited by structural constraints, critical consideration of aspirations is therefore necessary to distinguish whether one desires something as an end or merely as a means to an end and why. These concepts are thus particularly useful in assessing Cameroonian women’s higher education aspirations and the empowering value they expect and derive from it.

Agency. Yet another relevant concept, particularly central to the Capabilitarian perspective of empowerment, is that of agency (Sen 1992; Robeyns 2017). According to Sen, an agent is “someone who acts and brings about change, and whose achievements can be judged in terms of some external criteria as well” (Sen 1999, pp. 19). However,

Robeyns (2017) makes it clear that there is no single Capabilitarian account of agency. As such, for the purpose of this research, agency is understood in its simplest form as a choice freedom encompassing the “ability individuals have to set and pursue goals which are important to the kind of lives they value” (Ongera 2016, pp. 45). Agency is that Capabilitarian concept which speaks of power as it asserts the capacity of the individual to make choices and decisions for themselves regardless of these choices being positive or detrimental. Agency can be both a freedom and an achievement (Sen 1992, pp. 56-57) and is a freedom which can either enable or constrain other freedoms, depending on the decisions taken by the individual.

From the explications in this section, it should be clear that these core concepts and distinctions are instrumental to the Capability Approach’s mechanism for evaluating (dis)advantage, such as Cameroonian women’s (dis)empowerment in this specific study. This concludes the introduction to the Capability Approach as one of two frameworks used in the development of the original theoretical framing of this study.

3.2 An introduction to African-feminist thought

Drawing from the views of pioneer African-feminist scholars such as Filomena Chioma Steady, Obioma Nnaemeka and more, Gatwiri and McLaren (2016, pp. 266) present African-feminisms as “an epistemology that empowers many African women to understand their gendered status in society” and African-feminist thought as that school of thought by which the African woman “implies their strength and their multiple identities amid the challenges that threaten them”.

African feminisms have been contested from inception. Debates abound on whether there is such a thing, the authenticity of it, how to define it, whether a few scholars can speak representatively of all African women, and there are likewise internal topical debates on the African-feminist stance on motherhood, sexuality, accommodation of men, cultural practices like female circumcision, polygamy, bride wealth and more (see Masuku 2005; Dosekun 2007; Gatwiri & McLaren 2016; Oyekan 2014; Ogundipe-Leslie 1994). This section will present this much debated school of thought as the second framework from which the specific theoretical outlook of this research has been developed.

There is no single definition of African feminism as there is no single African feminism but rather a wide array of African feminism(s). African-feminists (see Ogundipe-Leslie 1994; Lewis 2002) posit that there are various terminological approaches to African challenges of gender issues because some African-feminist scholars have raised issues with using the word feminist to describe their stance as they are reluctant to ascribe the already value-laden term to indigenous African thought. It is important to relay, as Coetzee (2017) does, that the rejection of the term 'feminism' by some African-feminist scholars does not imply the belief that feminism is a merely Western conception. On the contrary, given enduring contestations of its authenticity, a wide body of African-feminist scholarship affirms that African women took on sexism prior to colonialism and that local resistance to "imperialist patriarchies predated contact with Western feminists" (McClintock 1995, pp. 384). African scholars' "discomfort and resentment" (Coetzee 2017, pp. 5) with the term 'feminism' is rather born of consciousness feminism as conceptualised Euro-American theory is ill-equipped theoretically to deal with the complexity of African women's realities (Taiwo 2003) and African women's experiences of oppression from other members of the mainstream feminist movement. This in no way suggests that African feminists are anti-feminism; what African-feminists are, is anti-imperialist.

Although African-feminist thought in general predates scholarship, African-feminist scholarship as we know it today developed out the inadequacy of western feminisms in general (despite some similarity with Black feminism on intersectionality) to recognise the multiplicity of African women's oppression, and acknowledge the relevance of indigenous/alternate mechanisms to handle the unique needs of African women and resist the oppressions they face in their contexts (Coetzee 2017).

Today we use African feminism(s) an umbrella term to encompass a variety of strains. These include (but are definitely not limited to) the likes of; *Africana Womanism* as conceptualised by Hudson-Weems (1993), similarly termed *African Womanism* by Ogunyemi (1985, 2006), *Complementarity* articulated by Oyewumi (1997), *Femalism* put forward by Opara (2005), *Motherism* coined by Achonlonu (1991), *Stiwanism* presented by Ogundipe-Leslie (1994), *Negofeminism* submitted by Nnaemeka (2004), *Snail-sense feminism* brought to light by Ezeigbo (2012), and the African Muslim feminist perspective

as propagated by various scholars like Ousseina Alidou (2013) of Niger, Leila Ahmed (1992) of Egypt, and Fatema Mernissi (1992) of Morocco.

In acknowledgement of the plurality in this school of thought, I opt for a more inclusive definition of African feminism(s) for this research. As Nkealah (2016, pp. 62) asserts,

African feminism(s) “in their definitive plurality, are ‘indigenous feminist models’ that offer to speak to/of feminism from (1) an African cultural perspective; (2) an African geo-political location; (3) and an African ideological viewpoint”.

African-feminist thought has evolved over many decades and in diverse mediums to shape both scholarship and practice. While a great deal of African feminist thought is rooted in literary studies of African women’s writing and literature capturing African women’s lives, several bodies ranging from the Association of African Women for Research and Development (AAWORD) and the CODESRIA Gender Series established in the 1970s, to the more recently established the African Gender Institute and African Feminist Forum (among others) have played a role in encouraging African feminist organisations, and facilitating the development and mainstreaming of African-feminist thought for critique and application in other fields of research and practice (Awumbila 2007; Mama 1996, 2004, 2005). To this end, the African-feminist framework has been described as one which ought to be critical and revisionist in its endeavours (see Arnfred 2004, pp. 50).

3.2.1 Principles of African-feminist thought

African feminisms, as identified by Davies and Graves (1986, as cited in Silva 2004, pp. 137) and affirmed in the Charter of African Feminists (AWDF 2006) uphold certain core principles for theory and practice:

1. They have a shared commitment to dismantling patriarchy in all its manifestations, particularly on the African continent. Yet, African-feminists emphasise that they do not desire to exclude men, but to cooperate/negotiate with them, challenging men “to be aware of certain silent aspects of women's subjugation” (because African women and

men are united in a common struggle against their dehumanisation through colonialism, Western hegemony and racism).

2. They recognise that African women - as women and Africans - are at least doubly oppressed and thus, African feminisms are by default committed to two struggles: the struggle for empowerment of African women and the fight for the decolonising of African societies, and overshadowing of African knowledge and narratives.

3. They demand the interrogation of cultural assumptions (decoloniality), recognising that historical and socio-political events contributed to and continue to compound the perception of African womanhood and gender inequalities on the continent. It follows from this that African-feminist thought rejects Western conceptualisations of what African womanhood/gender constructs entail, as well as Western/colonial methods for perceiving, interrogating and countering gender inequalities on the continent, asserting the inadequacy of Western feminism to address the unique problems of African women.

4. They demand for African-centred analysis of African societies and issues which respects African culture enough to retain what is of value/non-harmful to African women, yet reject those aspects that work to their detriment. In this way, African-feminist thought purports that challenging African women's oppressions is a continuous process of self-definition and re-definition (Nnaemeka 2004; Gaidzanwa 2010).

5. Finally, they emphasize the a plurality of African womanhood, and reject monolithic assessments of African women's experiences and feminism, noting that African gender needs are wide ranging depending on our multicultural contexts. Amina Mama captures the need for the emphasis best when she asserts that:

Feminism in Africa is extremely heterogeneous as it bears the marks of having been forged in quite diverse colonial contexts (British, French, Portuguese, Italian, Belgian, Spanish), and influenced by a multiplicity of civilisations, Islamic, Christian and indigenous, before being further shaped by an array of anti-colonial and nationalist movements. Since independence, feminism in Africa has been diversified by the range of political regimes (from multiparty, state socialist, capitalist, civilian and military dictatorships), not to mention the influence of the Cold War, various conflicts and other forms of instability. Across all these conditions there have also been diverse approaches to national development

coming up with their own gender policy regimes, but often subject to international influences. (Mama 2011, pp. 8)

As per the core principles of African-feminist thought presented here, this framework calls attention to unique considerations to be made when inquiring into African gender issues. This framework is thus beneficial to countering assumptions, obliviousness and revisionist ideas in knowledge production and development practice (as encouraged in the Afrocentric paradigm). With this introduction, it is clear that African feminist thought offers an ideal lens for investigation into and assessment of Cameroonian women's (dis)empowerment as either enabled or not through higher education.

3.3 The case for an integrated African-feminist and capabilities theorisation

The necessity of merging two frameworks for a thorough conceptualisation of empowerment and analysis of data in this research is best captured by Kimberlé Crenshaw, the Black-American feminist scholar credited with coining the concept of intersectionality. At her 2016 TED talk, Crenshaw narrated how the idea of intersectionality originated from her perception of how being black and woman in the USA renders African-American women victims of 'injustice squared' under the country's discriminatory structures of race and gender. In a 2017 interview, Crenshaw succinctly described intersectionality as "a lens through which you can see where power comes and collides, where it interlocks and intersects".⁵ With the concept of intersectionality, Crenshaw submits that in addressing issues of social justice it is important to consider the frame - whether there is one, and which one it is. In her TED talk she opined that "without frames which allow us to see how social problems impact all the members of a targeted group, many will fall through the cracks of our movements, left to suffer in virtual isolation" (Crenshaw 2016). As the uniqueness of African-American women's dual oppression inspired Crenshaw to propose a new lens, I identify that the even more multifaceted nature of African women's oppressions demands a more suitable framing to

⁵ Ahead of the 20th anniversary of the African-American Policy Forum co-founded by Crenshaw, she spoke with journalists about where she sees intersectionality research heading and her ongoing work as a scholar and advocate. See more here: <https://www.law.columbia.edu/pt-br/news/2017/06/kimberle-crenshaw-intersectionality>.

capture the multiple layers that must be considered with regards to Cameroonian women's (dis)empowerment.

For this reason, despite the potential of both the Capability Approach and African feminism(s), this research proposes a merger of both frameworks to develop an original African-feminist application of the Capability Approach. This application will be called the African-feminist Capability Approach (AfCA) and will serve as the 'pair of spectacles' for this study. My proposal of this merger is based on:

- i. the promise of African-feminist thought to centre the unique and intersectional empowerment needs of Cameroonian women in their plurality,
- ii. the potential of the Capability Approach to enable satisfactory evaluations of Cameroonian women's empowerment based on the real (and achieved) opportunities and freedoms which their higher education advanced for them.

A solely African-feminist theory conceptualisation of empowerment may address what mainstream feminism missed pertaining to cultural diversity, history and coloniality, but lack the rich concepts of the Capability Approach to express the difference between freedom to attain and attainment of that freedom. In turn, the Capability Approach on its own is underspecified and it is required that the framework be 'closed' for applicability in investigating gender issues (Robeyns 2003, 2017). Still, engendered applications of the Capability Approach typically engage with mainstream Western-feminist thought, rendering them unable to capture intersections of African women's (dis)empowerment and provide an African-centred response to gender issues in this context. Interrogation by the average feminist-informed application of the Capability Approach of beings and doings would be limited to inhibitions as a result of gender. In contrast, the African-feminist Capability Approach would go further to question what African women [would] be able to be and do not only with consideration of gender inhibitions, but equally considering the intersection of colonial legacies, ethnicity, religion and more.

I therefore posit that though these frameworks are good individually, a merger of these frameworks as proposed here serves to layer a good theoretical lens and frame for spectacles rigorous enough for scrutinising a multidimensional issue.

3.4 The African-feminist Capability Approach (AfCA)

Having established that this new framing is crucial, what would it entail? A simple answer would be that it requires marrying the features of both the African feminisms and Capability Approach to produce an adapted framework which enables more rigorous interrogation of African gender issues. In practice, however, the construction of this merged African-feminist Capabilitarian application could be realised in a variety of ways. For instance, one could offer to decolonize existing gender applications of the capability approach. However, I have opted to construct this original application using Robeyns (2017) modular framework. My reasons being that no other work that I know of presents as simple an outline of the construction of Capabilitarian applications and theories as hers. Given that I am creating something new out of two large frameworks, this modular format seemed the best tool to present this new approach and illustrate the combination of the principles of the two frameworks.

i. The process of modular construction

In making her case for the differentiation between the Capability Approach itself and individual capability theories and applications, Robeyns (2017) presents a modular process for the construction of a capability theory/application. The modular structure lends itself as an apparatus to map the overarching features of the Capability Approach and guide for constructing a host of diverse capability theories and applications such as the African-feminist Capability Approach advanced here.

As per Robeyns' (2017) modular view, capability theory/application construction is done over the course of three modules. Modules A are compulsory for all capability theories, B-modules are non-optional/fixed modules with optional content (with choices often dependent on the theories goals), and the C-modules are modules contingent on previous choices made and ontological positioning desired (see figure below).

The A-module: the non-optional core

- A1: Functionings and capabilities as core concepts
- A2: Functionings and capabilities are value-neutral categories
- A3: Conversion factors
- A4: The distinction between means and ends
- A5: Functionings and/or capabilities form the evaluative space
- A6: Other dimensions of ultimate value
- A7: Value pluralism
- A8: Valuing each person as an end

The B-modules: non-optional modules with optional content

- B1: The purpose of the capability theory
- B2: The selection of dimensions
- B3: An account of human diversity
- B4: An account of agency
- B5: An account of structural constraints
- B6: The choice between functionings, capabilities, or both
- B7: Meta-theoretical commitments

The C-modules: contingent modules

- C1: Additional ontological and explanatory theories
- C2: Weighing dimensions
- C3: Methods for empirical analysis
- C4: Additional normative principles and concerns

Figure 2: Modular view of components of capability theories/applications (Robeyns 2017, pp. 74)

The construction of the African-feminist Capability Approach using this modular format conveys the personalisation of the content of the A, B, and C-modules. This personalisation outlines the African-feminist Capability Approach as follows:

Consistent with all applications of the Capability Approach; my African-feminist application holds the concepts of functionings and capabilities as core dimensions (A1). It abides by the value-neutral nature of capabilities and functionings (A2), noting in line with African-feminist theory, that the beings and doings chosen and hence valued by African women may not always be of benefit to them. Similarly, the theory considers functionings and capabilities as the evaluative space for comparisons to be made (A5) and highlights the differential abilities of persons to convert resources - if available - to functionings (A3). The theory differentiates between the means and ends (A4) and stresses the need to evaluate advantage based on what ends the person values rather than what means they possess in the hopes of achieving said end. This application advances the acknowledgement and prioritising of African women's plurality, valuing each as principal figures and ends in themselves (A8). The theory also recognises the

Capabilitarian principle of value pluralism (A7) which allows for the multidimensional nature of the capabilities and functionings sought after, the likely need for other objects of value beyond these two concepts, and allowing for other dimensions of ultimate value (A6).

My application purports to conceptualise empowerment (B1), rethinking the concept from an African-feminist perspective and investigating what is required for the achievement of it for African women particularly. It posits that for the circumventing or minimising of coloniality, the selection of capabilities that matter (B2) ought to be based on empirical and participatory data from African women. As per African-feminist rejection of a monolithic African woman and recognition of multifaceted oppressions and multicultural contexts, this theory prioritises adherence to diversity (B3) in investigations of African issues in general and empowerment particularly. This theory gives precedence to the unique structural constraints (B5) of the African women who are at least doubly oppressed and committed to struggles against both patriarchy and Western imperialism/coloniality.

The theory does not make a choice between functionings or capabilities (B6) but recognises that both in their different capacities would better enable conceptualisation of what empowerment is, bridging the gap between the freedom to realise and the actual realisation of that freedom. Moreover, this theory adopts the concept of agency (B4) as core to the conceptualisation of empowerment, and stipulates based on African-feminist thought that for an agent to be one who acts to bring about change, they would need to be one with a developed consciousness. An agent here would have awareness of the contributions of historical and socio-political events which warped the conceptualisation of African womanhood and genders, demand an interrogation of what is presumed to be “African culture” (decoloniality), and advocate for multi-layered transformation given historically consolidated power structures. Finally, as this theory’s primary purpose (B1) is to serve as an instrument for conceptualising empowerment by African women, the theory makes meta-theoretical commitments (B7) only to a partial outline of the ideal by means of prospective indicators of what empowerment – and the education delivering it - may entail.

As such, the theory opts out of weighing/measuring the dimensions of functioning and capabilities (C2) seeing that its aim for conceptualisation requires simply the method of (C3) qualitative analysis of the empirical data. Additional notable properties of this theory include: its opting for the broad-ranged African feminism(s) as the explanatory theory (C1), stressing as its principle concerns (C4) the decoloniality of the knowledge-creation process, and the centrality of 'power' structures over different periods in African history / social development, to the understanding of African women's empowerment.

Following this personalisation of Robeyns' (2017) modular approach, I originally define this newly-constructed African-feminist Capability Approach as:

An application which argues that the multifaceted nature of gendered oppressions on the continent demands the employing of multiple theoretical/analytical lenses to adequately capture the multiple layers that must be considered with regards to advantage and disadvantage as perceived and experienced by African women. The application offers guidelines for a more nuanced understanding, re-framing, and evaluation of notions such as empowerment using the concepts of the Capability Approach and the principles of the African feminisms.

To enable visualisation for further understanding, below is a graphic outline of the modular construction of this African-feminist application of the Capability Approach as per Robeyns (2017).



Figure 3: Graphic illustration of the construction of the African-feminist Capability Approach based on Robeyns' (2017) modular view

Having presented the modular construction of the African-feminist Capability Approach above, it is worth noting that Robeyn's (2017) modular framework in itself is not meant to contribute to my analysis. It has been used merely as a tool to develop the African-feminist Capability Approach and present it an application having both implications for theory and operationalization.

It is also necessary to note that the union of the African-feminist Capability Approach forwarded here is not a perfect one as theoretical differences between the frameworks exist. For instance, the Capability Approach's emphasis on expanding individual freedoms to be and do all that they aspire to may smack of what Khader (2018, pp. 51) terms "independence individualism". In this way the Capability Approach is inconsistent with African-feminist ideas on the interconnectedness of women's emancipation and development, understates solidarity in advocacy (including men) against oppressions, and ultimately could undermine the value of cultural attachments.

I am cognizant of the differences between the frameworks. Yet I posit that even an imperfect African-feminist Capability Approach offers a great deal more than other feminist framings to the investigating gender issues on the continent on account of its anti-imperialist perspective and contextually-relevant questioning. I posit that applications of African-feminist thought need not be perfect, because as Maldonado-Torres (2016, pp. 30-31) notes, "decoloniality is never pure nor perfect... and asking for purity or for perfection, for a complete plan of action, or for a complete design of the new decolonised reality are forms of decadence and bad faith". The merger presented here therefore reconciles as much as is possible between the frameworks and acknowledges that there must be a continuous interrogation of both in the process of research.

As this study has both conceptual and empirical dimensions; it aims to re-conceptualise empowerment for Cameroonian women and go forward to use the new conceptualisation to interrogate empirical data on Cameroonian women's higher education experiences, the analysis in later parts of this work will employ operationalizations of the African-feminist Capability Approach presented here. The subsequent section presents two possible ways of operationalising the African-feminist Capability Approach which I employ in this study.

ii. Operationalisation of the application

In considering the operationalisation of the African-feminist Capability Approach, I recognise the dearth in operationalisations of African-feminist thought, specifically in education and development studies. I also recognise, as Unterhalter (2017) does, the difficulties associated with measuring a range of unmeasurable issues such as empowerment and the tendency of Capabilitarian scholarship to employ list-based approaches in circumventing this problem. As this research eschews an arbitrary conceptualisation of what empowerment is, nor aspires to measure empowerment, the creation of indicators for use as a metric is unnecessary. However, the lack of previous African-feminist operationalisations leaves me no choice but to suggest adaptations of existing operationalisations within feminist and Capabilitarian scholarship as instruments for analysis in this research.

I therefore posit that for the purposes of this study, the African-feminist Capability Approach can be operationalised by informing and adapting both Rowlands' (1997) categorisations of power and the framework for empowering education proposed by Murphy-Graham and Lloyd (2016). An adaptation of Rowlands' (1997) categorisation will enable adequate interpretation of empowerment needs; and an African-feminist informed empowering education framework will serve satisfactorily for evaluating what an empowering education would be for Cameroonian women.

These suggestions will be further elaborated upon and their adaptations presented in later parts of this thesis.

4.0 RESEARCH DESIGN: METHODOLOGY

Crotty (2003, pp. 3) describes research methodology as the strategy, plan of action and process part of the research design. With the methodology, the researcher affirms what ontological, epistemological and theoretical suppositions were made. In the case of this research, I actualise my commitments to the transformative and Afrocentric paradigms, and the African-feminist Capability Approach with the methodological framing of this study as a narrative inquiry. This chapter sets out to describe this course of action and present justification for choices made with regards to the process/methods of data collection, manner of analysis, and ethical considerations.

4.1 About narrative inquiry

The power of stories to elicit empathy and make complex issues accessible is renowned across various fields. A 2005 report by the Department for International Development opens with the following quote:

“To be educated means... I will not only be able to help myself, but also my family, my country, my people. The benefits will be many” - Meda Wagtole, Schoolgirl in Ethiopia (DfID 2005, pp. 3)

This quote effectively introduces Meda to us as a human subject with simple ambitions to be of help, and who has confidence that education will deliver that. With this titbit alone, we can understand and are able to relate to an unknown schoolgirl. Similarly, Nussbaum (2011), by using the poignant story of an Indian woman she calls Vashanti, illustrates the power of storytelling to elucidate the complexities of context and to make a theoretical framework like the Capability Approach comprehensible to readers.

It is therefore understandable why there has been what is recognised as a ‘narrative turn’ across several academic disciplines, from education to the social sciences (Andrews, Squire & Tamboukou 2013). Yet, with expanding usage narrative research is often misconstrued. I perceive that this misunderstanding arises from the fact that both narrative inquiry (as methodological strategy) and narratives (as merely a research

method) are referred to using the term 'narrative research'. Noting this common misconception, it is necessary to spell out here that my research adopts narrative inquiry as the methodological strategy guiding the course of investigation, precipitating the choice of methods used to data collection, the manner of analysis, and subsequently the presentation of findings.

Clandinin and Connelly (2006) describe narrative inquiry as the 'study of experience as story' (pp. 375), a description which denotes that narrative inquirers are charged with both the narrative collection of data and the narrative imparting of knowledge on human experience. Narrative inquiry is often presented as a more human-centred alternative to positivist accounts of research as it rejects the scientific goals of generalisability and objectivity in favour of centring the subject and their personal experiences using stories (Griffiths & Macleod 2008). Narrative inquiry appeals particularly as a methodological perspective which enables "the known to be re-examined from a new perspective...shedding light on established hierarchies and problematising the taken-for-granted" (Griffiths & Macleod 2008, pp. 137). It is this aspect of narrative strategy which has scholars such as Hamdan (2009) tagging it as a decolonising methodology.

By shedding light on the experiences of marginalised and 'dislocated' people, narrative inquiry challenges established stereotypes and myths by highlighting their inter-group heterogeneity and the diversity of how reality can be perceived. Narrative inquiry therefore appeals for much more than its persuasive power; it has the power, as Adichie (2009) declares, to enable the dispossessed to regain power by presenting many stories to counter the single story.

It has been noted that in spite of increasing interest in narrative inquiry, there is still a great deal of vagueness regarding what this methodology entails (Miller & Salkind 2011). Barusch (2012) observes that the nature of narrative research must be more clearly specified and takes up the task by presenting the defining features and perspectives which make narrative inquiry unique, particularly in the social sciences. According to Barusch (2012, pp. 3) narrative research is defined by;

- The creating of space for tales, with narrative inquirers either observing and/or participating in the construction of narratives,
- The attention to plot and language with narrative analysis addressing not only the content, but also the form of narrative, and finally
- The contextual interpretation of data, as interpretation in narrative research, must acknowledge the context of the story-telling as well as narrative intent.

As these principal features and earlier definitions imply, describing this research as a narrative inquiry denotes that the study employs storied form in both presenting and explicating the subject of its investigation. It is for precisely this reason that this methodological choice is deemed best for this study.

Empowerment being a process, it could be argued that the ideal strategy for evaluating women's empowerment through higher education would entail longitudinal research tracking participants' progress over years of higher education. Narrative inquiry -where stories are used to recount not just succession in time, but [also] change through time (Andrews et al. 2013) -presents a more viable alternative given the limits of doctoral study as it enables some evaluation of progress over time, based on participants' accounts.

4.2 The process of inquiry

Prior to my departure for fieldwork, most of the research design (including methodological) decisions had been made as is required to receive institutional ethical clearance. However, making decisions and implementing them are different. This section will attempt to present both that difference and the development of the research, in the field, with the engagement of participants.

4.2.1 Sampling

My decisions regarding 'the selection of specific data sources from which data will be collected to address the research objectives' (as sampling is defined by Gentles et al. 2015, pp. 1775) were made prior to arriving in the field. As this study's objective is conceptualising empowerment and investigating higher education's enabling of it for

Cameroonian women, I determined that the sampling would need to target women from state universities across the country. Participants selected would need to have acquired sufficient higher education to have encountered the notions of *too much book / long crayon* and the sample would need to be varied enough to also capture Cameroonian women's diversity across linguistic, institutional, cultural and regional lines. For these reasons, it was pre-determined that the study would employ purposive sampling known to enable the selection of information-rich cases for in-depth study (Silverman, 2000).

Given the multidimensional nature of higher education in Cameroon, the process of sampling began with the selection of four higher education institutions to be targeted for participant recruitment. While the research does not aim at making generalisations, it was necessary to ensure that the institutions targeted would enable some reflection of the variety in and between public higher education institutions which the majority of Cameroonian women have access to.

Name of University	Region/Location	Statutory Descriptor	Language of Instruction
University of Yaoundé I	Yaoundé, Centre Region	Bilingual University	French Dominant
University of Ngaoundere	Ngaoundere, Adamawa Region	Monolingual- French University	Strictly French
University of Buea	Buea, Southwest Region	Monolingual-English University	Strictly English
Higher Teachers Training College/École Normale Supérieure, (ENS) Bambili	Bamenda, Northwest Region	Grand École/ Advanced Professional School	English Dominant

Table 1: Presentation of State Institutions Targeted for Participant Recruitment

Based on the understanding that narrative inquiry methods tend to produce copious amounts of data requiring in-depth analysis, I pre-determined that the sample would

consist of a total of 20 Cameroonian women (five from each of the selected institutions) sufficient to ensure adequate diversity but also to avoid data saturation.

It is worth noting that, although sampling was determinedly purposive, it took on aspects of convenience sampling as well. Considering that the women being targeted were second-year Master's students, most potential participants had completed coursework and rarely visited the university campus except if necessary for seminars and supervision meetings. In addition, the ongoing Anglophone Crisis made campuses of institutions like ENS Bamili, situated in the Northwest region, a risky area that students rarely visited. I was therefore forced to share a digital version of the calls for participation via graduate student networks on social media. In this way, the 20 Cameroonian women I ended up with meet purposive requirements (that is reflect diversity in institutions attended, field of study, socio-economic background etc.) but are also a group of women who I could convene with relative convenience. Appendix F offers a tabular presentation of all 20 women participants.

4.2.2 Instruments

When we hear of narrative research, we think of stories. Still, there are various methods/instruments by which storied data can be collected, ranging from journal entries to portraiture. My decision to use life-stories and a participatory analysis workshop as instruments for data collection in this narrative inquiry is yet another choice which had been made prior to fieldwork and without the participants' input. Nonetheless, the latter method was only developed upon arrival on the field with participants' engagement (as stipulated in the transformative research). The methods of life-story interviewing and a participatory analysis were thus developed and utilised sequentially to achieve an engaged narrative inquiry.

4.2.2.1 *Life-story interviewing*

The life-story interview is an instrument of narrative inquiry expected to illicit highly contextualised, highly subjective accounts of human experience. Atkinson (1998, pp. 8) defined it as "a fairly complete narrating of one's experience of life as a whole, highlighting the most important aspects". I chose to use life-stories as the first of two methods of data collection in appreciation of two qualities outlined by Tagg (1985, pp. 163): "first, the

involvement of the personal conceptions of the past and all its stages, and second, the readily interpretable nature of the open interview product”.

I carried out life-story interviews as outlined by Atkinson (1998) in a characteristically unstructured manner with very little input after welcoming participants to tell their life-stories from childhood to post higher education with an interview guide (see Appendix B). Although, Atkinson (2002) details the life-story interview process as unfolding in three stages (see graphic below), I found it beneficial and consistent with Afrocentric and feminist principles of sharing in the process of knowledge production to share my own life-story with participants prior to their own narrations.



Figure 4: Stages of Life-story Interviews (Adapted from Atkinson 2002, pp. 131)

The process of my life-story interviews therefore consisted of: informing participants using the information sheet to ensure understanding of the research and the method; presenting them with the form for their written consent to the interviewing and participation in the subsequent analysis workshop; sharing my own narrative to put the participant at ease and build familiarity. Interviews were carried out in both French and English depending on the language preferred by the participants. Though ten of the 20 participants identify as Francophone, one of them preferred to be interviewed in English, and so nine of 20 interviews were conducted in French.

Though the institutions selected are located in four different regions, the life-story interviews were carried out across three regions in Cameroon. Upon logistical consideration, participants of the University of Ngaoundere were requested and agreed to have their life-story interviews done in the central region where the second part of data collection would take place via a participant analysis workshop. Interview times ranged from 90 to 180 minutes (preliminary discussions excluded). This length of interview matches the recommendations made by Atkinson (2002). Interviews generally followed the same pattern; participants opened with their demographic data such as real name, age, faith if any, family background, relationship status, linguistic identity, and the academic discipline/institution they are enrolled in. This would be followed by their stating their chosen pseudonym, saying “I would like to be known as”, and beginning their accounts with “this is my story”.

The life-story interviews ended with the participants giving a direct description of what being empowered meant for them and who could be considered an empowered woman in Cameroon.

4.2.2.2 The participatory-analysis workshop

The second instrument for primary data collection (and subsequent data analysis) employed by this study is a workshop for participatory analysis. Educational practitioners at Learning for Action best define participatory analysis as “a method that involves bringing a group of stakeholders, such as programme participants or programme staff, into the data interpretation and meaning-making processes.”⁶ The rationale behind participatory analysis, as with all other participatory research methods, is to reduce the researcher/participant divide and enable collective inquiry into the problem.

As earlier mentioned, the choice of this method was made prior to fieldwork, but the instrument itself was developed in collaboration with participants as stipulated by principles of transformative research. Developing this method entailed inviting participants to think about how best to investigate assumptions of women’s empowerment through higher education. Following their life-story interviews, I asked participants for their

⁶ Learning for All: <http://learningforaction.com/participatory-analysis>

methodological input, saying: *Considering that you are a graduate student and familiar with research methodology in general and the purposes of this specific research to an extent, if you were the researcher, what exercises, questions or methods in general would you use to examine the problem and answer the research questions.*

Interestingly, participants' suggestions leaned towards the quantification of their perceptions; ranging from a survey to 'grade' their higher education institutions to a self-assessment of their own level of empowerment using percentages. I recorded the variety of suggestions, merging those which were similar. In this way a workbook with eight activity sections was developed for a full-day participatory analysis workshop (see Appendix D).

The participatory workshop held on the 30th March 2019 at Yaoundé, and the costs of bringing all 20 women, were covered. The first part of the workshop consisted of me giving an introductory lesson on African-feminist thought and the Capability Approach, followed by the more interactive second part of the workshop where participants engaged in analysis by way of the workbooks comprised of their own suggested activities. For efficiency, I hired a Francophone gender practitioner to serve as co-facilitator of the workshop. By using a French translation of the same PowerPoint presentation she was able to deliver the same lesson, co-lead a discussion on gendered experiences with participants and walk participants through the workbook activities they had come up with.

In the end, the participatory analysis workshop proved to be both empowering and transformative. Recent scholarship purports that participatory methods such as this provide research subjects with opportunities to voice and express concerns that are often internalised (see Cin and Mkwanaenzi, forthcoming). True to this sentiment, the participatory analysis method made a substantial contribution to unearthing otherwise impossible to access data (as I wouldn't have considered some of the suggestions made by participants).

In addition, this method augmented the narrative capability of both the participants and myself. Watts (2008) puts forward the concept of narrative capability to refer to the real

opportunities/freedoms which individuals have to tell or in telling their stories. Although participants did not have a choice but to share their perspectives narratively, given my choice of the life-story form, the participatory analysis workshop provided participants with the opportunity to use their preferred means to articulate their thoughts on what has been (dis)empowering for them, with this in turn enhancing my narrative capability as researcher to adequately present and analyse their stories (as will be illustrated later).

Finally, this method actualised the co-construction of knowledge deemed necessary by both the transformative paradigm and Afrocentric paradigms as a means of addressing power imbalances and enabling social change and centring Africans in research. In fact, because of this method, the research could be said to have taken on the issue of epistemic injustice. Fricker (2007) defines epistemic injustice as aspects of unfairness in the generation of knowledge such as how it is communicated and how it is understood. With this method of participatory analysis and my introducing participants to the theoretical frameworks instrumental to my study, I counter a specific epistemic injustice - hermeneutical injustice - “which occurs when there is a deficit in our shared tools of social interpretation such that marginalised social groups are at a disadvantage in making sense of their distinctive and important experiences” (Goetze 2018, pp. 73). Likewise, by engaging participants in the formulation of the tools of inquiry (the activities they came up with and worked on interactively), this method effected the “epistemic turn” which Maldonado-Torres (2016, pp. 25) referred to as participants became co-researchers in the interrogation of what affects them and the analysis of their own life-stories.

4.3 Analytical process: narrative analysis vs. analysis-of-narratives

Reflecting on their doctoral research experiences, Sakata et al. (2019) assert that the “complexity and fluidity” of analysis is not given enough attention in accounts of scholarship, rendering a false impression of the “messy” process of analysis as “technical and straightforward” (Sakata et al. 2019, pp. 318). Considering this problematic trend, I find it necessary to underscore the fact that though this section may present the analytical process as a linear progression, in reality my analysis of data was “concurrent and reverberative rather than sequential” (Saldana 2011, pp. 66).

This transparency is particularly important here as narrative inquiry distinguishes itself from other methodologies (which merely utilise narrative methods in data collection) by taking a narrative approach to analysis as well. In essence, narrative inquiry entails making sense of participant stories in storied format; placing just as much weight on what was said (content) as on how it was said (narrative form). To paraphrase Catherine Riessman (in Lewis-Beck et al. 2003, pp. 705), narrative analysis as used here refers to:

“a family of approaches to diverse kinds of texts, which have in common a storied form... making both the participants and researchers storytellers as they interpret the world and experiences in it... Narrative analysis represents storied ways of knowing and communicating data”.

There is no single process of narrative analysis, as analytical procedure within narrative research varies depending on the narrative intent. Some narrative analyses incorporate narrative coding, others do not. Some modes of narrative analysis lay emphasis on the interaction/dialogue between teller and listener, while others focus solely on the teller's tale. I considered various ways to go about analysis, recognizing that my choice must be suitable to narrative inquiry but also considerate of the self-efficacy and analytical contribution of participants from the participatory workshop. I considered options such as: the Critical-Feminist/Double-hermeneutics narrative approach forwarded by Pitre et al. (2013); the Critical Events Approach proposed by Webster and Mertova (2007); and Labov's Model as outlined in Kim (2016). I finally settled on the sequential use of narrative analysis followed by analysis-of-narratives as differentiated by Polkinghorne (1995).

Polkinghorne (1995) uses the argument of paradigmatic vs narrative reasoning to differentiate between analysis-of-narrative (or narratives-under-analysis) and narrative analysis as analytical method of narrative inquiry. He asserts that in narrative analysis, the final research product must be a full story “composed by the researcher to represent the events, characters, and issues that he or she has studied” (Bochner & Riggs 2014, pp. 204). Upon taking plot, language, setting and more into consideration, the end product is a new story co-authored by both the participants and researcher. This end product is also known as ‘re-storied narrative’ (Ollerenshaw & Creswell 2002). On the other hand,

analysis-of-narratives refers to the interpretation of either re-storied data or untouched data collected as narratives (Bochner & Riggs 2014). But for the fact that it requires a more verbose presentation of data to support analytical claims, analysis-of-narratives closely resembles conventional forms of analysis in qualitative research.

I made the choice of sequentially using both analytical procedures on account of the utility of both. As Saldana (2011, pp. 155) affirms:

“When you emphasize description, you want your reader to see what you saw.
When you emphasize analysis, you want your reader to know what you know.
When you emphasize interpretation, you want your reader to understand what
you think you yourself have understood”.

It is my desire to present some full stories to offer the reader a more holistic view of women assumed to be empowered through higher education and let a description of their realities respond to those assumptions. Yet, I also recognise that a storied response is open to misinterpretation and there is need for my own ‘meaning-making’ and conclusions drawn to be tabled clearly in response to the questions I set out to answer. The sequential use of narrative analysis and analysis-of-narratives in this thesis ensures I am able to do both. The benefits of the sequential process of analysis however constrain the amount of data which can be presented in this thesis given word-count limitations. Although all 20 women’s data was analysed (see the table presenting all 20 participants in Appendix F), only data from half the participants (ten women) is put forward here for the analysis of narratives and only two women’s stories are presented in full as re-storied narratives (in Chapter 8). The choice of which ten participants are presented in this thesis was made based on the need to reflect diversity in educational fields and institutions attended, socio-economic background and other identifiers. The subsequent choice of which two women’s stories (of the ten set apart) would be told in full, is a choice made based on the richness of their narrative and participatory-analysis data as well as the contrast between them. The difference between the two analytical processes is presented in the following subsections.

4.3.1 Narrative analysis

The life-story interviews produced rich raw data with transcripts ranging from 13000-23000 words. My narrative analysis of this raw data was a threefold process involving; narrative coding, re-storying of participant narratives, and substantiation with participants' own analysis in the form of workbook data.

Saldana (2009, pp. 109) defines narrative coding as “that which blends concepts from the humanities and literary criticism in the codification and interpretation of participant narratives”. Coding narratives therefore involves the dissection of “big gulps of text” to enable the re-construction of participants' stories with elements of literature, context, time, and other aspects depending on narrative intent (Daiute & Lightfoot 2004, pp. 2). With this perspective, I utilised several tables (a total of 5) with multiple categories to dissect the raw narratives and restructure participants' stories with the intention of presenting an evolution of the women's (dis)empowerment before, during and after higher education.

The following graphic captures the various tables used for narrative coding.

Table 1: Synopsis/Plotting of Life-stories					
Participant Bio-Data	Childhood to Higher Education	Initial Higher Education Experience		Post-Initial Higher Education/ Graduate school Experience	Current Status & Future Ambitions
Table 2: Mapping (Dis)Empowerment					
Participant	Valued Capabilities	Self- Identified Periods of		Structural Constraints	Conversion Factors
		Disempowerment	Empowerment		
Table 3: Evaluations of (Dis)Empowerment					
Participant	Self-Efficacy			Recognition	
	Self-identified oppressions/ Inequalities	Self-identified Power	Self-ranked empowerment	Empowered enough to...	Disempowered so much...
Table 4: Literary Perspective of Participant Narratives					
Participant	Story Type/Genre	Participants Narrating Style/ Choice of Narrative Voice	Points of Hesitation in narration	Points of emphasis/Thick description	Other major characters in participant's story
Table 5: For Analysis of Narratives					
Identified Themes	Recurrence in Participant Narratives		Examples/References of Identified Themes		

Figure 5: Outline of tables used in narrative coding

As the graphic suggests, each of the five tables served a purpose in the dissection of participants' narratives: In Table 1 raw data was summarised and categorised into life 'chapters' thus establishing the plot for individual stories. Table 2 charts what participant's valued, changes in status of (dis)empowerment, and what influences contributed either negatively or positively. Table 3, on its part, unearths responses to the overarching research question which asks if Cameroonian women can consider themselves and be considered as empowered through higher education; here the difference between what participants acknowledged in their narratives and what I, as researcher, recognised that they did not, is recorded. Table 4 focuses on classifying the narratives by literary form; categorisation here was done to highlight the literary aspects of the story and eventually facilitate the re-storying of narratives. Finally, with Table 5 I recorded ideas and themes I recognised as relevant, discussing Cameroonian women's empowerment through higher education and responding to the research questions. By collating commonalities in participants' experience and marking examples which support certain arguments, this table expedited the subsequent analysis-of-narratives.

The narrative analysis process proceeded with the re-storying of data. Following the abridgement of participant narratives in Table 1, and due recognition of literary elements of the story (e.g. time, place, plot, and scene) in Table 4, stories were re-written to situate them "within a chronological sequence" (Ollerenshaw & Creswell 2002, pp. 332), stressing key experiences and feelings expressed by participants. Given the criticisms levelled against the practice of re-storying narratives and the depiction of re-storied data as 'altered truth' (see Del Monte 2015; Polkinghorne 1997), it is necessary to note as Riessman (2005) does that re-storied narratives are not to mirror nor refract the past, but rather to interpret the participant accounts and facilitate understanding in research. Re-storying therefore does not alter the 'truth of narratives' because narratives do not claim to be more than what they are - subjective accounts – which, if analysed as is being done here, produces "a co-constructed interpretation of what has been experienced purposefully told to others in light of a particular intention and to benefit a specific audience" (Pitre et al. 2013, pp. 118).

The final stage of narrative analysis was the substantiation of re-storied narratives by way of reviewing what participants' analysis added that may have been missed at the life-story interviews. The participatory analysis workshop was held some time following the one-on-one interviews, and this workshop enhanced participants' abilities to articulate their thoughts in their preferred ways and consider their life-stories with new theoretical concepts. As a result, the data collected from via the workbook of exercises formulated by participants (see Appendix D) enabled this final stage to be a process of verification to either support or inject new thought to re-storied narratives thus placing participant's self-analysis alongside my own as the researcher. Appendix E presents an illustration of the narrative coding process through which restorying of participant's narratives is achieved.

4.3.2 Analysis-of-narratives

Polkinghorne (1995) asserts that analysis of narratives is that which is grounded in paradigmatic reasoning, that is, analysis which is based upon ontological, epistemological and theoretical ideas. To this end, the second sequence of analysis utilised excerpts from participants' narratives (culled from transcripts/raw data) to induce conceptualisations of empowerment put forward by participants and deduce the role higher education was to play, played or failed to play in empowering these women. In this second sequence of analysis I was able to use more participants (as opposed to the two whose narratives are re-storied in full). This allowed me to make more substantial arguments and claims in response to the guiding research questions.

The choice of how many participants and whose stories/analysis will be featured or not in the thesis was made based on a number of factors. First, I concluded that despite limitations of a thesis at least half participants should be reflected in this work. Next, it was necessary to ensure that the participants whose data will be presented in the thesis reflected the overall diversity of the sample in the linguistic group, age, family background, economic status, religion and higher education institutions attended and more. Finally, the choice of the ten participants whose data will be presented and the two whose narratives were re-storied and presented in full was made based on the amount of data which was generated from their interviews and their participation at the workshop. Therefore, the participants presented here are those who either offer their uniqueness

(based on the programs/institutions they attended or other identifiers) or those who were better able to articulate their life experiences and interact effectively at the participatory workshop. I am conscious that these choices on who is presented have consequences on how the study is received and that I may have contributed to disempowering some participants. I acknowledge this and other limitations much later in this work.

4.4 Methodological and ethical issues/considerations in narrative inquiry

As is the case with doctoral research, I was only permitted to proceed with fieldwork after presenting evidence to my institution's research ethics committee of having reflected on the potential impact of this research, of measures taken to abide by the ethical guidelines of my discipline, and of having secured research approval by the concerned Cameroonian institution. However, ethical and methodological considerations cannot simply be checked-off as deemed completed with attainment of institutional approval. It is necessary to note that my reflexivity on ethical principles and dilemmas ran throughout the course of the research.

Aside from the required institutional approvals secured prior to the study (see Appendix A), it was important to secure not only participants' consent but equally their understanding and approval of the research process. To effect this understanding and approval and make the research accessible, I designed creative posters for recruiting participants (see Appendix B) and produced an 'infomercial' by way of the PowToon platform⁷ in addition to the information sheet. Each of these were translated into French to ensure inclusivity, and I noted that they enabled me capture participants' interest and willingness prior to the interviews, where they were presented together with consent forms. In this way I also gave consideration to research transparency (no deception/omission of motives) which Balsera (2014, pp. 93) notes as pertinent.

Life-story interviews are prone to elicit the discussion of sensitive topics (Balsera 2014). It is in consideration of potential participant discomfort that I shared my own life-story and

⁷ Watch here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W2nJWJA6zSY>

assured participants of their right to either pause or, in the worst-case scenario, end the interview.

In the course of planning for the participatory analysis workshop, I considered the challenge of assuring participant anonymity and confidentiality, given that they were required to meet and interact. With this in mind, participants were asked to introduce themselves using their pseudonym at the workshop. However, given how familiarity is bred in group settings, I must acknowledge that this measure was insufficient to address risks of confidentiality.

Later on in the research process, I gave further consideration to issues such as data protection and research validation. I reached out to all participants to confirm the accuracy of their words upon transcription of the life-story interviews. Unfortunately, only 11 of the 20 women responded to confirm their transcripts, and only 3 made edits, which suggests they reviewed the transcripts with care.

Yet, as Saldana (2011, pp. 24) notes, “there will always be subtle, slippery, even unsolvable dilemmas when we work with human participants because of unforeseen issues and the idiosyncratic nature of being human”. Several issues require my acknowledgement as they impeded the ethical progression of this study. For one, I underestimated the influence of the ongoing Anglophone crisis on the research. As earlier noted, participant recruitment was made difficult by the Anglophone crisis in certain regions. As the crisis, through an increase in the number of kidnappings, had created a climate of insecurity and distrust, few people responded to an open call and potential participants who did were reluctant to meet someone they did not know in a private space for one-on-one interviewing. As a result, the majority of my participants had been introduced to me by someone in a position of authority (such as an academic administrator I am familiar with), or some mutual acquaintance. While this snowballing was undoubtedly effective, I recognise that it posed an ethical dilemma as it required more effort to put participants who had been secured via recommendations of superiors (rather than peers, or those who participated of their own volition) at ease.

Yet another impact of the crisis on the study was the prevailing tension and the tiny window of time available for the interviews in the Northwest region. In addition to being wary of meeting someone unknown to them, participants interviewed in this region (students of ENS Bambili) were harder to put at ease and tended to rush through the recounting of their life-stories as a result of the state curfew in the region. With limited hours in the day to be outside, interviews here were comparatively brief when compared to those held in the other regions where participants felt safer.

Likewise, my methodological choice of the participatory analysis method had ethical implications as it made it even more difficult to recruit Muslim participants. Three out of four of the higher education institutions targeted are based in predominantly 'Christian' regions, so it was understandable that Muslim women were a minority group in those institutions. However, the fourth institution - University of Ngaoundéré - is based in a predominantly Muslim region, and was selected with the aim of securing a greater number of Muslim participants. It was a surprise to find that although this institution has more Muslim students than the others, students of other faiths still outnumbered the Muslim women students at this institution. As a result, irrespective of the institution, the recruitment of Muslim women students was a challenge.

Still, a good number of Muslim women students were interested in the research and openly participated in the one-on-one life-story interviews at the University of Ngaoundere. Yet, the majority were unable to commit to their participation in the participatory analysis workshop as that would mean traveling out of the region to the nation's capital where all the participants would meet. Thus, the participants we ultimately recruited were those who already had some degree of agency/privilege which would permit them to travel out of the region to participate at the workshop in Yaoundé. As this research emphasises African women's (dis)empowerment, it is necessary to note how this methodological stipulation further contributed to underscoring the disempowerment of a minority and the ethical dilemma it raised. Would the research have excluded the voices of those who need to be heard most by using this method? Were those who already had freedoms to travel have been given an unfair advantage over others?

Nevertheless, my consciousness of these dilemmas and the regular questioning of my own choices and the potential consequences of each affirmed conscientiousness to – if not perfect adherence of - the principles of ethical research throughout this study.

5. RESEARCH CONTEXT

I, like Adichie (2009), have always felt that it is impossible to engage properly with a place or a person without engaging with the story of the place which made that person. So having introduced this research, outlined its commitments and described its process, it is necessary to now 'set the stage' of the study. As is permissible of narrative inquiry, in presenting the research context here, I will draw from statistical data, historical fact, social commentary, oral tradition, my own experiences, development reports, and a wide range of research by scholars to tell the story of Cameroon in narrative form. Given the storied format of this account, this chapter will exceptionally be devoid of in-text citations in favour of footnotes to facilitate narrative flow.

5.1 The story of Cameroon

Most accounts of Cameroon begin with the German annexation of the territory in 1884. But it is necessary to emphasise that life - with an eclectic array of people, cultures, socio-political and economic systems and more - existed and thrived here before colonial contact.⁸ Even before imperialists came and drew lines making new borders, rendering the new identities by which Cameroonians are now differentiated from each other, this territory had been home to variety. In fact it is the countless pre-colonial migrations spanning the course of several hundred years which accounts for the country's diversity with over 200 ethnic groups.

So, at the time the Portuguese sailors docked on Cameroonian shores and came across a river they would call '*Rio dos Camarões*'⁹ from which the appellations of Cameroon would evolve, we had our own names. We were called the Baka, the Bagyéli, the Mbororo, the Bedzang, the Ndjem, the Duala, the Sao, the Fang (Pangwe), the Beti, the Kanuri, the Bamoun, the Tikar, the Bamileke and more. We had kingdoms like the Mandara and Kotoko; unique and complex socio-political organisations - like that of Bamileke kingdom where Fons (male) shared authority with Mafo (female), an advisory council, various

⁸ DeLancey & DeLancey (2000)

⁹ Portuguese for 'River of Prawns'.

intergroup associations and secret societies.¹⁰ And before European missions and colonisation introduced the two European languages we now recognise officially, we had our own languages. There was Shumum, which was standardised by Sultan Njoya and used for teaching, Fulfulde which had been used for the dissemination of Islam during the Jihads Mungaka, Ewondo, Isubu, Duala, Lamnso, and over two hundred more still here today although they are now overshadowed by French, English and Pidgin.¹¹

The knowledge of our precolonial life matters because knowledge of that time shows just how much we have erased, borrowed, and maintained. A lot can change over hundreds of years but in many ways what we are now can be easily traced to who we were then. For instance, the fact that the people of the Northwest and Southwest regions (despite common present-day Anglophone identity) differ, in terms of their Muslim population. Likewise, how the people of the Bamoun tribe adhere to Islam in contrast to the Bamileke people who are either Christian or traditionalists, despite the fact that both ethnic groups share the same region - what is known today as the Western region. Such diversity cannot be explained by colonialism; it is traced to the Fulani campaign of the early nineteenth century led by Mobido Adama - Emir of Adamawa - who vowed to spread the Fulani Empire and Islam as far south as he could.¹² It is this precolonial event that explains why there is a Sultanate in Bamoun and why the linguistic disharmony that is a legacy of colonial rule, has not to date trumped the filial bonds of certain tribes (like the Anglophone Kom and Francophone Bamoun).

I tell you this because it is necessary to show that while a great deal of our current problems, stereotypes and social classifications are rooted in our colonialism, not everything was initiated in that time. Take for example Cameroon's legalised homophobia; although it is typically justified by the religions introduced to us by missionaries and jihads, it can equally be traced in part to our precolonial life. Back then, homosexual intercourse - particularly between men - known as *bian nkuma*, was practiced amongst the Bulu and Pangwe peoples, and considered a ritual for acquiring

¹⁰ Nelson (1974)

¹¹ Nana (2016)

¹² Encyclopedia Britannica (2019), <https://www.britannica.com/place/Cameroon/History>

wealth.¹³ Hence the present-day social belief that links homosexuality to occultism. Likewise, the inequalities between men and women as we know it may have been amplified by our colonisers' ideas of 'civilisation', but even before they showed up Cameroonian women faced subordination - and resisted it. This is evident in the tale of the woman founder of the Bafut tribe, buried alive because men feared the power she wielded after discovering the settlement now known as Bafut land.¹⁴ Elsewhere, scholars have recorded folklore of the Dowayo people of the North which tells of an old woman who discovered the practice of male circumcision (having seen its benefits on her sons), and was beaten to death because women should not have such knowledge.¹⁵ So, even as far back as the 16th century our societies have demonstrated patriarchal tendencies, although as the gender-neutrality of some of our languages (like the Eton language of the Beti people) suggests, things were more complementary back then and the gap between the genders not as wide as it became with colonialism.

It should be clear that though the story of who we are - flaws and all - goes back to way before colonialism. Still, the arrival of the Europeans, first as traders, then as missionaries, and finally as envoys carrying treaties claiming protection via annexation, would mark for us the beginning of a new chapter in our life; a major one.

With the hoisting of the German flag on July 5th 1884, all of us with our multiple names, tongues and ways would become *Kamerun*,¹⁶ subjects of the German Chancellor for thirty-two years (1884-1916). There was some resistance but not only were German weapons far more sophisticated, some of our own chose to collaborate with them against those of us who resisted. Consequently tribes like the Bali, the Bamoun, and the Ewondo would become more powerful. Although that chapter of our history was just over three decades, it left a mark on us. It was the first time we would all be expected to communicate in one language - German. It would mark the loss of land ownership as the Germans seized most of it to build plantations. It also heralded a greater imbalance between men and women based on the worth of what they now cultivated - plantation cash crops or

¹³ Mehra, Lemieux & Stophel (2019)

¹⁴ Chunyuy (2019)

¹⁵ Barley (1997)

¹⁶ DeLancey & DeLancey (2000)

subsistence agriculture for families. Like the infrastructure colonial administrators forced us to build to facilitate their settlement and exploitation, the work of German missionaries would also be visible for years to come. Many of our people converted to the Christian faith. Some did so believing that the colonial master's deity was superior given their sophisticated weapons; others did so because they knew that having a church meant having a school. This was the case of a Beti Chief, *Mme-Ela*, who decided to give up polygamy, divorcing all other wives as he converted with his first wife. He would say frankly: "two things my heart has always longed for, [are] a gun and a school".¹⁷ This is how formal education came to us.

Our lives as German subjects would come to an abrupt end after Germany was defeated in World War I. Once again, agreements we had no part in would result in us being subjects of foreign countries - this time of France and Britain who shared German territories between themselves as spoils of war.¹⁸ Cameroon's case was special; neither France nor Britain were willing to give up their interest in Cameroon for the other and so it was decided that our territory would be divided. On 23 February 1916, even before the war was officially over, British officials Strachey and Oliphant met with French official Picot and divided our territory; the British willing to take what the French were willing to do without. This partition, reported to be drawn "in a casual way and with a blue pencil",¹⁹ would mark yet another turn in our story. It would usher in the British-French dual reign of an already multi-ethnic territory that the Germans had ruled as one. During this period of dual rule, three-fifths of our people belonged to what was known as 'French Cameroun' and two-fifths to 'British Cameroons'; they were ruled as differently as they were named.

It is at this point that our once fairly uniform story branched in two different directions:

On one hand, the story of French Cameroon tells of the making of Francophone Cameroonians under the paternalistic colonial system of Direct Rule employed by the French. The French Cameroon story was characterised by the presence of French officials who repressively administered the territory and considerable financial

¹⁷ Sundkler & Steed (2000)

¹⁸ DeLancey & DeLancey (2000)

¹⁹ Guarnieri & Rainer (2018)

investment with over \$500 million devoted to trade and urbanisation between 1947-1959,²⁰ although this development was skewed to the benefit of the metropolises they resided in. Most importantly, the story of Francophone Cameroonians featured a bevy of repressive colonial policies like Assimilation,²¹ by which Cameroonians in this part of the territory were systematically assimilated. Assimilation was based on the notion that they needed to conform to 'superior' French culture to be of value; it implied that the French were generously civilising indigenous Cameroonians by evolving them into Frenchmen and it made earning the status of *Évolués*²² a goal for people in this part of the territory. Becoming *Évolués* entailed the dismissal of our culture as subpar, acquiring a Western education, adopting French culture by way of dress, language, belief, knowledge and obedience of French law. Becoming *Évolués* also meant one was no longer considered 'indigenous' but rather a 'French subject'. *Évolués* were exempted from customary laws harshly enforced via policies like *Indegenat* and *Prestation* and subjected to French laws only, they could vote and were - in comparison - afforded more humane treatment as a reward for becoming French-like.²³ In this way, the success of the policy of Assimilation was evident in the near erasure of traditional identities, and socioeconomic and political structures became a key feature in the French Cameroon story.

As of the late 1940s, the French Cameroon story developed into one of the bloodiest nationalist struggles of the French Empire. France would try to contain nationalist sentiments in many ways; engaging *Évolués* in nation-building via the establishment of a 'Representative Assembly of Cameroon', revising their constitution to permit both men and women *Évolués* to vote, and other strategic concessions. Still, revolutionaries raged for independence under the banner of the political party *Union des populations du Cameroun* (UPC), and women like Laurence Eteki Maladi made it clear that being a woman made it ten times more difficult to attain the status of *Évolués* and advocated for universal suffrage.²⁴ In the end, this branch of our story was pruned in a calculated and open-ended way. Calculated because even as the French seemed to be preparing to

²⁰ Lee & Schultz (2011)

²¹ Mills (2011)

²² Mills (2011)

²³ Mills (2011)

²⁴ Ndengue (2016)

concede independence beginning with the granting of universal suffrage in the mid 1950s, they would brutally suppress main independence activists (UPC and UDEFEC members), eventually handing over to *Évolués* who had never really resisted the French administration.²⁵ It was open-ended because, with economic and security agreements made as conditions of independence, France ensured they would always have some degree of control over the territory.²⁶

The development of the French Cameroon story accounts for a great deal of contemporary Cameroonian realities. The policy of Assimilation can be credited with our default admiration and respect for everything Eurocentric and why we have a colourism problem with greater value attributed to being light-skinned to the point of carcinogenic skin-lightening products having become popular commodities.²⁷ It is this backstory of French Cameroon which explains the imbalance in influence wielded by traditional rulers across different regions and the awkward co-existence of customary and civil law, as it explains why the French parts of the country hosts better infrastructure - some built for French settlement and others as post World War II attempts to appease and consolidate power. Above all else, this branch of our story explains why we remain tied to France in a plethora of ways, most evident in our currency being anchored to theirs and subject to devaluation by them irrespective of our agreement.²⁸

On the other hand, the story of British Cameroons was markedly different as people in this part of the territory were ruled based on what was deemed most convenient - least financially and manpower demanding - to the British. The prioritising of British convenience meant the further division of this section of the territory into two parts - British Northern Cameroon and British Southern Cameroon - and administration of both as parts of neighbouring Nigeria and with the use of Indirect Rule.

With Indirect Rule, the British colonial representative on the ground - the Divisional Officer - served as a superintendent and used indigenous rulers to enforce British policy

²⁵ Terretta (2012)

²⁶ Pigeaud & Sylla (2018)

²⁷ Amaazee (2011)

²⁸ Pigeaud & Sylla (2018)

in administrative blocs the British termed Native Authorities through decrees called Native Ordinances.²⁹

In this way, the story of British Cameroons was one of ‘divide and rule’ from the onset. Division for administrative ease as the predominantly Muslim British Northern Cameroons had a great deal in common with Northern Nigeria, and division for exploitation with the British turning the indigenes against each other as they deposed and imposed Chiefs depending on who would best serve their purposes. In British Cameroons, the British were nonchalant colonisers who sought to exploit all that they could with very little investment in the territory. In terms of agriculture and infrastructural development, the British would merely add onto what the Germans had already done, with equally inadequate provision of health and educational services.³⁰ The few hospitals they set up were mostly located in areas where the Divisional Officer resided or where German plantations were located. With regards to education, the colonial government set up institutions in British Cameroons sparingly, relying on missionaries to augment their efforts with mission schools and preferring to sponsor a small number of Cameroonians to study in Nigeria on scholarships. By doing this they established Nigeria as the metropole and British Cameroons as a dependent periphery.

This would all have consequences of course. The reliance on missionary contributions to educational development gave the majority-Christian British Southern Cameroon an advantage over British Northern Cameroon in terms of educational institutions. In the same vein, missionary education encouraged the domestication of Cameroonian women as per Victorian ideals, with the aim of making them “good” wives and mothers.³¹ Sponsoring limited British Southern Cameroonians to study out of the territory resulted in feelings of animosity as particularly the British Southern Cameroonians felt like they had never belonged to Nigeria. The limited investment in education also meant that those who had been selected to study out of the country formed a small class of local elites who

²⁹ Ebune (2016a)

³⁰ Ebune (2016a)

³¹ Adams (2006)

were used to speak for the vast majority of their compatriots to whom they could no longer relate.

British Cameroon's story built to a crescendo in the 1950s with the rise of pro-nationalist movements among both British Cameroonians and Nigerians. As Britain began preparations to hand over power, British officials made a decision that would have long-lasting repercussions. It was decided the territory they had ruled as extensions of Nigeria did not warrant independence on its own. The United Nations was charged with coordinating plebiscite elections in the British Cameroons for the people to decide between limited options of either integrating with Nigeria or reunification with the then independent Republic of Cameroun.³²

The 11 February 1961 plebiscites marked a final division in the story of British Cameroons. This plebiscite resulted in British Northern Cameroon voting 60% in favour of integration with Nigeria and British Southern Cameroon voting 70.5% in favour of reunification with French Cameroon,³³ with the vast difference in the votes being an obvious consequence of the way these areas were ruled in a fractioned and indirect manner. Acting on these results, British Northern Cameroon was ceded to Nigeria and the people of British Southern Cameroon were left comparatively disadvantaged to negotiate reunification with a more autonomous and secure French Cameroon which had gained independence in January 1960 - over a year before.

As in the case of the French Cameroon story, the experience of British rule and the nature by which it came to an end accounts for a great deal of today's reality. It explains the close relationship Cameroon shares with Nigeria and the influence of Nigerian culture on Anglophone Cameroonians. The backstory of indirect rule explains why traditional rulers retain more power in Anglophone Cameroon to the point of presiding over 'customary courts' as opposed to the relative powerlessness of traditional rulers in most parts of French Cameroon. This backstory equally implies the problematic root of contemporary customary laws given that what was deemed customary was heavily influenced by the

³² Ebune (2016b)

³³ Nohlen, Krennerich & Thibaut (1999)

British who deposed legitimate traditional rulers and imposed those who would serve their purposes.

Above all else, the backstory accounts for the ethnic/class divisions which are the legacy of divide-and-rule, the disproportionate levels of development, cultural ideals and power between Anglophones and Francophones, and the geo-political (de)evolution of the territory as the below graphic captures with its illustration of changes in the country's boundary lines over time.

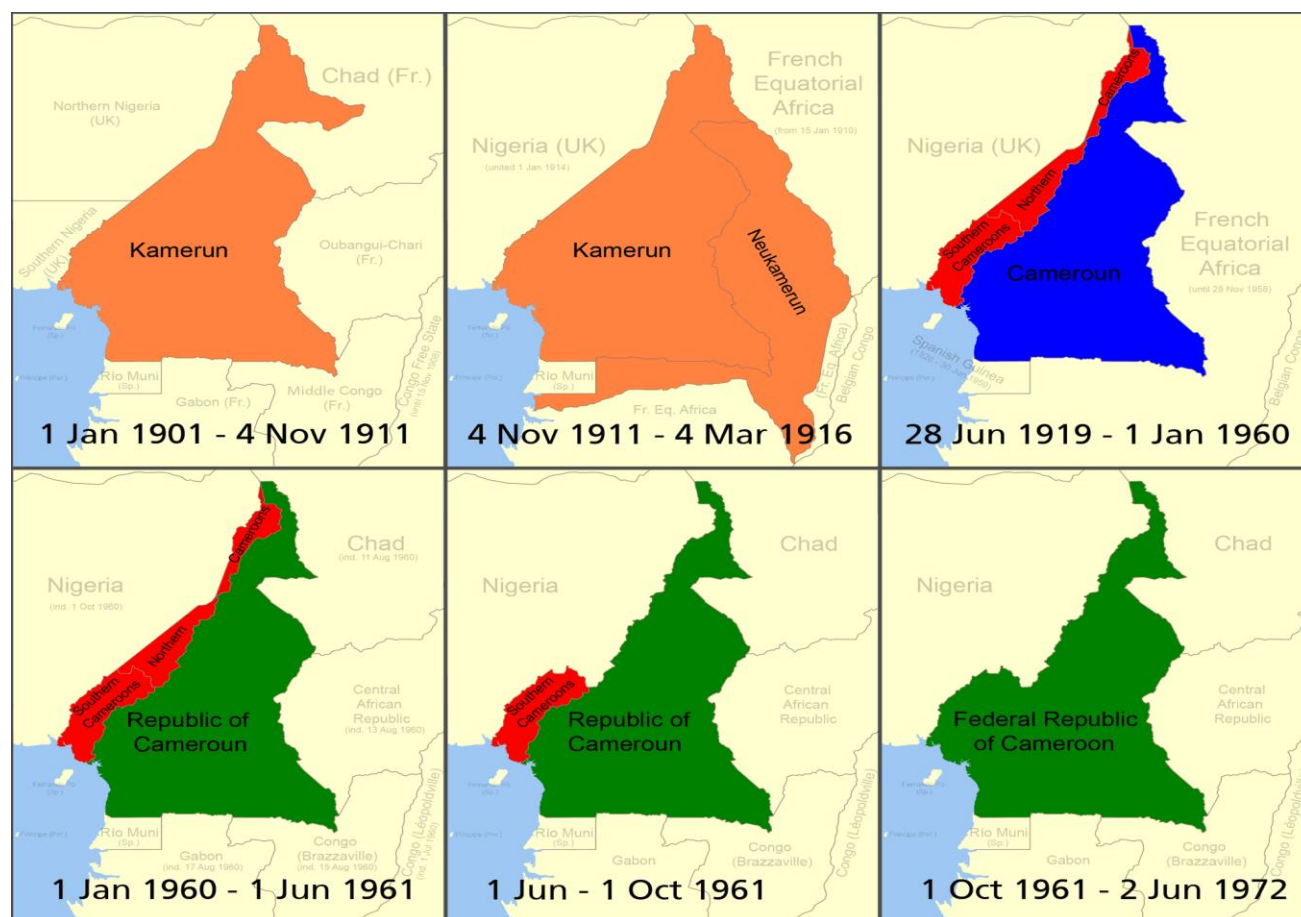


Figure 6: Cameroon boundary changes from 1901-1972

The two branches of Cameroon's story became one with the Founban Constitutional Conference of July 1961. This conference was the official meeting for reunification which brought together representatives of British Southern Cameroons and the president of the independent Republic of Cameroun (accompanied by a delegation which included

advisors from France).³⁴ The conference is often referred to as the 'marriage' between the Cameroons,³⁵ and the terms of union the wedding vows. By these 'vows' both sides presented their demands and expectations of what the union should look like. They began with identifying the reunified state as the Federal Republic of Cameroon comprised of two states, East Cameroon (former Republic of Cameroun) and West Cameroon (former British Southern Cameroon). At Foumban, it was agreed that the federal government would make an effort to ensure equality between the two federal states as well as preserve and appreciate their cultural differences, beginning with mutual respect of the official languages of English and French. Among other agreements, it was vowed that the respective states would abide by their existing legal and educational systems. This would mean a legal system respecting both English Common Law and French Civil Law with a bicameral legislature which involved traditional rulers through the House of Chiefs. It would also mean the co-existence of two subsystems of formal education; the General Certificate of Education system and the Baccalaureate system. More vows were exchanged, and stipulations for the union made, like that prohibiting the first and second in command - president and vice-president - of the country to come from the same state. In essence, the vows and stipulations made at Foumban are evidence that both factions feared the loss of their colonial heritage. Eventually, British Southern Cameroons was described as the dependent 'bride' who left home to marry the 'groom' – the already independent Republic of Cameroon, but in that moment things looked promising.³⁶ As Britain granted Nigeria and British Cameroons independence on 1st October 1961, a new chapter of Cameroon's story began with excitement. The country as it was then was a two-state bilingual federation headed by President Ahmadou Ahidjo and Vice-President John Foncha.³⁷

Historians note that the political devolution of the union began mere months after independence and that within ten years the majority of vows made at the Foumban conference were broken. For instance, Article 59 of the final version of the constitution

³⁴ Ebune (2016b)

³⁵ Awasom (2000)

³⁶ Awasom (2000)

³⁷ Ngoh (1996)

suggested that contrary to what was agreed at Fouban, the official languages were not equal - the French versions of the constitution were deemed 'original' and the English versions second-place as they were 'translations'.³⁸ In another move, without prior deliberation with the West Cameroon government, Ahidjo divided the country into provinces and appointed administrators with equal or more powers than the governors of federal states - contrary to the agreed upon structure of federation. The greatest breach of contract came with President Ahidjo's announcement made at National Assembly on 6 May 1972, which advanced a national referendum by which the dissolution of the federation orchestrated to make the country one 'united republic'.³⁹ Without federal lines, the Anglophone minority found itself forced to assimilate to the ways of the Francophone majority, losing whatever semblance of autonomy they had. The 1972 Constitution placed broader political powers in the hands of the president and marked the country's progression into a centralised one-party state.

The downward political spiral stopped momentarily in 1982 when President Ahidjo would decide to hand over power to Paul Biya Mvondo, a cabinet minister whom he had groomed. This news, which was welcomed nation-wide, proved short-lived. Ahidjo may have resigned as president but he attempted to hold onto power as the ruling party's chairman.⁴⁰ A power tussle between them resulted in the former president being accused of plotting against Biya as the failed coup attempt of 1984 had been led by people of the predominantly Muslim Grand North - Ahidjo's region of origin. The former president was exiled and his stronghold was split into three provinces in what has been recognised as a divide-and-rule strategy.⁴¹ From then on, Cameroon has had ten major administrative regions and the Northerners became yet another politically disfavoured group, benefiting little in terms of development investment.

³⁸ Ebune (2016b)

³⁹ Konings (1999)

⁴⁰ Ebune (2016b)

⁴¹ Fonchingong (2005)

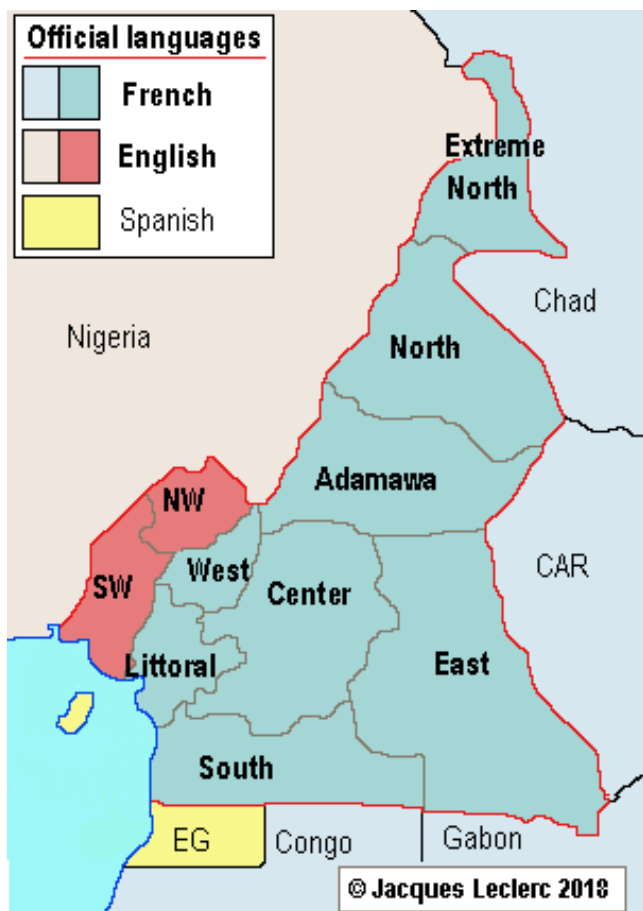


Figure 7: Administrative regions of the Republic of Cameroon as of 1986

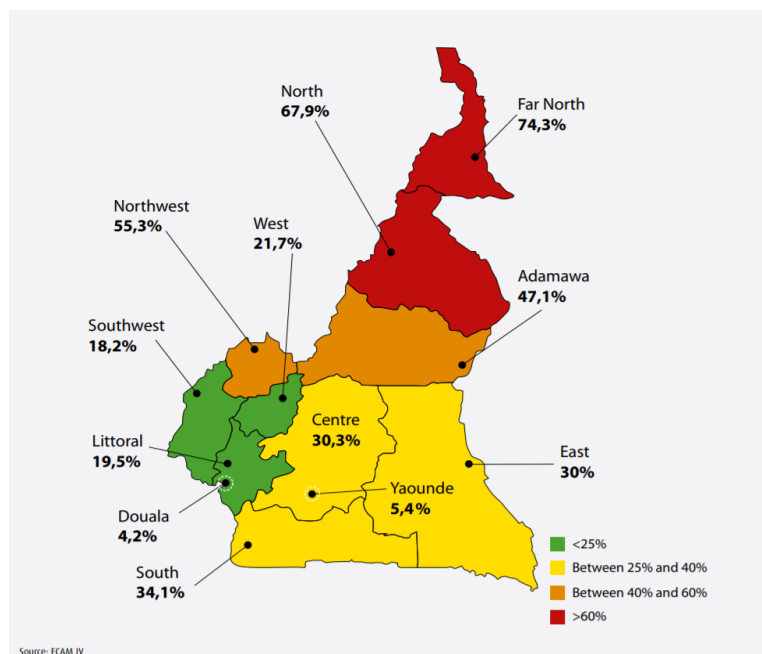


Figure 8: Illustration of disproportionate development across regions in Cameroon

New constitutional changes following the coup attempt heralded yet another change in Cameroon's official appellation, from the 'United Republic of the Cameroon' to the 'Republic of Cameroon'. From then on the scope of presidential powers has been continually broadened to the point that the president currently retains executive powers to appoint and dismiss all government officials (prime minister included), administrators of public educational institutions, as well as the power to nominate 30% of Senate members and all the judges of the supreme court/constitutional council. Conversely, the Prime Minister's position (being de facto Anglophone) was relegated to a prop with very limited executive powers and no right to succession.

As this is a presentation of the research context for the understanding of the research subjects, it is therefore worth highlighting the Cameroonian story the women of this study have known. As all participants are of the millennial generation with the oldest among them born in 1987, they have all known only one president, Paul Biya, who rules the country by decrees. Despite the fact that Biya introduced multi-party politics in 1990 following protests in the Anglophone regions, the Cameroon these women have known has always qualified as a dominant party system with limited freedom of speech and the regular use of armed forces to intimidate protesters.⁴²

The Cameroon these women grew up in was one of many consequential events. It was in that time that Cameroon experienced its greatest economic crisis resulting from a combination of poor governance and the dramatic drop in prices offered for export commodities.⁴³ During the period of recession, Cameroon's GDP declined by 30% and the country enforced tough Structural Adjustment Program measures such as; cuts in civil servants' salaries and access to subsidised utilities, the forceful retirement of older civil servants, the privatisation of state and parastatal enterprises, and an overall reduction of government spending by 18%, which meant limited support of social services. They have mostly known a Cameroon with a struggling economy as the 1994 devaluation of the

⁴² International Crisis Group (2010)

⁴³ Tambi (2015)

FCFA added to the crisis, and Cameroon would only begin slow recovery from the crisis by the year 2000.

The Cameroon they have lived through is one of multiple insurrections; the 1990s alone saw at least three different instances of prolonged protests and government suppression which precipitated the introduction of the multiparty system, higher education reforms, and constitutional amendments for decentralisation.⁴⁴ They would meet Cameroon in a time of social cohesion over international recognition in football and music, and yet reinforced division as the government extensively applied the regional/ethnic balancing policy as an instrument of divide and rule.⁴⁵ It was in their era, the year 2000 specifically, that the Cameroon government would achieve its only Millennium Development Goal of universal basic education by making primary education free for all children and subsidising secondary education.⁴⁶

They were raised at a time when Cameroon made a lot of commitments to its human development and pledged - at least for the sake of international funding - to address the inequalities that plagued the country. Yet in reality the context within which these women were groomed remains systemically sexist; recent statistics show that Cameroonian women occupy only 13% of the decision-making positions in the country, and they own only 2% of land despite accounting for about 80% of the country's food production.⁴⁷

To this end, it is necessary to note that the Cameroon these women have known is defined by patriarchy, with all ethnicities- even those like the Kom where inheritance is matrilineal -⁴⁸ upholding men as the superior gender in strength and intellectual ability. In general, these women were raised with the Cameroonian construction of gender which presents masculinity as defined by virility, income and employability, physical strength and athleticism, stoicism, the ability to command control, and Western exposure among others.⁴⁹ Conversely they were socialized to perceive their femininity and their relative

⁴⁴ Takougang (2019); Konings (1999)

⁴⁵ Monga (2000)

⁴⁶ UNESCO (2016)

⁴⁷ Pemunta (2017)

⁴⁸ Taoyang (2019)

⁴⁹ Atanga (2012)

worth as dependent on domesticity, morality, humility, physical attractiveness, fertility and general desirability to men.

However, apropos to how the socio-political history outlined herein rendered Cameroon the diverse and complex country now nicknamed 'Africa in miniature', so too it has made Cameroonians and by extension experiences of Cameroon diverse depending on how one identifies. Hence, depending on other identifiers (such as religion, linguistic group, tribe, and economic/educational background) these women's experiences of Cameroon are vastly different even in the same national context.

Part II

Challenge the power/knowledge structures and discourses through which Indigenous peoples have been framed and known.

~ Aileen Moreton-Robinson (2016)

We do not just risk repeating history if we sweep it under the carpet, we also risk being myopic about our present.

~Chimamanda Adichie (2009)

Academic rigor demands that the researcher provides evidence of having covered previous scholarly work to support what their own study questions and to delineate the additional value of what they propose to find. This part of the thesis fulfils this requirement by offering a review of literature on the subjects of this research; higher education, empowerment, and the reality of the Cameroonian women assumed to be empowered on account of their higher education.

Through the chapters in this part, I outline what is already known by scholars [on Cameroon, higher education and empowerment], identify areas of agreement and debate, and present the re-storied narratives of some of the research participants. In this way, this part differs from the norm by its inclusion of participant narratives (re-storied data) as a form of literature, consequently reviewing both primary and secondary research. In sum, this part lays the foundation for later interrogation and outlines the contributions of the research by developing this research's problem with the available literature and underlining gaps which must be filled and problems that arise from what has been covered.

6. EMPOWERMENT: AS CONCEIVED IN THEORY AND REQUIRED IN REALITY

Philosopher Jay Drydyk has noted that it is “customary to begin a conceptual article on empowerment by lamenting how confused the concept has become over the last decade” (Drydyk 2013, pp. 249). In keeping with this, I note the modern-day obscurity of the concept of empowerment. Aside from the fact that the multidisciplinary usage of the concept encourages diverse and debatable conceptualisations, capitalist attempts to profit off of revolutions has rendered the word ‘empowerment’ a fashion statement. For example, you can find the phrase *‘empowered women empower women’* on a slogan t-shirt sold at a mall despite the fact that such a t-shirt was likely produced in a sweat-shop by underpaid and disempowered women.

Having noted the contemporary convolution of the concept of empowerment, in this chapter I focus on reviewing relevant literature on women’s empowerment specifically. The chapter has five sections. The first offers an overview of the origins and development of women’s empowerment rhetoric. The next two sections present the perspectives of the Capability Approach and African-feminist theory on women’s empowerment. The fourth section explores the reality of women’s empowerment - or lack thereof – in the Cameroonian context. Finally, the closing section will put forward the research standpoint on empowerment scholarship and intimate the relationship between education and women’s empowerment ahead of the chapter which follows.

6.1 A brief history of women’s empowerment: concept, practice, problems

A number of scholars have traced the evolution of the concept of empowerment over time. According to Batliwala (2007), the use of the word empowerment stretches as far back as the Reformation period, although the concept itself expressed in other linguistic equivalents was evident in many other historic struggles for social justice, including some in her own native India. Lincoln and colleagues (2002) for their part trace the etymology of the word empowerment and assert that the first recorded use of the word “empower” was in the seventeenth century by Hamon L'Estrange in his book 'The Reign of King Charles'. They state that this first usage was to infer the idea of authorising or licensing - to

give power to - so to speak. Yet, some two hundred years later in 1849, the Oxford English Dictionary would define "empowerment" as "the action of empowering and/or the state of being empowered" (Lincoln et al. 2002, pp. 3). Alternatively, Unterhalter (2015) outlines the use of the word across four historical incidents; Civil War in 17th century England, the education and social change activism of Highlander School, Tennessee in the 1940s, Dr. King's writing during America's civil rights movement of the 1960s, and Angela Davis' 1987 address at Spelman College. Unterhalter's outline attempts to connect the concept's usage to reflexive education qualities and elements of the capability approach which she asserts would 'contribute to deepening ideas about equalities, social justice, women's rights and solidarities' (Unterhalter 2015, pp. 21).

Irrespective of the variations in their accounts, the majority of scholars (see Rowlands 1995; Lincoln et al. 2002; Batliwala 2007; Stromquist 2015) agree that the term was revitalised and gained widespread usage from the second half of the twentieth century as a result of work by a collective of feminist researchers, activists, and leaders of the Global South in a network known as DAWN (Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era). Calvès (2009, pp. 3) notes that although early theories of empowerment were inspired by the conscientisation approach developed by the Brazilian educationalist Paulo Freire in his 1968 book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, it is the 1987 publication of *Development, Crises and Alternative Visions: Third World Women's Perspectives* (Sen & Grown 1987) which laid down the broad principles for a new approach to the role of women in development labelled the "empowerment approach" (Moser 1989; Calvès 2009, pp. 4).

It is at the point of this publication and the proliferation of the approach that the misuse and abuse of the concept of empowerment seemingly began (Batliwala 2007; Calvès 2009). Calvès (2009) reports that following the release of Sen and Grown's 1987 book, there was an upsurge of feminist publications on empowerment, gender, and development. Batliwala likewise asserts that the concept was gradually co-opted by multi-lateral corporations, neo-con political movements and more from then on (Batliwala 2007, pp. 558). This turning point in the use of the concept reportedly distorted what is an intrinsically political term meant to "confront and transform unjust and unequal power

relations” into yet another buzzword in development theory and practice (Rowlands 1995; Batliwala 2007; Calvès 2009; Cornwall 2016, pp. 343).

This is evident in how funding of scholarship and work on women's issues has been increasingly made dependent on whether empowerment is a stated goal, without clarity on just how women's empowerment is understood, identified, or measured, nor a clear strategy for enabling it (Batliwala 1995). Still, the lack of clarity in conceptualisations of empowerment over time is equally a consequence of its usage across various fields. In fact, as empowerment literatures cannot be confined to any single discipline, I have had to ‘read around’ various branches of scholarship ranging from feminist studies to economics to literature and psychology in order to provide a comprehensive review of the term.

Scholarship reflects the multiplicity in conceptualisations of empowerment and approaches to enabling [women's] empowerment. The variety of definitions of empowerment across and within branches of scholarship is reported by Drykdyk (2013) who illustrates the conceptual confusion with the Human Development Report of the year 2000, saying that one “encounters ‘empowering’ everywhere, but with various meanings and no discussion of what they have in common” (2013, pp. 249). Though Ibrahim and Alkire (2007, pp. 380-382) best capture the variety of conceptualisations of empowerment with a table summarising 29 definitions they identified in development literature, deviations across disciplines can be seen in the following definitions.

McWhirter (cited in Rowlands 1995, pp. 103) defines empowerment from a counselling perspective as:

The process by which people, organizations or groups who are powerless (a) become aware of the power dynamics at work in their life context, (b) develop the skills and capacity for gaining some reasonable control over their lives, (c) exercise this control without infringing upon the rights of others and (d) support the empowerment of others in the community.

Some economic definitions of the concept include that which has been put forward by multilateral organisations such as the World Bank (2006, pp. 4), stating that:

Empowerment is about making markets work for women (at the policy level) and empowering women to compete in markets (at the agency level).

Otherwise, feminist interpretations of empowerment often focus on power, underscoring transformation as the goal. This is the case with Batliwala (1993) who presents the collective work done on the conceptualisation of empowerment by grassroots women in South Asia, defines empowerment as:

A process, and the results of a process, of transforming the relations of power between individuals and social groups and women's empowerment specifically as "the transformation of the relations of power between men and women, within and across social categories of various kinds." (Batliwala 2007, pp. 560)

Aside from the single definition highlighted above other feminist scholarship on empowerment generally notes that in the process of the proliferation, co-opting and commodification of the word empowerment; the transformative potential and revolutionary stance on which the concept was founded has been lost (Calvès 2009; Cornwall 2014, 2016; Batliwala 2015).

Similar variation is observed with regards to approaches put forward to explicate the process of empowerment and the facilitation of empowerment. One of the earliest applications of an empowerment approach in the field of development was by Zambian gender activist and development practitioner Sarah Longwe (Tsikata & Darkwah 2014, pp. 81). Longwe adopted Molyneux's (1985) differentiation of women's Practical and Strategic Gender Interests/Needs⁵⁰ and asserts that it is only when women's strategic

⁵⁰ **Practical gender needs/interests** are the needs of women or men that relate to responsibilities and tasks associated with their traditional gender roles or to immediate perceived necessity. Responding to practical needs can improve quality of life but does not *challenge gender divisions or men's and women's position in society*. Practical needs generally involve issues of *condition or access*.

Strategic gender needs/interests concern the position of women and men in relation to each other in a given society. *Strategic interests may involve decision-making power or control over resources. Addressing strategic gender interests assists women and men to achieve greater equality and to change existing gender roles and*

needs are met that you actually begin to empower them. Longwe's framework known as the Gender Equality and Empowerment Framework equally engaged with Moser's triple role framework to design an original one encompassing five stages of empowerment - welfare, access, conscientisation, participation and equality of control; with welfare as the lowest level and equality of control as the highest level of empowerment.

Conversely, Rowlands' (1997) categorisation of power is an approach to understanding and appraising women's empowerment favoured by feminist scholars who assert that there is a need to state clearly that empowerment is about power. Rowlands' (1997) approach underscores the centrality of power in empowerment by presenting four dimensions with implications of power lost (disempowerment) or power gained (empowerment). Rowlands' (1997) categorisation of power has been used to operationalise the concept of empowerment in work by other scholars; notably Ibrahim and Alkire (2007) who use it to develop a comparable list of empowerment indicators. Luttrell and colleagues in *Understanding and Operationalising Empowerment* (2009, pp. 8), present a tabular outline of Rowlands' categories of power and their implication (see below).

Type of power relation	Implications for an understanding of empowerment
Power Over: ability to influence and coerce	Changes in underlying resources and power to challenge constraints
Power To: organise and change existing hierarchies	Increased individual capacity and opportunities for access
Power With: increased power from collective action	Increased solidarity to challenge underlying assumptions
Power from Within: increased individual consciousness	Increased awareness and desire for change

Figure 9: Rowlands' (1997) Categorisation of Power illustrated by Luttrell et al. (2009, pp. 2)

stereotypes. Gender interests generally involve issues of *position, control, and power* (adapted from CEDPA 2000, pp. 160). Strategic gender needs are identified as those which, if addressed, will transform relations of subordination between men and women (Moser 1989).

The range of variation in approaches to empowerment is captured by Monkman (2011) who presents and reviews approaches such as:

- Stromquist's four-part model of empowerment. An approach which entails four dimensions by which to evaluate empowerment - the cognitive (critical understanding of reality), the psychological (self-esteem), the political (awareness of inequalities and capacity to mobilise), and the economic (capacity to generate income).
- Rocha's Ladder of Empowerment. An empowerment model that focuses on institutions and relations between NGOs and project participants or benefactors and beneficiaries.
- The Empowerment Process Model. Put forward by psychologist Cattaneo and Chapman, it demarcates empowerment as a process where subjects repeat steps in attaining components of self-efficacy, knowledge, competence, action, and impact.
- The Capability Approach. An approach to empowerment deemed best for its consideration of "the particularities in individual lives and life contexts, not assuming that everyone has the same values, priorities or conditions within which they live...emphasising a person's capability to lead the kind of life she values not only by the culmination of alternatives that she ends up with, but by the processes of making choices involved, or one's agency freedom, to choose alternatives within her ability and context" (Monkman 2011, pp. 7-8).

Despite neither a universally applicable definition nor consensus in approach to empowerment in the literature, there is recognisable overlapping in the way the concept is understood and described. Scholars (see Malhotra & Schuler & 2005; Mosedale 2005; Ibrahim & Alkire 2007; Murphy-Graham 2012) have acknowledged more commonalities than deviations in explications of empowerment and agree that there is a great deal of overlapping of terms. Murphy-Graham (2012, pp. 15) specifically notes "autonomy," "agency," "domestic economic power," and "participation" as frequently used adjectives and/or synonyms for "empowerment" and identified four main points of consensus in the

literature which conceptualise empowerment. In her words, the empowerment literature generally agrees that:

1. To be empowered, one must have been disempowered. Women's empowerment is relevant because as a group women are disempowered relative to men.
2. Empowerment is a process rather than a product. People are empowered or disempowered relative to others and to themselves at an earlier time.
3. Empowerment cannot be bestowed by a third party. External agencies or programmes cannot empower women but can facilitate the conditions for women to empower themselves.
4. Empowerment implies human agency and choice. A fundamental shift in perception or an inner transformation is essential to the formulation of different choices. Empowerment includes people making decisions on matters that are important in their lives and being able to carry them out.

(Murphy-Graham 2012, pp. 15-16)

Despite the benefit of recognizing the above as key elements of empowerment visible in the broad range of scholarship, I must note that the dissimilarities in conceptualizations and practice of empowerment are not necessarily a problem to be harmonized. As earlier work by feminist-economist Naila Kabeer (1999 pp. 442) suggests: the problem with conceptualizing and measuring empowerment and by extension the reason for variations in presenting the idea of empowerment is caused by the fact that studies differ on “the dimensions of empowerment which they choose to focus on, and in whether they treat power as an attribute of individuals or a property of structures”.

Kabeer's (1999) critical review presents the focus on certain dimensions like resources, consciousness, agency and achievements as problematic when conceptualizing and measuring empowerment. She posits that although these are undoubtedly key elements of empowerment, the decision of what conceptualization ought to be used (and therefore what dimension ought to be prioritized) depends greatly on the context and needs. Cognizant of this, the following sections examine the conceptualisation and approaches

to women's empowerment put forward by the Capability Approach and African-feminist thought specifically to establish this specific study's conceptual standpoint.

6.2 Empowerment within the Capability Approach

In Part I of this work, the Capability Approach was introduced as a normative framework originated by Amartya Sen “that gives a central role to the evaluation of a person's achievements and freedoms in terms of his or her actual ability to do the different things a person has reason to value doing or being” (Sen 2009, pp. 16). The Capability Approach has gained traction in development scholarship and practice over the last couple of decades, having proved that it is “theoretically superior and facilitates the understanding of individuals as human beings, and not simply as human capital, or resources for economic growth” (Keleher 2007, pp. 204). Increasing acknowledgement of the benefits of Capabilitarian assessment has contributed to definitions of empowerment in development literature becoming recognisably capabilities-based. Such definitions include some widely used World Bank definitions.

Empowerment is the expansion of assets and capabilities of poor people to participate in, negotiate with, influence, control, and hold accountable institutions that affect their lives (Narayan-Parker 2002, pp. 11).

[Empowerment is] the process of enhancing an individual's or group's capacity to make effective choices, that is, to make choices and then to transform those choices into desired actions and outcomes (Alsop, Bertelsen & Holland 2006, pp. 10).

It is worth noting, as Keleher (2007) does, that neither Amartya Sen nor Martha Nussbaum (who follows him as the scholar who has contributed most to developing the framework) explicitly define the word empowerment. Yet, these definitions and many others by scholars using the Capability Approach (such as Raynor's in Walker and Underhalter 2007) are rooted in Sen's work, which sees the expansion of opportunities and freedoms (i.e. capabilities) as what defines development.

Though Capabilitarian definitions of empowerment may slightly differ with regards to aspects which are emphasised from one scholar to the next, Keleher (2007, pp. 100) observes that that Capability Approach offers “two fundamental and very useful conceptions of empowerment: (1) agency and (2) capability-set expansion”. That is to say, empowerment within the Capability Approach is generally depicted as the expansion of the individuals’ capability sets - particularly their substantive freedom - and necessary agency to enable them to live a life that they have reason to value. In his closest attempt to a definition of empowerment, Sen himself places emphasis on the acquisition of ‘agency and voice’ as essential to empowering women (Sen 1999, pp. 193; Stromquist 2015). It is from this that some scholars interpret Sen’s definition of empowerment from his definition of agency as “what a person is free to do and achieve in pursuit of whatever goals or values he or she regards as important” (Ibrahim & Alkire 2007, pp. 384).

Still, as Keleher’s (2007) work suggests, the Capability Approach offers a great deal more to the conceptualisation of empowerment than economic growth based definitions given its recognition of multiple dimensions such as the meaning, role and process (how) of empowerment. First and foremost, Capabilitarian scholarship has contributed substantially to conceptualisations of empowerment by registering the failure of solely income-generation methods to empower women, and countering the previously predominant belief in the development sector that empowerment is largely, if not exclusively, about economic employment, productivity, and other forms of market participation (Keleher 2007).

In addition, the Capability Approach’s perspective on empowerment makes considerable difference by “acknowledging the particularities in individual lives and life contexts, and not assuming that everyone has the same values, priorities or conditions within which they live” (Monkman 2011, pp. 7). In this way, the Capability Approach disavows generalisations of empowerment on the grounds of relativity in conversion factors (opportunities and constraints), and individuality in desired functionings as what is considered valuable by one person may not necessarily be considered valuable by another.

Yet again, the emphasis on agency in Capabilitarian conceptualisations underscores the necessity of people having the freedom and ability to make decisions about their lives and well-being for them to be considered empowered. That is to say, conceptualising empowerment within the Capability Approach underscores that people are not passive recipients of social welfare provision but active subjects who must themselves decide what kind of development they want (Alkire & Deneulin 2009), if any.

Amartya Sen (1999, pp. 31) exemplifies this point when he writes that, “if a traditional way of life has to be sacrificed to escape grinding poverty or minuscule longevity, then it is the people directly involved who must have the opportunity to participate in deciding”. With this view, the Capability Approach rejects what is termed ‘justice monism’, the idea that there is a single ideal way of social organisation and development (Khader 2018).

Furthermore, the Capability Approach lends to the conceptualisation of empowerment with its differentiation between what is possible and what is achieved, as well as looking beyond one’s ability to achieve to consider the process through which that achievement comes about. Understanding empowerment from the Capability Approach perspective requires distinguishing between freedoms to function and achieved functioning; acknowledging unlike other conceptualisations that individuals do not always realise what they are capable of (Robeyns 2017). In like manner, Capabilitarian conceptualisations of empowerment as agency recognise that the empowered ought to possess more than one type of agency; first Agency Freedom by which individuals have the ability to realise the objectives they value and pursue (freedoms to function), but also Opportunity Freedom by which the individual has agency in the process of their empowerment. In this way, the Capability Approach purports that empowerment not only means increased opportunities, but equally increased agency and voice of the individuals expressed and engaged in the process of expanding opportunities (Drydyk 2013).

Aside from the rich contributions made by the Capability Approach to the understanding of women’s empowerment as is evident in conceptual scholarship, empirical studies also illustrate the Capabilitarian perspective on women’s empowerment through education in particular. As Robeyns (2006) reports, the Capability Approach recognises education as

valuable for both intrinsic and instrumental reasons; on one hand having access to education and necessary knowledge to flourish is seen as a valuable capability on its own, and on the other education is valued as instrumentally important for the expansion of other capabilities (Robeyns 2006, pp. 78). As a result, studies employing the Capability Approach tend to use education as an aspect by which they evaluate the women's empowerment and advocate for education as necessary for empowering women through the widening of capability sets and the enabling of agency.

Janet Raynor (2007) provides an example of the operationalisation of the Capability Approach to examine girls' empowerment through education. Raynor (2007) questions the claim that Bangladesh had achieved goal three of the MDGs, namely achieving gender parity and equality in primary and secondary education leading to increased empowerment. As many of the empowerment claims and reports had employed loose or undefined conceptions of either education or empowerment and Bangladesh lacked specific education-linked empowerment indicators, Raynor saw need for a thorough investigation of the misleading claims. Her study operationalises the Capability Approach by utilising Nussbaum's list of central capabilities (Nussbaum 2000, 2006). This list holds ten capabilities which Nussbaum asserts are 'necessary for a life with dignity' (Nussbaum 2006) and which if absent in a society means the society is unjust. Raynor considers this list as "elements that make up empowerment" (Walker & Unterhalter 2007, pp. 158), and uses it as a backdrop for identifying ways in which girls' education contributed to the corresponding capabilities and thus, by extension, their empowerment.

In another study by Murphy-Graham (2012), women are considered empowered by virtue of an adult learning programme (SAT) in the Honduras because of a similar recognisable expansion of capabilities on Nussbaum's list. Murphy-Graham (2012) purports that Capabilitarian advocacy of women's education for empowerment is exceptional because it is not emphasised merely for its economic and social benefits but as a way of expanding opportunities. She argues that women are considered empowered by education within the Capability Approach because "it can expand what people are able to be and do... develop their senses, imagination and thought; their ability to reason; and their relationships with and concern for others" and more (Murphy-Graham 2012, pp. 13).

Seeberg (2011) presents another empirical study using the Capability Approach to outline empowerment through education. This study attempted to reveal what mattered to scholarship recipients in China and account for their subjective experience or disempowerment. Rather than assessing empowerment based on Nussbaum's list, Seeberg (2011) identifies wellbeing, agency freedom and achievement of valued functioning as components of empowerment put forward in Sen's (1980) work. Using these three components as the basis of her evaluation, Seeberg (2011) operationalises the Capability Approach's understanding of empowerment as expansion of these components in participants.

Like the above suggest, the empirical research employing the Capability Approach generally sustains the framing of empowerment as a process and outcome of the expansion of individual capabilities - opportunities and freedoms and education the primary 'expander'. Still, some scholars of the Capability Approach have put forward a disclaimer with their promotion of education for empowerment.

Within the earlier mentioned work by Murphy-Graham (2012), the author recognises that not all educational experiences are empowering and makes reference to other scholars (Stromquist 2002; Nussbaum 2003; Walker & Unterhalter 2007) to argue that for empowerment to be achieved, 'real' education must be offered. She goes on to describe 'real' education as that which "challenges the status quo and the ideological forces that operate against women" and acknowledged that this sort of education is "far more challenging to implement" (Murphy-Graham 2012, pp. 23).

Similar disclaimers are made by other Capabilitarian scholars who criticise the tendency of international development discourse to assume all education enhances the freedoms of students, especially girls, and equates years of schooling with degree of empowerment (see Nussbaum 2002, pp. 73; Walker & Unterhalter 2007; Dejaeghere & Lee 2011; Unterhalter, Heslop & Mamedu 2013; Murphy-Graham & Lloyd 2016; Dejaeghere 2020).

In line with their criticisms, such scholars have noted the need for more critical gender appraisals of education and suggest that Capabilitarian assessments of empowerment

ought to go beyond ideas of education expanding fixed capability sets. Unterhalter, Heslop, and Mamedu (2013, pp. 569), for instance report on a project where they operationalised the Capability Approach with the aid of alternate development approaches (such as Women in Development- WID, Gender and Development- GAD and some African-feminist scholarship). In so doing developed more suitable indicators for ranking levels of human development in the context of the project (Tanzania and Northern Nigeria). Although the full theoretical and analytical process is unspecified in the report, the researchers conclude that more empirical investigations need to be launched into the relationship between education and empowerment (Unterhalter, Heslop & Mamedu 2013, pp. 573). This suggests that they think assumptions of direct correlations between education and [women's] empowerment should be made with care, given that the indicators (of what is necessary for empowerment) need to be fine-tuned for every context (as they did with the aid of other approaches). Elsewhere, Unterhalter (2017) emphasises the need for care in Capabilitarian list-based assessments of empowerment; asserting the challenge of measuring such immeasurable concepts in the field of education and development.

With regards to this challenge of better evaluating empowerment from a Capabilitarian perspective, Murphy-Graham and Lloyd (2016) make a substantial contribution with their framework the Capabilities and Empowerment Framework. Drawing from a vast body of literature they reviewed as well as empirical work each author has done in the field of engendering education, the framework shares their understanding of how education can empower girls/women, what is needed for it to do so and what competencies can be looked for and deemed empowering as a result of education. They propose that the framework be used by educationalists to enable them to better design resource material, interventions and generally foster better empowering education. Their framework outlines three core conditions education must meet to deliver on empowerment and four competencies which education ought to have delivered for the students to be considered as having empowered them or to have contributed to their empowerment.

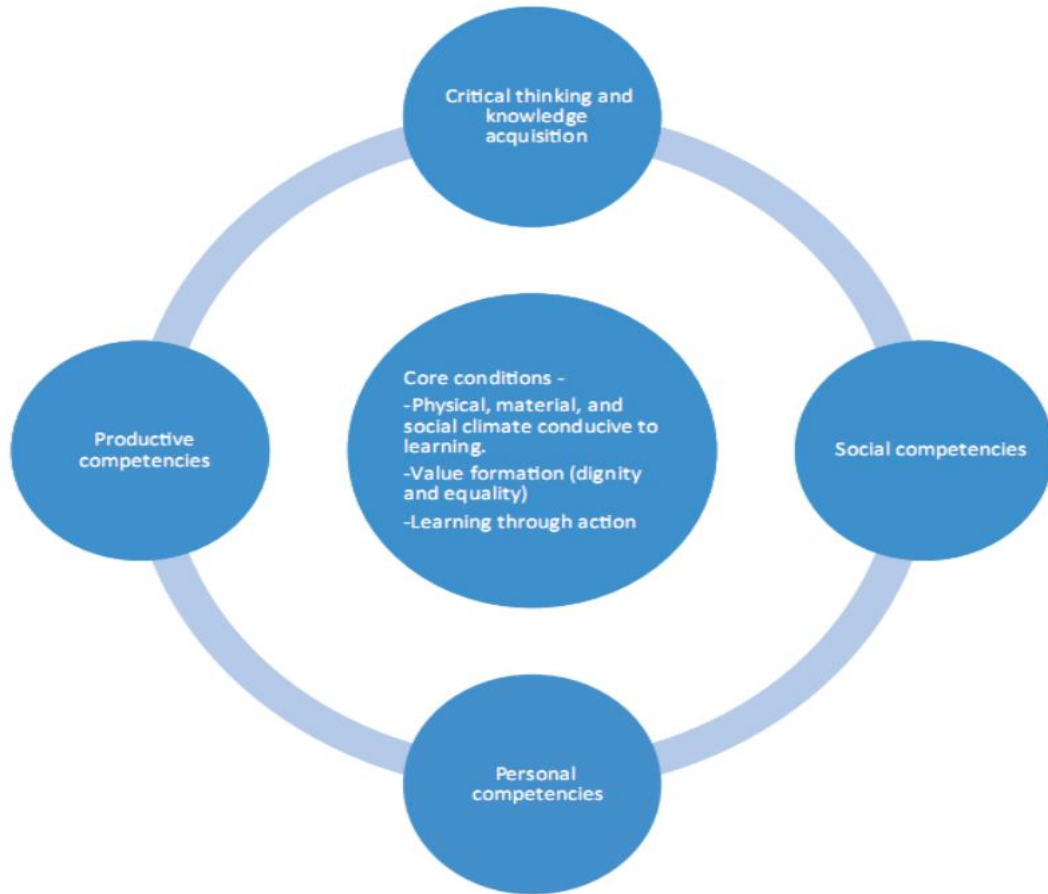


Figure 10: Illustration of the Empowering Education Framework by Murphy-Graham and Lloyd (2016, pp. 562)

As the graphic above illustrates, the framework states that three core conditions education must meet for empowerment are;

1. Physical, material, and sociocultural environments which are conducive to learning,
2. Education which fosters girls' recognition of their dignity and equal worth with others,
3. Education which is pragmatic and experimental, involving action or learning by doing.

Likewise, four competencies which education ought to have delivered to girls in order for it to be considered as having empowered them or contributed to their empowerment are outlined as:

1. Critical thinking and the acquisition of knowledge
2. Personal competencies
3. Social competencies
4. Productive competencies

Murphy-Graham and Lloyd (2016) acknowledge that in practice there will likely be an overlap between core conditions and competencies. Yet, with this framework, they provide an alternative to predominantly list-based assessments of empowerment in Capabilitarian scholarship (a limitation discussed later) and illustrate what empowerment the Capability Approach purports is possible through education.

6.2.1 A critique of Capabilitarian framing of empowerment

Nonetheless, Capabilitarian conceptualisations of empowerment have several failings as identified by various scholars.

Due to its normative nature, the Capability Approach is often criticised as impracticable (Robeyns 2017). The frequent use of lists (like Nussbaum's) to measure the 'immeasurable' within the Capability Approach illustrates the limited pragmatism of the framework and has been found problematic (Unterhalter 2017). Sen has declared that operationalisations of the Capability Approach with lists should be done by means of a democratic process with the involved individual(s) engaged to determine what their most valued functionings are (Keleher 2007). Nussbaum (2011) has equally clarified that her list of capabilities is not final. Still, the fact that Capabilitarian framings of empowerment rarely deviate from established lists suggests the need for more and better engagement by those involved in the construction of lists outlining aspects of empowerment.

Sen's conceptualisation of empowerment has also been widely criticised as incomplete and vague in addressing the issues of power, disempowerment, and how subjects can gain 'agency' in their lives (Keleher 2007; Drydyk 2013; Unterhalter 2015; Stromquist

2015). Feminist critics for instance question Sen's failure to recognise the important role of institutionalised power in not only generating, but also reproducing and consolidating the inequalities faced by women (Keleher 2007; Stromquist 2015). Iversen (cited in Stromquist 2015) notes the inadequacy of Capabilitarian conceptions where she asserts that "the issue at hand for women's empowerment is not merely what you are able to do or be with the goods at your disposal but whether you have command over goods in the first place" (pp. 308). To this end, Capabilitarian framings often project "individualist, depoliticized, vertical, and instrumental" ideas of empowerment through international development organisations (Calvès 2009, pp. 14).

Similar critiques are lobbied by fellow Capabilitarians scholars who note that the conceptualisation and evaluation of empowerment as the expansion of individual capability sets and agency is problematic as it suggests that the promotion of individual self-interest always equates to more social justice. In her appraisal of Capabilitarian accounts of empowerment, Koggel (2013) asserts that for the most part the approach puts too much of an emphasis on individuals and what they can do to enhance their agency failing to pay attention to the relational dimensions of women's (dis)empowerment which is crucial for possibility of durable empowerment. Koggel (2013) affirms Keleher's (2007, pp. 202) conclusion that Sen fails to adequately grasp the relational aspects determining social roles and, in turn, individual power shares.

On this issue, Capabilitarian scholars agree with criticisms levied by anti-imperialist and Afrocentric scholarship scholars against the neoliberal nature of Capabilitarian conceptualisations of empowerment on the grounds that the enhancement of individual interests is not necessarily transformatory. Khader (2018, pp. 149) in particular addresses this, saying that Sen's discussion of "enhancement sometimes suggests that we do not need to make judgments about just social relations at all and that we should instead focus on improving individual well-being. Khader rejects this idea "since it is incompatible with the conception of feminism as opposition to sexist oppression" (2018, pp. 149).

Elsewhere, she asserts that: “Judgments about what improves individual women’s desires and well-being in the short term are distinct from judgments about what improves the status of women as a group...” (Khader 2018, pp. 139).

In the end, the literature reviewed affirms that although conceptualisations and operationalisation of empowerment within the Capability Approach prove to be better than previously economic-growth focused models, they are still inadequate in investigating women’s empowerment. As both Keleher (2007) and Robeyns (2017) note, Sen himself has acknowledged that there is important work yet to be done with regards to the Capability Approach’s perspective on power and empowerment. This suggests that if adequately informed, or merged with another framework or theory, this approach can be exceptionally applied to the conceptualisation and appraisal of empowerment in the Cameroonian context. As this research does exactly this by informing the Capability Approach with African-feminist thought, the following section will present the African-feminist perspective on women’s empowerment.

6.3 Empowerment in African-Feminist scholarship

African feminisms were introduced in Part I as one of the theoretical frameworks this study commits to. It was explained that African feminisms arose from the inadequacy of mainstream [Western] feminist theories to adequately capture the situation of and advocate for the African woman. African-feminists generally offer a more nuanced counter-response to representations of African women and understandings of gender issues in feminist scholarship and organising (Dieng 2019). Hence, this study’s recognition that “interpreting African realities out of context results in distortions, obfuscations in language and often a total lack of comprehension”. Oyewumi (2002, p. 5) demands that African-feminist interpretations of women’s empowerment and what it entails be equally presented.

First, it is necessary to underscore - as the Charter of Feminist Principles for African Feminists declares - that African feminists are also a part of the global feminist movement. As such, African-feminist thought is in accord with the stance of feminist scholarship on the centrality of power, the necessity of transforming distributions of power, and the

definition of empowerment as a process and not an end in both theory and practice (see Rowlands 1995; Cornwall & Anyidoho 2010). Next, it is worth noting that compared to the Capability Approach and other feminist schools of thought, African-feminist scholarship is underdeveloped, meaning that the conceptualisation and operationalisation of empowerment from this perspective is limited.

In fact very little African-feminist scholarship focuses on the conceptualisation and process of women's empowerment specifically. Silva (2004, p. 137) comes closest to doing so where she asserts that the politics of empowerment for African women is that "which searches for the full participation of African women in African societies". Despite limited scholarship, the fact that an African-feminist understanding of empowerment differs from other epistemologies can be deduced from African-feminist criticisms of development discourse on empowerment, the general commitments/principles of African feminisms, and the findings of empirical research by African feminists.

African-feminist critiques and promoters of context-driven strategies to women's issues (see Khader 2018; Swai 2010; Parpart, Connelly & Bariteau 2000; Duisters 2015) have noted that concepts such as empowerment are frequently used in gender and development contexts as a cover for Western interventions and interference which are typically imperial in nature. Tsikata and Darkwah (2014) also levy criticisms of conceptualisations of empowerment for applicability in African contexts whilst reporting on a particularly relevant longitudinal study into Ghanaian women's empowerment. They note that despite the fact that an African gender practitioner - Sarah Longwe - developed one of the earliest approaches to the women's empowerment, there has been an "intellectual silence" (Tsikata & Darkwah 2014, p. 81) on theorising the meaning and measurement of empowerment in Africa. They affirm criticisms of the concept being depoliticised and imprecise, particularly in African scholarship, as it lacks definition "beyond its use mainly as a descriptor of improvements in women's lives" (Tsikata & Darkwah 2014, p. 8). For this reason Tsikata and Darkwah (2014) abide by the more generic definition of empowerment as "the expansion in people's ability to make strategic life choices in a context where this ability was previously denied to them" (Kabeer 2001,

p. 19) for their Pathways of Women's Empowerment Research Project Consortium Research Project.

However, given the criticisms levelled against mainstream definitions of empowerment and considering the principles of African-feminist thought, it can be deduced that African-feminist framings of empowerment would be unique from other conceptualisations. Based on the principles of African feminisms outlined in Part I of this work, it is inferred that conceptualisations of empowerment within African feminisms ought to be characterised by (but are not limited to) the following features:

Recognition of empowerment as a continuous 'process of reclaiming power and redefining' rather than an end

African-feminist conceptualisations of empowerment agree with other feminist scholarship that empowerment is more a process than a destination. However, African-feminist scholars highlight an additional aspect of this process being a repetitive one of reclaiming power and unlearning learned notions of what an African woman is and what her empowerment should be. Ocholla (2014) illustrates this in her auto-ethnographical research exploring the tensions and contradictions of being African, feminist, and an LGBTI activist. She presents decolonial thinking as the unlearning of colonial heritage, and un-training ourselves of what we think we know (or have been taught to believe within coloniality) as imperative to the anti-imperial epistemic response to African women's problems (Ocholla 2014, p. 11). In addition, in earlier work on women's rights and equality in Cameroon, education is emphasised as the foundation to women's empowerment and "the practice of freedom because it creates an opportunity to unlearn and challenge long-standing traditional and stereotypical beliefs about women" (Ambe 1998, p. 269). Meanwhile, other African-feminist research denotes that given cultural sensitivities and repression, the unlearning of patriarchal ideas of masculinities, femininities, and sexual pleasure is evidence of empowering (see Fiaveh 2018; Tamale 2012).

The engagement of both genders in the empowering process

African-feminisms are noted for their rejection of the idea that the feminist agenda can be achieved without the involvement of men. In line with this, African-feminist scholarship on empowerment often features the necessity of men's engagement in the empowerment

process. Renowned African-feminist theologian Mercy Oduyoye (Mouton et al. 2015, p. 276) reportedly posited that:

African men must be willing to share power and to become aware of new possibilities. Power-sharing has become difficult for African men as to have to learn to *unlearn* dictatorial and self-serving attitudes is of course painful. The transformation of power that women seek could enable men to see the importance of service as a key element in the responsible use of leadership positions. Empowering women to succeed in their many critical and laudable life-sustaining projects is a duty expected of African men. To be afraid of women, not to trust women, to exclude women, to treat women with contempt, to patronize women are all signs of insecurity of men afraid to be simply human.

As the excerpt suggests, in African-feminist framings the empowerment of women requires power-sharing by men and for this transformation of power to take place, awareness in men must be raised, and they must be engaged in the unlearning and rejection of patriarchal notions which tend to serve them.

Centring African women as active subjects in evaluations of their (dis)empowerment
African-feminists also denote the necessity of African women's self-efficacy in empowerment approaches. As Ilumoka (in Arnfred & Ampofo 2010) suggests, they must lead the defining of what the focus of their empowerment ought to be and how it ought to be pursued; African women need to be able to define for themselves and also be able to contribute to the implementation of what they have defined.

This importance of contextualising conceptualisations of empowerment and centring African women in the investigation of their (dis)empowerment is demonstrated in the research of Tsikata and Darkwah (2014) mentioned earlier. The scholars reportedly commenced data collection with several hypotheses (such as: the higher a woman's level of education the more indicators of empowerment she is likely to fulfil) and indicators of empowerment developed from prior reviews of literature, several of which were invalidated by their findings or redefined with nuances as a result of the context. This was the case with their hypotheses relating to education and employment. Tsikata and

Darkwah (2014) reported that unlike other countries where similar research project was carried out, the majority of Ghanaian respondents conceptualised their empowerment with regards to access to/control over resource capacity with very few mentioning aspects of political, psychological and sociocultural empowerment. However, these same participants differed from those in other hubs of the project in that they did not rate their empowerment based on how well they were paid or if they enjoyed their work. Rather the researchers noted that participants simply stressed their ability to take care of their needs without depending on men as being empowering “and did not necessarily think that the amount earned was important so long as it allowed them to maintain their families or assist their husbands to do so. Thus, many of the 70% of women who were earning below the minimum wage in our sample considered themselves empowered” (Tsikata & Darkwah 2014, p. 85).

Likewise, their findings disavowed their expectations of higher levels of education guaranteeing more empowerment, as the more educated participants recorded very little difference in level of empowerment from the educated participants aside from difference in the sector in which they worked.

In respect to this emphasis on recognising what is valued by the subjects of the specific context, African-feminist and Capabilitarian scholars are in accord.

A requirement of collective empowerment, a goal of interdependence rather than independence

African feminisms like other anti-imperial feminisms reject the conceptualisation of empowerment as an individualistic commitment. Empirical research by Tsikata and Darkwah (2014) affirms this as findings present two main categories of definitions of empowerment by Ghanaian women; definitions which presented empowerment as an individual process and those which recognised it as a collective endeavour. They report that a good portion of respondents did not see empowerment as limited to the ability to expand one's life choices, but also the ability to empower others. This affirms, as African-feminist thought contends, that both personal commitment and collective engagement is necessary for women's empowerment.

The African-feminist framing of empowerment not only rejects individualistic approaches to empowerment as purported by Capabilitarian conceptualisations, but equally critiques Western feminist projections of the 'independent woman' as the goal of empowering. These seemingly well-intended ideals of 'individualism' and 'independence' as strategies for empowerment are recognised as harmful in the long run to African women. With regards to individualism, Khader (2018, p. 50) asserts "anti-imperialist feminists worry that individualist commitments wrongly make associational losses seem like feminist benefits". In other words, conceptualisations which promote individual advancement as empowerment encourage the idea that individuals can be the exceptions rather than address the general problem. However, African-feminists recognize that while being the only African woman (an exception) may be an individual victory, it is equally evidence of the collective disempowerment of many other African women.

Similarly, African-feminists perceive a problem with the 'independent woman' ideal in empowerment rhetoric on grounds of the feminisation of responsibility (see Khader 2018; Switzer 2018). Khader (2018) rightly correlates the valorisation of independent women to Western industrialisation and capitalism, asserting that the independent women ideal is a product of the narrative which claims that "it is possible for individuals to meet their needs under capitalism, and defects responsibility for ensuring people's survival from communities, kin, and the state" to individual women (Khader 2018, p. 64).

African-feminist scholars thus recognise that empowering African women to be "independent women" merely implies that they take on more roles, earn more, etc. to warrant respect and equity which should be theirs by default, and that this shifts focus from the systemic injustices which requires them to work harder than men for the same results. To this end, conceptualisation of empowerment by African-feminist theories, such as Oyewumi's (1997) Complementarity, would accentuate interdependency rather than independence. In this way, African-feminists recognise that independence as we know it is encouraged because of systemic failings - amplified by the imposition of Western formal economy - but that interdependence (such as complementarity) is more sustainable in the long run.

Considerations of contextual history and critical consciousness of multivariate intersecting oppressions

Finally, African-feminist scholars stress the consideration of the history and political-economy of African women for critical consciousness in the evaluation of their (dis)empowerment. African-feminist consciousness demands the recognition that African women's experiences are complex and heavily influenced by external and internal changes over the course of history. Although there have always been some gender inequalities in African societies, religious crusades and colonialism introduced more. As such, being empowered within African-feminist framings would require consciousness of the multivariate nature of oppressions and the analysis of African women's issues historically. Such consciousness would enable an analysis of African societies which retains what is of value to African women and rejects those aspects that work to their detriment (AWDF 2006). To this end, an African-feminist framing of empowerment espouses intersectionality and emphasises the fact that African women do not live single-issue lives. In fact, as African-feminist theorist Molaria Ogundipe-Leslie (1994) outlines in her book *Re-Creating Ourselves*, African women have at the very least "six mountains on their back" which they must overthrow for their empowerment.

She lists the first one as "oppression from outside" (colonialism and neo-colonialism); the second one as oppression "from traditional structures"; the third one is African women's perceived "backwardness"; the fourth is man; the fifth is the African woman's color/her race; and the sixth is herself (Ogundipe-Leslie 1994, p. 28).

As Silva (2004) asserts, "those metaphorical mountains represent the situations that contribute to the African woman's subjugation". The consciousness of the plurality of 'mountains' contributes to African-feminist framings of empowerment and its insistence upon the acknowledgement that although an African woman may be empowered to overthrow one of two of the mountains, several more would remain. For this reason, African-feminist framings of empowerment underscore the multidimensionality of empowerment needs as a result of the multivariate ways in which African women experience disempowerment. Economic empowerment without political empowerment is

not enough. Legislative equality without sociocultural liberation is inadequate and considerations of empowerment from an African-feminist perspective must reflect this.

6.3.1 Women's empowerment through education? Critiquing the African-feminist take

Although the African-feminist take on empowerment presents significant considerations to the conceptualising of African women's empowerment, it remains underdeveloped with very little operationalisation and application in fields other than literary scholarship.

Several African-feminist scholars (see Swai 2010; Tsikata & Darkwah 2014) acknowledge the inadequacy of Western theoretical frames but employed them or a combination of them in their studies related to African women's empowerment. Swai (2010) for instance employed a combination of social historical theory, feminist theory, and critical discourse analysis, postmodern and postcolonial theories.

African-feminist scholarship equally falls short with regards to assessments of women's empowerment in and through education. Despite the principles and theoretical commitments of African-feminists to decolonising and unlearning for the liberation of African women, there is a lacuna in work on decolonising education for women's empowerment in the African context. Rather, with a few exceptions, most African-feminist scholarship touts education as pertinent to African women's empowerment and offers little criticism of educational content itself and the potential influence on African women (see Arnfred & Ampofo 2010; Mouton et al. 2015; Makaudze 2016).

Swai's (2010) work is particularly exceptional in that it levels substantial critique against the generally acclaimed virtues of modern education for African women and the very notion of empowerment. Based on empirical research which focused on the construction of Tanzanian women's disempowerment and the marginalisation of African knowledge systems, Swai (2010, p. 7) argues that:

The notions of women empowerment are in fact mechanisms for women's dislocation and have always been used to suppress women's agency for political purposes.... for shaping women to fit into patriarchal and capitalist agenda...marginalising women's knowledge systems.

Swai (2010, p. 8) goes on to assert that African women's disempowerment is in part a product of education saying:

I believe that education shapes [African] women's predisposition toward certain predetermined goals without considering their realities, and I see this as problematic because it is inherently normative, often unknowingly so; it is a way of avoiding or hiding a foundational element of the hegemony of patriarchy and capitalism... the institution of education for women is by no means innocent and impartial. Education seeks to control, manipulate, and shape the worldviews of participants and helps in dismantling other knowledges and ways of knowing, denying them autonomy and capacity to contribute to policies and formal practices and should therefore be assessed more critically than has been the case in the past. The study shows how education for empowerment is loaded with patronising, distancing, and "Othering" agenda, replete with chauvinistic binaries of "us" versus "them," "backward" versus "developed," and more. These types of binaries shape women's thinking and behaviour, regarding good and bad, normal and abnormal, and mainstream and periphery.

With such reasons, scholars like Switzer (2018) and Swai (2010), who assess development rhetoric on African women's empowerment, argue that education should not be seen as the only way of empowering African women in modern society, as there are in fact multiple strategies which should be considered and that we should be more critical of education's enhancing potential. Such contributions recommend a deeper assessment and African-feminist critique which asks:

- i. If African women would be considered disempowered but for the ideas that associate lack of modern education with ignorance or education with freedom and empowerment.
- ii. What the emancipatory potential of education for African women is given – as Swai (2010, p. 6) notes the "insistence of science as the only mode of knowing" and lack of acknowledgement of "the knowledge systems that

African women have developed for many centuries and that have sustained their lives and communities for generations”.

6.4 Women's empowerment in practice

Scholarly debates aside, it is necessary to recognise that women's empowerment is not merely an abstract concept to be theorised. In introducing the contextual background of this study earlier in this work, I noted that although Cameroonian women (as women in any patriarchal state) generally experience subordination on the basis of their gender the extent of their experiences of disempowerment would depend on other factors (like age, family structure, linguistic group and religion).

In this regard, there is a need to remark on the uniqueness of theorizing, measuring and working for empowerment in this context. With this section and its subsections I therefore aim to contextualize the limited scholarly and development practitioner literature on empowerment in Cameroon to demonstrate what sort of empowerment is expected and required versus what the actual status of women is in Cameroonian setting.

The situation of women's (dis)empowerment in Cameroon

The status of women in Cameroon is best described as 'good on paper'. Cameroon's constitution proclaims equal rights for women and men and the government has made several commitments to gender justice via international covenants such as the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (see Time 2014).

Yet, reality contradicts such claims. For one, Cameroon's constitution also legitimises customary laws; such laws vary vastly from one custom (tribe) to the other but generally disavow equality between the genders as the breadth of patriarchal customs recognize a woman as property of her husband (as he has to pay a dowry in order to marry her) and limits a woman's role to working for her husband and bearing children (Cheka 1996 pp. 42). The legitimacy of customary laws in Cameroon and the failure of government to efficiently supervise the enforcement or harmonization of such laws with the civil law leaves the average Cameroonian woman susceptible to abuse and disempowerment

(Cheka 1996; Kiye 2015). This equally explains why women of one region would be more or less disempowered than women from another region; customary laws being cultural artifacts are often linked to the religion of the region and as a result respect of different customary laws instead of a harmonized national code results in different power dynamics across different regions, particularly those with variations in Christian and Muslim populace.

Even more contradictory to the government's claims of commitment to gender equality is the fact that neither CEDAW nor the Maputo Protocol (both of which have now been ratified) have seen effective translation into laws for legal applicability. Country reports note that this inapplicability of the international conventions leaves many Cameroonian women helpless as there is no legal recourse for justice and accountability in the face of normalised abuses such as domestic violence in the country (OECD 2019). In fact, some civil law still discriminates on the basis of gender and reflects patriarchal gender stereotypes (Kiye 2015). Examples of this are the civil code articles which stipulate the man as a head of the household (Articles 108 and 215), names the husband sole administrator of common property in marriage (Article 1421) and grants husbands the authority to object to his wife's employment (Article 74). The above mentioned legal failings have been directly linked to Cameroonian women's limited ownership of resources, limited access to the workplace, limited reproductive rights (as they need consent for use of contraceptives) and their general dependence on their husbands (OECD 2019).

Further evidence of the dire situation of women's (dis)empowerment in Cameroon is registered by (Djapou-Fouthe 2017) who notes that Cameroonian women (despite making up 51% of the population) occupy only 13% of the political and decisionmaking positions in the country. She further reports that over 40% of adolescent girls have reported that they have experienced physical violence since their 15th birthday in Cameroon with perpetrators of this violence often being close relations (Djapou-Fouthe 2017 pp 7). Elsewhere, Cislighi, Mackie, Nkwi and Shakya (2019) note that despite the 2016 changes to Section 356 of the Penal Code which raised the minimum age of marriage for girls (from 15 years to 18 years) making them equal with boys, a considerable

percentage of Cameroonian women are still married before 18 (30%). The authors credit this continued sustenance of child marriage in the country to an intersection of material, institutional, individual and social factors (Cislaghi et al. 2019). This is worth noting because using statistics on gender inequalities (from key bodies such as UN Women, the World Bank and the OECD Development Centre) to paint a picture of women's (dis)empowerment in Cameroon will be inadequate as such data – while necessary for a general overview- fails to capture the likelihood that the mean number (statistic) is likely swayed by women of a certain social group, linguistic background, region, or economic class.

Few studies, acknowledge this intricacy of multiple factors and fewer still capture it. This makes Cislaghi et al. (2019) an exception as they note how family structure (polygynous unions), religion and economic class factor into the likelihood of child marriage and use modern contraception.

Perhaps most relevant to this study is the fact that even schools do not present themselves as wholly empowering for Cameroonian. While findings by FAWE (2013) and Djapou-Fouthe (2017) note that schools are often sites for harassment against girls, Yeba (2015) acknowledges the gender disparities in higher education staff and hence the lack of representation and protection for female students. Based on the statistics she presents; the universities of Yaounde I and II had just 523 female to a total of 2225 male assistant lecturers, out of 116 professors only 6 were female, and of 204 assistant professors on 13 female (Yeba 2015, pp. 182).

In the end, the dire situation of Cameroonian women's (dis)empowerment is affirmed by the country's low scores in global rankings based on gender indices. Recent ranking places Cameroon in a position of 140 out of 162 countries with a Gender Inequality Index (GII) value of 0.56 (UNDP 2018). Likewise, the OECD Development Centre's Social Institutions and Gender Index affirms the high levels of discrimination against women in embedded in Cameroonian social institutions. In their 2019 report, Cameroon is ranked in the 'Very high' social inequality category with an SIGI value of 52% (OECD 2019).

The expectations of women's empowerment in Cameroon

There is general agreement that Cameroonian women are in need of empowerment based on development indices and statistics which studies on Cameroon often use to project women's empowerment either as a variable for the achievement of some development goal (such as improved maternity health) or as a consequence of some development efforts (such as microfinance projects).

Yet, there is little to no literature that actually define what empowerment would mean to Cameroonian women uniquely. Although Nkealah (2018) attempts to conceptualise women's empowerment from Cameroon literature and discusses the complexity of it, Endeley's (2001) work remains the only empirical study to capture the confusion and anxiety around women's empowerment in Cameroon. Endeley's (2001) research investigated whether the notion of women's empowerment exists in Cameroon, focusing on two Cameroonian communities (the Bafaw of the Southwest Region and the Moghamo of the Northwest Region) and how their indigenous notions differ from the understanding of empowerment that constitutes the basis for most development projects in Cameroon. The study caused some confusion around the understanding of women's empowerment in and between both societies. For instance, despite the fact that some Moghamo "respondents considered women's empowerment to be a borrowed, feminist idea with no place in society... a third of the Moghamo respondents reported that they had a phrase - '*bere ekai*' – in their language which signified empowerment" (Endeley 2001, p. 36).

Endeley (2001) concludes from findings in both societies that the concept of women's empowerment is not foreign to cultures in Cameroon, as indigenous languages had vocabulary which acknowledges the reality of women's disempowerment, and need for empowerment. She also noted that most women agreed that their current living conditions are undesirable, and expressed the need for women to be free to pursue their individual interests rather than having to succumb to societal pressures of gender roles. Still, Endeley's (2001) work establishes the need for reconceptualising empowerment in this context as there are different understandings of the concept in and between the communities which are not congruent with what international development practice

purports, particularly with regards to the role of money in empowering women and marriage in disempowering them. As Endeley (2001, p. 39) writes:

Development policy-makers need to be much more critical in analysing cultural contexts, and questioning the likelihood that a given income-generation or credit project will change power relations between women and men. Access to income is not necessarily linked with achieving control over resources, or the right to participate in social, economic, or political decision making. Poverty means that women need to be able to earn and control income, but in some contexts this entails them giving up other kinds of power and status, at least in the short-term... If women are permitted to earn money without retaining control over it or gaining status in their households or the community, men are the ultimate beneficiaries.

From Endeley's (2001) research it is clear that women's empowerment in Cameroon should be understood as achieving control over resources and women's ability to participate in social, economic, or political decision making to their fulfilment. This definition is very similar to that of Silva (2004).

Scholarship aside, national policy documents, like Cameroon's 'Vision 2035' development plan and National Gender Policy acknowledge the disempowerment of Cameroonian women, establish the need for women's empowerment and outline what it would mean in Cameroon.

Cameroon's 'Vision 2035' outlines the nation's aspiration to be an "emerging, democratic country, united in its diversity by 2035" (UN Cameroon 2017 p. 3). Correspondingly, Cameroon's National Gender Policy (2011-2020) was developed with the assistance of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and serves as a guide to ensure the equal rights and participation of both genders in development for the success of Vision 2035 (Republic of Cameroon 2010).

The policy denotes that:

1. Gender equality is an integral factor of all policies, plans and activities.

2. Gender equality does not mean that women and men are the same (differences between sexes are respected).
3. Women's empowerment is a prerequisite to the achievement of gender equality.
4. Promotion of women's participation in economy, society and politics as agents for change is a prerequisite to the achievement of gender equality.
5. Partnership of men and women and means for eradication of gender discrimination contribute to the achievement of gender equality.

Cameroon's National Gender Policy therefore recognises both the reality of Cameroonian women's disempowerment and the variation in how they experience disempowerment. The policy documents (Republic of Cameroon 2010, p. 28-29) clearly states that:

Despite a marked improvement in the situation of women, gender disparities and discrimination persist in many areas of national life... The status of Cameroonian women depends largely on the perception that society has of their role. This perception is inherent in the traditions of different ethnic groups, which are an expression of cultural patterns internalized in the socialization process... Thus, the perception of the woman and the place reserved for her vary from one region to another: a woman knows that, so long as she is from the northern, southern or Western region, her status is determined by the influence of social perceptions. These perceptions also differ, depending on whether we are in the rural area, influenced by traditional beliefs, or in urban areas, inclined to modernity.

In this way the policy makes a case for the contextualisation of empowerment given the diversity in Cameroonian women's experiences. With the policy, the government equally outlines what they deem necessary for Cameroonian women's empowerment with six strategic areas which include education, health, economy and employment, and laws to respect women's rights and improve social and cultural environment. It is worth noting that under the strategic area of education, the policy posits that what is required for women's empowerment through education is:

- To ensure equal access of women and men to education, training and information.
- To change the attitude towards girls' education in the family and the community.
- To reduce drop-out of girls.
- To reduce women's illiteracy rate from 35% to 10%.
- To improve women's access to information, communication and technology (Republic of Cameroon 2010, p. 76).

This suggests that despite the fact that the policy recognises the influence of socialisation on women's (dis)empowerment, the policymakers posit that women's empowerment through education may be determined based solely on increased access and retention of female students in education.

6.5 The need for re-conceptualising women's empowerment

The review of literature in this chapter has presented the development of women's empowerment as a concept, debates in scholarship around its conceptualization and measurement, its place in the relevant theoretical frames and the status of women's (dis)empowerment in Cameroon. At this juncture it is necessary to summarize points of agreement, disagreement and gaps in empowerment literature which emphasize the need for an African-feminist Capability Approach framing of empowerment despite the wealth of already existing perspectives on empowerment.

Literature generally agrees on key elements as characteristic of women's empowerment but there is very little clarity as to exactly how the shifts in power, attainment of agency, and resources and more happen within existing empowerment literature. Likewise, there is substantial disagreement as to whether empowerment is achieved with the attainment of these characteristics by individual women or not until the systematic changes have been made to free them of their oppressions. Depending on which theoretical framing one chooses, one characteristic would be prioritized over others and the opinions of the women themselves may not be sufficiently acknowledged resulting in imperfect measurements of empowerment. Recognizing this, scholars of this field generally agree

on the need for context-specific conceptualizations; while Kabeer (1999) in particular points to the need for triangulation of meanings of empowerment to avoid focus on any certain characteristic for more accurate appraisals of women's empowerment. In the end, the re-conceptualization of Cameroonian women's empowerment and empirical investigation of higher education's enabling of it proposed here responds to existing empowerment literature in multiple ways. The ground-up conceptualization in this empirical study offers to illustrate the difference between ideation and lived reality of (dis)empowerment by including the input of the women of whome empowerment is assumed alongside theoretical perspective. With the African-feminist Capability Approach framing, this study illustrates a triangulation of empowerment meanings for better assessment as proposed by Kabber (1999).

Later in this thesis, this study's reconceptualisation of empowerment will be presented from the combined African-feminist Capability Approach as well as from empirical participant data.

This chapter has presented what empowerment is and ought to be within the necessary theoretical frames and in practice in the context of Cameroon. Literature has been discussed here to underscore the need for re-conceptualising empowerment for this particular research despite the literature and related research already available. The next chapter shall review literature on the possibilities of attaining said empowerment through higher education.

7. HIGHER EDUCATION AND WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT: LIMITLESS PROMISES, LIMITED POTENTIAL

A panellist at my UFS proposal defence asked: "Why would you question the ability of education - any education - to empower? Obviously learning and gaining knowledge equips anyone to do more than you would be able to otherwise." This panellist's query was justified; aside from scholarly work, there is a great deal of evidence recorded in annual development reports by agencies such as UNESCO that firmly establishes education, including higher education, as both intrinsically and instrumentally good. Education is considered as a human right for this very reason; it is recognised as extremely important in the 'making or breaking' of an individual. However, as I defended to that panellist, the benefits of education - many and irrefutable - are not at the centre of this research query. Rather, this study calls attention to the Cameroonian presumptions inspired by our general agreement on higher education being something so beneficial that its utility must be curbed for women lest they become 'too much'.

There is an extensive body of literature on the influence of higher education institutions and university education, on students' behaviours, personal and professional development. A great deal of this literature, however, is based on research in or led by researchers of the Global North (Psacharopoulos 1985; Pascarella & Terenzini 1991, 2005; Guimond 1999). Higher education in Africa is relatively under-researched and scholars have attributed the lack of broad-range research on African higher education to the fact that till recent decades the utility of higher education in Africa was decreed as negligible in comparison to basic education by the World Bank (Doh 2012; Daruhutse & Thompson 2016). Global South scholarship, specifically Afrocentric research, which has been done on higher education tends to focus on the access to, and the contributions of higher education to national - primarily economic - development, and often foregoes the gendered experience of higher education (Morely 2005; Ongera 2016). As a result of this disparity, despite my Afrocentric obligations to draw on primarily African scholarship, a review of the literature on higher education in Africa (as it intersects with women and empowerment) requires that I draw from Global North and South scholarship

interchangeably. Nonetheless, as per the context of this study, African and Cameroonian scholarship pertaining to the promise, problems, and potential of higher education for the empowerment of African and Cameroonian women, will maintain primacy.

As I delved into literature concerning this study's question on whether higher education enables Cameroonian women's empowerment, I realised that one must first ask why this is expected of higher education before they ask if it does. As a result, this chapter is split into subsections which reviews the literature to ascertain what has been addressed regarding whether higher education *should* and *can* do this enabling of women's empowerment prior to assessing if higher education does empower Cameroonian women.

7.1 Should it? The purposes, promises and roles of higher education

At the 27th session of UNESCO's General Conference, higher education was defined as: "all types of studies, training or training for research at the post-secondary level, provided by universities or other educational establishments that are approved as institutions of higher education by the competent state authorities" (Dias 1998, p. 374). Elsewhere, 'sustainable development' is defined as "a process in which human beings are actors of change" and underscored as one of the capacities of higher education by which it is "fulfilling its social responsibility" by educating "those who will be agents and facilitators of sustainable development" (see UNESCO 2010, p. 24). This recognition of higher education's social responsibility to sustainable development means, as Walker and Fongwa (2017, p. 14) assert, that universities should "...not only provide knowledge and skills required by the economy but also contribute to developing thinking citizens, who can function effectively, creatively and ethically as part of a democratic society...people who have an understanding of their society, and are able to participate fully in its political, social and cultural life".

This promised responsibility of higher education has been the subject of debate in international and comparative education scholarship across the years. As Boni and Gasper (2012) wrote on the increasing pressure being put on higher education to prioritise what they perceive as a 'narrow focus' on supporting economic production and growth for

the society, they noted this debate on what role higher education should take in contemporary times. They traced differences in the debate on what higher education should and therefore can be expected to do, down to differences in how higher education is perceived. Some perceive it as a public good given that social development is the ultimate end and others perceive it as a private good that individuals invest in for their own personal returns. In agreement, Oketch (2016, p. 528), proposes that these debates about the role of higher education in development are basically a split in opinion on whether “private benefits from higher education outweigh societal benefits”.

Nevertheless, despite the scholarly debates on what universities should offer, conventions by higher education bodies or related government machineries typically define the purpose of higher education with some general consensus on aspects of [human and social] sustainable development. The following excerpts exemplify the consensus visible across conventions:

Universities must give future generations education and training that will teach them, and through them others, to respect the great harmonies of their natural environment and of life itself. (Magna Carta Universitatum 1988, cited in Boni & Gasper 2012, p. 453).

[Higher education has a responsibility]...to educate, to train, to undertake research and, in particular, to contribute to the sustainable development and improvement of society as a whole. (World Conference on Higher Education 1998, p. 2).

We believe that higher education institutions exist to serve and strengthen the society of which they are part... Universities have the responsibility to foster in faculty, staff and students a sense of social responsibility and a commitment to the social good, which, we believe, is central to the success of a democratic and just society... the university should use the processes of education and research to respond to, serve and strengthen its communities for local and global citizenship. The university has a responsibility to participate actively in the democratic process and to *empower*⁵¹ those who are less privileged. (Talloires Declaration at 2005 Conference in Boni & Gasper 2012, p. 454)

Despite the consensus suggested by the above declarations, the purpose and promise of African higher education has - as a consequence of colonialism - been

⁵¹ Emphasis mine

defined differently over the course of African history. Woldegiorgis and Doevenspeck (2013) reflect on the role of higher education in Africa throughout history and observe that though African higher education can be traced back to the pyramids of Egypt, the obelisks of Ethiopia, and the Kingdom of Timbuktu, these indigenous African knowledge systems and learning spaces were disrupted by colonialism, and higher education on the continent today is a largely European invention (Woldegiorgis & Doevenspeck 2013). The interruption of African history by colonialism meant a redirection of the purpose and dislocation of the promise of higher education for African indigenes. Following independence, Africans inherited dislocated and fragile higher education systems and once again needed to redirect in terms of purpose and expected utility. As per these historical shifts, Woldegiorgis and Doevenspeck (2013) identify that the purpose of and role played by African higher education changed, depending on the period.

It is worth noting that literature on the state of higher education in Africa shows concordance in how socio-political and economic events have shaped not only the role of African higher education but likewise the ability of higher education to meet its desired ends for Africans. In the 1880s colonialism changed the traditional role of cultural preservation and transmission to cater to colonial administrative needs. Similarly, as of the 1980s, institutions headed by former colonial masters would force a change in the role and capacity of higher education in Africa. African higher education institutions would have to move from focusing on their role as agents of development, nation-building, social justice, 'Africanisation' and decolonisation, to assume the role of being agents of modernisation and meet the desired needs of knowledge economies (Doh 2012; Woldegiorgis & Doevenspeck 2013). It is for this reason that higher education in Africa cannot be divorced from its colonial foundations. The proper functioning of higher education to deliver desired and expected ends [such as empowerment] depends on a plethora of factors and involves a wide range of stakeholders. Bateman (2008, p. 9) captures the predicament as follows:

Higher education institutions in Africa increasingly find themselves trapped in an ineluctable impasse: to remain relevant they must satisfy the diverse and often contradictory demands of various stakeholders while doing so with severe limitations to their budgets and other resources. Examples of the range of stakeholder demands include: admit more students; introduce 'more relevant' courses; adjust to social and cultural change; recover costs; charge no tuition fees; produce quality research; cut costs; increase collaboration; become more competitive; produce sound minds; redress the gender imbalance; contribute to development; safeguard the environment; produce work-ready graduates; engage with industry; embrace new technologies; engage with the Diaspora; promote autochthonous knowledge; embrace globalization etc. and achieve all this in a context that promotes the Africanisation of the academy that is based on a well-articulated, relevant Afrocentric philosophy.

Though the above implies the impossibility of meeting a tall order placed on the shoulders of African higher education institutions, notable examples of African-led re-definitions of the role and purpose of higher education affirm that similar opinions/goals are put forward by the institutions themselves. The declarations of conferences such as the African higher education conference at Tananarive,⁵² Madagascar in 1962 and the 1973 session of the Association of African Universities in Accra, Ghana, outline the roles which higher education in Africa specifically should play.

Resolutions of the 1962 Tananarive conference (UNESCO 1963, cited in Bateman 2008, p. 5) present seven roles African higher education is expected to fulfil.

To teach and advance knowledge through research, to maintain adherence and loyalty to world, academic standards, to ensure unification of Africa; to encourage elucidation of and appreciation for African culture and heritage, to dispel misconceptions about Africa, through research and teaching of African Studies, to train the 'whole person' for nation-building; to develop human resources for meeting labour force needs; to evolve over the years truly African institutions for higher learning dedicated to Africa and its people, yet promoting a bond of kinship to the larger human society, and to emphasize science and technology so that the continent could by 1980, produce 60% of its own doctors and agriculturalists.

⁵² Now called Antananarivo

In concordance, the Accra Declaration of the 1973 as reported in Yesufu (1973, p. 4) states:

A truly African University, it was submitted, must be one which, while acknowledging the need to transform Africa into the twentieth century must yet realize that it can best achieve this result by completely identifying itself with the realities of a predominantly rural 'sixteenth century' setting and the aspirations of an unsophisticated but highly expectant people...It follows that an emergent African university must, henceforth, be much more than an institution for teaching, research and dissemination of higher learning. It must be accountable to, and serve, the vast majority of the people who live in the rural areas. The African university must be committed to active participation in social transformation, economic modernization, the training and upgrading of the total human resources of the nation, not just of a small elite.

Most recently, the role and purpose of African higher education was addressed in a press release (Press Release No: UNIS/SG/2625, cited in Bloom, Canning & Chan 2006, p. 2) where former UN Secretary General Kofi Annan asserted:

The university must become a primary tool for Africa's development in the new century. Universities can help develop African expertise; they can enhance the analysis of African problems; strengthen domestic institutions; serve as a model environment for the practice of good governance, conflict resolution and respect for human rights, and enable African academics to play an active part in the global community of scholars

As the excerpts thus far indicate, despite the historical differences, higher education in Africa and elsewhere has both promised and been established by the international community as a central site where the essential skills and knowledge necessary for economic, social and human development are produced and transferred (Ongera 2016). Therefore, the interrogation of higher education's ability to enable Cameroonian women's empowerment is validated by the fact that such declarations affirm that it has an aim to do exactly that. These declarations cement normative projections for higher education as a "vehicle for achieving equity" (Walker & Fongwa 2017, p. 12) and a "liberator which empowers individuals to make choices, and lift themselves from disadvantaged positions" (Ongera 2016, p. 32). On grounds of the resolutions made by the Association of African Universities at Tananarive and Accra, we are right to expect that Cameroonian higher education *should* contribute constructively to the development of women who "can

think for themselves, criticise [negative] traditions, and understand the significance of another person's sufferings and achievements" (Nussbaum 2010, p. 2).

Above all, it is the commitments made by the Cameroonian government and higher education institutions in the country that lay the ground for the popular expectations of Cameroonian higher education and subsequently this study's query.

7.1.1 The promise and purpose of higher education in Cameroon

Cameroon's first higher education institution - the National Institute for University Studies - was established at the independence of the Federal Republic of Cameroon and combined the two divergent educational systems, legacies of French and British colonial masters (Doh 2012). At its establishment, the National Institute for University studies had the primary aim of producing a wide array of professionals who could take over administration of the new nation (Fielding 2014). The new Cameroon government signed an agreement with its former French colonial master, giving France the responsibility of creating a Federal University, overseeing personnel management, and supervising financial operations of the institution (Fielding 2014). According to Ngwana (2001), the influence of France meant that Cameroon adopted the binary higher education system of both traditional universities and *grandes écoles*. *Grand écoles* are those like the National School of Administration and Magistracy (ENAM) from which state administrators are appointed, or *Ecole Normale Supérieure* (ENS) from which public school teachers are recruited, or the International Relations Institute of Cameroon (IRIC), which is responsible for training Cameroon's diplomats and attachés.

The roles and purposes of Cameroonian higher education were first redefined in the early 1990s following prolonged protests by university students for academic freedom, against ethnic/linguistic discrimination and centralisation, and over a host of quality issues resulting from congestion at the sole university at the time (Ngwana 2001; Nyamnjoh, Nkwi & Konings 2012). To deescalate the crisis, Presidential Decree no. 93/026 of 19 January 1993 was passed, by which the government made extensive higher education reforms, most importantly the creation of five autonomous universities to add to the then sole University of Yaoundé (Doh 2012; Ngwana 2001). With that decree, Cameroon had

six universities. Four were to be bilingual (the University of Yaoundé I, the University of Yaoundé II, the University of Douala, and the University of Dschang), and two were to be monolingual - strictly based in French and English academic traditions – the University of Ngaoundere and the University of Buea respectively (Nyamnjoh, Nkwi & Konings 2012).

These reforms which outlined the linguistic obligations of higher education institutions, the establishment of new universities, and subsequently the professional institutes under them, presented the multi-dimensional nature of higher education provided by the Cameroonian government. On one hand, some institutions would have to cater to both linguistic groups equally, while some are permitted to offer educational services in just one official language. In another dimension, institutions would differ from each other in that some would be driven by academic qualifications and research status in the way of traditional universities, while others - the professional and technical higher institutes or *grand écoles* - would offer specialised training and guaranteed government recruitment based on competitive entrance exams. With this outline, the government underscored the responsibility of Cameroonian higher education to enable the harmonisation of the two linguistic groups in Cameroon (through bilingual education) and its role in the development of the state's labour force through direct recruitment from the *grand écoles* (Fielding 2014).

According to Samfoga-Doh (2015), since 1993 higher education in Cameroon has been characterised by a series of reforms which either claim to institute new objectives or reiterate already existing ones. A central objective, she observes, across all of the reforms or policies, is “relevance of higher education to: changing societal, national, regional, international and labour market expectations” (Samfoga-Doh 2015, p. 64).

Writing on the most recent law on the orientation of higher education in Cameroon, Samfoga-Doh (2015, p. 65) reports that:

The most recent law on the orientation of higher education in Cameroon (16th April 2001) states that the fundamental mission of higher education is to produce, organise and disseminate scientific, cultural, professional and ethical knowledge for national development and the advancement of humanity (section 1, Art. 2.).

From this mission the law outlines the following objectives in chapter 1, Art. 6(1):

- Excellence in all areas of knowledge;
- The promotion of science, culture and social advancement;
- Social advancement, with the participation of competent national structures and socio-professional milieu with regards to programmes, organisation of theoretical and practical education, and internships;
- Contribution to development activities;
- The training and refinement of managerial personnel;
- The reinforcement of ethical sense and national conscience; and
- The promotion of democracy and development of a democratic culture and bilingualism.

In addition, the 2010 Sectoral Policy Document (SPD) for higher education in Cameroon underscored the importance of higher education to the Vision 2035 roadmap to becoming an emergent nation. The document which outlines the promises and expectations of higher education states that higher education must be able to:

1. Bring pertinent responses to the projects and challenges of economic growth,
2. Play a leading role for Cameroon becoming an emergent nation and its sustainable development, and
3. Contribute to the overall long-term vision up to 2035
(MINESUP 2010, cited in Doh 2012, p. 60)

Although none of these documents declare Cameroon's commitment to enabling women's empowerment, nor addressing gender inequality in and through higher education, it can be argued that higher education's responsibility to advancing women and gender equality is implied in the SPD which alludes to Cameroon's Vision 2035. The Vision 2035 declaration has clauses which explicitly denote the national commitment to promoting socially and economically empowered women and gender parity in electoral processes. To this end, it is clear that Cameroonian higher education *should* be expected to empower women.

7.2 Can it? Higher education's potential contribution to sustainable development

The general belief in and expectations of higher education's potential for the development of the individual and society by extension is not merely a result of what is promised by accords and declarations. That is to say, even if certain schools of thought refute that it is a responsibility of higher education to equip students for social justice and towards sustainable development, there is substantial evidence from research and reports which testify to the impact that higher education has already had and indicate what potential it has with regards to development of individuals, communities and countries.

Murphy-Graham (2012) recounts that as far back as 1776, Adam Smith made a case for investment in education for this very reason. His ideas were later developed following empirical studies by other scholars into what is known as the human capital theory. Assié-Lumumba (2006, p. 9) recounts that this theory:

Assumes a linear and positive relationship between education and development, both at the individual and societal levels... [and argues that] the higher a person's level of education, the higher their productivity [was] ...injected into the nationalist discourse and liberation agenda [and] the idea of the university as an effective and necessary instrument to achieve socio-economic development was articulated by educational and political decision makers in official documents and discourse.

The human capital theory therefore shaped the majority of studies carried out over the years to evaluate what education can do by way of private and public returns. Some researchers have carried out reviews of such studies. Brennan and Séné (2013) for instance, present an overview of what is known and not known about the wider benefits of higher education in a review of Global North studies on the impact of higher education. They observe that academic and policy literatures predominantly report the human capital benefits of higher education to the individual and society at large by way of higher wages (graduate premium) and contribution to economic growth. Yet, they note that besides this there is a category of wider benefits bestowed by higher education. The authors identified 'wider' as private non-monetary benefits to the individual/family, and the subsequent impact of these higher-educated students upon the wider society. Analysing the findings of over 50 studies, the scholars grouped wider benefits to the individual in five categories;

increased political and civic engagement, reduced propensity for crime, and improved health access and likelihood of well-being. As per their analysis, these wider benefits for the individual beget even wider social impact such as how students' increased civic engagement results in wider social benefits in terms of social cohesion, improvements in the functioning of democracy and "the construction of just and fair societies" (Brennan & S  n   2013, p. 23). This review of studies on the impact of higher education upholds that higher education produces mostly personal impact but this in turn generates an impact on society and that, "as a whole... these seem generally to be beneficial" (Brennan & S  n   2013, p. 19). Still, they acknowledge gaps that point to a need for further research on whether the impact of higher education as found in the array of studies and reports would hold, irrespective of what degree programme students are educated in, what institution is attended, mode of study undertaken, age and exposure of student, regional location and other contextual factors. In this way, Brennan and S  n   (2013) recognise that what they conclude from their review of selected Global North studies should not be generalised for all contexts.

A similar review of literature performed by Oketch, McCowan and Schendel (2014), which focuses on low-income countries in the Global South, proves to be more suited to the context of this study. The review identifies the main pathways by which higher education impacts development based on an analysis of the findings of ninety-nine rigorously selected studies on tertiary education impact. The five pathways identified were individual (graduate) earnings, economic growth, productivity, technology transfer, capabilities and institutions. The reviewers set out to assess evidence linking tertiary education to a wide range of economic and human development outcomes in low- and lower-middle income countries (Oketch et al. 2014). Of the 99 studies reviewed, over 70 focused on individual countries from Sub-Saharan Africa, South and South-East Asia. Pathways were graded for strength and consistency based on recurrence in the findings of the empirical studies reviewed.

OUTCOME	CHARACTERISTICS		
	SIZE	CONSISTENCY	OVERALL STRENGTH OF EVIDENCE
Individual earnings	Large (48)	Consistent	Strong
Economic growth	Medium (25)	Consistent	Medium
Productivity	Small (13)	Inconsistent	Limited
Technological transfer	Small (8)	Inconsistent	Limited
Capabilities	Medium (24)	Consistent	Medium
Institutions	Small (13)	Consistent	Medium

Figure 11: Tabular presentation of strength of evidence of higher education outcomes by Oketch et al. (2014, p. 52)

Evidence for impact on individual (graduate) earnings was declared strong, while evidence as to tertiary education's impact on economic growth, capabilities and institutions was considered as medium, and there was limited evidence to suggest tertiary education's impact on productivity and technology transfer. This review of literature has its weaknesses, however. Oketch et al. (2014) greatly limited representativeness by scaling down over 6,000 studies to 99 *English* studies which they felt met their academic standards. Likewise, the authors reported that the majority of studies which they reviewed were quantitative rather than qualitative or mixed-method studies. Given this information, it can be deduced that the type of studies reviewed would be able to offer evidence to more quantifiable outcomes like individual earnings and economic growth, but not other capabilities like critical reason nor the development of a 'whole person for nation-building' as outlined by in the earlier mentioned AAU declaration.

There is no doubt that stronger - and perhaps different - evidence would have registered if more studies had made it through their academic and cultural sieve and if they were open to more studies of a qualitative or mixed-methods nature (Salmi 2016). The DfID-commissioned literature review showed a positive impact of tertiary-level study "on graduates' capabilities in areas of health, nutrition, political participation and women's empowerment" (Oketch et al. 2014, p. 52), supporting conventional belief in the potential of higher education to contribute to the instrumental development of students, particularly women. Yet, the review also supports this study's argument on the need to question higher education's impact as the authors identified that the impact of higher education as

perceived across all studies reviewed is not fixed. In the end, their review underscores that the potential impacts of higher education “rests on certain assumptions, including: sufficient primary and secondary education; sufficient quality of research, teaching and learning; academic freedom; and equality of access and opportunities within tertiary education” (Oketch et al. 2014, p. 6).

Whereas most reviews of studies gloss over exactly *how* higher education enables and impacts individual and social development, work by Ndaruhutse and Thompson (2016) augments their review of country-specific studies with evidence of higher education’s impact on (or failure to positively address) specific development/SDG issues such as gender and disability. For instance, the authors highlight research from Eritrea and Pakistan which “demonstrates how access to university can empower women through giving them greater economic independence and social status” and underscore specific findings from Tanzania which “reveals that while students with disabilities are motivated to pursue higher education, they are unable to because infrastructure and student support structures in higher education institutes are inadequate” (Ndaruhutse & Thompson 2016, p. 20). Still, it is work like that of Salmi (2017) which offers very practical illustrations of the “vital contribution that tertiary education makes to economic and social development” (2017, p. 6). Tracing development achievements to higher education institutions, Salmi (2017) credits the success of the Brazilian aviation company, *Embraer*, to the creation of the National Aeronautic Engineering School in the early 1950s. He also notes the invention of Typhidot - a revolutionary method to diagnose typhoid fever - by scientists at the University of Science in Penang (USM) Malaysia, and mentions the improvement of quality teaching among teachers in Palestinian primary schools following new regulations which required all teachers to have both a university degree and a relevant professional teaching qualification. These cases confirm arguments made in earlier work by the same author. As Salmi (2017, p. 39), asserts the “innovative application of knowledge has become a fundamental driver of social progress and economic development”, tertiary education is “indispensable for the effective and efficient creation, dissemination, and application of knowledge”, and it is “doubtful that any low-income country can achieve the

United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) without a strong tertiary education system”.

As can be seen from the scholarship presented here, literature sources on higher education generally agree that higher education makes a positive contribution to development at both at the individual and societal level. Yet, irrespective of this general agreement on the transformatory potential of higher education and its influence on student development, debates ensue as to the extent of higher education's potential to influence, transform and contribute to development as well as what aspects of it actually do so. In the Global North, scholars' debates tend to focus on whether it is course content (informational influence) or the normative influence of campus life and peers which ought to be credited for students' development during university years (see Pascarella & Terenzini 1991, 2005; Guimond 1999). Alternatively, debates in Global South scholarship - particularly those on African contexts - generally question how effective higher education is in achieving the relevant transformation in this context, reflecting on the issues of higher education quality and calling for a more critical look at the impact of higher education's influence (see Assié-Lumumba 2006; Swai 2010).

This difference is worth noting because, as earlier outlined, the role of African higher education and expectations of its contribution towards development extend beyond the norm to include expectations that higher education address multivariate historical economic, political and sociocultural issues which are foundational to the continent's developmental problems. Given these greater expectations/needs for higher education's transforming power, it is understandable that Global South scholarship, more than Global North scholarship, emphasises that the capacity for [higher] education to achieve its promised roles is very dependent and cannot be guaranteed (see Assié-Lumumba 2006; Adelabu & Adepoju 2007; Fonkeng & Ntembe 2009; Kinge 2014; Mejiuni 2013; Salmi 2016).

7.2.1 Limited potential: a picture of African higher education

It is thus clear that the relative consensus on higher education's responsibility and its potential to contribute to development validates the expectations made of higher

education outcomes for women graduates in Cameroon. Yet, literature on the nature of higher education in Africa and Cameroon reveals limitations as to what the higher education offered in this context can do and what higher education can do in this context.

Scholars like Sawyer (2004) relate that higher education in newly independent African states began with much promise as it was seen as a necessary public good by which citizens would acquire necessary expertise to accelerate the development of the new states and attain social justice through fair access to knowledge resources. Correspondingly, Woldegiorgis and Doevenspeck (2013) recount that the higher education policy of African states in the 1960s and 1970s birthed the idea of 'development universities', underscoring higher education's role in 'Africanization', decolonisation, redressing colonial injustices, and contributing to socio-economic development. Unfortunately, a myriad of issues would challenge the flourishing of higher education on the continent.

For one, the economic challenges of the 1980s forced many African governments to make structural adjustment reforms which led to the gross underfunding of higher education. In Cameroon for instance, student enrolment in higher education dropped as a result of structural adjustment policies which ended state support to university students (Woldegiorgis and Doevenspeck, 2013). The financial neglect of African higher education was further exacerbated by the infamous World Bank publications of 1974 and 1980, which undermined the utility of higher education in Africa, and decreed that priority should be given to primary and secondary education. These events led to an abrupt halt in international funding of African higher education effectively crippling the development of African higher education institutions and offsetting a donor-client dependency relationship as African states sunk into debt to keep their institutions open (Woldegiorgis and Doevenspeck, 2013).

While I agree with scholars (see Bateman, 2008; Doh, 2012) who credit these events with inhibiting the capacity of higher education institutions in Africa to deliver education which is socially relevant and financially feasible to Africans, what I recognize as the greatest challenge which stifled the potential of higher education institutions is their lack of

autonomy. Some scholars note that given their colonial foundations African higher education institutions have struggled to exist and define themselves independently. One such scholar (Lulat, 2003) outlines that some African institutions were created as extensions of universities in the 'metropolis' of their colonial masters own country; this was the case of the University of Dakar which was established by a decree from the French Ministry of Education referring to it as the eighteenth university in the French higher education system. Thus Assié-Lumumba (2006 p.9) asserted that:

“In African states, social institutions of higher learning are still mostly being organised according to the parameters of colonial legacies with regard to the nature of the institutions, and the criteria of access to them”

I believe this challenge proves to be the most cumbersome in how consistently it has plagued the sector.

At this point it is necessary to note that the state of higher education in Africa in general and Cameroon in particular is not completely dire. Prior to financial challenges higher education had already been established as a route to more respectable white-collar employment and class mobility, and so demand for higher education increased, and continues to increase in African states (Assié-Lumumba 2006). As a result of the high demand, limited funding of public higher education institutions, and increasing globalisation, there has been an increase in the establishment of private universities on the continent. Additionally, as African states began to recover from economic crisis in the mid-1990s, researchers presented findings stating that the rate of return for higher education is actually higher than estimated by the previous World Bank publications (Doh 2012). These new studies were matched with new demands for Africans to be trained for an increasingly knowledge-intensive economic system or what was termed the knowledge economy (Doh 2012). The sum of these developments is visible in statistics which show that the number of tertiary students increased from 800,000 to about 3 million between 1985 and 2002, with the annual enrolment rate being 15% on average and 22% in Cameroon (Bateman 2008). Likewise, as Mohamedbhai (2018) reports in an article for University World News, African higher education has developed considerably over the last decade. He notes these progressive steps as; the acknowledgement and revitalisation of higher education as an important tool for Africa's development confirmed

at the 2009 UNESCO World Conference on Higher Education, the impressive increase in tertiary student enrolment from roughly 5 million in 2008 to almost 12 million in 2018, and progress in the recognition of need for improving the quality of higher education. Scholars like Zeleza (2016) and Yisengaw (2008) affirm that the proliferation of higher education has enabled Africans meet the needs of the “knowledge economy” via adaptation in research, support the development of other levels of education, promote globalisation through international academic cooperation and more. Adelabu and Adepoju (2007) illustrate a correlation between the impact of higher education on women and sustainable development, asserting that ensuring women [who make up at least half the population in most African countries] access higher education has considerable economic returns ranging from increased participation in the wage labour market, consumerism and household productivity. With regards to gender imbalances in higher education, massification has also reflected an increase in female enrolment with some universities like Makerere University and the University of Dar es Salaam successfully developing systems to attract female students from secondary schools and remote regions and achieving a rise in female enrolment from of 5% in the early 1990s to 30% in 2009 (Lindow 2011).

Yet, given the even more considerable challenges of higher education in Africa, it is clear that its potential to fulfil its purpose for development and women’s empowerment specifically is limited. Despite remarkable increase in enrolments, Africa remains the continent with the lowest levels of participation in higher education (Mohamedbhai 2018). The array of literature on African higher education over the years suggests that the successful functioning of higher education institutions on the continent is hampered by a multiple factors. These include; the absence of academic freedom and university autonomy due to centralisation of political and economic power by the state, reliance on ‘imported knowledge’ with little contextual relevance and applicability, underfunding, insufficient remuneration for researchers, inadequate facilities and infrastructural problems, a culture of sexism, overpopulation, brain drain and shortage of capable staff which in turn inhibits capacity for teaching and research (see Collins 2013; Materu 2007; Teferra & Altbachl 2004; Mohabedbhai 2008, 2018). Such scholarship generally purports

that the exponential increase in student enrolment has not been matched by recruitment of capable academic staff, and this has resulted in overcrowded classes, lecturers who resort to rote learning, and students who receive very little academic supervision and welfare support for self-development. Bunoti (2011) particularly notes that lecture halls in Uganda of more than 500 hundred students would lack auditory equipment to enable the students to hear the lecturers, and Kumi-Yeboah's (2014) empirical findings of African emigrant students reports their surprise at regular supervisions because they were unaccustomed to that from their previous institutions. As Mohamedbhai (2008) notes, on account of such circumstances, some universities record as high as 70% failure rates for first- and second-year undergraduate students. Meanwhile, others report similar dismal outcomes in graduate and postgraduate student performance including a recent report of 66 doctorates awarded by a private university in Uganda being declared invalid.

Recently, issues such as systematic corruption in higher education linked to the lack of institutional autonomy has been recognised following a report by Transparency International in 2013, which exposed corruption at all levels and in various forms of institutional activities from management to student admissions, to examination malpractice, and plagiarism in theses (Bunoti 2011). One of the more often acknowledged issues has been that of relevance of higher education content in Africa. Several scholars have criticised the inapplicability of higher education curricula to African contexts and question how what is learned would prepare graduates to contribute to the developmental needs and aspirations of the societies in which they are to be employed (Adu-Febiri & Camosun 2014). Woldegiorgis and Doeverspeck (2013), however, posit that any criticism of the insufficiency of higher education curriculum is incomplete if the wider discussion of curriculum relevance does not include the Africanisation or decolonising of higher education.

One of the most obvious displays of the derelict state of African higher education can be found upon gender assessment. Though significant progress has been recorded in relation to African women's increased access to higher education, a variety of socio-political and economic barriers still impede access to and effective utility of higher education for many African women (Yebo 2015; FAWE 2013). Collins (2014) reports that

gender imbalances in overall enrolment, favoured academic discipline, leadership representation and more are common characteristics of many African higher education institutions. He asserts that these gender imbalances are symptomatic of both academic institutional failings and African countries' contextual issues and that is necessary to bear in mind the unique gender roles and cultural demands put on both women students and faculty to address the imbalance. His perspective, in his stating that increases in women students is not enough as they tend to drop out more than men, mirrors that of other feminists which affirms that African women have a different higher education experience than men because of tensions between their higher education aspirations, cultural expectations and family (Kamau 1999; Yeba 2015). In addition, women students in African institutions have been proven to be more disadvantaged by societal pressures and lack of women faculty/staff to support and serve as models, and also more vulnerable to abuse and sexual harassment.

Above all, it is the dismal nature of graduate outcomes which confirms the doubt cast on the ability of African higher education to meet its responsibilities and deliver the desired and expected ends. With the renewed belief in African higher education, scholars and practitioners focused on access to undergraduate education and as a result there is a dearth of data on the experiences of African graduates and graduate studies. Nonetheless, that which is available reveals that the challenges of graduate studies in African higher education are numerous and the situation of the graduates churned out by these institutions are a reflection of the questionable quality of their higher education (Hayward & Ncayiyana 2014). Research on higher education outputs has revealed that the majority of students are ill-equipped for employment, having been trained with contextually irrelevant and/or impractical course content and therefore end up joining the thousands of unemployed upon graduation (Mohamedbhai 2018). Some have attributed the reported irrelevance of higher education knowledge to the unrevised colonial foundations of African higher education and the disconnection between African universities and the world of work, which makes it difficult for them to deliver the competencies sought by employers in graduates (Adu-Febiri & Camosun 2014). Still, others argue that the limited funding of African higher education hinders the delivery of

relevant competencies, citing contributing factors like unreliable and costly internet connectivity, inadequacies in infrastructure and capable staff, poorly stocked libraries, laboratories and the absences of professional student services (Bateman 2008; Dei, Osei-Bonsu & Amponsah 2020).

Irrespective of what perspective one takes, the above information presents the general agreement that as a result of the questionable quality of higher education offered at African institutions, they are unlikely to meet the needs of their women students and as a result fail to meet their self-declared responsibility to African human development. Although I agree with Mukwambo (2016) who says that higher education should take into account who is defining it, for what purpose and in what context; I share the reported misgivings of higher education given what is known of the case of Cameroonian higher education in particular.

7.2.2 The case of Cameroon

The majority of scholarly research on higher education in Cameroon focuses on the history of protests, student activism, institutional governance and linguistic issues which afflict universities in Cameroon (Ngwana 2001; Ngalim 2014; Nyamnjoh et al. 2012; Fongwa & Chifon 2016). Fewer studies have highlighted the contribution of higher education in Cameroon to development. Far less have paid attention to gender in higher education, not to mention women's empowerment through higher education specifically.

Nonetheless, what literature is available indicates that Cameroonian higher education can indeed be empowering but also that this potential is limited. Research by Fongwa (2010) shows the contribution of higher education to regional socioeconomic development, focusing on the University of Buea. Though his study concentrates on the infrastructural development, business climate and overall poverty alleviation the area experienced with the establishment and growth of the university, he notes that the University of Buea has contributed to the development of rural women by way of engaging its students with local NGOs committed to such work. Fonkeng and Ntembe (2009) offer a human capital account of the individual and public profitability of tertiary education in Cameroon. Their study concludes that higher education is undoubtedly profitable to the government for the

specialised labour it provides as well as social development benefits. At individual levels, they found that higher education offers men more substantial economic returns with percentages of 21.78% to 17.82% for men and women respectively, showing great gender inequalities in wages which they reason is linked to the specialised/technological fields men dominate and which women are inhibited from for sociocultural factors (Fonkeng & Ntembe 2009, p. 240). The authors conclude by affirming the positive outcomes associated with higher education, both at the individual and society level, but call for measures to improve the efficiency of the higher education system to reduce inequity in the distribution of benefits from higher education in Cameroon.

Despite the laudable Vision 2035 and the promises of the most recent SPD, the Cameroonian government has done little to improve the quality of higher education offered. Higher education in Cameroon is still characterised by political protests, absence of academic freedoms, and a host of quality issues that make its delivery of competencies necessary for individual and social development questionable. For one, the political centralisation of administrative power over Cameroonian higher education institutions by the president and his self-appointed minister of the Ministry of Higher Education (MINESUP) considerably limits the potential of higher education institutions to enforce transformatory change as the regime retains powers to appoint and dismiss academic staff irrespective of institutional needs and academic qualifications. One consequence of this centralisation is the monopolisation of the admission processes, recruitment and deployment of staff, and a biased entrance examination process in favour of the majority Francophone population (Nyamnjoh, Nkwi & Konings 2012). This is a principle factor in the 'Anglophone crisis,' a socio-political conflict which has embattled the country for 4 years now.

It is also worth noting that the stark imbalances in the regional distribution of both state and private higher education institutions casts doubts on the potential of higher education to enable equitable regional development as it pledges to do.

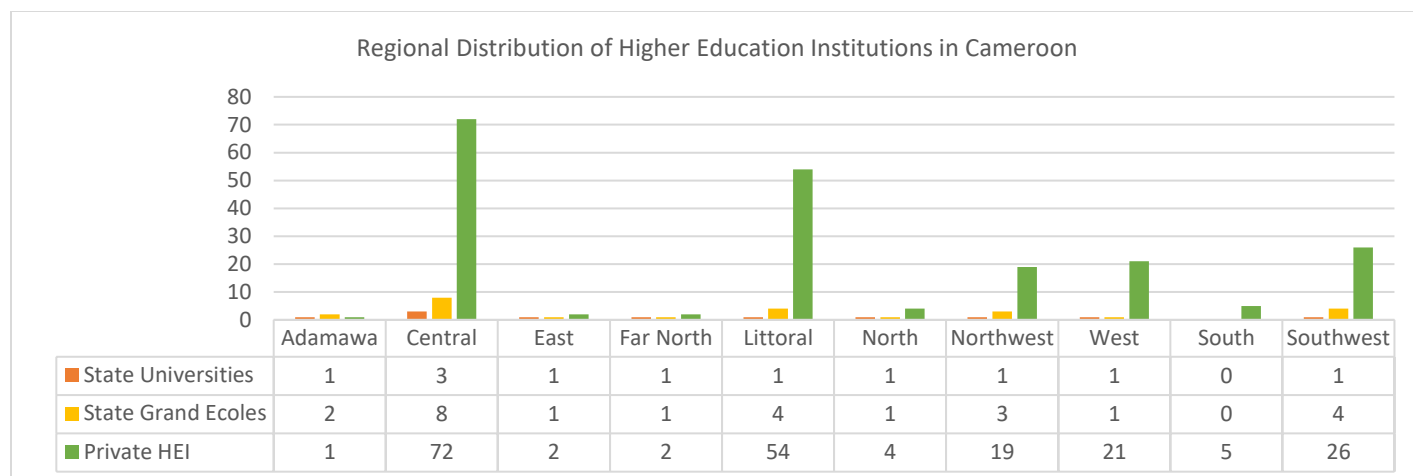


Figure 12: Chart of regional distribution of higher education institutions in Cameroon adapted from MINEPAT (2016, p. 12)

In Part I of this thesis, it was noted that one's region of origin colours experience of Cameroon, given inequalities in efforts made towards development across the different regions in the country. As the chart above illustrates, the potential of higher education to contribute to development is questionable given the lack of institutions in areas which are most underdeveloped. This is not to say that the availability of institutions in certain areas means that higher education can contribute to development there. As empirical research by Vuban (2019, p. 139) purports there is no "complete" or adequately developed state university in Cameroon which belies their ability to be centres of development as expected. Vuban (2019) presents Cameroon's substandard adoption of the Bologna Process as a signatory non-member state as problematic given the significance of quality assurance issues which the country has neglected. Her findings demonstrate limitations to Cameroonian higher education's potential rooted in quality issues such as the lack of: adequate educational resources, periodic monitoring, follow-up/staff-development, efficient/equitable student admission processes, university ranking standards, institutional autonomy and more.

Going forward, it is clear that we *should* and *can* expect higher education to enable women's empowerment based on its commitments to and track record with sustainable development. Yet, the reality of higher education in Africa, specifically Cameroon, denotes limitations which belie presupposition of higher education outputs. Moreover, I

find it necessary to note that the majority of higher education literature merely suggests women's empowerment through higher education; as either a by-product or consequence of higher education's contribution to national development and human capacity through knowledge making and sharing. For instance, Haneef (2017, p. 9) asserts that higher education enables human development as it "stretches the ability to ponder with reason, pursue visions and objectives in life and live a decent reputable life in the society". This assertion undoubtedly implies higher education's potential to empower women and yet such takes are limited and problematic because human development does not always equal women's empowerment. Scholars who put forward this approach fail to consider whether and to what extent the specific empowerment needs and desired capacities of women are enabled in higher education - if at all. As I argued in the previous chapter on empowerment literature, it is necessary to note that what is deemed empowering, and needed for women's empowerment, is not fixed even if there are recurrent and expected aspects of empowerment. When considered in this light, one can surmise that while higher education *should* (as it commits to) and *can* (as it has potential to) enable Cameroonian women's empowerment, whether or not it actually does so is not guaranteed.

7.3 Does it? Relating higher education and women's empowerment

It has thus far been established that the assumptions that higher education empowers Cameroonian women rests on what higher education promises and what research has proven it is capable of. However, the conclusion that higher education empowers women is generally extrapolated from higher education outcomes such as the increased aspirations, confidence and employability which the knowledge/skills/abilities a student attains as a result of their higher education experience (see Bhatti 2013; Malik & Courtney 2011; Walker 2018; Adelabu & Adepoju 2007; Fonkeng & Ntembe 2009). The portion of empirical research on higher education specifically (as opposed to education in general) which points to the enabling of women's empowerment and the section of scholarship which spells out a direct relationship between higher education and women's empowerment, is surprisingly limited.

Yet, in the limited field, four main ideas are noted:

- i. attainment of higher education does generally register a positive influence on women's status,
- ii. however, higher education institutions (particularly those in Africa) are for the most part systematically unjust and often perpetuate or reinforce gender inequalities,
- iii. to realise women's empowerment, institutions must be conscientious and intentional in delivering relevant quality higher education,
- iv. and being empowered through higher education has its limits and drawbacks for women, particularly African women.

With regards to the first idea, several empirical studies by Global South scholars in particular draw correlations between higher education and aspects of women's empowerment presented in the literature reviewed in the previous chapter.

Research conducted by Bhatti (2013) aimed at understanding women's aspirations, experiences and benefits through higher education. She reported that women in her study associated their higher education with increased awareness, more confidence and personal growth, which she defined as empowerment. Yet another Pakistani study which is recounted by Malik and Courtney (2011) argued that higher education had a significant impact on women's willingness to take matters to court in order to defend their rights and increased their civic engagement, all of which can be considered as 'empowering'. Similarly, research carried out in Papua New Guinea by Spark (2011) suggests that higher education qualifications empower women with social power as they are assumed to be of higher socioeconomic status as graduates. Another dimension of the change in status with higher education attainment is presented in empirical studies by Bhatti (2013) and Noreen (2015). Both studies set in Pakistan affirm that social views of limiting a daughter's education are being replaced by the belief that education at higher levels is necessary for daughters to ensure they appear better able to contribute to their marital homes as well as for their socio-psychological independence. Correspondingly, Guinée (2014), writing on women in Nepal, offers insight on how Dali women's higher education frees them from arranged marriages and enables them to negotiate better unions.

In an interesting study, Nigerian-feminist scholar Mejiuni (2013) compared women enrolled in higher education and semi-illiterate women to explore whether their level of education and religions were enabling or restrictive of their aspirations and exercise of

power. Her findings revealed that respondents enrolled in undergraduate studies expressed increased aspirations, more self-awareness and consciousness of gender inequality as a result of their undergraduate education.

With regards to *how* higher education actually empowers women, Walker's (2018) paper reports findings from a study at a South African university which clarifies the relationship between higher education and women's empowerment by examining the increased aspirations of female students. She asserts:

...there are many formal and informal opportunities within the higher education context which help students develop into critical and reflexive thinkers, build their confidence, and empower them to act and make use of opportunities... higher education has the potential to reduce the impact of disadvantages, to build individual capability sets, strengthen agency... this, in turn, shapes and reshapes aspirational pathways towards what people have reason to value, thereby contributing to their sense of well-being. (Walker 2018, p. 138)

Some Cameroonian scholars and scholars writing on Cameroon have published evidence from studies which explored higher education's influence on women's status and its potential to enable aspects of women's empowerment. Among them, scholars like Kinge (2014), Adepoju (2014) and Taoyang (2019) report that higher education enhances Cameroonian women's willingness and ability to engage in politics. Drawing on an empirical study on Cameroonian women's sexual and reproductive health, Johnson-Hanks (2003) confirms a correlation between Cameroonian women's higher education and their sexual liberation and family planning. The research reports that as a result of their higher education, participants registered the importance of developing individual character which can be construed as personal autonomy, and accorded "a less central role to marriage in women's lives" (Johnson-Hanks 2003, p. 179). Another scholar, Fielding (2014), explored the gendered nature of Cameroonian higher education with a focus on a professional institute/grand école called *École Nationale Supérieure Polytechnique* (ENSP) which trains government civil engineers and only welcomed female students in 1990, nineteen years after its establishment. She concludes that female students at that institution "have achieved a level of equality with males denied to most Cameroonian women" by virtue of their access to education at this institution as

their impending “seamless incorporation into the labour force” as a result (Fielding 2014, p. 134).

Notwithstanding such evidence of women’s empowerment through higher education, scholarship which triangulates higher education, gender and women’s empowerment often purports that higher education does not do as much as it should and can to empower women because it is not constructed to do so. Such literature suggests that gender inequalities are embedded in higher education, particularly in Africa, and as a result the institutions are systematically unable to empower women beyond a certain extent.

Manyá, (2000, cited in Assié-Lumumba 2006, p. 14) presents this idea best when she states that:

African universities were established to nurture an African male elite who, even though they de facto were conceived as subordinate to European rulers, could relate well with the concerns of European colonial masters whose social structure of power was essentially patriarchal.

It follows then, as argued by Assié-Lumumba (2006, p. 14), that:

Higher education in Africa...has generally favoured the male populations due to the prevailing cultural and social attitudes in society and the subsequent policies and practices whose explanatory factors are quite well known. There are social values that were inherited from colonial policies and that have persisted in Africa even when major changes have taken place in former colonial powers that transferred such values. The conjunction of such values with cultural factors and timid policies leads to the persistent gender imbalance in higher education throughout Africa.

Such insight begs that we ask: how then does higher education enable women’s empowerment when - as a colonial legacy - it is bound to perpetuate the inequalities of its historical foundation? The answer is that it simply does not do much enabling. As has been presented earlier, though there has been considerable improvement over the years, gender inequalities in African higher education constitute one of its major failings. Given the widespread gender inequalities in access and staff recruitment, coupled with the lack of gender sensitive curricula and institutional policies, African higher education often fails to empower women as it should.

Research on Cameroon demonstrates how limited higher education is in empowering women as a result of historical and structural issues. In the conclusion of her graduate study on higher education, health and development in the Cameroon, Mavis-Nono (2013, pp. 36, 102) shares what she finds problematic:

There is a popular saying in Cameroon which states that spending over the education of a girl is watering the garden of the neighbour. It is like taking care of the garden of someone else without any assurance that you will benefit from the fruits of your labour. The education of girls and women is presented as a risky enterprise without a sure return...

Among the problems faced by higher education in Cameroon, one of them is the structures and academic models of education that were conceived as copies and ugly reproductions of higher institutions of the former European powers...It created a problem of structural dependence on, and submission to, the models of the former colonial power's institutions. The result of such dependence has been...struggling between a caduceus Western model and our own social and economic missions... The tertiary institutions that are functioning now failed to create a model that could respond to the expected role of higher education...

These closing remarks by Mavis-Nono (2013) highlight how limited higher education in this context is to do what which it should and is expected to as a result of the historical dependency and beliefs embedded in sociocultural structures.

In a more recent study, Yeba (2015) outlined the relationship between sociocultural factors and the experiences of gender inequality by doctoral students in Cameroonian universities. She found that across all regions in Cameroon, girls "attend school less frequently than boys due mainly to discriminatory attitudes towards girls in the socialisation process linked to economic, social, educational and pedagogical factors" (Yeba 2015, p. 181). Through engaging 77 female doctorate students from three universities in Cameroon, Yeba concludes that the gender imbalance in doctoral student enrolment in Cameroon can be traced to women's disadvantage as a result of sociocultural limitations on their financial autonomy and participation in decision making, and the expectations and responsibilities traditionally attached to their gender roles, like marriage and child bearing. Yeba's (2015) findings are particularly relevant to this work as they present that higher education is a poor match for countering sociocultural impediments to women's empowerment. Irrespective of their level of education as

doctoral candidates, Yeba's (2015) participants were severely constrained and illustrated how gender affected access to, participation in and the achievement of gender equality through postgraduate studies in Cameroon.

That higher education did not sufficiently empower Yeba's participants to address the inequalities they reported facing in their pursuit for doctorates is understandable given research which registers a dire need for gender-responsive curricula and gender-sensitive policies for everything from access to participation of staff and students in Cameroonian higher education institutions (see Endeley & Ngaling 2007; Daoust 2012; Fielding 2014).

This need is well captured by statistics which show persistent gender disparities in educational attainment which widen with higher levels of education (Stiftung 2018). In fact, according to the 2020 Global Gender Gap Report referred to in the previous chapter, the gender ratio for Cameroon's tertiary education attainment stands at 11.4% for women to 14.1% for men. It is also worth noting that the country's performance has reportedly dropped as the quality of education has deteriorated and further entrenched regional and gender imbalances (BTI 2018, p. 15).

The limitations of Cameroonian higher education with regard to empowering women is equally captured by the reports of other feminist, human rights and development agencies. One such report is that by the Forum of African Women Educationalists (FAWE 2013), which shows that despite relative improvement in women's tertiary enrolment (from 39.73% to 42.53% between 2005 and 2009), there is an alarming gender disparity in technology courses as the STEM fields remain a typically masculine domain in Cameroon (see also Fielding 2014; Ouendji 2000). Moreover, their review asserts that female students are forced to "cope with the verbal, sexual and other forms of harassment that undermine their motivation, self-confidence and achievement" (FAWE 2013, p. 19), which is obviously disempowering.

Alternatively, a Resolve Network research brief on Islam and Higher Education in Cameroon reports that higher education for Muslim women is not as empowering as it

should be considering the harassment that female Muslim students experience from other members of the campus community and by local authorities with the recent spread of Islamophobia and the stigma attached to their veils (Kendhammer & Ousmanou 2019).

This brings to the fore the third strain of higher education and women's empowerment discourse which purports the need for conscientiousness and intentionality in higher education reform for enabling considerable women's empowerment. This idea stems from research which denotes instances where higher education not only fails to enable the empowerment of women but contributes to their disempowerment and furthering gender inequalities. Findings by Mejiuni (2013), for instance, suggest that although higher education enabled aspects of women's empowerment, it equally contributed to consolidating their subordination. She observed that no education is value-free and that women's education mirrors the community around them, perpetuating unequal relations of power, exhibited in administration, teacher-student relationships and the content taught. Her research notes that among the differences between the higher educated and semi-literate women, the latter group was more assertive and able to negotiate 'control' of their personal plans. She theorised that this difference can be credited to the latter group having little experience with the regulatory structure of schooling and raises the question of whether education's influence is always positive. Mejuini's theorising is echoed by Mushibwe (2014) whose research looks into the effects of cultural traditions on the education of the Tumbuka women of Zambia. He observes that although education can influence, the extent to which it does and the direction of that influence is often dependent on the quality and context in which it is delivered. Education does not exist in a vacuum and where the informational influence of education opposes the norms and cultural influence of the student's environment, the transformatory potential of education is uncertain and often gives rise to compromised learning outcomes.

Studies like that by Chisale (2017) and my own earlier work (Kwachou 2015) attest to such compromises as participants demonstrated cognitive dissonance and difficulty in reconciling the belief in gender equality which higher education exposed them to with the reality of a patriarchal context. Even scholarship on African women university educators makes it clear that higher education attainment on its own does not free African women

from the disempowerment embedded in their identities and societies (Kamau 1999; Adusah-Karikari 2008; Mabokela & Mlambo 2015). Writing on a research project on 'Gender Empowerment and Agency in Higher Education' in the South African context, Walker (2017) captures the argument of this strain of literature where she asserts that:

University conditions do not seem to foster a widespread feminist consciousness or a critical awareness of gender inequalities among students so that the data shows that women tolerated everyday harassment (such as name-calling or sexist comments on their appearance) and other gendered microaggressions. In this way the university culture was complicit in maintaining and tolerating unequal everyday gender relations. (Walker 2017, p. 3)

In line with this, scholarship on Cameroon relates the limits of higher education to enable women's empowerment to the normalisation of sexism in this context. Cameroonian scholars Endeley and Ngaling (2007) report that the patriarchal institutional structure and lack of gender sensitivity among University of Buea staff promises a reproduction in negative gender stereotypes and a continued insensitivity to gendered need unless reforms are made. Also, the World Bank (2017) country report for Cameroon notes that the lack of improvement in educational outcomes is a result of the lack of conscientiousness in the needs of the population. The report suggests that investment in higher education be geared towards labour market needs for more relevance and that areas which are particularly deficient in levels of human development (like the northern regions) be given more attention for impact.

The idea that higher education must be reformed and improved to satisfactorily address gender inequality and enable gender justice in African contexts is not new. A decade before Mejuini's (2013) study, Amina Mama (Mama 2003, p. 115) noted that:

Universities do not necessarily present the gender neutral organizational climate that tends to be assumed in higher education. There is evidence to suggest that they may, on the contrary, operate in ways that reproduce gender inequality and injustice, instead of challenging it.

Mama's (2003) quote points to the need for a deeper level of analysis of higher education which goes beyond access to and parity to addressing institutionalised gender

inequalities. She suggested back then that considerations for women's strategic need for maternity leaves, child-care/domestic support and changes in gender relations and sexual cultures be made to address inequalities.

Since then, other scholars have made recommendations for what needs to be considered to enable the empowering of women and addressing of gender inequalities through higher education. Walker (2017, p. 4), for instance, makes four recommendations by which higher education would actually enable women's empowerment and/or address gender inequalities:

1. Higher education processes should develop critical agency so that students (men and women) do not accept beliefs as authoritative simply because they have been handed down by tradition or become familiar through habit, but rather traditions must survive critical scrutiny through inclusive and participatory public reasoning. University and policy actions should therefore expand capabilities for critical thinking, including self-reflection, practical reasoning and access to knowledge.
2. Gendered norms and practices in higher education influence women's experiences of higher education and their identities even as higher education also enables greater opportunities for women. These gendered disadvantages are not captured in the parity of numbers. A national gender equality policy is required which rather advances capabilities as the informational basis of gender justice.
3. Universities should be required to implement this policy and develop gender awareness in all students. Universities should work to develop all seven capabilities in formal and informal learning contexts and transform institutional cultures. Thus, universities need to pay careful attention to gendered cultures and norms which are shaping identities in subtle and not well-recognised ways but which nonetheless lay down or reinforce patterns of identity and acceptance, and which may not serve women's aspirations well in the future.
4. Universities need to pay attention to resource-based inequalities and find ways to address both these and gendered identity formation together for gender equality and expanded opportunities for working class black women in particular in order to fracture intergenerational cycles of disadvantage.

In line with other literature of this strain, Walker's (2017) recommendations emphasise the need for intentionality in the engendering of higher education institutions and the effective implementation of gender policies for the enabling of gender equity within and women's empowerment through higher education. Still, the general nature of Walker's (2017) recommendations makes it clear that taking them

up requires that further research, such as this, be done to determine what university and policy actions are needed in a specific context.

Finally, a last strain of this section of the literature counters assumptions of women's empowerment in and through higher education on the grounds that women's higher education often comes with backlash and negative effects for them and as such they cannot be considered truly empowered by it. As I presented earlier on in Part I, women with higher education are perceived as a threat and often face backlash and antagonism for their presumed empowerment (Guarnieri & Rainer 2018).

Spark (2011), who was mentioned earlier, notes the negative consequences of the social recognition that women with higher education receive in Papua New Guinea. These women's qualifications and the higher socioeconomic status which presumably comes with it, paints them as threats to the patriarchal order and renders them more vulnerable to male partners who attempt to reinstate dominance through domestic violence which (in this context) is generally accepted as the norm. Similarly, the work by Malik and Courtney (2011) presented earlier revealed that acting on the knowledge of their higher education (such as knowledge of their rights to take matters to court) put the Pakistani women at risk of alienation from their immediate family, the wider community, and becoming a social outcast; and losing the only protection and support network they have (p. 41).

In an editorial piece on the perceptions and treatment of women doctoral students in China, Kuo (2014) reports the hatred that Chinese women receive because of their level of education. In her words:

In China, highly educated women are mocked as a sexless "third gender"...According to their many critics, they are aloof, unattractive, self-important careerists who, according to some Chinese academics and officials, threaten the country's very social fabric by putting education before family... But the derision towards those with or earning PhDs, who typically don't finish their degrees until the age of 28 or later, is particularly vitriolic...There is a media-enforced stigma surrounding women with advanced degrees...

This report is intriguingly familiar to Kamau's (1999) research on the experience of female academics in Kenya which presents the dilemma of being empowered through higher education as an African woman. She says:

It is well demonstrated throughout this thesis that whereas single women who pursue higher degrees are denied affiliative needs on account of their being perceived as too qualified, too uncontrollable, too old, too ugly, too aggressive, too independent minded, or too self-serving for the marriage market, they are at the same time chastised and blamed for rejecting marriage in favour of loose lifestyles. These women are characterised as morally loose home breakers and, therefore, as unacceptable role models for the rest of Kenyan women. They are perceived as a real threat to the social and moral fabric of Kenyan society...get blamed for their predicaments while the patriarchal system is exonerated. The married women academics also are daily confronted with accusations that they are arrogant, bossy, too manly, too high minded and use their higher degrees to emasculate their spouses...married women academics experience tensions, anxieties as they try to balance their academic careers and family obligations... Higher education and careers therefore have led to further entrapment of the women. Higher education in spite of its liberatory potential, created social and psychological dissonance as the academic women tried to reconcile the expected societal script and their own personal agendas. (Kamau 1999, p. 386)

Over two decades later, Kamau's (1999) work is still relevant with several scholars reporting the risks of empowerment and attaining higher education for African women particularly with regards to their marriageability (see Guarnieri & Rainer 2018; Oyewale 2016). I, however, opine that the perceived drawbacks and negative repercussions women experience as a result of their higher education is not because it was empowering, but because it was not adequately empowering for their contexts. As (Guinée 2014, p. 189) argues, for higher education "to have empowering outcomes, it needs to engage with women's priorities, including their social roles and responsibilities". If higher education policy and practice takes into account the needs, roles, responsibilities and oppressions of women in specific contexts, it would better enable women's empowerment

by addressing gender inequality through students, staff and learning resources. I thus echo the idea that intentionality and commitment to addressing gender inequalities is necessary for higher education to enable empowerment. Mama's (2003) suggestion that universities organise gender-sensitisation programmes to enforce a climate which addresses women's issues is an example of such intentionality. Such initiatives would target strategic gender needs through the education of both genders.

This chapter discussed literature which firmly establishes the relationship between higher education and sustainable development by way of women's empowerment. Literature suggests that higher education has the potential to empower but is embattled by problems which limit that potential. Literature also affirms that higher education institutions in Cameroon have responsibilities to foster women's empowerment as instruments of national development in a nation which is committed to global development efforts (currently the SDGs). Yet, scholars posit that without intentionality and commitment to enabling women's empowerment these institutions do not achieve their aim and rather leave women at a disadvantage with their higher education. In the end, the wide body of work discussed here presents higher education's enabling of women's empowerment as a complex endeavour and sustains the basis for this study's inquiry.

8. THE TALES OF TWO 'LONG CRAYONS'

Anne's story

Anne was born in 1996, in Kumba, the third largest town of the Anglophone Southwest Region of Cameroon. She is the fourth of seven children born to a mother who was a petty trader in the market and a father who ran a cosmetics business.

Anne received a fairly good early education and began her secondary education in a boarding school attended by children of the local middle class and upper class. However, as her father's business began to fail and the children tallied seven it was decided that the boarding school was not worth it and Anne was made to go to a government school and live at home. She was not asked nor involved in the making of this decision, only informed after she was registered in the new school.

Moving to a government school exposed Anne to people from more diverse socioeconomic backgrounds, and she felt like she belonged more than she had in the boarding school. Anne retained her dream of being a doctor (inspired by receiving the prize for 'most caring student' at boarding school) and felt it was still a possibility as the government school had academic contests (Brain Box) she had not known in boarding school. However, life as a day-school student made Anne fully aware of just how abusive her father was. Her father regularly verbally and sometimes physically abused her mother to the point where she had once considered getting a knife in the kitchen to defend her mother who had experienced an asthma attack during the abuse. The children were not spared the abuse either. Their father was jealous of the fact that the children were closer to their mother and forbade them to use her as an intermediary through whom they asked him for whatever they needed. Anne says he did this to make it clear he was the provider and to wield control over them as he wanted them to plead for the money he gave, often making the process long and drawn out. She recalled nearly missing the deadline for the payment of her registration for the GCE Ordinary Level for this reason.

Living at home, Anne learned to manage her time on her own in the absence of the support system provided in boarding school. Yet, she was often attacked for studying, especially given the subjects she was studying. Her mother had a fear of Physics and

Math, thinking such things were not for girls. This fear was capitalised on by her father who reminded his wife that she had an uncle who 'isn't quite sane' because he constantly used physics terminology in his conversations with people. Anne had to lie and sneak about to attend classes on Sundays after church because that would have annoyed her father. Her mother paid for these secret classes, which were to make up for the government school teachers who never took up their posts and hence never came to teach.

Despite the little encouragement she received, Anne performed very well at the Advanced Level GCE. She recalled in excruciating detail how her father all but ignored her when she hurried to his shop to give him the news of her good grades. Soon after the announcement of her results, her father suggested Anne stay home because there was no money to send her to Buea where the closest state university was. His attitude was discouraging, but Anne's mother was sufficiently supportive of her dreams, to the point of using her savings to register Anne for the preparatory classes she needed to ready herself for the medical school entrance exam. Anne once again attended these classes secretly for fear of her father.

Though Anne was determined to study medicine, Anne's mother equally encouraged Anne to apply for admission into a 'regular' degree program as a plan B, saying "public exams are not guaranteed". As it turned out, Anne failed the medical school entrance exam, but was offered admission by the university to study Biochemistry; a subject she listed by ignorantly assuming it was what her older brother had studied.

Anne and her mother finally told her father that she had been admitted into the university. He insisted that there was no money to accommodate her in Buea and was only willing to pay for her fees (60.000 XAF). Eventually, it was Anne's mother who found a solution, courtesy of her best friend. Anne went to study at the University of Buea and lived with a friend of her mother's best friend in Buea. Due to her accommodation arrangements, the higher education experience for Anne was overshadowed by the experience of living in this house where she struggled to stay on the good side of her hosts. The woman hosting Anne was very strict and biased against 'university girls' who she felt were very deceptive,

likely promiscuous, and needed to be handled strictly. The exception to this rule was the woman's own daughter whom Anne would often try to please so as not to receive the mother's wrath. Anne struggled to study in this house while beleaguered with chores, which included carrying water for the household at midnight when the taps would flow. She recounted not being free to have afternoon naps or watch the TV and constantly being on guard for what she ought to be doing to serve her host/earn her place there.

One night she was doing laundry and carrying water as usual when her brother showed up with her mom's best friend. They had arrived very late at night and her brother was surprised to see her not only awake but working. This is how Anne's mother found out that Anne was struggling. Prior to that she could not complain because she knew it was the only available option if she wanted to continue school. When her brother relayed what he had seen, Anne got the chance to open up to her mother and father. Soon thereafter, the host's daughter revealed she was pregnant, fulfilling the suspicions which they had directed at Anne. It was this news - of another girl there getting pregnant - which made Anne's father promise to secure her a student room the following academic year.

From the second year, Anne had a more engaged higher education experience. She was course delegate for at least one course every semester. She did this so as to benefit from free handouts (reading material for the course) as delegates oversaw the copying of selected texts for the lecturer. She joined the choir as an extracurricular activity and she came to really appreciate her chosen degree programme, especially during the mandatory internship which she did at a hospital laboratory.

Living on her own as of second year also meant Anne had to deal with her father a lot more. Though he had provided her rent at the start of the academic year, she had to earn money for her upkeep by marketing his cosmetic products to stores in Buea. He sent her an allowance based on how many shops she could get to run his products. Her mother tried to send her food or small sums of money but she could only do so much as a petty trader and with other kids to help.

As she could not depend on her father for support, Anne got a job as a sales agent for a new telecom called Nextel. She thus came to class dressed as a Nextel sales agent. Between her selling sim cards, her father's products and haggling with photocopiers for deals as class delegate, her classmates often teased her, asking 'are you sure you're supposed to be studying in the pure sciences?'

Anne maintained a good academic average considering the multiple tasks she was engaged in. Her classes were often theoretical and formulaic, she recalled. While doing her internship she realised that she would have to really learn on the job because most of what they were taught was theory. Lecturers often taught by referring to instruments which were not readily available. Lecturers also regularly made inappropriate comments in class where they tried to teach 'real life lessons' to the students, like warning girls not to forget to secure marriage as they pursued their education, and telling boys that they were merely preparing the girls they were dating to marry older men. By the end of the second year, the number of her classmates had diminished as several had decided to leave the country for greener pastures abroad. Anne and her classmates were coming to the realisation that who you know and your economic background trumps what you know and your academic performance. As a class delegate, she even found that academic performance could be 'bought' as she discovered a course mate had been graded exceptionally for an assignment they had not submitted by a lecturer they were dating.

As she navigated life as a university student, Anne realised that she struggled with members of the opposite sex. As a result of her father's abuse, she did not trust or feel comfortable around males. She could see this in her reaction to receiving student complaints as class delegate. Anne realised she felt more comfortable mediating on behalf of female students than male students.

By her third year, Anne had become 'bolder' as she could speak up for herself and communicate less reservedly with more diverse people. She had also learned a lot more responsibility and took time management very seriously as she was working to meet a sales goal each week while being a student and attending church/choir practice. She loved living on her own, but had to leave Buea mid-first semester as the Anglophone

Crisis turned violent. The crisis made the third year very difficult. She missed two months of school because of the crisis and at least one month of teaching because Francophone lecturers still gave lectures despite the ongoing protests. Anne had to convince her father to let her return to Buea by reminding him that he had already paid her rent in full and the money would be wasted otherwise.

Anne says she understands the crisis as an Anglophone, in part because of her higher education experience. The marginalisation of Anglophones was obvious to her in the reported experience of Anglophone classmates who applied for internships at SONARA – the national oil refinery based in the neighbouring town yet run by Francophones. Also, she came to experience the sad state of centralisation when she applied for a work/study programme and was told that applications would have to go to the capital prior to the successful candidates being announced.

With so much going on that year, her grades dropped and she stopped working part-time to focus. When she completed her final-year project and returned home for the holidays she determined that she had to continue her education by all means, not because she wanted to do a Master's degree in biochemistry (she would have preferred to study public health or travel abroad and do 'a real Pharmaceuticals program'), but rather because staying at home and witnessing her father's continuous abuse was not an option. Anne applied for the Master's programme within a month of receiving her results for the BSc. With money gifted by her brother, she was enrolled as a Master's student by the time her BSc. graduation was scheduled.

Her family did not celebrate her graduation as they had done for brothers before her. Nor were her parents in support of her continuing studies. Yet, her mother understood it would be better than living at home, and her father saw some advantage in having Anne solicit for customers in Buea on his behalf. So Anne was able to get some support to pay another year's rent and was once again working as a sales agent or taking up short-term jobs to make money for her personal needs because her father's support is sporadic.

Anne related that the graduate student experience had been a bit different. Teachers are less condescending and they see students as more mature and consequently speak to them better, telling them about opportunities for work as research assistants or advising them of scholarships to travel out of the country. The course content at this level is still very theoretical and a lot of her classmates are doing the Master's programme 'just to keep busy', rather than as a primary choice.

Anne's graduate studies have been interrupted with the regular ghost towns, strikes and protests which form the political crisis. She feels the protests have gone off track and now inconvenience and endanger the people they are supposedly for.

Her favourite part of her graduate studies, content-wise, has been the entrepreneurship course which is now mandatory for all graduate students. She loved the course because it validated her being a science student who has been forced to do business to support herself and has developed an interest in the health business. Anne is currently rounding up her Master's research thesis. She says the experience is very disjointed, with supervisors often forcing their research interests on you. She has struggled to find current material as the school doesn't have access to many scientific journals. At the moment, Anne is trying not to think of what next. She is looking for work. She knows her father would definitely not support her furthering her education to PhD level although that is an option she is considering (still out of lack of more viable options). There has been a lot more pressure to get married from her family and friends. Anne says she is working on her fear of men and trying to unlearn the limitations she put on herself which keep her from going out and interacting more, or leave her feeling like she is not good enough.

While she is happy with her education and will definitely expound on the benefits of receiving higher education, she is now jaded. She no longer thinks her degrees will be instrumental in getting her what she wants. She would need to leave the region to work in her field in a pharmaceutical company. She would need to learn French to do so. She would also need to have someone in that region who could accommodate her because housing would be too expensive to pay for her to 'just go try and see'.

She wants to be financially independent and to her that is the only form of empowerment that matters. To be able to have a voice in their family like her older brother does, she needs to have a job that is steady and pays substantially.

Her father's abuse has lessened, she says, particularly after her older brother physically confronted him when he hit their mom over the Christmas holidays. She notes that her father recently boasted about her level of education while introducing her to his friends. This was a pleasant surprise.

Dija's story

In 1992, Dija was born into a polygamous Muslim family in Ngaoundere - a considerably underdeveloped and predominantly Muslim-Fulani town which is the capital of Cameroon's Adamawa Region. She was the first child to her mother who was the third wife, but the fourth child in the family at the time and the third girl. A mere seven days after her birth, Dija was taken to an orphanage called "Foyer de Charité" (Charity Shelter) and was left there for the first decade of her life.

Dija was aware she was not an orphan, but had never visited her family though they lived in the same town. Her parents, particularly her father, would occasionally visit her at the orphanage. But aside from those visits, she lived like the other kids of the orphanage, all of whom were enrolled at a Catholic Mission primary school and raised by a Christian woman from the South Region of Cameroon. However, the orphanage invited a Muslim Imam as it did a Catholic priest to hold religious services for the children, depending on the faith of the child's family.

In 2003, the orphanage had to close down and with that the woman who raised Dija at the orphanage decided to move down south. She and Dija had developed a mother-daughter bond and Dija called her mother. Dija's foster mom asked for permission to take Dija with her, to adopt her as her own, but was denied and with that, Dija had to return to her parents now ten years old and in Class 5 (with one more year of primary education to go).

Returning to her parents was a sudden and difficult transition. Dija felt physically ill and could not eat for a while. Her foster mum had been a pillar in her life and she did not know her biological parents at all. But she learned to adjust and managed to complete the last year of primary school. As of her entry into secondary school, Dija's health began to fail and she attributes it to the trauma of being suddenly removed from where she was being raised as Christian, then placed in a Muslim home overnight and expected to fit in seamlessly. Dija struggled to adjust at home for several reasons; primarily she found it difficult to bond with the mother who had left her at the orphanage and whom she had barely seen for her first decade. Her mother had birthed three more children, all boys, and Dija could not relate to them either. As is often the case with polygamous homes, relationships between the wives and their children were tense, and Dija struggled to adapt to the family dynamics which meant she was also not able to form close sisterly bonds with her half-sisters. Her adjustment was also difficult because it was not easy adhering to the dictates of the Muslim religion and her ignorance left her with feelings of unbelonging and misunderstanding.

For a long time, Dija would cry to be taken to her foster mother even for holidays but this was denied and she would have to make do with phone calls through her father's phone as her demands upset her mother. But Dija's foster mom understood Dija much better than Dija's mother did, and so Dija would typically call her foster mother when she had difficulties or problems.

One holiday, when Dija was 14 years old, a distant relative of Dija's father asked that Dija come stay with him for a weekend. Dija's father was reluctant but eventually gave in out of fear that the uncle would feel his request was denied because his wife was childless. During that weekend, while this uncle's wife stepped out, he snuck into Dija's room where she was having a nap and raped her. This uncle then threatened that if Dija spoke, she would have problems. At 14 years old and given her feeling of unbelonging with her family, Dija was already scared. In her own words "I was not like today's 14-year-olds, who are woke. So, I was too scared. I kept quiet and didn't talk." Despite not talking, the rape took a physical toll on her and she fell ill. The uncle bought her antibiotics, which she took in silence, and then let her return home. Dija would not say anything of the rape to her family

upon return. She and her mother were not that close and she had already learned that sex and things related to it weren't freely discussed in Muslim spaces. For instance, she recalls that she couldn't even bring up having her first period with her mother. Her mother never discussed it. Rather, Dija's foster mother had already given her some information on menstruation by the age of 10, when she left her care.

So it was not until the age of 19, that Dija informed her parents of the rape. That year, Dija was in the junior year of high school and found herself pregnant with her boyfriend's child. Dija's mother's reaction was worse than her father's. Her mother raved against her, threatened to disown her and send her away to the foster mother. Surprisingly, it was one of her stepmothers who pleaded for Dija not to be disowned. What seemed to have changed the tide in Dija's favour was that, when asked if the father of the child was the one who had 'deflowered' her, Dija then confessed to her uncle's rape, to the shame and dismay of her parents.

Dija's final year of high school was spent pregnant. As a teen mom in a very conservative Muslim society, Dija was constantly mocked. It was, in her opinion, the lowest point in her life and she was made to feel so disgraced that she could not bear to go out of the compound at times. The other wives and relatives mocked not only Dija, but her mother as well. They taunted Dija's mother asking if this was the result of the education she kept claiming her daughter excelled at.

Dija's boyfriend who had gotten her pregnant came to see her father to present himself and agreed to take responsibility. As per Fulani dictates, however, he had to make a choice to both convert and marry Dija or take the child. He opted to take the child. Hence, Dija continued her education after nursing her child and gave him to his father. The child was sent to her for visits but resided elsewhere.

Dija was admitted into the University of Ngaoundere to study for a BA in History. Going to the University was a big deal for her. Though she was still in Ngaoundere, she was staying in a student room on her own and for the first time in her life. This was the first time she felt at home and independent. Most of what she recounts as notable experiences

from her undergraduate years are related to the independence it offered her. She could decide if to cook or not, what to cook, whether to go to class or not. She drew up her own schedule and followed it. She noted the inhibitions. She was still in a society that made judgements on her if she dressed inappropriately, and she still had limitations as to where she could go and what she could participate in given her financial status. But her time at university made her feel bigger and more grown.

With regards to her academic experiences, Dija recounts that all that made university different from previous levels of education was the switch to studying something more specific which one chose to be the subject they would establish their career on. She says she expected that the university experience would equip her to get a livelihood, but all she did was learn a lot about one thing - history. She notes, however, that her education was constantly interrupted by strikes as teachers frequently protested against the situation of their unpaid salaries.

Having completed university, Dija 'felt bigger; she felt that she had taken a step forward as the first in her family to do so. So she felt intimidating, as people had suggested she would be. Dija had no choice but to return home with her first degree and began applying for public exams for direct recruitment or entrance exams into professional institutions which would ensure her employment, like ENS. She entered for such exams for a couple of years and then gave up, using skills she had learned as seamstress to make a bit of money for herself.

It was at this point that Dija decided to go in for a Master's programme at the same university, hoping that with a higher degree she would be more eligible for public recruitment exams. But her family felt she had already done too much and with no support, she recently had to drop out. She regrets having to give up and says she would have gone farther educationally if she could, but she needs financial sustenance and can't 'just continue being a student'.

From her brief experience with graduate studies, she says "undergraduate studies are very different from Master's. The first cycle is a sort of training. You're trained with a view

to obtaining something. In any case, that's what I think. It also enables you to grow: to open up your mind, even open up to the world." The next cycle, she suggests, is a lot more concentrated and self-led.

It is at this point of her education that she perceived quality issues with the limited course options offered at the University of Ngaoundere. Students can only choose from what is available unless they are able to move to the capital or another region to study English, for instance, or to Maroua in the far north to study at the Teachers' Training College there.

Having dropped out, Dija now devotes herself to seamstress work and plans to go in for more recruitment exams when she is able to afford it. She still lives in their family compound although her father passed away earlier in 2019. She shares a room and the kitchen with her two half-sisters, while the boys all have their own rooms.

While she shares a living space with her sisters, she cannot say they are close as the children tend to be dragged into the disagreements between their mothers who are co-wives. For instance, the family is currently going through a battle over inheritance following her father's death. Her mother and stepmothers are arguing over how the inheritance should be shared; with her mother arguing that it should be based on which wife had more children, and not on who is oldest.

Either way, Dija knows her brothers will inherit and not her. Depending on what they inherit they would support the running of their own part of the household as her brothers (though younger) now have the status of 'Man of the House' in place of her father, and Dija is under their care.

Aside from her seamstress work, Dija has joined the Ngaoundere-youth development association with members of both genders and different faiths led by her uncle - the Lamido – through which she is occasionally recruited for events such as the visit of a minister. She considers this youth association her second family as they understand and support each other as young people of that society.

Still, outings are not allowed every day as per the Muslim social norms, so Dija doesn't go out much and when she does she needs to ask for permission. It is much more permissible on weekends as she and her sisters can go out to braid their hair or visit a family member. Except, in some cases, they take the opportunity of going to campus for a class to see friends. This is how they have fun, she says, because parties or the like are not really allowed.

Dija hopes to either get recruited to a steady job or to develop her tailoring business such that she can have a shop and train other girls. She says nothing about marriage but she mentions the need to be financially viable so she can handle her responsibility as a mother.

She still has a difficult relationship with her mother. She says to date her mother has yet to give her an acceptable response to how she could abandon her at the orphanage a mere week after delivery, and why she treated her brothers differently. Dija concluded that her mother did not take having a daughter as a blessing given that she was married as the third wife for the sole purpose of having sons (her father had had only one son from the two previous wives). Yet her mother has not said anything to either confirm or deny this. Till today the mother claims she left Dija at the orphanage because she was feeling unwell after delivery and when asked why she treats Dija with less concern compared to her brothers, her mother claims the boys are more affectionate towards her.

Part III

When I was young, I thought that life of equality, wisdom and justice would be my birth right if only I worked hard at school, excelled, got a good job and a good salary. I was wrong.

– Hope Chigudu

Interviewer: *What would you say to a woman in this country who assumes she is no longer oppressed, who believes women's liberation has been achieved?*

Nawal El-Saadawi: *Well I would think she is blind. Like many people who are blind to gender problems, to class problems, to international problems. She is blind to what is happening to her.*

This research can be summed up in a simple problematic: As illustrated by the expressions “too much book” and “long crayon”, there is a widespread belief among Cameroonians that women risk becoming overeducated through graduate studies based on the assumptions of women’s empowerment through higher education. However, relevant literature on higher education and empowerment belies this belief and the presumption of women’s empowerment through higher education. It is thus necessary to address this contradiction with empirical data on the life and educational experiences of Cameroonian women who are on the verge of completing graduate education and are thus the epitome of those presumed as empowered.

The entirety of this thesis encapsulates how I problematise and address the above issue. Thus far the thesis has presented the rationale and strategy opted for addressing the problem, relevant literature which belies the assumed empowerment of Cameroonian women through higher education, and some empirical data- by way of narrative analysis- to depict the life-stories of two of the women Cameroonian society labels as “long crayon” and deems have “too much book”.

Table 2 Tabular profiling of selected participants

	Participant + Age	Linguistic Group	Region of origin	Higher Education Institutions Attended	Field of Studies	Faith	Family structure	Economic Background	Employment Status	Current Relationship status
1	Amena (33)	Anglophone	Northwest	University of Buea	CST-History + Educational Psychology	Muslim	Monogamy	Relatively impoverished	Unemployed	Single
2	Anna (22)	Anglophone	Northwest (dad) + Western Region (mom)	University of Yaoundé I + Catholic University-Bamenda + IRIC	Biochemistry + Accounting + International finance	Christian	Single mother/ married father	Upper middle class	Underemployed	Single
3	Cynthi (32)	Anglophone	Northwest	ENS Bamili+ UNIYAO I for 1 year	History (teaching)	Christian	Polygamous	Relatively impoverished	Employed	Single + 1 Child
4	Dija (27)	Francophone	Adamawa	University of Ngaoundere	History	Muslim	Polygamous	Lower Middle Class	Underemployed	Single + 1 child
5	Fatima (28)	Francophone	West Region	UNIYAO I + ENS Bamili	Geography	Muslim	Polygamy	Lower middle class	Employed	Married + 2 children
6	Hope (31)	Anglophone	Northwest	University of Buea	Journalism + Gender Studies	Christian	Monogamy	Lower middle Class	Unemployed	Married + 1 child
7	Jesurelle (25)	Francophone	West	University of Dschang + ESSTIC + IRIC	Bilingual letters + Journalism + International Communication	Christian	Monogamy	Middle class	Employed	Single
8	Momo (31)	Anglophone	Southwest	UNIYAO II + IRIC	Law + International humanitarian action	Christian	Divorced	Upper middle class	Unemployed	Married + 3 children
9	Oulimata (26)	Francophone	Adamawa	University of Ngaoundere + IRIC	Law + International cooperation	Muslim	Monogamy	Wealthy/Upper middle class	Unemployed	Married
10	Yoyo (26)	Francophone	Littoral	University Institute of Technology - Bandjoun + University of Ngaoundere	Industrial mechanics	N/A	Polygamy	Relatively impoverished	Unemployed	Single

With this part of the thesis, I further address the problem at hand with even more empirical data. The first three chapters in this part respond directly to the three guiding research questions of this study. As earlier mentioned, due to word-count limitations, I will be using 10 of the study's 20 participant narratives and their self-analysis submitted at the participatory workshop. The 10 participants were selected primarily based on their reflection of diversity in educational fields and institutions attended, socio-economic background, and the richness of their narrative and participatory-analysis data. Figure 13 above which profiles the selected 10 can be compared to the table presenting all 20 participants in Appendix F.

The last chapter presents the conclusions of the research according to the overriding objective to: offer a more rigorous African-feminist and human development based conceptualisation of empowerment for Cameroonian women, investigating if and how the higher education offered to Cameroonian women enables the empowerment they strive for.

Making sense of data is a never-ending process and interpretation can be done in multiple different ways to draw varying conclusions. As such, it is necessary to be clear that the ideas I choose to focus on here and the way I go about deliberating on them are not all-encompassing, nor are they merely cherry-picked on my bias. What findings and themes are presented and discussed out of the vast body of empirical data collected is based on what is relevant to the questions posed at this time by the researcher. Also note that given the duality in the research questions which asks for both the consideration of the participants and the consideration of the theoretical perspective, the analysis of narratives here is both inductive and deductive by presenting the analysis that participants made of their own life stories in conjunction with my interpretation of the empirical data as per my African-feminist Capability Approach theorisation.

9. EDUCATED ENOUGH TO CONSIDER THEMSELVES EMPOWERED

As mentioned in the literature review section of this thesis, my interrogation of Cameroonian women's empowerment through higher education is not merely grounded in the questionable quality of the higher education offered at state institutions, but also in the fact that whether higher education enables empowerment or not is dependent on how empowerment itself is conceptualised. To assume that these women are empowered and to give credit for that empowerment to their higher education requires that one knows what empowerment is for them and then to ascertain that their higher education has enabled the necessary aspects of this.

To this end, this chapter addresses the following research question:

1. How do diverse Cameroonian women graduates conceptualise empowerment, and how do they (if at all) consider themselves empowered on account of their higher education?

To comprehensively answer the above question the chapter is split into four sections; the first offers Cameroonian women's perspective of what is empowering, revealing what sort of power, freedoms, and abilities these women value. The next section focuses on these women's self-efficacy and tables personal assessments of their own (dis)empowerment. The third section explores the extent to which they credit their higher education with their self-assessed status of (dis)empowerment and the final section submits their thoughts on the labels of "too much book" and "long crayon" - the external assumptions of empowerment and perceptions of them as a threat on the basis of their higher education. With these sections, this chapter not only foregrounds the voices of relevant Cameroonian women, but also imparts how their perspectives confirm, deny and otherwise add to what is already known in related literatures.

9.1 The process of participant conceptualisation

The participants in this research were asked to share their understanding of the concept of empowerment at two different points in time. As part of the one-on-one interviews, after they had completed the narrations of their life-stories but before they were asked to

suggest activities for the participatory workshop, each woman was asked to share what being an empowered woman was for her and whether she considered herself empowered. Next, at the participatory workshop following the lesson on African-feminist theory and the Capability Approach, each participant was once again be asked to define empowerment; this time they wrote down the definition and key words/aspects which they felt characterised empowerment as per Activity 3 in the workbook (see Appendix D).

This iteration is recommended for research seeking to construct ideas from participants as the repetition ensures epistemological reflections (see Magolda 2004) and captures likely variation in participant conceptualisation for more nuance and accuracy. As expected of the repeated questioning process, this study showed that the choice of words used to convey participants' understanding of the concept of empowerment changed at the different instances. When asked to share their understanding of what is empowering and who an empowered woman is at the end of their life-story interviews, participants used more informal and descriptive language, defining the concept in relation to themselves. In contrast, when filling out the above Activity 3 section in their workbooks, participants used formal language and some of them added terms from the Capability Approach or African-feminist thought they had just been lectured on.

Momo, who at the time was a 31-year-old wife and mother of three children, and had been a student of what should have been a two-year graduate programme in humanitarian relief for over five years, is a participant who illustrated this difference particularly well. At her life-story interview, Momo said:

To me an empowered woman is that woman who is working in her lane. When I talk about in her lane...she is walking in her passion. And a woman working in her passion and she knows how to go about it...She has her vision and she knows how to go about her vision and she is not being stopped by anybody. She has something to pursue and whatever she has is something impactful, yes something that can impact the society positively, yes. When you are able to take both your challenges, you are able to have your vision and you go for it and when you encounter your challenges you know what to do, I mean to overcome them, to me that is empowerment...

To me when you say you want to empower somebody, it is about, hmm, making that person to understand that he or she is up to a particular task, let me put it that way. He or she is up to a particular task as in, as in they can stand up and

become the person that they are supposed to be...who they are destined to be. You first stand up and you...you become the person that you are destined to be, then make a person to discover his or her passion. You see...so empowerment is all about giving the person the, giving somebody the...what is that word nah... The ability to become, whom the person wants to be or to stand on their own.

In her workbook Momo listed “feminism” and “diversity” as keywords/aspects of empowerment in the illustration under Activity 3, and defined the concept in the lines below:

Empowerment is bringing out and encouraging the potentials in women without limiting their capacities according to their various backgrounds.

The main differences in her two attempts at conceptualising empowerment are the word choice, length of definition and tone; with the latter showing more objectivity than the former. This confirms scholarship which suggests that open-ended tasks produce more elaborate and authentic portrayals of students’ opinions than devised questioning, where responses are given with expected objectivity and hopes of meeting accuracy (Barton 2015).

Modifications in the participants’ definitions at the different instances also attest to the informational influence of the workshop lesson on theoretical frameworks. It is also worth noting that asking for the meaning of empowerment in a personal space, one-on-one, allowed for participants to share their reflections more unreservedly than they could do in the more formal and/or classroom-like setting of the workshop. For instance, the unstructured format of the life-story interviews allowed for Jesurelle to ramble as she reflected on how she perceived empowerment and her being empowered through higher education. Jesurelle, who at the time was an international communications student with previous degrees in bilingual letters (a dual honors programme in English and French) and Journalism, revealed an etymological issue in conceptualising empowerment as a Francophone. Her response showed what she perceived as characteristics of being empowered, but also made it clear that responding to whether higher education had empowered her was not so simple:

Yes and no. I am looking for exact words to explain it. When I say no, it's because, when I close my eyes, I don't remember if there was ever, in my training, a course on 'empowerment'. If I say this word in French, it's not going to really fit. So there was no course on 'empowerment', a course where you're taught to stand up and act, to get up and work.

In this way Jesurelle exposed a gap in literature on the conceptualisation of empowerment; that is, the problem with conceptualising in colonial languages and the possibility of meanings lost in translation. This demonstrates arguments made for decolonising higher education (see Yallem 2019; Cushman, 2016). Jesurelle's response revealed that I had taken it for granted that the intricate concept of empowerment could be captured in a single word which can have multiple meanings as in the English language. This perception led me to accept official French one-word translations for "empowerment" as "autonomisation" and in some cases "émancipation" or "responsabilisation". But neither of these words quite allow for a multiplicity of meanings as the English "empowerment" does. The first, "autonomisation" expresses individual autonomy/independence and the second translation "émancipation" leans towards freedom and liberation from a specific thing and the third "responsabilisation" refers more to the aspect of delegating responsibilities to someone- with all the power to do it. As such, these words commonly used in place of empowerment can adequately relay aspects of "empowerment", but neither one would by themselves allow a wide breadth of meanings as empowerment does in English.

A review of Jesurelle's response sheds new light on the way other Francophone participants used a variety of words intermittently to capture different aspects of empowerment and express their status of (dis)empowerment in their life-story interviews. Words used included the aforementioned three as well as "*promotion*" for the advancement/building up of someone, "*habilitation*" to convey the enabling of something, "*autorisation*" used to relay the authorising of one's value, and phrases like *prise en charge* which capture the giving of support/care, or *donner du pouvoir* which literally translates to giving power. This would also explain the unique differences in later conceptualisations by Francophone participants at the workshop following the lesson on theory in French. It is there that they would find that though their words and phrases most commonly used in

French to convey aspects of empowerment, language is a dynamic instrument. The word “empowerment” has been added to the French language with the same spelling (though its conjugated form differs) as a term in academic and development jargon and is used synonymously with words like “*capacitation*” and “*démarginalisation*” to convey the development of human capacities and addressing of inequalities (see Calvès 2009).

Thus, Jesurelle would still use the word “*autonomisation*” in the workshop, but now includes aspects of newly learned theory. Her keywords/aspects of empowerment were: financial independence, freedom, selfishness, decision making and fulfilment. And her new definition of empowerment in the workbook was:

Empowerment means equip someone in order to give them the necessary tools to acquire what is necessary for his wellbeing.

Despite the inconsistency in choice of words used for conceptualisation at the different points of questioning, the essence of participants’ ideas of empowerment was mostly consistent pre- and post-workshop lessons. Still, findings from this process lend credence to the argument for a contextual conceptualization of empowerment, particularly considering the nuance of multiple colonial languages in this context

9.2 First, what does empowerment mean to these women?

Irrespective of how the women expressed it, participants’ conceptualisations denote that they perceive the development and possession of certain valued powers, opportunities, freedoms and functionings as empowering. Commonalities across the sample indicate that for these women being empowered entails opportunities for gainful employment and the functioning of financial autonomy, freedoms in choice and the power to decline, freedom from control and power of self-authorisation, freedom of voice and the functioning of assertion, the power of knowledge and functioning of necessary competence, the power of external recognition and functioning of self-confidence, the power to empower others, decision-making power and opportunity, and the functioning of self-actualisation.

Opportunities for gainful employment and financial autonomy

All 20 participants involved in this study prioritised having a paid job, money of their own and control over it as a key aspect of empowerment. Of the 10 women focused on here; six described themselves as unemployed at the time although one of them was awaiting her government appointment and four (one of whom was also awaiting government appointment) made it clear that they were under-employed as the jobs they were engaged in were short-term, irregular, inadequate with respect to economic need and unrelated to their field of study. Irrespective of their employment status they recognised that working out of home and having a source of income was empowering and the lack thereof was the most recognised source of disempowerment. At the time of the interview, Anne was on the brink of completing graduate studies for a Master's degree in biochemistry. When asked how she understood empowerment at her life-story interview session, she said:

I will first of all look at it from the angle of finance... a disempowered woman always depends on the husband for even basic things let me say even to buy a cube of Maggi,⁵³ you need to meet your husband to give you money... she is just depending from his own income in order for you and everybody in the house to survive... I will also say an empowered woman is a woman who can work... she can do things without her husband's assistance, do things on her own not depending on her own husband's income or depending on other people... even though they say 'no man is an island', but like 80% or 85% what such a woman does is supported by her own work... anything she is doing is from her own pocket anything she wants she get it by herself not depending on her husband's pocket or husband's salary.

Jesurelle shared a similar opinion:

To me, an autonomous Cameroonian woman is one who doesn't depend too much on her husband. Because in Cameroon, we're in a context where men tend to want to exert a little too much influence... I recognise that the husband is the head of the family, but I also recognise that the man's leadership does not mean that he should crush the woman. I mean, because you have a wife at home who doesn't work, doesn't mean you should subject her to blackmail, cheating, because you're telling yourself, 'anyway, she's at home doing nothing' and so on. So, I think that an autonomous woman is one who is first of all financially independent. That is, she has a job that enables her to have money at the end of the month such as to even contribute to the household, let it be fair. In fact, let

⁵³ Maggi is the brand name for a commonly used seasoning cube.

her not expect everything from her husband, it should not be like everything comes from her husband.

I also think that autonomy goes even beyond the financial [...] But, I think that all this, all these other powers are bestowed upon women, in the Cameroonian context, as soon as they have money. Because in Cameroon, when you are a woman and you don't have money, only a very good husband will let you do as you wish. Otherwise, he will always tend to manipulate you. In fact, you will have the impression that you are a puppet in his hands, one that he controls as he chooses.

Like Jesurelle and Anne above, all the women's conceptualisations mentioned being able to avoid depending on and being at the mercy of others, particularly husbands, as the reason why working and having money was empowering. These women's comments affirm that income is a crucial conversion factor, particularly for women under patriarchy. The findings are also consistent with related research which showed that financial empowerment remains the most recognised form of empowerment based on the ability to free one from their partner's financial control and other inhibitions (Endeley 2001; Tsikata & Darkwah 2014). The women's responses showed that they were very aware of how being gainfully employed triggers other aspects of desirable empowerment.

When asked for her conceptualisation of empowerment and who an empowered woman is, 33 year-old Amena, shared the story of a woman whom she does not know personally who was a guest on a radio programme she had listened to in the period following her completion of her undergraduate studies.

There was one woman on the program I was listening to, and she was sharing her story, trying to educate young girls, telling them that 'you don't have to depend on your parents, you don't have to depend on your husband or your relatives'.... She narrated her own story, how she struggled in life because she was someone who was always depending. At one point when she would ask anything of the husband, he would say no, he would complain that she asked for everything even to the level of asking for Maggi to put in the soup, and say that he doesn't have money. Until one day the husband had to talk back to her rudely; that every day she is asking for something, is he producing money? So from then she started thinking, according to her story, that scolding from her husband made her decide to empower herself not to be depending on her husband again. She said she started looking of what she can do and she ended up finding a program where

women were learning how to produce things like savon,⁵⁴ body lotion and things she can sell and make money from in order to take care of herself. She said from that program she was selected to go for training in America for one month so she would come back and set up a bigger enterprise and train others. At that point she could do other things like taking care of the nails, making sanitary pads and she could pass the knowledge on to young people. She had achieved her aim, which was not to be depending on her husband. But from there she was able to do more, she could travel and have exposure, she could organise a group of women where they came together and raised funds and opened a workshop for training on such skills, she is now employing people herself and her status has really changed. She is now an empowered person, she is no more depending on the husband. She has even gotten respect in the family because family members now are like seeing her as a different person, especially when she went to America and came back... So you see how she is an empowered woman as she can produce things and she stopped depending? For me the case of that woman shows what it means to be empowered. She was not able to be empowered by that time simply because she got married when she was not yet doing something, not able to do something for herself. And that is what I learned from it, that before I enter into my marital home, I need to be independent so as not to face the problems that she was facing.

Amena's recounting of this woman's story suggests that she saw the woman's (and all women's) ability to make an income as not merely an end in itself, but equally a key conversion factor for living a full life. Making and income and the capability of economic opportunities would generate other desired ends like gaining her family's respect, having an opportunity to travel, becoming an employer with a social status, being able to influence people and more.

Still, as other participants like Fatima and Hope pointed out in their interviews, there is a notable distinction between having money and being financially independent. At the time of the interview, Fatima was waiting to defend her dissertation which would mark the end of her graduate studies at the Higher Teachers Training College in Bambili, after which she would be appointed as a government secondary school teacher. When asked about her idea of empowerment and empowered woman at her life-story interview, Fatima corroborated what others had said about financial independence being primary:

⁵⁴ Refers to a locally made palm-oil based soap.

For me, empowerment is about being independent, financial independence. You can't talk about empowerment when you're not independent. You can be independent in the sense that you make your own decisions as you wish, but can't make a decision when it involves spending. For me, empowerment is synonymous with financial independence. It is something a woman can only get if she is working, or even has a business, not necessarily working at an office job. But, as a student? Mchew! A student cannot speak of 'empowerment'.

Yet, after some consideration she said that she could not name any woman around her who she felt was completely empowered. At this point she referred to herself to explain that dilemma; her pending appointment assured her that she would be gainfully employed soon and though it would be a couple of years before the government began paying her a regular salary, she noted that she would be just somewhat less financially dependent at that time because as she said:

...even if I get this money, I will never be independent because of my religion, and my marriage... You can be independent if you are not married and are working; you make the decisions, you do the spending, you choose what to do... But, once you're married, you need your husband's opinion. You can't make a decision without consulting him, without his opinion...

In this way, Fatima demonstrated her consciousness of religious and cultural constraints which having a paid job would not erase. As these comments were made at the life-story interview prior to her introduction to any Capabilitarian or African-feminist concepts, Fatima was unintentionally expressing how the intersectionality of her religion and marital status would ensure that certain levels of financial independence would always be out of her reach. Her words suggest that asking for her husband's opinion on how to spend her salary is equivalent to gaining permission to do so as opposed to including a spouse into her plans. By such an admission Fatima illustrates how the degree of empowerment possible via employment and income would be different in this Cameroonian context. Contrary to what Western scholarship presumes, access to income alone would not overturn the inequity embedded and passed on through religious and cultural structures.

Hope, who was carrying out her own empirical research for a Master's degree in gender studies, affirmed Fatima's point with an example from her own research which

investigates the impact of microcredits on household food security. She explained that her research was confirming a hypothesis she had when she was employed at an NGO in Bamenda which ran a microcredit project. Remarking on her own participants in the project, she noted that:

...in each session they complain that the money is not sufficient and the institution [which runs the microcredit project] in its reply would say they should make-do with what is available... But how can they pay back what they are given and then have to pay back the loans and make a profit when what they are given is not enough to do something satisfactory? I am coming to a conclusion myself that this microcredit rather helps to impoverish these women rather than empower them... but I still have to actually find out if my conclusion is right.

Hope's remarks reflect the realisation that being given money on its own does not equal having control over the money nor being able to make transformational life changes with the money for empowerment. This lesson which Hope credits to her work experience and graduate studies corroborates the findings of other scholars (see Ganle, Afriyie & Segbefia 2015) who have found that microfinance schemes can be disempowering and as well as others who have criticised such economic-growth model attempts at women's empowerment in the Global South (Bateman 2010).

It is also significant that while the participants seemed open to a variety of 'gainful employment,' their responses showed obvious preference for salaried jobs and even greater preference for being employed by the government. Dija, who was introduced in Part II, described herself as unemployed at the beginning of her interview, but in the course of it she mentioned being a seamstress and being able to take care of her personal needs with sewing jobs. She too felt that financial constraints disempowered her but she attributed this to her lack of success in entrance exams which would secure her government employment and not to her tailoring business not taking off. Likewise, Yoyo an industrial mechanics student, mentioned being unemployed though she does small scale trading alongside her studies. These women's delineation of gainful employment is clear and suggests that not all forms of employment would be considered empowering, because not all forms of employment would be strong enough conversion factors to generate other aspects of empowerment. Cynthi's narration is a testament of this; as she

displays how her yet to be finalised appointment as a civil servant is already enabling other aspects of empowerment:

Before, there were many who looked down on me so much in the society. At first there are some people who just to greet you was so difficult because they value the matricule but the moment they realised that I have the matricule, and that it is even better than theirs...so many people, some are driving their cars, they will park and greet you. Greetings that I have never received. And at any gathering, when you are there, when they want to select leaders, they will look for me and say call for her she is of this level.

At the time of the interview, Cynthi was employed as a teacher in a private school where she earned an average of fifty-five thousand francs [100 USD] per month. This is certainly not a high paying job; slightly above Cameroon's legal minimum wage and certainly something which someone who runs a small business could earn. As such, it is easy to decipher that the considerable respect she was receiving and positions she was being nominated for was not because of her current employment but her pending appointment by the government as marked by a civil service matricule. The value of Cynthi's pending government matricule is particularly empowering in the Cameroonian context as government employment remains the most reliable, with dismissals being rare, salaries being assured, and banks more willing to grant loans to civil servants. Thus, while employment would be empowering to women everywhere, and even though Cynthi would still be a teacher when she leaves her current private school to commence work at a government school, it is clear that not all paid employment is equal as it begets different gradients of power and breadth of accessible opportunities.

Freedoms of Voice and Power of Assertion

Being able to speak up in both public and private spaces to articulate their needs and express opinions is a power which the majority of women in this study claimed to have and one which they ranked highly. Dija ranked herself highly empowered in workbook Activity 5 despite her underemployment and other self-identified oppressions. In that activity she presents her reason for this high grading of her empowerment, saying: *"I have the power to speak to people and the power to speak my mind"*.

Yoyo likewise saw her ability to speak up as evidence of empowerment. At her interview, she defined who an empowered woman was by describing that disempowered women are not expected nor able to speak up.

A man comes and takes you from the village, asks you to be his wife. In such cases, the man usually tends to undermine you. He thinks that since you're from the village, you don't have the right to speak, you are a village girl who doesn't know anything about life. So he can treat you as he pleases. And this is generally the case in our environment. There are many cases like that. I, for one, have come across men who think like that, a guy friend... When we were talking and I gave an idea, he would always try to demean me, to make me understand that, a woman may go to school, but her place remains in the kitchen. He would say 'you can't tell me anything, you don't have an opinion to give. What you're saying is not valid because I'm the man, so what matters is what the man says'.... But as I was fortunate enough to have pursued further studies - he had stopped at the Baccalaureate - I would still speak up, I would have suggestions to make.

The importance of having a voice in these women's conceptualisation of empowerment is most discernible from their descriptions of periods of disempowerment versus periods of empowerment; the inability to express themselves either out of insecurities, lack of what to say or how to say it was a common attribute of the periods during which they felt disempowered. Dija, for instance, illustrates this when she describes how different she is now from her younger self that felt disempowered as she tried to adjust to her polygamous Muslim family and then with her rape. She said:

...in my family - with us Muslims, girls don't have the right to speak in public. For example, if you are married and your husband does something to you, you have no right to speak...

And referring to her inability to talk after she was raped by her uncle at age 14, her exact words were:

At the time, I was too scared; 14-year-olds then were not like today's 14-year-olds, who are 'awake, awake'.⁵⁵ So, I was too scared. I kept quiet, I didn't talk. Even though I didn't talk, I felt sick.

Later on, when describing how much more empowered she is today, she said:

⁵⁵ The exact expression Dija uses in this sentence is "éveillées, éveillées" which literally means "awake, awake". The best semantic equivalence is "woke", a socio-political term of African-American origin which refers to perceived consciousness of injustices.

My eyes are now open as compared to when I was a kid. Take the rape I told you about; I know that at this age, where I am now, it can no longer happen to me. And even if it happened to me now... when it happened the first time, I couldn't speak out because I was afraid. But, right now, I know that if it happens to me today, I will deal with the person.

In a similar manner, one of the ways Momo recognised her disempowerment through a particular life event was by her inability to speak up for herself because she either did not know better, felt insecure or was trying to please. Such life events she recounted included; her time at boarding school where she struggled to fit in and speak with her friends because she had a feeling of inferiority rooted in her bed-wetting and poor grades, her inability to tell her father that her sister had caused the delay which resulted in her being locked out of the exam hall for the first government entrance exam she was to write - ENAM - and which her father had pre-arranged for her to pass, and even at the time of the interview her inability to speak up for herself and say she did not want to write the entrance exam yet as her husband demands that she does. When referring to her losing her chance to write that first exam due to her sister, Momo said:

Now this particular incident made me notice what had been happening in my life. It's that I don't put myself first when it comes to my issues. I try to consider other people's opinion. I realised that it really affects me...yes...because if I had followed my own voice I wouldn't have tried to please her... that is how I did not write that concour and we lied to my father that I had headache. That I didn't write because I was unwell. Because that time my father was the board member of ENAM. He was a board member in ENAM. He said I should just make sure that I write to even pass the written part of it. So that when I passed the written part of it, he would just take my receipt and help for me to get into ENAM.

Although Amena did not recount her lack of a voice in her experience of disempowerment, her narration underscores having a voice and being able to use it as a crucial difference between her and those women she considers disempowered. As she described her current inclination to speak up in mixed-sex Muslim gatherings, she said:

...when they [both Muslim men and women who attend these meetings] go together, they don't sit together...women are likely behind and men are in front. And you discover that in this case women don't always talk in such gatherings. So it is just like there, it is just like you cannot talk, and you don't have a voice...Someone like me, when I attend the meetings sometimes, you are just [shrugs] ...I can talk, I know that I can talk, but I just decide to sit and observe

how women are acting. I can talk but since they have divided men from women it is now sometimes the conversation is just between men and men. The women are not contributing, they are just sitting and listening...they are not like outspoken again because they are not given that opportunity to talk.

Yeah, so somebody like me and with my level of education, when they are talking and I discover there is something I can talk that is not [falls silent] ...well, I have to raise my voice and talk. But the other women, they have not gone to school, they are just there and are just always being very reserved. And one thing is that when you....you know as a woman when you are talking, when these women discover that you are such a woman who can talk like at a place like this, they tend to respect you and whatever thing you are saying they respect it because they see that you are different because it is not every woman that is able to stand up and talk. So they see you as a different figure...and whenever you say something, everybody would turn their attention to you because they know that it is not easy to stand up and speak there as a woman.

Being able to speak up for oneself is an attribute well recorded across all genres of empowerment scholarship (Tsikata & Darkwah 2014; Mejuini's 2013; Malik & Courtney 2011; Monkman 2011; Rowlands 1995) but it is necessary to underscore that the gravity of speaking up is not the same for all women. While Momo acknowledged that her inability to speak up for herself is rooted in an inferiority complex and the need to please, Amena's narration illustrates that there is a stronger barrier for Muslim women when it comes to speaking up. Both Dija's description of her new life as a Muslim girl and scholarship on Cameroonian Muslim women's socialisation make it clear that Muslim girls are not brought up to speak up for themselves (Van Santen 2010). Given that this is a culture which ingrains deference to men into girls and women and where a woman would be perceived as rude for speaking up publicly, what Amena does by speaking up at that gathering is more significant than it would be elsewhere. This would explain why Dija would consider her ability to speak up for herself and in public so empowering that it overrides other oppressions to warrant her self-assessment of her high empowerment. Voice would be significant to Cynthi or Jesurelle, but not in the same manner as with Dija and Amena. Jesurelle for instance reports that she has been class president, speaking in front of school assemblies from childhood. Consequently, freedoms of voice and power of assertion in this context ought to be appreciated as 'fertile functionings' which beget even greater access to other opportunities and realisation of other functionings (Nussbaum 2011).

Correspondingly, other participants recounted experiences which suggest that the weight of one's having a voice is not always equal and the ability to use one's voice is often hampered by certain conditions. When Cynthi narrates her experience as an Anglophone student studying at the University of Yaounde I, she expresses the frustration of having the power of your voice lost in translation:

In Yaoundé I faced a lot of challenges, one being an Anglophone, life was not easy... I will do the presentations in English whereas it needed to be done In French because most of the lecturers were Francophones. At times when we are doing presentations, the lecturers will go out and look for Master's students who are Anglophones to come and sit in class because they themselves will not understand what you are saying. After the presentation, they will ask the Master's student how was it? What grade do we give them? The grades were now being given by the Master's students and not the lecturers... But our classmates, a lot of people don't understand. They only cheer, what they do is they cheer. They say yes nice. They just appreciate without even getting what you are saying. It was the same thing with us when they are doing their presentation we sit as if we are Southern Cameroonians attending the Fouban Conference. We don't get what they are saying, but we cheer.

For her part, Hope shows that even when you have attained the point where you have something to say and the confidence to say it, there are other issues to be taken into consideration. She says:

If we have a family issue that needs to be discussed and the views vary. Say, what I think is not what my elder brothers think, my parents will obviously take what my elder brothers think. That is where I have a big difficulty [with making my voice heard]. At times they tell me out rightly that 'you belong to a different family now. So even if you are giving a suggestion just know that it can only be taken if it is actually well appreciated by everybody'. You see this is because I am married; but now with my in-laws they equally have this notion of the woman's place is secondary... so if I am with my in-laws and I want to tell them something, I have to ensure that my husband approves, I have to speak through him.

Hope, like women in a similar African-feminist study (Chisale 2017), indicated that she and her husband have a fairly equal relationship, within which she has a voice. However, because of his family's patriarchal ways her voice is muted and can only be amplified by him. By such recollections, it is clear that in addition to having a voice and being able to use it, voice as a capability which enables other desired ends is dependent on if one's voice can be understood and actually heard.

The Power of Knowledge and Functioning of Necessary Competence

By these women's narrations, being empowered here is having knowledge which would enable them to do better for and by themselves. True to the adage that "knowledge is power", the women in this study asserted that they recognise being learned as a source of power; power to make the right decisions, power to open other doors, and power to change one's status.

Since secondary school, Anne struggled with a father who was very abusive and was disparaging of her interest in the sciences particularly because he felt STEM subjects were not something women should be involved in. Anne would have to sneak out of home for classes, endure his shutting off the lights when she stayed up late to study, and when she begged him through his reluctance to pay her fees, he would demand that she act as a sales agent for his cosmetic business [where he includes his self-concocted beauty products] prior to him sending her any money. It is with this in mind that she feels that her knowledge gave her power over her situation with her father. Anne said:

Whenever I go to stores to distribute my father's products, some of the customers will say: what do you study in school because you talk like a business student? I will respond 'no I study Biochemistry' and using that Biochemistry knowledge I would be able to market his products better...Even when I go back home, when my father is in his laboratory, where he does his mixtures. I will go and meet him there sometimes and be like: why don't you do it this way instead? Because in Biochemistry some chemistry knowledge which I was taught a little is useful to the mixtures and preservation. I will propose some ideas - that you could do it like this... And now he is also proud to tell his family members that he has a biochemist in the house, even though it was not easy to get him to train that biochemist.

In like manner, Yoyo identifies having knowledge as empowering, saying that:

It is the knowledge I received [in higher education] that enables me to differentiate, to have discernment, and to express myself in any such question. That sort of empowerment is thanks to my education, because if I had not gone to school, there would perhaps be certain life principles that I would not understand, perhaps certain details that I would not have learned.

She goes on to demonstrate how her knowledge begets more capabilities:

...now, my frame of mind is not focused only on going back to work for someone. Instead, I see myself either teaching people...I would need to enrol for a PhD after the Master's degree, after which I could come back to lecture. The other option available to me is setting up a business, perhaps with knowledge imparted to us through courses such as 'Business Creation', thanks to which one could develop their own business plan, try to design a product to the point of marketing it... And also, when it comes to my company...if I set one up, God willing, in meetings for example, I will be able to use the knowledge, resulting from school, to run things, to manage people.

The above examples of how participants feel knowledge has made them more competent to pursue varied goals and garner respect, uphold the position assumed in a variety of Capabilitarian literature sources on education, which places great importance on education as a conversion factor for such reasons (Robeyns 2006; Walker & Unterhalter 2007). Aside from this take on knowledge being empowering by imparting competencies, other participants shared that knowledge strengthened them mentally as well. Amena and Cynthi credit their knowledge to their ability to defend their personal convictions in the face of cultural pressure and religious bias. Amena attributes her religious studies instruction and knowledge of her faith for enabling her to stand up for her identity as a Muslim in the face of unfounded teaching from other Muslims and prejudice from non-Muslims. Cynthi equally relayed how her higher education in history enabled her to question and counter the origins of sexist and borrowed traditions. As Cynthi described how her studies had enlightened her on the roots of present-day gender disparities, she went on to say:

...tracing the history of precolonial African society, you realise that women played an indispensable role. We had women who were leaders, women acted as Queen Mothers during the enthronement of kings. Women were considered as givers of life because without a women in most African societies, a king could not be crowned. Today we are trying to look for examples like those women who stood up and fought for their rights in the society...

On the other hand, participants confirm their conceptualisation of knowledge as empowerment through the instances they narrated, where ignorance has disempowered

them. Yoyo was born to the third wife of a traditionalist family and her father died a few years after she was born. Her mother was uneducated, and left with no financial support as she was the wife with the least claim to property, having borne only one daughter. Yoyo's mother nevertheless believed in educating her daughter and both mother and child would hawk food on the roadside to support Yoyo's education. Despite her good intentions, Yoyo's mother was ignorant of the educational system and when she went to pay Yoyo's tuition and register her in *Troisieme* [the grade where Francophone students first select their preferred academic focus], her mother made an error which Yoyo was unable to undo. In recounting her episodes of disempowerment, Yoyo mentions this, saying:

In Troisieme, I planned to switch to technical education; having grown up involved in trading, and given that I was passionate about it, I really wanted to go into Accounting and Management. Unfortunately for me, that didn't happen because, as my mother knew little about the workings of school, she didn't really know how to go about it for a switch from general to technical studies... I knew I could make up for it by doing the C series, and maybe later try to switch to Accounting. But... Because of that, I opted for the C series and I found it really challenged... I went almost a year without schooling... I was still able to pass the Probatoire but I didn't really do as well as I wanted. And so I did not see myself going forward with my longstanding dream of becoming an accountant.

This excerpt reveals how Yoyo feels her mother's lack of knowledge disempowered her ability to pursue her own studies in the field of her dreams. It is necessary to note that at this time, Yoyo was more knowledgeable than her mother on the educational system, and as such it was not her own lack of knowledge that disempowered her but rather the limitations to her mother's scope of knowledge which delimited Yoyo's freedoms. By this example, Yoyo affirms the Capabilitarian notion of 'relational capabilities' which argues that the ability of others affects our own abilities. It questions the conceptualisations of freedom [and by extension possible empowerment] put forward by capabilities theorists like Sen (1999), that a truly empowered individual ought to be able to achieve valuable functionings, regardless of the conditions [ignorance] of others. That Yoyo's power of

knowledge is only as strong as her mother's lends credence to African scholarship which critiques the Capabilitarian take arguing that true freedom lies in interdependence. True empowerment by knowledge is dependent on collective empowerment by collective consciousness.

Particularly relevant to this study, however, is the conceptual angle by which participants see knowledge as empowering because they have recognised that having it makes you intimidating. Oulimata - who was also introduced in Part II - captured this palpable fear of women having knowledge when she said:

People always say stuff like: this one's overeducated, this one will not respect you. I remember a friend saying to my face, 'I would never want to take an educated woman for a wife'. I asked why and he said: because at home, when you will talk about Putin, she too will talk about Putin; she won't be surprised. Rather, she will even put forward better arguments than yours, and that is not what a woman should be good at.

Oulimata asserted that she realised at that point that having the same knowledge as men had put you on par with them and they do not want that; they are not happy with that.

Freedoms of Choice and the Power to Decline

Empowerment for these women is also conceptualised as having the ability to choose and refuse. By their admissions this aspect of empowerment entails not only agency and capacity for self-determination but equally the availability of options/absence of desperation. All these women described an empowered woman as one who can make choices for herself or turn down options she did not want. Cynthi, for instance, assessed herself as 85% empowered in Activity 5. Despite her pending government appointment and the financial security which she recognised would come with it, the reason she wrote to support her high ranking is:

I think I am up to this level because I know my rights to choose and can say no when I deem it necessary.

It is worth noting that this opinion is consistent with that which she had prior to the workshop. At her one-on-one interview, Cynthi reflected at length on what being an empowered woman entails, saying:

To me, empowerment means you have the right to contest, you have the right to elections, you have the right to choose, to say yes or no to something that favours or disfavours you...You are not being forced to do something out of your will....

Though being able to choose or refuse is recognised as an aspect of being empowered by all these women, most of them barely had instances of choices they could make or options they had the opportunity to reject, aside from choosing what to study. Eight of the ten women focused on here had parents with no higher education experience, and as a result they acknowledged that their academic choices were mostly as a result of their own choices, made based on what they performed well in, what was available to study near them and affordable to them. With regard to the paradoxical freedom of academic choice, Anne said:

I would say I'm on the fence that is empowered and disempowered. Empowered in the sense that I have the choice to choose whatsoever I want to study... like I earlier said might be if you ask my father now that what am I doing now at Master's level, he knows that I go to the lab since I do my internship while staying in the house, so he always sees me going in the morning that I am going to the hospital he just knows I am dealing with something related to the hospital but he cannot say the exact thing or what I am studying. On the other hand I am disempowered educationally in that I could not go in for the Public health MSc program I really want. That is, I am restricted to choose from the professional programs as a result of financial constraints.

Exceptionally, Cynthi relates an experience where she had to choose between her marriage and her education

...He was not happy, he was so skeptical. When I tell him: this is my program, I will leave school, I have assignment, I need to go download [at a cyber café], I need to do group work before coming to the house, it posed a lot of problems...He started dating another woman and so, when I realised it, I tried to call his concern back home but the relationship kept moving on and on and I said I should not lose my life because of a relationship. So one day I called him and I told him: My dear, I have decided to choose between my education and my relationship. With my education, I will have a better life, minus this relationship I will be able to move

on with life. So if you choose to keep a concubine out of your marital home then you forge ahead. No response. And so what did I do? I took a giant step, I left home...

Cynthi narrates this as an illustration of exercising power based on what 'favoured her' [as per her earlier definition]. Yet, situational decisions such as this are theorised by Capabilitarian and feminist scholars as trade-offs which denote constraints to freedoms (Alkire & Deneulin 2009). The fact that she still has to choose between studies or relationship and that she cannot have both relays that her empowerment is compromised and belies the idea that the choice made and the act of choosing was truly empowering.

Freedom from Control and the Power of Self-authorisation

In their attempts to illustrate how they knew they were disempowered at certain periods in time, the women in this research often pointed to their having to ask during those times. That is, aside from previously discussed dependency for money, these women denote the need for permission to be and do/be what they desire to as a result of restrictions they are bound to adhere to. As noted in Dija's story earlier, given the passing of her father, her brothers are 'head of the home', and even though she is the oldest she had to gain their consent prior to traveling to Yaoundé for our interview and the participatory workshop. It follows then that Dija's power to choose to be a participant and travel to another region was based on permission granted to her by a more powerful younger brother. Conversely, several other potential Muslim women students at the University of Ngaoundere had the power to choose and the ability to participate in the research but eventually declined their availability to participate because they were not granted that permission. That Dija did not need, nor receive any additional ability [like funds or protection] from her brother to travel for the workshop suggests that having to ask and be subject to certain control as per sociocultural regulations, is a form of disempowerment here and freedom from that - being able to authorise yourself - is a defining aspect of empowerment.

In their stories, Anne and Jesurelle also gave poignant illustrations of how they conceptualise empowered women as those who do not need to ask. Jesurelle illustrated

how her not having to ask nor worry about certain things being agreed to is a mark of how empowered she has become. In her words:

...I think it was 2017, yes, when I took part in this training, when I received the award and all. That's when I started to be more certain about wanting to get out of my comfort zone, to organise something. Because before, when I wanted to do...since I had been sort of closed off since I was in the family home... as soon as I wanted to do something, I'd ask myself, 'Will it even be possible? Will I even get the permission to? Will I have the means? Do I...' But, as I'm working now.... things are happening rather easily, and that it's just a matter of getting started...

She went on to say she feels empowered because she doesn't have to answer to people daily, except her boss:

...if you mean someone who dictates what I should do, what I should choose... No, that's over. For example, when I wanted to take driving lessons, I decided to go to driving school. I told my dad that I wanted to take driving lessons. In the past, I would have said, "Daddy, I would like to take driving lessons. Are you okay with me taking driving lessons?" But today, I make the decisions and I report to him.

Anne's narration illustrates that in addition to having to ask being a sign of powerlessness, who one asks denotes who has power. When recounting her childhood, she tells of her father's abuse and upset at how she and her siblings preferred their mother's company over his:

He felt as though we were not coming close to him because the way the parlour at home is divided, he had his own section. Not really his own section but we just said that it's his section because we never went to sit or interact with him there and my mother did not really sit there she always sat in the other section where we were sitting and we liked to sit with her. So I feel as if he was jealous... because soon he began saying we should never go and ask her for any financial issue whatsoever we should come and meet him. But of course I just went to him just for the basics, the ones which I knew obviously he should be the one to pay like things like my fees, house rent since I rent here in Buea... I was trying to always bypass him or not to get in contact with him. But actually, could that be possible? Of course not, because he is the one... in charge. I need to go and ask money for this, money for that. And he had made it clear that we should never go to our mother for anything we should come directly to him for everything.

Later in her narration, she shares what she envisages she would be able to do if empowered - and by default signifying that she is yet to be:

...if I am to continue with PhD I am sure I will not even tell my dad in the sense that he is to pay the fees or I could tell him but I will not expect him to be the one to pay the fees, so I think being empowered is for me to be able to pay that fee and also being independent. That is you don't need to ask permission before you go there or you travel somewhere or you need to do this thing or do that...

These women's mutual understanding of being empowered as being free from having to ask is on par with literature which states that empowerment entails the capacity to act on your own volition and being the authority in your own life (Rowlands 1997), unlike Anne's father being "in charge". Their perception of 'not having to ask or defer to regulation' as being empowering also reflects why educated [and presumably empowered] women are considered undesirable by patriarchal Cameroonian society (Atanga et al. 2013). To not ask from or to defer to someone else who is 'in charge' would mean they are their own authority and not submissive as social norms demand them to be. Not asking for permission nor obeying is therefore a mark of both power and rebellion; not having to obey indicates that you have power [do not need to], and not obeying when you are expected to exhibits insubordination. This is the quandary that these women must negotiate in their empowering process and efforts. Like the story Amena shared of her exemplary empowered woman shows, it is regarded as shameful and disempowering that a woman would ask for money for 'even Maggi', and yet Amena later asserts that she gained permission to further her studies from her fiancé's family and extols them for it. She also emphasises her submissive character as what appeals to her fiancé most and something which more women need to be taught through the inclusion of religious studies in curriculum so they could better navigate life for national growth. In her words:

... He always tells me that there is something he has found in me which other women he has dealt with that are not even up to my level of education have never done. That is...I am patient, humble and I am also a very submissive somebody. I am a God fearing woman. And with these qualities, no matter the level of my education he knows very well that I will always be submissive to him. That is what he has studied about me... So if the curriculum planners could insert the idea of religious studies [in all schools] especially for women. You know a woman...when a woman listens to the word of God, she can be able to change things, so many

things. Because first of all she is very submissive, and as she is submissive now, just her manner of approach...she would be able to talk to the society and many people would respect. But if the moral is not there, the economy would not be growing.

Given that being in charge of one's self and not needing to ask is a power, which Amena recognises in the previous section, asking without needing to can be regarded as perfunctory subservience done [as Amena outlines it] out of gendered socialisation of what she deems morally right and religiously ordained. It is necessary to underscore that Amena's idea that the "submissive manner of approach" is the best way for an educated woman to "change things" and "gain respect" in Cameroonian society conjures an African-feminist perspective, specifically Nnaemeka's (2004) Negofeminism. As Nnaemeka contends, African women know when, where, and how to 'detonate' or 'go around' patriarchal land mines because for African women, feminism is an act that evokes dynamism and shifts of process as opposed to stability. It is about 'negotiation' and 'no egos' (2004 p. 378).

Amena's recommendation that educated women ought to take a humble and submissive manner of approach to economic independence – making enough not to be embarrassed as a dependent and a nuisance to her husband, but still submit herself to the man's authority as is 'morally correct' – illustrates precisely such negotiation. Given that she understands that women are prone to abuse for lack of financial autonomy, her recommended subservience is seemingly strategic and can be interpreted as African-feminist negotiation. However, considering such negotiating of patriarchy as feminism has garnered criticism of African-feminist thought as it permits a continuation of male dominance rather than counters it (see Kwachou 2015; Chisale 2017). Amena's negotiation also bears resemblance to arguments which are made in support of women's education on the grounds of its human capital benefits for others, such as reducing the patriarchal expectations of men bearing financial burdens, more than the changing of the status of women themselves (Chikunda & Chikunda 2015).

The Power of External Recognition and Functioning of Self-confidence

For these women, being empowered equally entails being self-confident and having your value acknowledged. Several of them list shyness and low self-esteem as characteristic

of their periods of disempowerment and conversely ascribe their boldness to having been empowered. Amena' story shared earlier shows that she remembers her Imam Uncle as having empowered her by his acknowledgement of the validity of her higher education aspirations, and later on she asserts that her work has enabled her empowerment as her students praise her teaching skill, and in so doing make her more confident to speak in public, despite her previous fear. In a similar manner, Oulimata denotes that considering the derogatory stereotyping attached to Muslim women in Cameroonian society and the timidity which is expected of them, her current confidence should be regarded an achievement. She said:

Now, as a Muslim woman...from the word go, you are labelled as 'sheep from the North'. Why sheep? I think it's meant to say that you're not smart enough because you're a Muslim woman...I remember once that I gave a little speech and they asked how a Muslim woman could make that kind of speech. A coherent speech! How does she manage to do that? I asked why and was told that it was because Muslims can't - they don't know how to speak French properly, talk less of it being done by a woman. So, not only was I judged because I was a Muslim, I was also judged because I was a woman...I think that today, if I can manage to give a speech, to speak at length without being shy, feeling shame, it is because I have...I have been through the International Relations Institute.

It is apparent that these women conceive of the overcoming of their inhibitions and gaining of recognition of their worth as a tell-tale sign of being empowered. When Cynthi narrates her story, she suggests that she is an overcomer. She presents the examples of regret from her father and previous husband as evidence of her having been empowered and vindicated by her dedication to being educated. Of her father she said:

On his sick bed he said: something is missing somewhere... if I knew, I would have educated my female children because at this point in time I am so sick and none of the boy children is beside me? I responded saying it was late because by then, we [his daughters] were so demoralised... because he told us we could only get married.

And of her ex-husband's reaction after her successful admission into the government recruitment programme she said:

When I made this entrance...the man was so shocked. He said 'had I known'. He came, he turned back to me, but I said: my brother, I don't despise you in anyway,

all I can do is encourage you to move ahead with your life... My education, is my pride... Now he sees the potentials, so he is seeing that at one point he was blind, so there is a lot of regret in the whole show...

Exceptionally, Jesurelle's narration offers great detail of her perceived empowerment as related to the confidence her professional education and line of work affords her:

...I think that the more I move forward academically, the more credibility I get. It gives me a certain influence with other people, so much so that when I say something, some people go: well, she's a journalist... in addition she's an 'IRIC-ienne' [an IRIC student]. So, you see, that counts...

I don't really feel like I'm shaking in front of people because journalism and my various internships have enabled me to rub shoulders with people of this stature. Sometimes, when I accompanied the journalists to the field, we could do an interview with a minister for example - you get used to seeing a minister. So, the day you see another minister, it's no longer as if I had come directly from Dschang and had been told "Jesurelle, this is the Minister". So that's what happened on the social level...

At the end of her narration when she presented her definition of empowerment and who an empowered woman is, she remarkably captured what the conceptualisation of self-confidence as empowerment is by saying:

Now, I also think that I am empowered because I was able to detach myself from the forces that were weighing me down like fear, lack of self-confidence that would prevent me from opening up, and also launching the association with which I am currently working; and now, every day, I achieve things that I didn't think were possible, that I could never imagine were possible a few years ago.

Decision-Making Powers and Opportunities

In addition to previous indicative features, these women made it clear that the mark of an empowered woman is that she is included in decision-making. Their presentation of inclusion goes beyond personal choice power, as earlier discussed, to whether one was involved as an equal partner in situations where important decisions are made. Two excerpts from Anne and Hope make it clear how these women see their engagement or exclusion from the process of making decisions as either empowering or disempowering.

Anne's story opens with her family's financial downturn which changed the trajectory of her educational experience. She recounts that experience as a period she felt disempowered as her parents changed her school without engaging her:

...At form three he [her father] started having challenges in paying my fees and he started complaining about paying close to 400,000 for school fees and other expenses and saying that it is school fees for how many children there in public schools...I told my mother that already form three is the beginning of GCE preparation... so I was like I don't want to change my school. So, they had to do my admission for me without me knowing in another school, a government school. Since they had my report card they did my admission...She called me one day to come to the market, that they had to take my measurements, I thought it may be for an ordinary dress she wanted to sew for me. The way they [the tailors] were taking the measurements I was like... I asked the madam 'which type of style do you want to sew for me?' She said: which type of style how? It is your school uniform CCAS jacket... I said: jacket for which school? Because in my boarding school we put on shirts. My mother then told me that my new school was a government school and my name was found form 4A. I said well since you people have decided for me [shrug]...I was disturbed but I had no say.

Conversely, Hope, who is the fourth of eight children recounts how she realised she was empowered by her inclusion in deciding how many children she and her husband have:

When I was growing up I used to hear women say 'my husband wants this number of children, my husband wants that number of children' and the question I failed to ask until recently was but how many do you want? And in the course of it I discovered that it has always been about what men want. But you are the one bearing the children and some other person decides on how many of those children you should have....fortunately for me I don't fall into that category but I would not like it to happen to other women. I am able to say that okay these are the number of children I will like to have, and also this is when I will like to have my children. And in as much as I am happy that this is happening to me I equally will like to see it happening to other women. And this cannot happen through my own education alone but society... men should be able to know that: Okay, this decision is supposed to be taken by the two parties and not one person imposing on another.

Dija who was disempowered as a child by decisions made, without her involvement, to completely uproot her from the life and mother she had known as one of the children in the orphanage, seemingly perceives such decision-making power as a

mark of one's recognition as a fully grown/whole person with accompanying responsibility. She said:

When you are autonomous, you make your own decisions. You have to make your own decisions and know how to respect them. This is a sign of being grown.

Functioning of Self-actualisation

In their own words and through self-efficacy of their empowerment, the women in this study substantiated Capabilitarian literature which purports the distinction between the end and the means when evaluating individual advantage (Robeyns 2017). Several women, despite ranking themselves as highly empowered, observed that they could not claim full empowerment because they had yet to or did not foresee themselves being able to actualise their original dreams [initially desired ends].

In this regard, Anne notes in her narrative that she had wanted to be a doctor but due to both constraints [financial problems made it impossible to retake the government entrance examination], she deviated to biochemistry in hopes that she would later be able to pursue her passion for medicine. As she matures, she realises that unless she leaves the country, realising that switch to medicine is near impossible as is a secondary dream of studying pharmaceutical practice because there is no such programme available in the country and there is little hope that even if she were to find a job, she could save up enough to apply for admission into a Cameroonian school for medicine again at this point. She has seen that switch effected only by her classmates who left Cameroon to study abroad, and for that reason, she says she is not completely empowered as her goal remains unfulfilled. In her words:

Since my dream plan is to become a medical doctor and I have not yet achieved that...so I am still, like, on the way, still going there [to empowerment]. The higher education is like pushing me at least I have gotten some knowledge related to it and I am now in a field that is somehow related to what I really want to do...but my passion remains as a medical doctor.

Likewise, at the workshop, Momo's Activity 5 assessment of her empowerment outlines that she "understands how to go about empowerment", but that she cannot yet get there

because she is still “financially disempowered”. She claims that she can only say she is fully empowered when her goal has been met.

Another angle of this conception of empowerment as an attainment of fulfilment was forwarded first by Oulimata in her interview and later confirmed by Jesurelle, Momo and other women at the participatory workshop. The women assert that empowerment implies having relative success at both productive and reproductive goals/roles. As Oulimata defined empowerment and conceptualised what she saw as an empowered woman, she evoked what has been theorised as the ‘Superwoman Syndrome’ and that section of her interview went like this:

Oulimata: Who is an empowered woman to me? It’s a woman - I think it’s a woman who’s educated, a respectable woman, a housewife who’s educated and has children, and can make a difference, manage all of that at the same time. Like, it’s a woman who goes to work, plays sports, cooks, educates children.

Monique: A Superwoman.

Oulimata: -- Not superwoman, because it can be done. It’s just that she has drawn up a schedule, she has to be able to draw up program and set each hour for a specific activity. It’s doable because the woman has this super power.

On par with Oulimata’s take, at one point in her interview Momo elucidates the idea that she would need to ‘balance’ her achievements to be empowered. She says:

I have had my kids, I have had my husband; I am just looking forward to defending my thesis and to write that concour and pass and that is it [for her empowerment].

Despite Oulimata’s denial, these ideas convey the argument put forward by theorists of the ‘Black Superwoman Syndrome’; which asserts that black in general [and African specifically] women are pressured and expected to manage multiple roles - like that of wife, mother, career woman, student, caregiver and more - concurrently, and with consistent effort (Huddleston-Mattai 1995). This idea that they not only should, but can be everything to everyone, juggling professional, family and social life, is often passed on to women in the subtle ways which make it hard to recognise it as negative. Being described as a Superwoman is typically meant as a compliment; African literature is rife with conceptualisations of African mothers as super humans to be honoured and African-

feminisms like Stiwanism and Motherism promote the idea that African women *want* to do both, to be both (Ebunoluwa 2009; Chisale 2017). Likewise, Christian girls are socialised to aspire to the multiple-role-fulfilling superwoman character described in Proverbs 31⁵⁶. So it is but normal that Oulimata, Momo and the other women here consider empowerment as an achievement of this standard they have been encultured to see as ideal.

The Power to Empower

Though not mentioned as frequently or unanimously as other aspects, being empowering to and for others was considered necessary in some women's conceptualisation of empowerment. Amena, Momo, Fatima, Jesurelle and Cynthi all pointed to one's ability to; instruct and inspire others [particularly girls], contribute to changing the status of family/community members, and make an impact in terms of social development. These capacities were acknowledged as confirmation of their empowerment. As mentioned in the previously recounted story of Amena, she feels that how empowered she is comes through clearly in the 'positive influence' she had on her students in the classroom. When describing her fight with a female colleague she described as arrogant, she asserted that despite being younger than a lot of the students she taught at the Islamic teacher's training college, she by virtue of being more learned than them and having a more humble and respectful approach was able to influence them with her counseling during lessons.

Now if you really want to know who you are, or who a particular teacher is ask from the students they would tell you. So this woman we started very well, everything was moving on very well but along the line she discovered that I am the kind of person that... students loved me more than her. And the reason they love me was because of my...that is my manner of approach towards them. For example when we entered the class I took it as a duty that any time I am concluding my lessons at least I must talk to my students and give advice about how to live in life. With my knowledge of psychology at least I am able to teach them; both those who are married and those who are not yet married, at least I tell them how life is all about. I take like five minutes to teach them how to live in the society...

⁵⁶ The 31st chapter of the book of Proverbs in the Christian bible is popular for its depiction of the ideal Christian woman

For example I tell them: Look outside there it's not easy. You have come here to learn...forget about hanging out, having boyfriend/girlfriend relationship that is going to distract you from achieving your goal. Because you came here as individuals you are not going to see each other again when you graduate from here. And when you graduate, that is when you have passed...after your graduation if you never made it very well, the person who was distracting you, you will never see the person again... And for those who are married, I can tell them: with your knowledge of this educational psychology, as you are going back home you should at least be a good woman so that when you return your husband would be asking 'is it really you?'...If you were somebody who was a nagging wife, your husband should say that at least school has changed you" and I always say that: when people will be asking what changed you, tell them that it is psychology, because psychology is life. It talks about everything about life." So I always take time to talk to my students like that. And they were very interested in me. Unlike that colleague of mine, since she believes that she is The Almighty.

Similarly, Jesurelle and Momo conceptualised their own empowerment in the work they have engaged in for community development and both of them expressed ambitions of impacting more young people, particularly girls. Jesurelle mentioned feeling inspired to do more to make a difference and empower others as she has been influenced by other young African change makers whose ability and achievements impressed her and Momo declared that she feels an empowered woman to be making a difference using what she has - the lessons from her own failures and past experiences. At the very least, women in this study conceptualised being empowering as empowerment based on their example as the first girl to reach their level of education in their family, setting a precedent for their younger siblings and extended relatives to follow.

9.3 Second, how [if at all] do these women think they are empowered?

Although touched on in the first section, this section specifically asks: Based on both what was shared at their life-story interviews and the evaluative exercises they worked on at the participatory workshop, do these women graduate as persons that consider themselves empowered, and how? As a result of the participatory nature of this study which incorporates participants' suggested activities for reflection on and analysis of the research problem, the data available here extends beyond the dense texts characteristic of typical narrative inquiry. Participants in this research conceptualised women's empowerment and shared how they perceive their own empowerment not only through their life-story interviews but also through Activities 5, 6 and 7 of their workbooks at the

participatory workshop. Consequently, in answering the question at hand in this section, responses presented and discussed here will be culled from both individual narratives and the more finite/quantifiable workbook responses to reflect the entirety of the individual women's assessments of their own (dis)empowerment.

Anne

At her interview, Anne shared that though there are ways [in her words, 'sectors'] by which she can be seen as empowered, she feels she is only empowered to a limited extent. Describing the extent of her (dis)empowerment, she said:

...I will go down to the financial sector of it, there I am not empowered because I still depend on my father to pay my rent and pay my fees. In the religious sector of it, there I am empowered because here I have the free will for me to go to church and also partake in other activities...because I have seen that there are some women that when they got married their church activities just die down or they are being restrained from going to church or involve their self with church activities...

She went on to use an example of what she had witnessed in the course of her hospital internship in support of how she is somewhat empowered:

...his example is not related to me, but...there is a religious movement I have forgotten that faith [Jehovah Witnesses] and they don't believe in you having blood transfusion... so in a case... the mother of that child was in a case where her child is about to die... but she needed to consult her husband if the child should have a blood transfusion or not. That means she is a disempowered woman since she always depends on her husband's final decision and maybe that helpless child would die given that the husband is from that faith and the woman is not or perhaps the man could reply when it is too late...

Yet, she shared even more of her reality to demonstrate why she feels she is more disempowered than not:

I feel as though at times my right has been taken; for instance what happened at the audition for the Mount Cameroon Race⁵⁷ event. They had to take their own people that did not even qualify and just put their names on the list just because they have 'godfathers'. So knowing that I have nobody up there, at times there

⁵⁷ An annual marathon organized by the state tourism office.

are some things, some positions that I want to go for, to work there... but you need to have someone to follow your application. So that is the 'not empowered' part of me... Also, in a society as ours, we always think a woman doesn't have the right to own certain things like land... for instance let me say if my father distributes inheritance, as a woman, I don't need to own anything from dad... And as a woman, I have seen that I'm not empowered in dressing code, in the case of you going to the court right? You as a women you don't need to put on trousers, you need to dress maybe in skirts or gown.

In addition to these, activities 6 and 7 ask that participants present the different powers they recognise they have and inequalities by which they recognise themselves as oppressed by. Here, Anne assesses that she has; the power to learn, the power to speak up for herself, religious power, and the power to decide when and to whom she gets married. Conversely, she asserts that she faces inequalities with regard to decision making, with division of labor in the household and concerning any future access to family property on the basis of her gender.

Though the examples Anne used at her interview illustrated why she feels her empowerment is limited, the pinnacle of her assessment was her using percentages - probably as a result of her STEM background - to capture just where she feels she is in terms of empowerment. As this idea is her contribution towards the analytical activities for the workshop [see Activity 5], and something she used to articulate assessment at the interview, she is the only participant who ranked her empowerment with percentages at two points in time. Interestingly, Anne maintained her self-assessment of 40% empowered both times. Yet, as the workbook offered restricted space for writing a reason for the chosen percentage, the reason she offers at the workshop is slightly different. Her workbook response states that she is only 40% empowered because she has yet to attain the education necessary to work in her desired fields of medicine or pharmacology.

Amena

Amena likewise recognised that despite having several aspects of an empowered woman, she is not yet fully there. At her interview she said:

I am still struggling, I am still in the process of empowering myself. I am not really independent. You recall when I said that for you to be able to say that you have empowerment, you have to have that independence, that at least you are no more depending on somebody. I am still in the process of it... As I told you, I want to be a lecturer and I also want to maybe fit myself in an organisation where I can be able to take care of younger children... I also have younger siblings at home I need to support through school...had it been that I was already empowered, I could help some people, maybe some people who are not able to pay their hospital bills or whatsoever...And if I already had the means, if I was already empowered, I could be a source of happiness to many. So if I am able to do all of these things that is when I will feel that I am already an empowered somebody.

However, unlike Anne, Amena felt she deserved a higher ranking of her empowerment as observed by her responses in her workbook. Amena ranked herself as 65% empowered in Activity 5, stating that to an extent she does not have a voice because she cannot back-up her opinions with action for want of financial standing and difficulties faced as an Anglophone and a woman. At her interview Amena presented the reasons why she is still “struggling” with empowerment, saying:

First of all as an Anglophone Cameroonian I am facing a lot of challenges. Especially now... because the situation in Cameroon today, things are not really moving. This crisis in particular has really put me down. Because most of my things that I could have already achieved, things I really liked, this crisis is like an obstacle to it. For example like now I was intending that if I am going for my Master's I would be able to keep teaching so as to be empowered and be paying my own school fees and all the like. But now there is no school for me to teach, with the crisis there is no school again... It is really a barrier to me and the way I could have been doing my things, my personal life has changed, because first of all maybe the kind of thing I could have wanted to eat, I can't eat it because I don't have the money. The kind of oil [body lotion] I would have been rubbing I am not able to rub it again because of no means. So whatever thing I have now, I am struggling to see if I can manage at least to solve my academic problems.

Later in activities 6 and 7 of her workbook, Amena expressed a more varied take of the hindrances to her full empowerment. When it comes to evaluating what power she has, Amena listed the power to express herself, language power, cultural power, and interestingly, the power to withstand trials. Even more interesting is how she notes that her cultural power is at 90% because of her knowledge of her culture, religion and

indigenous language, whereas her language power is only 50% as a result of her lack of fluency in French. As per Activity 7's evaluation of her oppressions, Amena noted oppression in the workplace where she feels there are always more men who dominate the women. She also recognises oppression of women in religious and cultural gatherings, like the one where she recounts standing up to speak, and relating that men get more chances than women in society.

In the end Amena notes that it is a process but she will withstand it because she is capable of being "strong, patient and resilient".

Cynthi

Cynthi, as mentioned in the previous section, considers herself highly empowered, i.e. 85% empowered as per her response to Activity 5. She asserts that her power comes from her education and her pending matricule. In Activity 6 she lists that she has the power to vote, the power of ownership (she possesses things), freedom of speech and to choose a career. Despite the high ranking of her empowerment, Cynthi notes that she still faces oppressions. In Activity 7 she denotes inequalities in pending government appointments for which she will need to bribe to sway the outcome in her favour. She also recognises that her experience of gender inequality still persists despite her educational achievement and as per her responses the second highest form of oppression she faces is political inequality as an Anglophone Cameroonian based in Bamenda.

Cynthi's comments in her interview corroborate this later assessment; when referring to the extent of her empowerment during her interview, she suggests that she still lacks some social respect for not being married.

Its only when you are empowered, when you are educated that you know life without a man is better. It's actually better because there are so many things you will do without a man, even though at one point they say you need some respect, you need a man for some respect. But then, we have women who are not married yet they have the respect, they are able to pull a crowd. So because of my level of education, I know there are so many things I can do without a man, even though it is not like a challenge.

Dija

As mentioned earlier, Dija considers herself highly empowered with a response of 75% in Activity 5 based on her ability to speak up for herself. Other responses at both her interview and in activities 6 and 7 (see Appendix D) nonetheless suggest otherwise. In terms of what power she has, Dija responds that she has limited financial power (35%), power of self-expression (45%), power of bodily autonomy (85%), self-confidence and networking power (90%). Alternatively, Activity 7 shows that she sees herself as oppressed by gender inequalities in her family, citizenship disadvantage when it comes to her hopes of leaving the country on a Cameroonian passport, inequalities in decision making as a result of her gender, and lack of money as well as political inequalities as a part of the disdained Fulani Muslim Northerners.

In describing her everyday reality at her interview, Dija says:

...Among Muslims - in my family for example, a man, even if you're older than him, as long as he's a man, he's like your older brother. So you have to accept everything he says because he's like an elder. For example, like I told you, my father died and all I have is younger brothers now. But, to travel here, I had to ask for permission. He had to accept first before I could come. He's now like a father. He's older now. And if you don't ask, it will be interpreted that you are turning your back. Even if I have to get married today, the man would have to go to his house and ask for my hand, because he's already... He's already mature. So he has the same rights as my dad now...

Given this reality and the other oppressions she denotes, one could contradict Dija's high ranking of her empowerment, but then that would be overriding her self-efficacy which is similarly disempowering. Capabilitarian and African-feminist standpoints argue for the respect of individual values, and by considering herself empowered despite consciousness of multiple oppressions, it can be said that Dija is choosing what power matters most to her. By her evaluation, her self-confidence, bodily autonomy, and ability to speak her mind trumps other recognised inequalities and marks her as empowered overall.

Fatima

As per the relevant workbook activities; Fatima ranks herself as 50% empowered. This ranking is based on recognition that although she is oppressed by gender, linguistic and cultural disadvantage, she also has the power to express herself, self-confidence, limited decision-making power (60%), but with no (0%) financial power. This workshop assessment aside, it is Fatima's comments on her empowerment at her interview which is most remarkable. At her interview Fatima expresses the impossibility of attaining true and full empowerment, saying:

I don't really have an example of an autonomous woman that I know of personally. Speaking in general terms, I think it is Christians who can speak of empowerment. With Christians, until the moment you are married, well generally, a Christian can say, "I can do anything I want"...from the conversations I've had with my Christian mates, but there is always some exaggeration; a woman can't be, can't be independent unless you're not married and are working. Yes, then you make the decisions, you do the spending, you choose what to do... mainly Christians. Speaking in general terms, a Christian who is not married is the woman who can be 100% independent. As long as you're married, you have to ask your husband's opinion and, when you have to seek someone's opinion, you're no longer independent...So, I'm not independent...I will never be independent of my religion. My religion does not allow me to be independent: I can't make a decision, whatever the decision, without my husband's opinion. If I do, I would be going against my beliefs and, for me, it's like sin.

As the above excerpt illustrates, not only does Fatima not see herself empowered now because of her financial dependency, she does not foresee any complete empowerment in future because of her identity as a married Muslim woman.

Hope

Based in her responses to Activity 6, Hope recognises that she wields power in the form of relative decision making within her family, her formal education and exposure, as well as her political consciousness. Still, Hope's responses to Activity 7 show that she feels most oppressed by her linguistic identity and lack of fluency in French and the inequalities in governance that render her marginalised politically. In explaining her grading of herself as 60% empowered, Hope wrote:

Because I am relatively empowered educationally, financially, and decision-making wise but I am not politically and security wise.

This assessment upholds previously shared opinions at Hope's interview, where she said:

My limitations come from diverse sources. Of course, one is my gender. Now I am a woman. I am a mother. And I have to work/school. And if I am not able to blend these three it is a problem... by that way we were already being limited, before the crisis...in the midst of the crisis it has intensified. And I find myself vulnerable because I can only complain because there is very little I am able to do.

Hope considers her full empowerment as beyond her control in the face of political insecurities, which leave her helpless.

Momo

Momo is exceptional in her certainty of her empowerment. She ranks herself at 85% empowered and claims that all she needs now is to be completely financially independent. She is married to a young diplomat with several members of her family working for the state and is at a point where she is uncomfortable with asking from her sister or husband regularly. She is also tired of her programme which she has been doing on and off for 5 years between having her children. As per Activity 6, Momo counts her "education", "knowledge of her rights as a woman" and "ability to play a woman's role" as her powers. In terms of her disadvantage, Momo denotes experiences of inequality when seeking employment on grounds of her gender (men were preferred for the position) and then with respect to religion (the organisation she applied to preferred candidates of a specific Christian denomination). Exceptionally, she is one of four participants (of the total sample of 20) who noted feeling oppressed by social conceptions of attractiveness to the point of listing her insecurity over her build as an oppression.

Despite this, Momo repeatedly described herself as empowered and made known her ambitions to empower other young women.

Oulimata

At her interview, Oulimata presented herself as empowered “to an extent”. Unlike Anne she did not refer to sections or percentages, but cites examples from which she gauges how she has progressed. The following excerpt captures two of these instances:

Today I think I am autonomous because I decided to do a PhD. Normally, since I am married and all that, I would be told ‘no you can’t’ - because I decided to do a PhD abroad. But, I didn’t ask anyone for their opinion. I just informed people, including my husband. I said that: this is what I want to do. So, if you support me, that’s fine. If you don’t support me, that’s fine. Neither society nor you will have no impact on my decision. That’s what I want to do as a person and since it is rightful - it’s not like it’s a bad thing. So, I take responsibility for my decision. I will go about looking for scholarship...

But I am currently not autonomous either, considering the prejudice we experience. For example, in my hometown of Ngaoundere, a young woman my age cannot sit in a restaurant and eat. You see that despite everything, I am still a woman... I could do it in a town other than Ngaoundere. But, I currently still can’t do it in my hometown because, there, the social construct still reigns. So, at this level I’m not autonomous, I can’t make this decision to just go to a restaurant and eat. Because if I do, I’ll be called a whore, an easy girl with bad intentions and all that. Despite everything, there is this point that still needs to be addressed.

The workshop exercises presented Oulimata with more finite tools for measuring her (dis)empowerment and she assessed herself as 45% empowered in Activity 5, noting in the subsequent activities that although she is empowered by her education, her voice and sound mind, she is still financially disempowered, still facing sexism as a woman, prejudice as a Hausa, and the disadvantages of Cameroonian citizenship as she considers all that is necessary to meet the visa requirements for studies abroad.

Yoyo

As per her assessment of her level of empowerment in Activity 5, Yoyo considers herself 70% empowered. In her opinion, she is nearing full empowerment with the event of the realisation of her aspirations and the fulfilment of both her private and public roles. The inequalities she recognises in Activity 7 are; political oppression which she presents as a general Cameroonian oppression, professional inequalities which limit her chances of

employment given corrupt practices, scholarly inequalities based on harassment which she has been a victim of in higher education, and exceptionally she lists lack of a relationship/partner as a disadvantage she must overcome. Correspondingly, she acknowledges that she has the power to express herself, the power to create and develop ideas as well as the power to integrate in society. At her interview Yoyo expressed the range she must cover for her to proclaim full empowerment, saying: “As far as I’m concerned, to be able to proclaim myself empowered, I first have to finish school, then perhaps get a paying job, one that provides me with an income at the end of the month. Then, I must perhaps have settled down: having a family, a home. Then I will be able to say that I am 100% empowered.”

In this way Yoyo exemplified the conceptualisation of empowerment being an actualisation of both the professional and familial roles.

Jesurelle

Of these ten women, Jesurelle ranked herself most empowered with a response of 90% in Activity 5. In her explainer she says of her empowerment level:

I put it at 90%. The remaining 10% is reserved for my future married life, which will depend on several aspects...

According to Jesurelle’s Activity 7 responses, what she feels she is still disempowered by are “general” inequalities and oppressions experienced by many Cameroonians like sexism, tribalism, passport discrimination and political censorship of freedom of expression. But, as she notes in Activity 6, she has financial power because she is employed, she has the power of self-expression and she uses it to write opinion pieces. She has social power from the networks she belongs to and the power over herself and has enacted that bodily autonomy in instances where she was being coerced into sex.

Jesurelle’s workbook assessment is concurrent with opinions shared at her interview; specifically her belief that her full empowerment would depend on her eventual marriage and what her marriage will be like. At some point in her interview she said:

Do I describe myself as an autonomous woman? I think so. Well, perhaps my answer could have been nuanced if I were married, because I'm thinking marriage might change some things. But right now, I'm not [married].

The sum of these women's personal assessments of their empowerment show that even though they do feel they have been empowered, they perceive that they cannot claim complete empowerment. Some feel that empowerment is within reach if one thing or the other is attained, like a paying job or achieving a career goal. Others feel they cannot expect full empowerment as they have adjusted their aspirations based on their reality or have noted that they will always lack certain power. In all, these women make it clear that their empowerment is a journey and they are not 'there yet'. Jesurelle depicts this perception poignantly when she says in her interview that:

I see myself becoming-- how do I put this? The expression often used is "a rising force". [Laughs] A force - I am an emerging woman... I see myself as a Cameroonian woman coming into the limelight. Because when I project myself into the next few years, I don't see myself as a woman living in the background; only as a journalist, married, with children, settling down, no I will be that and more. I see myself as a woman who is going to make an impact through what I do. The goal is not to make myself known, but actually, what I do is going to make people know me. And that's because I've decided, on my own, to be different.

By their accounts these women endorse an assertion made by the array of literature on the conceptualisation of empowerment and the theoretical framework of this research; that empowerment is a process and not an end (see Rowlands 1997; Alsop et al. 2006; Batliwala 2007, Keleher 2007; Eyben et al. 2008; Cornwall 2016). As such, the fact that these women attest to 'not being there yet' with regards to empowerment is not grounds for a negative appraisal of their having been empowered. Yet, it is basis for inference that their empowerment is incomplete and should not be assumed. Whether their higher education can be credited with enabling this incomplete empowerment will be discussed in the following section.

9.4 Third, do these women consider their higher education empowering?

It is necessary to start off asserting that none of the women in this study felt their higher education had not enabled any aspects of empowerment. With the exception of Jesurelle,

they all had more good to say about higher education's influence on their empowerment than not. While they all appreciated their higher education as a contributing factor to whatever level of empowerment they considered themselves at, the extent to which they credited higher education for empowering them and particularly how they saw higher education as empowering, showed variations in perspective.

In summary of their report on how higher education contributes to development, Brennan and Séné (2013, p. 26) say:

“What is known is that higher education makes considerable social, cultural and economic impact but what is not known sufficiently is how it makes this impact, on whom it makes its impact, when it makes its impact and the different forms which impact takes from an increasingly diverse higher education system...

This section will attempt to address what these scholars argue is often left unknown by presenting not only the participants' assessments of whether higher education enabled their empowerment, but also how specific attributes of higher education enabled specific aspects of empowerment according to them.

9.4.1 How higher education was empowering according to participants?

To these women, having acquired a higher education was definitely beneficial to their empowerment. With specific examples they note that higher education enabled their empowerment by:

First, the exposure and freedom it afforded them. The most common argument made by participants in support of higher education's capacity to empower them is that it was a period of liberation. For many of these women, their higher education enabled them to leave home to stay on their own or with unknown people for the first time. Aside from Amena and Fatima, all these women spent some part of their higher education in a room of their own and they attest to how empowering that was for them. As noted in Dija's story shared earlier, she has never had her own room at home. The boys have their own rooms while the girls (she and her step-sisters) share. Going to the University of Ngaoundere, even within the same region, was liberating for her as she could live in a student room on

campus. Given the unbelonging she had always felt at home, her undergraduate years were the first time she felt she could take up space. It was her space. She mentions that part of the reason she put a stop to her graduate studies was because of the fact that she was living at home. If her father was still alive and able to sponsor her to stay on her own as before, she would have continued.

Hope was selected by her diocese for a one-year exchange programme in Germany following her Advanced Level exam. While there her host families helped her save for her future studies and these savings were enough for her to rent a student room when she eventually began at the University of Buea. She also recounts being empowered by staying on her own:

It was the first time I was living alone. But it was a good experience for me because then I was able to judge my level of responsibility and it gave me the opportunity too to be able to meet up with whatever timetable I drew because there was nobody to interfere. I did what I wanted, at whatever time I wanted to do it. And within the three years in 2013 I graduated from Buea.

Correspondingly, the life-stories of Yoyo and Momo show that having the opportunity to live on their own gave them the opportunity to manage their lives and money for themselves. While Yoyo recounts tracking her utility bills for the first time, Momo told of her experience with buying furniture in Yaoundé on her own and being duped by a housing agent when she tried to secure a room. Claims by these women that the experience of living on their own gave them the authority to decide how their day is scheduled, what they ate, who can visit, and that it gave them a sense of responsibility is supported by literature on youth migration from home and resulting transition to adulthood (see Juárez et al. 2013). Yet the importance of this aspect of empowerment is even more pronounced in the African and Cameroonian context where women are often expected to be under the protection of some family authority figure until they marry. Here girls are likely to leave their parents' residential control only via school, work or marriage [and of those three marriage is the most certain] as migrating from home and living on one's own as a girl is often condemned (Hertrich & Lesclingand 2012).

Perhaps the most telltale sign that there is power in living independently is found in the fear and assumptions society has of young women living on their own as related in Oulimata's story:

And, at the time [when renting a student room on your own], no serious man would approach you. That was impossible. There were just people who were looking to sleep with you. You are in the University of Ngaoundere, you have a room, automatically you are not a serious girl, and you are not fit for marriage. The men who dared would call you only around 10 pm, wanting to come over and spend the night. Even when you try to make it clear that you are not that kind of girl, it's impossible: you have a Bac, you're in university, you have a room, you are automatically not a good girl.

As the excerpt above illustrates, being an unmarried young woman staying on her own is synonymous with being brazen and this assumption is grounded in the knowledge these women would be free of repressive homes and have freedom to explore for themselves.

The second most frequently occurring reason why these women attribute their empowerment to higher education is the qualification the programmes offer and the employment opportunities they may enable. As literature reviewed earlier asserts, employment remains the primary goal for pursuing higher education. Many of the participants of this study pursued higher education to attain degrees which would qualify them for desired employment. They appreciated the knowledge, but that knowledge came secondary to the degree itself. The stories of Amena, Fatima, and Cynthi make it clear that they pursued studies in education and teacher training for the express purpose of getting a professional qualification to work in what is considered a more certain field of employment. Aside from those, however, Momo's story illustrates just how the women feel the qualification empowered them over and above what was learned in the programme.

I was just doing the Law because I heard my family members have done it and because I heard that it has a broad base. That was something that they used to say law has 'broad base', so when anybody asked me why are you doing Law, I would say because it has a broad base. That was always my response... but I didn't really understand broad base... So I did the Law and it did not help me. It was only in level three that I really enjoyed my notes because they were in English...but it also helped me because after I completed I was able to use it to

write my concours. It is now that I understand that is the broad base, I can use my law degree to write many different government concours.

Even concerning her current studies at a professional institution [though not a programme which guarantees employment], Momo says she isn't there for the knowledge in real time but the respected credentials the IRIC offers as a government institution which trains government diplomats [like her husband]. Momo said she feels the education offered at IRIC is useful, but she has been unable to learn because of her struggle with juggling both studies and family. In her words:

Honestly...if you take my notes and give me I would not be able to explain these notes to you. It is only one particular course that I attended that I would say that ok I can explain the thing to you, but the other notes [shakes head]... And the Negotiation course that as in English, that is what I can still remember right from that second year till now. I cannot tell you what I studied in IRIC, just as I cannot tell you what I studied at Soa...that is why I have just kept the notes, I am like ok, when I am done with IRIC I would go back, I will take them one after another and try to really understand...I will study the noted in future because I plan to set up my own organization and I will like to apply what I was taught, I know it will be useful.

As Momo's account illustrates, getting a first degree is necessary above all because the qualification enables you meet the criteria for the opportunities you really want, the job you need to apply for, the government entrance exam [concour] you want to write, etc. The massification of higher education in Africa has made an undergraduate degree a minimal requirement for many entry-level positions. In this way, the women credit higher education for empowering them because - concurrent with Capabilitarian arguments - their higher education [specifically the credentials] serves as a capability which begets other capabilities (Robeyns 2006).

Still, some participants acknowledged that they were empowered by the knowledge derived through their higher education experience. As earlier mentioned, Anne was able to garner respect from her father by sharing suggestions for his cosmetic production based on what she had learned in biochemistry. Both Anne and Yoyo also mention the compulsory entrepreneurship courses they had taken as part of their graduate studies as very empowering for them with regards to their capacity building. Aside from specific course content, participants recount being empowered by higher education as it put them

in positions to learn in practice and for themselves through assignments, internships and teaching practice. For instance, Amena, Fatima and Cynthi mention that they had never touched a personal computer before going to the university and there was no computer training as part of their studies, so they had to either go to cyber cafés and learn how to use the machine within the access time they could afford to buy or they would offer to help friends who had laptops to do their work in exchange for use of their laptops. Anne also mentions having ‘aha’ moments in the course of her lectures:

In the classroom at times some of our lecturers used to give example not related to the topic, they just give something related to the home...okay for instance let me say in nutritional biochemistry class where they talk of alcohol and its adverse effect. My lecturer said ‘for you men, you people should not drink too much and go and start beating your wives in the house’, he explained how the alcohol works in the blood to produce that violence in men. So with that...my anger towards him [her father] lessened because of having that understanding right...

The women therefore credit higher education with enabling their intellectual capacities, skills and understanding of how things work in line with Nussbaum’s (2003) claim that education develops central human capabilities.

According to these women, higher education also enabled their empowerment by widening their social horizons, exposing them to more diversity and helping them learn to speak up for and to assert themselves in public spaces through new interactions. With the exception of Dija, all these women had to leave their hometowns at some point of their higher education experiences. Oulimata, who spent a lot of her life and education in Ngaoundere, like Dija, illustrated how powerful exposure at graduate level had been for her:

There is also [power in] the change of environment. Because when you’re in a town where you only see certain things... it’s first of all a small town, everything you do is known. When you come to a big city with a variety of people, a variety of cultures, all that changes. This all has an impact... At the University of Ngaoundere, people mainly hail from the predominant Fulani group... you are surrounded by the traditions. But when I arrived here in Yaoundé to enrol at IRIC, finding myself in a multicultural environment with people from several cultures and towns. It’s different - it’s unlike Ngaoundere with one predominant group and their culture. Here, you come to see that several cultures are represented.

Everyone has their own culture, which they don't speak about. So, there is also this element that helps you open up, you don't have to act to please a certain group anymore. There are several groups now and everyone has their own way of doing things, so you say: Well, here I can do things my way, so I'm going to do them my way.

Anne grew up timid as a result of her experience with domestic abuse and barely interacted outside of home, school and church. She too felt higher education empowered her in this way, saying:

Personally, it [higher education] has made me to learn how to network better since I had to go out of my shell. I don't need to be again in my own quiet corner, I had to start interacting with males because I don't need to see them like the type of enemy because of my father. Also, going to university has given - to some extent - the boldness I need to stand and speak out my opinion... and it is still empowering me because during this Master's studies I get to network better with other personalities...you become close with people who are above you because they are coming to supervise or to give visiting lecture or for an event...you get information of other opportunities in other places not only here in Cameroon.

Correspondingly, just as Cynthi gained exposure to Francophone culture and be forced to learn to interact in French to get through her year at the University of Yaounde I, so too Fatima experienced Anglophone culture for the first time when she moved to Bamenda to live with her cousin in-law and study at the HTTC/ENS Bambili. Fatima recounted the difficulty of adjusting in an environment where she was afraid to speak her first language, French, because she had arrived in Bamenda in the middle of the Anglophone Crisis and her very presence as a Francophone with barely any knowledge of English at an Anglophone institution made her an example of what was being protested against. She needed to learn to adapt to her new environment and could only do so with the help of unmarried classmates and people she would not otherwise interact with. She recounted the empowering nature of this higher education experience, saying:

Growing up, part of the advice I received about marriage was that a married woman should walk with married women. You shouldn't walk with unmarried women. However, with the reality on the ground, I could no longer walk only with such women, where was I to find married women? Most of my classmates were unmarried. I had to fit in with the community...It was hard adjusting, and whenever I met a Francophone, whoa! It was as if I had met my blood brother.

So, we would exchange numbers. I had to change my behaviour. I had to stop being Fatima, stuck behind her veil, her wrapper. No. I had to exchange with people. That is, open up; no longer closed as a married woman. I think the word is “conservative”, I had to change from that. At first, I was reserved, I didn’t talk. But, I realised that, if you don’t talk, you won’t discover a lot. The environment forces you to talk, to be open with people. So, I needed to - I had to forget the veil of wedlock, the Muslim woman, but - without going out of hand...I had never slept in other people’s homes before, people who were not my family. But I started to; I had to sleep with my friends. My friends lived in Bambili while I lived with my in-laws in town. On ghost town days, I had to sleep in Bambili to go to school.

Like Fatima’s account suggests, such higher education experiences are empowering as it forces the unlearning of some childhood socialisation. Such accounts substantiate arguments by scholars (see Milem 2003; Denson & Zhang 2010) who have reflected on this empowering aspect of higher education as a site of multicultural exchange which promotes empathy and tolerance as students from varied backgrounds form personal bonds outside of family, religion, linguistic group and tribe for the first time.

Yet another reason these women concede that higher education was empowering for them is because the experiences they had there matured them, incited self-consciousness and enabled them define themselves by themselves. Several of them would describe how they came to determine what they believe and what opinions they adhered to in the course of their university studies. Anne and Jesurelle, both Catholics, shared that it is while on her own as undergraduate students that they could reflect on their Christian faith for themselves. They were no longer going to church because their parents expected it of them, so they developed their own religious perspectives, determining through their developing relationship with God what was correct or not, to the point of choosing where to worship and how. Jesurelle in particular underscored the importance of her religious development as the most self-edifying aspect of her undergraduate experience, saying:

I went to the University Protestant Chaplaincy, and I’m glad I went there because going there changed so many things in my life, so many things about my outlook on life... In fact, after a year at the Chaplaincy, I was entrusted with a responsibility because their media organ was experiencing a crisis...I wasn’t

prepared for that job, I hadn't been groomed to be able to take on the primary role. I often assisted people in doing stuff, but I had never done that before; leading a group by myself. And that's how I ended up as editor-in-chief without being a journalist - I was a first-year student...when I expressed my fears, many elders encouraged me by referring me back to the Word of God, showing me how when God called Moses, you know he said he was a stutterer and therefore couldn't handle the mission... they used a lot of examples to give me faith.

Later, Jesurelle shared that her experience with calling off an engagement in her final year of undergraduate studies confirmed that she had learned to define her desires and her convictions for herself during her university years. Recounting the experience she said:

I had poor guidance on the issue of marriage. I'm in the Christian milieu and... Sometimes, many people have their points of view that they tend to want to turn into the truth. So, as a result, I had people around me saying I should go ahead, that God made this [the proposal] possible and I should just pray about it and say yes...But I didn't like him very much; he wasn't my type and all that.

Jesurelle did say yes to the proposal following the guidance she received from church members. But then she ended the engagement upon self-reflection and consideration of what was best for her.

It's true that just letting go like that was hard; I got called names... And then there are the people around you who start seeing you as an unserious person. People who said things like: a person who calls herself a Christian, can do that? But I stood my ground, I knew myself and my reasons better.

In other participants' accounts, this aspect of higher education empowering them through self-determination is illustrated in how they began determining for themselves what sort of work they would do, or how the experience helped them readjust their value systems such that they no longer do things because they are expected to, but because they have considered it and think it best for them. Oulimata's narrative poignantly captures how a favourite lecturer helped her learn this lesson at IRIC.

As I was saying, the difference between my undergraduate and graduate studies is that I met a doctor at IRIC. This person is the one who showed me that I didn't

have to follow society's design. That just because I'm from a family and that family behaves in a given manner, it doesn't mean I have to do the same. That I have a right to a personal identity, and that I have to do what suits me because I have reached an age where I can make my own choices. You see, when you are an undergraduate, for example, you are 21 or 22 years old, you think you are still a child. He made me understand: you made it into this school, you are 25 years old, you are a grown woman. You can change the way you see things... And this was not a day's job like I'm sitting here and telling you now. No, it took about two years. And, until today, he keeps giving me advice. Whereas, at the undergraduate level, I would just go for my lectures, then go home. But here, at the graduate level, because of this person I think of how I can be growing otherwise... this doctor would show me that the only obligation I have in my life is to better myself and live by my principles. That I owed respect to my parents, but they have lived their lives. I have to understand that I have to build mine and don't have to bend to constructs of the society in which we live... He said that I could be, no, that I am a person in my own right. He would constantly tell me: You have the right to make a decision, and after making a decision as a woman, a Muslim woman, you have the right to take responsibility for the decision, to stand up to people. For example, if someone comes to you and asks, 'but why did you make this decision?', you are a grown woman, you are in an institute of higher learning, you have a duty to take responsibility for this decision and tell them "I made this decision because of so and so reason which suits me", then go home and sleep tight, knowing that you have done nothing wrong. You just respected the decision you made...

When it's said that a person can impact someone's life, we think it's not true. But it's true! It is my interaction with this one person that set my undergraduate studies apart from my graduate studies.

Finally, participants in this study posit that higher education empowered them by increasing their aspirations. For these women, higher education enabled them to believe in greater possibilities. Fatima had never considered going to school to the point of university; she went to school as a child to be able to get her BEPC and train as a nurse or midwife as that was her mother's dream. When she got married in high school her husband and his family would insist that she continue her studies to secure a salaried job so she wouldn't expect them to support her large and comparatively poorer family. This is how she found herself studying at the University of Yaoundé I, but studying there [particularly at a time when her marriage was suffering because she had not had a son with her second pregnancy] would open her eyes to possibilities of relative freedom from

dependency if she could gain suitable employment. Seeing the relative freedom of other female classmates and finding out that her husband was cheating on her with someone more educated than she was at the time, spurred her on in her aspirations, and this would be the first time she would be deciding to go to school for herself.

It is then that I came to realise. I was like: I have to further my studies, not just for him, but for myself, to assert myself as a woman. It is in level three that I begin to realise that I must study for myself, not for him; in my own interest, for my own fulfilment. I realised a lot that year. Many things changed in my life. I wanted to go far in my studies, to the point of sitting for entrance exams. Hitherto, I had been avoiding HTTC Bambili. I didn't want to sit for its entrance exam. I just wanted to sit for those in Yaoundé, not even Maroua - because I was married, and it was too far-off... But at that point, I was ready to go even to Maroua. I was ready to go anywhere, far from him, to further my education.

Likewise, Yoyo, Oulimata, Amena, Cynthi, and Anne all noted that their higher education studies helped empower them by showing them what alternatives were possible. Yoyo for instance no longer feels she must get work only in Douala where she applied for employment after her undergraduate studies. She is considering a career in academia or setting up a business in which she could employ her engineering knowledge. Oulimata loved carrying out graduate-level research on Islamophobia and is now considering pursuing doctoral studies for that reason. Anne, on her part, recounts her undergraduate internship experience showed her that if she could not achieve her goal to study medicine, she could also have a career in pharmacy or medical laboratory sciences. In her words:

I will love to do medicine if I could... but I now know that I can also work in pharmaceuticals and use my entrepreneurial spirit there, or work in the lab. My internship taught me that behind any good doctor there is a good lab technician, since the doctor's prescription is based on the lab technician's diagnosis.

9.4.2 How higher education failed to empower according to participants

All the women in this study attest to their higher education experience enabling some desired aspect of their empowerment. However, participants likewise made noteworthy arguments, outlining the ways their higher education failed to empower them or served to disempower them.

For one, several participants suggested that crediting the higher education institutions they attended for their empowerment is superfluous given that for the most part they had to 'teach themselves' and figure things out on their own with very little guidance from or interaction between them and instructors. Amena, Cynthi and Momo particularly comment on whole courses being 'taught' by students doing group presentations week after week. The instructor would divide the class into groups at the beginning of the semester and give each group a topic from the course outline to research on their own and then teach the class on a set date. Going forward classes would entail listening to their fellow students' presentations and criticisms or comments made by the instructor. These presentations also served as a form of assessment. As per Cynthi's narrative this was her experience all through higher education.

At ENS much of the work is done by the student, whereas with the University of Yaoundé, the lecturers actually they take their time, they carry out the research. They have a research allowance and believe me, I will tell you from my experience that lecturers at the University of Yaoundé actually go in for that research. They carry out the research and deliver the knowledge. But with DIPES II in ENS Bambili, three quarters of the work is done by the student. They just come to class to introduce a topic, give you a guide and you do all the work they give you all the tutorial topics. They are just there to watch when you come and do the presentation and say this is right and this is wrong. Whereas they are supposed to teach you even on how to carry out the research but they don't do it. But that notwithstanding, It still gives us the room, the ability to read further, to be able to research for ourselves.

It is worth noting that despite her comparison in favour of University of Yaoundé I staff, Cynthi barely attended lectures at the University of Yaoundé I as she was enrolled there concurrently in her final year of undergraduate studies as a student at HTTC/ENS. In fact, she shared a similar self-teaching experience of herself as a University of Yaoundé I student, saying:

As we're in Bambili, my friend and I had a classmate in Yaoundé who we formed a friendship with when registered there. She would call us to say we have presentation coming up, that this is the topic, work on this topic and your presentation is on this day. So we do the necessary preparations by ourselves and then we travel from Bamenda to Yaoundé. We would take the night journey, and in the bus we put on our torchlights, we are reading what we never learned

before because the moment you drop from the bus station in the morning, you just have to wash your face, dash into the class and start your presentation. That is how we moved on and fortunately for us when the final results came out, our names were there. We had the degree.

As there is evidence which credits professional teaching programmes such as that which is offered at HTTC/ENS over academic degrees in education at universities (Endeley 2014), possible explanation for the discrepancies in Cynthia's opinions lies in the fact that she was comparing a programme which aims to teach her to teach history at the secondary school to a university degree in history which would be readying her for potential graduate studies as a historian. Her view sheds light on how different she and Amena would be in terms of knowledge and professional capacity, despite both having received higher education which qualified them to teach history.

Momo claims the student experience at the University of Yaoundé II, Soa, is even worse in terms of teaching engagement.

Soa, uh-uh, to me it is a zero. I don't know if it is better now. Because back in my days, you are on your own, you are on your own. I mean a professor or a lecturer will just come and start reading notes for people to copy and then go...the school itself, the amphitheatres we cannot even fit inside to hear him. The studies were not the best at Soa... Most of us in Soa do not go to class because most of the classes are in French, even when we do go to class, we still need to attend private classes in English...In those days it was a normal thing to spend about 6, 7 years in Soa. So some of us, I don't know, maybe it is because we were more focused that we were able to do 4 years. Because there were some people that I met in Soa, in level one, they had been there for two years. I left them there and I finished Soa and they were still struggling to go to level two you see...

Momo makes it clear in her life-story that her undergraduate studies did not empower her in any way but instead the undergraduate experience did, so she cannot credit the degree programme for that. In fact, her completion of her degree programme entailed academic corruption.

I was so lost in Soa. Soa did not impact me in anyway but the challenges [did]... that level one, I failed. I failed and I was supposed to repeat level one. But I told myself that no, if I tell my father that I had to repeat he would kill me. He would say that, 'aha you wanted to go to Soa'. So a cousin of mine in Soa, he told me that he knows somebody who could help me out to go to level two. That I should

bring 50000 francs. I hustled that money and gave it to him. So my name came out on the level two list. But I had no relevé de note.⁵⁸ When they typed my name in the machine nothing came up. But when they are writing exams in level two I would go and write my exams in level two and I went ahead like there was no problem... I failed level two also but I was afraid to do the same thing because my first relevé de note was not out. So I repeated level two and continued like that but I faced problems later... When I completed level three, I had to compile my relevé de note and submit to have my attestation of completion of studies. But I had only two relevé de notes, my level one relevé de note was still not out. And that is a serious issue, if you are discovered they would just tear all the other relevés and you would go back to level one or you are expelled. I started struggling. I have never prayed like that in my life before...fortunately for me, I met this cousin of mine...he had somebody who works at the computer room in the *scolarité*. So we went and saw this man and when I explained this problem to him he looked at my name and said I share his mother's name. So he said he was going to help me out. He actually helped and he asked me to give 75,000 FRS that he had to pay those guys. So that is how I actually bought out my relevé for level one...that is how I submitted and I had my attestation from Soa.

It is given such experiences of academic laxity that these women held reservations in crediting their higher education for empowering them.

Participants also recounted experiences of harassment and disadvantage in their higher education institutions which made them very aware of their disempowered state. For one, the majority of participants in the study shared personal or second-hand experiences of sexual harassment from academic staff. In fact Oulimata's suggestion for the workshop activities was a poll wherein the participants would denote how many times they or friends had been approached by a lecturer or witnessed what is termed as 'sexually transmitted marks' or STM. Aside from the fear and shame which these women recount feeling in the face of such experiences, disempowerment is evident in how they had to adjust their lives and delimit their freedoms as they negotiated the harassment which is taken as commonplace on campus. Cynthi for instance illustrates the normalising of female student's disempowerment via harassment as she attributes such experiences to students who leave the room for entrapment by lecturers.

⁵⁸ Academic year result slip

The best thing is attending all your lectures not to be marked absent, so that you don't run behind lecturers for marks. If they say present this tutorial at this time, do the presentation. You don't give them any chances. The best way is not to even go with a complaint in front of a lecturer. Don't give them the opportunity to get to know you more. Because once they discover that you keep coming to them for marks, you keep coming with complaints: Oh Sir, I was not in school this day, I was sick, my child was sick. I was this, I was that... You give them the opportunity, they are human. You give them the opportunity to draw closer to you and not all are actually stern. Some are so weak. And besides, they are not even the ones demanding. Some of us when we go closer to them, we behave in a funny way and make them to realise that we are willing to give whatever thing they demand. Because we stoop so low at one point that you say please 'Sir, no matter what you say I'm going to do'. And if you use that statement ...you push that lecturer to demand more. Some ask that you sleep with them. So how can you fight it?

Her remarks suggest that men, though older and in positions of power have less control and should have less expected of them than young women students. This is how gender constructs permeate higher education spaces and women - presumed to be empowered by being in higher education - are complicit in reproducing unequal gendered power relations. In a related illustration, Fatima presents her unique disadvantage with regards to the sexual advances made on female students.

In Bambili, I made one observation: there are not as many students as is the case at training schools... here students had to face lecturers. As a result, my status as a married women influenced things negatively. In Yaounde, my status as a married woman - it even enabled me to face [lecturers], spared me from problems. I received a lot of respect. But in Bambili, it was pretty hard for me ... things would become quite difficult once you were seen as a married, respectable woman; which meant there should be no direct relationship...it was not easy for me to meet a lecturer if I had an issue because I had to-- I couldn't be of a help to them in any other way. So I was obliged to use my friends who were not married, through whom I would pass to meet a lecturer when I had any issue because as a married woman, the lecturers saw me as a woman who is already taken, and therefore cannot be had. As a result, I wouldn't get the service I needed. But, if I went through my classmates who weren't married, it was easy.

On the other hand, Momo refers specifically to higher education serving to reinforce her marginalisation as Anglophones in Francophone institutions. Of her graduate studies at IRIC, Momo said:

I remember one course we had, it is the only English course we had in two years. A course on negotiation, and that particular course I had 17/20 average, whereas the other ones I find myself having ten, eleven. Meaning that if my courses were in English, just imagine how I would have passed. You see where we have the difficulty...you are reading notes and you are not even understanding the language and you have to pay for photocopies and then for translations... so we have to struggle, we must understand the French...that is why I was saying that, it is better for them to say that this particular institution is just for Francophones and this other one is just for Anglophones because when you study in your own language you are going to understand... yes, you choose your language for exams, but you have to read in the language that you find your notes in [laughs], read and then answer in your own language... Even in the hall. Let me say you are having difficulties with translation, the invigilators don't even want to hear anything. Even if you say you need translation, they are not going to cooperate, no, you sort yourself out... Sometimes they would put that Anglophones have 30 minutes and Francophones 20 minutes.

These participants' accounts of harassment and reinforced marginalisation in higher education confirm critical studies which discount the certainty of empowerment through higher education on the ground that institutions often serve to reproduce social inequalities. Interestingly, the way these women adjusted to and negotiated their disempowerment and disadvantage as presented in the above highlighted instances can also be considered as Nnaemeka's (2004) Nego-feminism. Yet again, such negotiation and adjustment as opposed to confronting normalised oppressions in higher education spaces is far from transformatory. This explains why another African-feminist scholar, Amina Mama (2003), posits that the reality of African institutions is that they are not constructed to transform systematic inequalities but to reform people's experience of them.

The lack of practical and relevant educational content was yet another criticism presented by these women to delimit the extent to which higher education empowered them. Several shared that they learned more out of the classroom than in it, and more from interactions at associations or acquaintances made in higher education spaces than from their

instructors. Anne for instance mentioned never having seen most of the laboratory equipment she was taught about in her undergraduate studies till she did an internship at a hospital laboratory in the first year of her graduate studies. It is for such reasons that Jesurelle asserted that her empowerment cannot be attributed to higher education.

Of the ten women focused on here, only Jesurelle clearly said she does not credit her empowerment to higher education. Though it was a lesser held view, Jesurelle's account raises pertinent issues for consideration.

I have a job. So, I'm not going to say that going to ESSTIC didn't help me. I think the man who recruited me did so because I had a Bachelor's degree in journalism; so at least it made me considered for a job. However, I know many people from my batch who don't have a job yet simply because in Cameroon it is not easy to find a place where you will be well paid, and when you think about it, they [classmates] have the degree but not my experience... If I have to say if it is the Master's that has influenced my life most, or my personal experiences? I would say both. I feel like saying both, but deep down inside, when I look at myself, I feel that the personal experience side weighs more than the Master's. That's not to say that the Master's doesn't play a role in the building of my personality. But, if you have to put percentages, I would say 25% for the Master's and 75% for the experience gained out of the classroom... Currently, for example, our chaplaincy is celebrating its 50th anniversary and I am in charge of communication. There are so many things I am in charge of which I am learning to do because of this responsibility, such as developing the marketing kit for this event. That's where I learned how to develop a marketing kit. I'm supposed to have learned that here at ESSTIC or IRIC. But the way things are going [shrugs] I don't think it's in the last semester that I'm going to be taught how to develop a marketing kit, or even fundraising methods and all that... Right now I'm in the second year of the Master's programme, and I have to admit that I've been sort of disinterested since I got there; I feel the training doesn't meet the need that I had because I'm being taught about public policy and such...I actually think my training there is much more theoretical, whereas I needed something practical. Practical cases are what I was looking for: how to manage communication in a company and international organization...I was expecting to be taught, for example, how to develop a communication strategy. Teachers mention it but only superficially. I think, as of now, I can count on the fingers of both hands the number of courses where we've really talked about institutional communication, where they teach with practical examples... we are more limited to concepts and definitions. Honestly, I get a bit bored with it because I often tell myself that I can

actually find all this stuff they are giving me on the Internet... So I think I'm called a journalist thanks to my studies, but I can actually do work because of things I learned by working on the side. There are many things I have learned because I did not confine myself to studying only...I sort of saw how things are done at the radio where I took a part-time job, at church where I was given responsibilities and I was learning by doing. And, this amounts to something like practical internships that I have had, but my classmates haven't.

As the excerpts above illustrate, Jesurelle feels that her empowerment should be credited to what she did differently and efforts she made in addition to what she was given by her academic programmes. Her take corresponds with scholarship which questions the quality of higher education in Africa and Cameroon with regards to graduate job-readiness (Walker & Fongwa 2017; Vuban 2019).

Moreover, Jesurelle goes on to argue that a Cameroonian higher education not only fails to empower but actually disempowers students.

I find the Cameroonian education system - at least the Francophone education system - is too focused on producing job-seekers, like they train you to go beg to be employed. They put it in your head, it kind of sets limitations in your head. You tell yourself, 'I'm going to school to one day knock on a door, submit an application, and say 'please, I want a job'... I think it is important to review the training courses offered to students, to make the system more practical, such that a student, upon graduation, will be equipped with the tools required to practice a profession, on the one hand, but also to be able to start a business worthy of the name. Show students: how to draw up a business plan; what, for example, are the procedures for starting a business in Cameroon, and even why it is important to walk this path...

In Cameroon, having a Master's degree or being in the process of writing a thesis or getting a PhD, begets a certain esteem in society, without necessarily giving you money. But I think it's time to deconstruct this way of thinking in the minds of Cameroonians, such that a young girl running a hairdressing salon, making sales, doesn't feel inferior to someone who's doing a Master's degree, because you're doing a Master's degree and are not even sure to land a job thereafter... I work, and my boss has never skipped a month without paying me and even though I am at IRIC, there are days when I make plantain chips or caramelised peanuts and sell when I feel like I'm running out of transport money, at first my friends were very surprised, they were like, 'Ekié! She's at IRIC, and she's making chips and selling them'. I can often read the shock in their eyes, because they see making chips as sort of demeaning. People feel like someone at this school

shouldn't be making caramel to sell, it's something to do when your suffering has reached an extreme and there's nothing else you can do; there's no hope for you...Whereas, on my part, I feel very empowered because I am supporting myself.

Jesurelle goes on to note that the difference in the way she thinks despite being a product of this system lies in the books she read [she mentions *Rich Dad, Poor Dad*] and the workshops she attended during her higher education years.

This way of thinking is the result of the many training courses I've undergone on leadership, women empowerment and all... I had the grace of meeting a lady who had a great influence on me because she organised seminars where she equips young girls. The topic of the first seminar I attended was 'The courage to dare'. It really changed a lot of things in my life. The courage to dare, to be able to, to not tell yourself that you are a woman, to not tell yourself that you are small, but to be able to take initiatives within your environment to achieve something and be proud of it, and not wait for the solution to the problems you encounter to always come from others. That really helped me a lot. There are a lot of things that I achieve today because I met her and because I received that training... That's why I know that I could look at an entity like this *Maison du Café* [the coffee shop where we held the interview], and realise that they are not present on Facebook, then pitch them a digital marketing plan. I would come, knock and say 'Hello. This is my proposal, here are the benefits, and here's what I'll require as salary' then I would work with them.

It is worth mentioning that unlike the University of Ngaoundere and the University of Buea, the professional institutes that Jesurelle attended do not have a compulsory entrepreneurship course for graduate students. Given her suggestions, perhaps she would have given her higher education more credit if they had offered such knowledge. Jesurelle's take therefore not only sustains the critique of assumptions that higher education empowers, but also points to the need for some structural harmonisation of Cameroonian higher education and the respect, and present the need to differentiate between them.

Likewise, as per Jesurelle's narration, it is not necessarily the higher education which empowers the student but rather the student who must make the higher education experience empowering for themselves. This idea is shared by Momo who confessed that

she felt her unemployment and financial dependence was also her fault because she solely relied on what she was offered at school by way of knowledge and did as was expected, writing government entrance exams for professional schools considered elite. Momo observed that some of her course-mates are faring better and have more skills because they built their capacities elsewhere on their own, something she never did. As she has often followed other people's opinion in making her decisions, she has rarely taken initiative of her own.

These perspectives portray the importance of one's own agency as a personal conversion factor in enabling their empowerment in and through higher education as noted by scholars elsewhere (Su 2014; Fongwa, Marshall & Case 2018). However, given the purpose, role and promises of higher education for its students, we risk diverting the responsibilities of higher education systems to students by accepting that one student's comparatively lower empowerment via higher education is their own fault as a result of little action. It is for this reason that this study argues that there is a need to ask: what is an empowering higher education here, as there is a need to delineate the minimum which higher education ought to deliver for it to be credited with enabling student empowerment.

At the workshop, the participants were asked to grade their higher education experiences, an exercise based on Hope's suggestion (see Activity 9 in Appendix D). The table below presents their responses to questions which the 'report card' survey asked. It is based on assessments such as that presented here that the Cameroonian higher education system can be transformed in ways that will ensure it fulfils all of its functions and enables the expected and desired empowerment of students, particularly women.

Table 3: Collated Responses to Participatory Analysis Workbook Activity 9

Activity 8: “Higher Education Report Card” Grade your higher education experience by answering the following questions using: Strongly disagree (1) / Disagree (2)/ Neutral (3) / Agree (4) / Strongly Agree (5)											
Question	Participants	Amena	Anne	Cynthi	Dija	Fatima	Jesurelle	Hope	Oulimata	Momo	Yoyo
1. The university education I received adequately prepared me for the job market		5	2	5	2	2	4	4	4	4	5
2. My university education and experience lived up to my expectations		4	1	5	4	4	3	3	5	1	4
3. The content of my degree programme(s) were relevant and effectively taught.		5	3	4	2	4	3	3	5	4	4
4. As a graduate I experience less and/or I am better able to handle oppression and inequalities		5	2	5	4	5	4	4	5	3	5
5. My university education has precipitated other desired/beneficial opportunities for me		5	4	5	2	3	5	5	5	4	5
6. My university experience has been crucial to my self-development/maturity		4	5	5	2	4	4	5	3	3	5
7. Attending university made me more socially and politically conscious/active		5	1	5	3	4	3	5	2	5	4
8. If given the choice I would attend the same university/study the same programme		5	2	2	2	2	4	3	5	2	3
9. I would say the education I have received thus far is sufficient to attain my desired ends		1	1	2	2	2	4	2	1	4	4
10. Considering my definition of empowerment, I would say my higher education has enabled my empowerment		5	2	2	2	2	4	4	3	3	4

This exercise presented a more delimited assessment of participants' perspectives of higher education's contributions to their empowerment. For most participants, their responses in Activity 9 supported the opinions expressed at the life-story interview; the exceptions being that of Dija and Jesurelle. Dija's responses in the workbook exercise show that she feels her higher education did not do as much as it is expected to have done, and Jesurelle's Activity 9 responses were far more positive in comparison to her criticisms of higher education at her interview. For the most part she responded with 'neutral', presumably to avoid expressing disagreement. Interestingly, this activity enabled an understanding of participants' regrets about their educational choices. Responses to Question 8 which asks if participants would choose the same academic route if they could do it all again, revealed the strongest disagreement.

In all, empirical data submitted here illustrates that for these women, higher education empowers by virtue of not merely academic content and access to knowledge and a qualification, but the entirety of the experience, which has transformative aspects in their lives. In other ways higher education contributes to disempowering them by maintaining and reproducing the status quo. This suggests that assumptions of 'too much book' that claim it is knowledge through which women are empowered, are not wholly accurate; a great deal of empowerment results from the interactive influence of the higher education environment on the students' personality development. The extent to which they are empowered would depend on the multiple factors addressed here.

9.4.3 What of the assumptions of participant's being 'overeducated'?

This study aims to confront the fear of allegedly overeducated women on the grounds of their assumed empowerment. It is thus necessary to go beyond sharing participants' conceptualisations and evaluations of their own empowerment through higher education, to address the assumptions directed at them. This last section of the chapter will present and discuss what participants had to say about society's assumptions of their empowerment through higher education as demonstrated with phrases like 'too much book' and 'long crayon'.

All but one [Momo] of the ten women here shared that they had, at some point, received warnings with regards to their education and the threat that being overeducated posed to their marriageability or other womanliness. Dija, Cynthi and Oulimata particularly endured the longest lasting and harshest critique of their education over the course of their lives in part because of the more traditional/conservative communities they were raised in. Thus, participants reacted to assumptions of their being empowered by higher education differently and to the perceived threat of being overeducated with varying levels of gravity.

Some women, like Dija, were understanding of the assumptions and agreed with the idea that they were a threat because of their education. In Dija's words:

Like I told you earlier, when I went to university, I felt independent because it was the first time I could make decisions for myself, the first time I had a room of my own, that I could do as I pleased, far away from parents. So, my university studies gave me a lot of power... so yes, I can be intimidating! I feel bigger. After my time at university, I felt bigger; I felt that I had taken a step forward, another step forward. So I really felt intimidating.

Amena shared a similar understanding with the social assumption and stereotype, albeit for different reasons. She felt higher education would make women a threat to society if 'they were not careful'. In Amena's opinion, being educated can 'go to a woman's head' and they need to temper their religion with morality to remember that they are to be submissive and humble. Amena claimed that though she believes in educating and empowering women, she has observed a lot of women who are 'arrogant' and 'disrespectful' because of their status and so she understands the stereotypical fear of overeducated women. She goes on to say that she - through her every acts of 'humility' and the way she handles her fiancé's tests of her character- is proving that she is different from other higher-educated women because she abides by her religion's teachings. In the end, Amena purports that what is to be feared is not a woman with education, but rather a woman with education but without religion/morals.

Fatima and Hope offer another variation in this response. They likewise expressed understanding of the social assumption but feel it is unwarranted because their higher education does not transform their reality by much. Fatima elucidates this by saying:

I think it [higher education] influenced me, yes, as a result of it I feel like I'm trying to open my eyes to certain things. But I can't let having an education influence me completely because of my religion. I have to take my religion into account; I have to consider what is written in the Koran. If I allow myself to be influenced by education, I will completely abandon my religion. So I take my religion into account so that I don't [shrugs] so that education should not influence me completely...It's a little difficult; firstly, the religion doesn't allow women to go far; secondly, married women must stay at home. As a result, there is this clash between my religion and education. However, work, education do not really have an impact on religion, as long as you don't mix them. When I talk about mixing, I mean stuff like gender equality. I can't go home now and tell my husband "you have to do this because that's what was said at school". No. I try to balance things out, to not mix things up applying what I learn in school at home. I don't really apply it.

On her part, Hope argues that although she understands the assumptions people have of her empowerment given her higher education and exposure, those who fear her for this presumed empowerment need to understand that her empowerment does not solely depend on her. She recounts an example of how she has tried to translate her higher education into gender equality in her home and found that there is a limit to how much she can do.

This issue of house chores has always disturbed me, even before I came to the university it has been disturbing me...boys and girls go to school they come back together and then a boy picks up his ball and he is in the field playing. The girl has to do laundry, do the dishes, maybe there is vegetables to be picked and then joins the mum in the kitchen and they both have assignments to do at the end of the day...when I came with my husband to the university. There are days that at times we both have classes and then we close at the same time, and we get home at the same time. And maybe food was not yet cooked. And he enters and goes to bed and he lies there, maybe he is browsing his phone. Maybe I have to go out, get what to come and cook. He is there. And when I complain to my friends about it, they say it is because of book you want to compare with your husband. The kitchen is your place. But I considered after a while that maybe he does that out of ignorance. There was a day I sat him down, I said but it is wrong. Both of us go to school and then when you come and you lie there and I am doing all those things. What do you think? Am I a kind of an elastic thing that doesn't get tired or what? And he did not argue with me and he has changed. Even if it is to pick vegetables for me to cook, he does it. There are times I go to school and

before I have come back he has done the dishes. What he would not do is laundry. He hates it. [laughs] From that I learned that if you see what is not right, you go about to change by bringing it out. If you don't say that this is wrong, nobody would notice it and nothing can be done to change it. But the change, those kind of things, it depends. Because now, my husband does these things when we are just two of us at home. If other people are at home, they would frown at it, obviously. And if I had raised that as a problem in the family, from my experience, I know that it would not be taken lightly...I feel that, I have the courage to say it out because of my experience in higher education, but society needs to address men too... And in as much as I am happy that this is happening to me I will equally like to see it happening to other women. And this cannot happen through my own education alone but society.

The above examples show that some of these women are understanding of and in agreement with the assumptions made of them on account of their higher education. However, certain participants like Yoyo, Oulimata and Cynthi feel the fear and labelling is completely unwarranted and ignorant. Cynthi asserted that her ex-husband's fear of her empowerment through higher education was stupid and his current regret illustrates this. She shared how she tried to convince him of the benefits of her education prior to their separation, explaining that if in future his business was not doing well she would be able to support the family as well, but he was too shortsighted to see how her education was beneficial for both of them. Alternatively, Yoyo does not understand the fear of her empowerment at all as she feels educating woman is of benefit to all and will not affect gender roles. Of this she said:

My empowerment will allow me to accomplish family projects. It may, for example, enable my husband and I to see things in a better light than maybe if I wasn't empowered. So, for me, being empowered doesn't necessarily mean that you have to be disrespectful in your home, or maybe that you lose your position as a woman. No, if I end up getting married, it doesn't necessarily mean that my husband won't have his place as a man. No, it doesn't. The man remains the man in a home.

Jesurelle's take was most remarkable in the duality of her perspective; while she agreed with the assumption, she felt it was unnecessarily exaggerated.

Well, I don't think it's wrong. [Laughs] It's not wrong that when a woman has been far in school, people tend to fear her. I once heard of a mother who said that,

“Girls who have been to school to the point of getting a Master’s, a PhD don’t groom themselves. They don’t have time to maybe wax, put on powder, lipstick, and sometimes men are also afraid of them, of approaching them”. And sometimes it seems that they don’t get married easily. I don’t think it’s untrue that women who are overeducated are intimidating. Maybe they don’t intimidate me because I’m educated. But I think the rest of society is intimidated by them, because we are in a context where the impression is that the place of women is in the home, in the house, raising a baby, handling the kitchen and all that. Even now, when you see a female associate professor at the university, it still creates distortions. And sometimes - well, I don’t know - but I think it can even impact life as a couple, especially if she’s married to someone who’s not as intellectual as she is, because the man will tend to feel demeaned. Imagine a couple where the man is a shopkeeper, he sells and has a Bac, and the woman is a PhD holder. It would really take a lot of grace for the couple to be balanced. Otherwise, the odds are tilted towards clashes, because they don’t have the same outlook on life, they don’t see things the same way. It’s perfectly normal that people are kind of afraid of such women... But I don’t totally agree that educated women are empowered. I don’t totally agree because for me, empowerment also means having a job. There are millions of girls who have Bachelor’s degrees, Master’s degrees in Economics, Law, International Relations, but are just there, don’t have jobs, and still need help, have to be given a helping hand all the time... They’re educated, yes. But do they have autonomy? If they have a job, fine. But if they don’t have a job, that’s a problem. You can’t talk about autonomy when, to do your hair, you have to reach out for help. So, education does not suffice to make a woman autonomous in my opinion. On the contrary, there are even uneducated women who are more autonomous than those who have been to school.

It is clear that they are very familiar with the assumptions of their empowerment as graduates of higher education and the perceived threat their educational attainment presents in Cameroonian society. Their responses show that the assumption which this research queries is somewhat shared by the women themselves, that is to say they do not find it problematic. They too have imbibed the global ideology that holds education as a panacea and expect empowerment from it. These women also expected empowerment of higher education and only realised much later that higher education could only do so much. It is the gap between expectation and reality that justifies this study’s interrogation of the labels which suggest these women are overeducated.

This chapter has presented and discussed empirical findings with regards to Cameroonian women's conceptualisation of empowerment, their perceived level of empowerment as graduate students, the extent to which they credit their higher education with that empowering and their status as women on the brink of being 'too much'. The findings thus far show that for these women, empowerment is indeed a multidimensional concept which entails financial independence, voice, authority over themselves, the ability to influence others, and to partake in decision making, amongst other things. These women recognise that they have some of these aspects and that in some ways their higher education did enable certain aspects of the empowerment they have gained. However, none could claim to have been educated to the point of attaining the desired level of empowerment and several of them had issues with higher education which in part limited their empowerment or outright disempowered them. The following quote by Hope poignantly captures the median of perspectives shared by participants on if and how they consider themselves empowered as graduates.

I think that I have actually gone a long way looking at my childhood to where I am today. But I am not content, I think that there is still a long way to go. There is much to be done, which I don't think I am able to do. It is true I have gained the education but just as I said earlier my education alone is not able to get me where I want to go. There is much that needs to be done. And I don't know how to...

10. EDUCATED ENOUGH TO BE CONSIDERED EMPOWERED?

This study presents the problem of Cameroonian women's assumed empowerment through higher education as a two-sided problem which requires a two-sided response. The research deems it necessary for the women themselves of whom assumptions are made to conceptualise empowerment and articulate for themselves if and how they have been empowered by higher education. Yet, this research likewise puts forward the necessity of external recognition of these women's empowerment based on researched and nuanced conceptualising of what empowerment should look like in their context and what aspects of it should be enabled through higher education. In this way, the study enables both participants and scholarship to respond to the societal assumptions of these women's empowerment through higher education.

As per the study's aim, the previous chapter discussed if and how these women consider themselves empowered, and to what extent their empowerment came about through their higher education. This second chapter will take on the second part of the research objective to determine if these women can be considered empowered by others; others here being African-feminist and Capability Approach theorists/practitioners. In so doing, this chapter will respond to the second guiding research question;

2. What does an original African-feminist and capability approach theorisation contribute to the understanding of Cameroonian women's empowerment and how does this theorisation consider the empowerment of these women by their higher education?

To do this, I operationalise the African-feminist Capability Approach application to interrogate empirical data collected from the ten women introduced earlier.

However, considering the ethical and methodological principles of the research, the empirical data analysed in this chapter will be limited to narratives collected in life-story interviews. This choice is made based on three reasons. First, out of respect for the participants' self-efficacy; as to override participants' self-analysis put forward at the participatory workshop, would disempower them as co-researchers. Second, this choice is made in recognition of the fact that data collected at the workshop is influenced by my own input to the workshop on African-feminist thought and the Capability Approach which

participants may not particularly adhere to, but would have employed as the activities demanded. Finally, a further analysis of the self-analysis participants engaged in at the workshop would mean engaging in a form of meta-analysis which is not this research's design - their participation at the workshop was not merely a means to an end but an end in itself.

To ensure a comprehensive response is given to the research question at hand here, this chapter is split into four sections. The opening section presents the African-feminist and Capability Approach's contribution to conceptualising what empowerment means in this context and for these women, with the second section reviewing participants' life-stories assessing their empowerment from the theorisation's vantage point. The next section builds upon what was discussed in the previous chapter with a theory-based review of the contribution higher education made towards participants' empowerment [if at all], and the closing section of the chapter asserts the analytical conclusions.

10.1 Empowerment as per the African-feminist Capability Approach

Prior to determining if these women can be considered empowered by African-feminist Capability Approach theorists, it is necessary to be precise about how the concept of empowerment is understood in this integrated application. The first of two categorical contributions made by this African-feminist application of the Capability Approach is the enhancement of understanding of African women's empowerment by way of a definition reconstructed for more contextual relevance, and a more sentient line of questioning for assessing African women's empowerment.

Part I of this thesis introduced both Capabilitarian and African-feminist thought and Part II's review of literature presented the concept of empowerment as understood through each of these theoretical frames. It is from that foundational information that this African-feminist application of the Capability Approach builds a new way of interrogating and defining empowerment for analysis here; using one of the participants, Dija, I will illustrate this application's contribution to the understanding of women's empowerment.

The application notes that empowerment as per the Capability Approach entails the expansion of freedoms and capacity to achieve what is valued by the individual. A Capabilitarian evaluation of Dija's empowerment would require asking:

- What are Dija's valued beings and doings [i.e. functionings]?
- What REAL opportunities/freedoms does Dija have to achieve her valued beings and doings [i.e capabilities]?
- What conversion factors and/or structural constraints serve to enable and/or obstruct Dija's achievement of her valued functionings and overall individual fulfilment?

Conversely, based on the variety of African-feminist scholarship, empowerment is understood by African-feminists as a negotiated process by which African women become aware of their multivariate oppressions and are enabled [both by self and external influence] to engage in a collective dismantling of long-standing manifestations of those oppressions towards the achievement of more equitable distributions of power on personal, economic, and political levels (see Longwe 1994, cited in Tsikata & Darkwah 2014; Davies & Graves 1986, p. 9, cited in Silva 2004; Nnaemeka 2004). An African-feminist assessment of Dija's empowerment would hence necessitate questions such as;

- What, if anything, does Dija recognise as her oppressions and oppressors?
- How do the intersections of Dija's identities (woman, Francophone, Cameroonian, Fulani Muslim, Adamawa resident, graduate student, etc.) uniquely define her (dis)empowerment?
- In what ways, if at all, is Dija able to resist what oppresses her and engage in the dismantling of inequitable power imbalances which delimit her realisation of African womanhood, and what would she need to be more able?

Following the appraisal of the commonalities across conceptualisations in the breadth of empowerment literature, a reviewing and blending of what is deemed essential by each of the theoretical frames which constitute this merged application, this merged African-feminist Capability Approach posits that:

The empowerment of African women should be understood as an interactive process by which African women – having gained consciousness of themselves and the multivariate ways they are

disempowered – come into fullness of being. This process involves reclaiming authority and expanding the capability sets necessary for meeting not only valued ends, but equally to engage in the dismantling of the structures and conditioning – patriarchal, colonial and more – which subjugate them, working relationally towards both individual and collective fulfilment.

Following this definition of empowerment, an African-feminist Capability Approach would require that we ask in addition:

- How, if at all, is Dija conscious of internalised, external and collective oppressions?
- What are Dija's valued ends vis-à-vis adapted preferences and socialised values embedded in coloniality and patriarchy?
- Based on Dija's experiences of multivariate oppressions, what powers, freedoms and functionings would she need to come into fullness of being?

Following this definition and line of questions, an empowered Cameroonian woman, to the African-feminist Capability Approach theorist, would be one who;

- is conscious or is gaining consciousness of self, internalised, external and collective oppressions,
- has reclaimed or is reclaiming necessary authority to engage in the dismantling of the structures and social conditioning which subjugate her,
- has sufficiently expanded or is expanding the capability sets necessary for meeting valued ends,
- is able to navigate/negotiate oppressive social structures and norms in ways which expand her freedoms – even if imperfectly,
- has acquired or is acquiring the overall ability to work towards not only her individual but also collective fullness of being.

The above aspects of this application's understanding of empowerment are demonstrated with my proposed reconstruction of Rowlands' (1997) 'Categorization to Powers' based on the African-feminist Capability Approach. This reconstruction is entitled 'AfCa Dimensions of Powers and Freedoms' and is illustrated below:

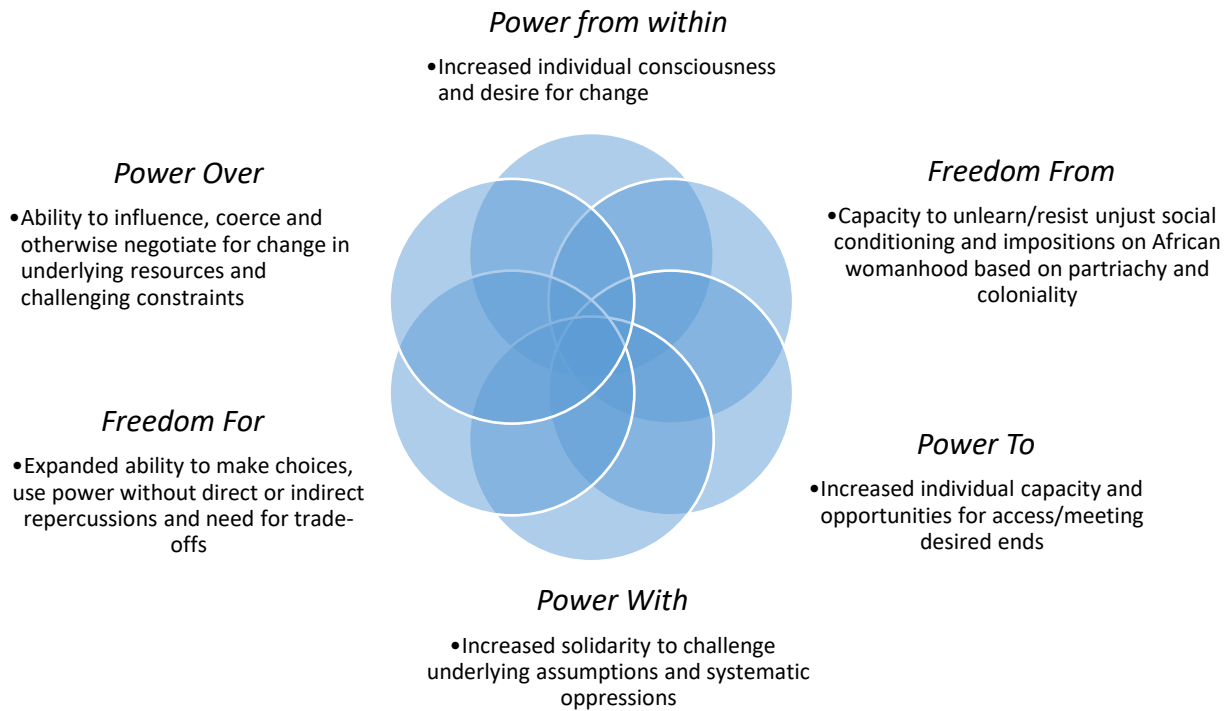


Figure 14: African-feminist Capability Approach Dimensions of Power and Freedom [Adapted from Rowlands' (1997) Categories of Power]

It follows therefore that the participants of this study would be considered empowered here based on the degree of their possessing the above outlined dimensions of power and freedoms. Likewise, their higher education may be credited for empowering them if it clearly enabled these attributes. The following sections shall examine the extent to which this is the case.

10.2 Are they empowered?

All these women could partake in this study, speak up for and of themselves, critically assess their position as Cameroonian women in higher education of whom empowerment is expected and assumed, and demonstrate how they negotiate their oppressions. This denotes that they all had some degree of empowerment by; consciousness of self and oppressions [power from within], freedom to act on their desire to travel to Yaoundé for the workshop without repercussions [freedom for] or power to negotiate their way there

[power over], and the intellectual capacity to contribute to and/or engage in the knowledge-making process [power to]. On the other hand, the African-feminist Capability Approach would consider these women disempowered as the majority of participants expressed lack of access and the capacity necessary for meeting valued ends [power to], they generally conveyed a lack of solidarity with fellow women [power with], and their narratives demonstrated significant internalised oppressions, limitations to their use of what power they have, and an inability to challenge social pressures and structural constraints [lack of freedom from, power over and freedom for]. As such, considering these women from the African-feminist Capability Approach perspective it can be said that they all share certain aspects of empowerment and disempowerment with variation in extent captured at the individual level as presented in the following subsections.

10.2.1 Clearly empowered

As has been noted earlier in this work, it was particularly difficult to recruit participants for the research at the predominantly Muslim University of Ngaoundere as most Muslim women are restricted from traveling far from home by their husbands or parental authority. Therefore, the ability of participants like Amena and Dija to merely participate in this study cannot be overlooked given this social context. Yoyo, who is a non-religious participant and student at the University of Ngaoundere, underscores the limitations to freedoms she observed as someone removed from that culture when she relocated to Ngaoundere.

Situations I encounter in in Ngaoundere where I currently live often leave me perplexed; in that region we cannot say that women are empowered or even “feminists”. In fact, one has the impression that they are still lagging behind civilisation. I have seen cases where a woman, to talk to her husband for example, has to go down on her knees along the road. Would anyone say they are empowered? I don’t think so. Over there, women are yet to be empowered. I don’t see how, in the 21st century, a woman has to kneel before her husband at a junction to talk to him, to ask for something that is rightfully hers, like money for food for example...

Scholarship affirms that this is the reality for many women across Cameroon who are dependent, but particularly women of the Muslim northern regions (Van Santen 2010;

Taoyang 2019). In view of this it is clear that these women's participation in this study already situates them as relatively empowered in their communities.

Based on the commonality of consciousness as a defining characteristic across the majority of conceptualisations of empowerment (see Tsikata & Darkwah 2014; Mejuini 2013; Rowlands 1995; Batliwala 2007), participants here can likewise be considered relatively empowered as all the women in this study exhibited awareness of multivariate oppressions with sexism being commonly recognised. Hope, for instance, exemplified consciousness of sexist divisions of labour and the oppression women face in meeting society's expectation of their public and private role.

My limitations come from diverse sources. Of course one is my gender. I am a woman. I am a mother. And I am a student...I work. And if I am not able to blend these three it is a problem. And why is it a problem? The problem stems first from the fact that a particular domain is still predominantly considered to be my own. Even though I have been given space in the public, the private sphere to a very great extent is still considered my domain. If something goes wrong in the private domain the blame falls on me as the woman. 'You did not do this, you abandoned your home for your career', that is what they will say. So you have to blend this together, and there is the probability that you will not be able to effectively accomplish whatever you are supposed to do in the different fields.

For her part, Oulimata shared consciousness of how her experience of sexism is compounded by her other intersecting identities and the variety of oppressions which ensues:

One has the impression that one committed a sin, that one is a woman because they did wrong...When something is likened to women in our society, like saying someone is 'doing something like a woman', it is automatically derogatory. It means that they are doing it wrong. For them, it is therefore surprising to see a woman doing something well, especially doing well in her studies. However, if you birth ten children, yes, you're a good woman. If you can cook well, yes, you're a good woman... One experiences inequalities every day due to differing causes. But as a woman first of all, there is a default prejudice with regard to doing some things intended for men...I'll take a common example; when I hail a taxi and there's a man behind and I open the door to take the front seat, the taxi driver will

say: Madam, women sit in the back and men in front. I ask why and he will say 'because you're a woman'. So, the only reason is because I'm a woman. I have the female sex organ, that's all; that's why he has to sit in front and I in the back. Now as a Muslim woman, it is even worse... I'll take another example of a taxi ride; I was waiting for a taxi once, and because I was dressed in loincloth⁵⁹ - I hadn't even give my destination yet - the taxi driver said to me: 'Ah! We know you, you're those delinquents from Brique⁶⁰. So, we're just going to drop you off there'. I said, 'So, because I'm in a loincloth and I look like a Hausa⁶¹, you automatically call me a delinquent?' He replied, 'No, that's the way it is; everyone knows that'... So it is not merely an impression for people, that's the reality: you are judged for being a woman, you are judged for being a Muslim. Then, you are judged again for being a woman and a Muslim. Because of your family background, you are also judged not only for being a woman, being a Muslim, but also for being Hausa. When the three are combined with your social class, the judgment comes full circle. You are judged relentlessly, and derogatorily. You can't be considered as a girl who has excelled in her domain, who is successful in her initiatives, who learns from her religion every day. No, it is assumed that because your father is wealthy, you used connections to get into IRIC. Life is not easy [laughs]. When you're a woman, life is really not easy.

Sexism aside, Cynthi, Momo, Amena, Hope and Anne all demonstrated awareness of linguistic and systemic injustice against them as Anglophones. Anne in particular gave a poignant example of how she gained awareness of the extent to which the system restricts her ability to be and do when she applied for a one-month vacation work programme for students offered at the University of Buea.

You'll see a notice on the notice board for the holiday job opportunity, but when you go and submit your application, that s when they tell you that the file needs to go to Yaoundé and come back... That means even here in your own home university you cannot still see things clearly, they cannot give you priority... and eventually you find yourself not taken.

That these women possess 'power from within' is equally evident in the desire they have to influence change in their communities. The majority of participants expressed a desire

⁵⁹ A rectangular piece of traditional cloth worn draped around the waist.

⁶⁰ A neighbourhood in Yaounde known to host migrant Muslims.

⁶¹ A Cameroonian ethnic group most known to be practicing Muslims.

to engage in some form of advocacy and development work which Capabilitarian scholarship upholds as evidence of empowerment by increased agency (Nussbaum 2002; Walker & Unterhalter 2007; Murphy-Graham 2012; Drydyk 2008; Okkolin 2016). Jesurelle, for instance, despite being Francophone expressed her recent awareness of Anglophone marginalisation and a passion for contributing to peacebuilding through an association she has founded with her friends:

I am working with my classmates to establish an association- Peace Makers International. I had the idea when I attended a seminar in 2016 on peace and security. And that day, I think I understood, I saw that it was urgent for me to get involved, to do something because, at the time, the Anglophone Crisis was still nascent, but the security problem in the Far North was already there. It was when I attended this seminar that I said to myself: "I have to do something". During this seminar, I also understood how important it is for a young person to vote, because I had registered on the electoral roll, but I had never withdrawn my card. And at the end of this seminar, the first resolution I made was to go and get my card from ELECAM. And, I said to myself, I must campaign later to encourage other young people to register on the electoral roll, to vote. And I will also campaign for the maintenance of peace because, in any case, if there is war in my country and I do nothing, it is not a Tunisian or a Congolese who will come to advocate peace in my country.

That these women have developed the capacity to recognise sexist inequalities, religious prejudice, and systematic oppression in a society where these are embedded and normalised, is clear evidence of their empowerment.

These women are also recognised as empowered here on grounds of the relative 'freedom for' they enjoy. All these women were able to access higher education based on the availability of certain conversion factors ranging from family permission and financial support to the availability of educational institutions. Despite the fact they faced obstacles to their access and progress within formal education, the majority of participants had relative freedom for educational aspirations and autonomy in educational decisions. Given how parental authority and patronising institutional policies often take away that choice from young women in such contexts (see Okkolin 2016), their ability to decide their educational trajectory – within limits of what was available and what they could afford –

cannot be undervalued. Their 'freedom for' is most visible in the narratives of those who shared that, despite multiple structural constraints, they were still able to pursue their education because it was still a possibility. Amena, Cynthi, Fatima and Dija all illustrate this. Amena was able to overcome constraints of religious prejudice and limited finances because, assured by her Imam and parents, there was no repercussion for pursuing education. Cynthi was able to continue with her studies and register herself for the GCE exam without her parents' support because there was a government school in the area which meant subsidised tuition which her friends could help her pay. Dija was equally exceptional in her desire for and pursuit of education because of her early years at an orphanage, where going to school was expected and encouraged. Even Fatima [whose family felt it was taboo for her to pursue education past primary school] was able to do so because of her mother's ambition to have a daughter who was educated to secondary school level and qualified to be a midwife. The Capabilitarian contribution to this application ensures that we recognise that without these enabling conversion factors these women would never have gone past basic education, if at all. Though their environment discouraged their educational attainment, it was not prohibited outright, and for this they can be considered reasonably empowered.

An African-feminist Capability Approach consideration of participants' narratives likewise acknowledges that they generally demonstrate possession of 'power over' as exhibited in the negotiation of their recognised oppressions. Hope's recollection of taking her husband aside to address the inequitable participation in household chores is an example of this. In addition, Dija's narrative shares that she and her step-sisters have learned to navigate the restrictions on their freedoms as Muslim girls.

You have to stay home. Women represent the home for us. You must be home at all times. Outings are not allowed every day, but much more on weekends. For example, you can go out to braid your hair or visit a family member. Stuff like that. Apart from that, you always have to be home except, in some cases, when we leave for school and take the opportunity to see friends, or visit a sick friend. This is how you have fun because there is nothing like parties or the like; it's not really allowed. So we are confined to the house.

Furthermore, participants are considered fairly empowered here in terms of the dimension of 'power to' which denotes their ability to access some otherwise inaccessible opportunities and to meet relevant and valued ends. Findings discussed in the previous chapter revealed that participants feel they are more able at this point in their lives to do and be a variety of functionings based on their increased authority and capacity. By their own admission, some women have the power to work, the power to assert themselves, contribute to decision making, influence others and more. That they have wider access to resources and opportunities also translates to other dimensions of power and freedom, such as increasing their capacity to influence change [power over] and to be free to enjoy their desired ends without condemnation or needing permission [freedom for].

The African-feminist Capability Approach acknowledges that these women are relatively empowered given that their narrative life-stories attest to development in their capacity to attain desired ends. For instance, Cynthi who was in a position of complete financial dependency and vulnerability with regards to her class and gender, is now able to access more opportunities, garner desired social respect and recognition, make autonomous decisions and look forward to financial stability as a member of the civil service and middle class. In general, these women's life-stories demonstrate some transformation in what they can do, how they are seen, and who they are now from who they once were, and this is indication of their empowerment.

10.2.2 Clearly not empowered

The above observations notwithstanding, considering participants' empowerment from the African-feminist Capability Approach would reveal even more ways by which they remain disempowered and counter assumptions of their empowerment. Their common awareness of sexist oppression in itself is proof of the collective disempowerment these women experience daily, irrespective of their other identifiers. The pervasiveness of sexism (some of which is internalised) is such that it limits even the women's desire for true gender equality, despite their awareness of gender inequality. That is to say, the application considers these women as disempowered not only by the regularity with which they encounter sexism, but likewise as a result of how they have come to accept and

reproduce it despite consciousness of it. Hope, who shared a remarkable consciousness of gender inequalities in division of labour, illustrated the limit to which her consciousness could go when she shared her experience of giving up her job to better fulfil her role as wife and mother.

I had discovered that it was going to be very difficult for me to blend the two, motherhood and work...because I didn't have an elderly person at home with the child. I had a babysitter who was 12 and to leave the house at seven and come back at 8pm it was.... The child was not really disturbing but psychologically I wasn't happy. It was like I value money to my daughter. So I talked with them [her employers] and told them that I am not comfortable and quit to go back to school. With school I could have more time to be at home.

In a similar manner, Fatima displays increased consciousness of inequalities in her religion between the genders, but this consciousness does not translate to desire for transformative change because of her religious enculturation.

I can't take education as a way to impose myself, no. I give my point of view, but I'm not going to say: 'since the man is wearing the shirt, I have to wear the pants'. No. I give my point of view, but... It's true if God didn't exist, maybe the world would be different. I, especially, do not live a carefree life. Because there are certain laws that must be respected in relation to my religion. It is forbidden to raise your voice at a man. Or to say "no". You have to accept what the man says first. You have to accept everything. My religion, Islam, says a woman doesn't even have a mouth. Everything her husband says is true, she just has to accept it. I, particularly, can't live a certain way, under the influence of education. No, I have to take into account - because I am a believer - I have to take into account my religion, I can't take education as a means, a power against men. No, no, no, no. From the moment a man is concerned, even when you speak - my husband, he's the one who allowed me to further my education. He agreed for me to have all this. In any case, he supported me, he supports me. So, I can't take this as... I don't know... a weapon against him. No, I can't do that.

As the excerpt above illustrates, Fatima has come to accept inequalities she now knows to be unjust as the norm because of the version of Islam she was indoctrinated with passes sexist ideology on as religious dictate. Though she asserts that she furthered her education to exact revenge [by succeeding] on her husband who cheated on her and to be relatively independent financially, she is still wary of using that education and status

to counter his supremacy as a man. Such evidence affirms that these women lack sufficient 'power from within' to be considered truly empowered.

Limitations of these women's lack of 'power from within' can be recognised in feminist scholarship as internalised sexism and adapted preferences (Khader 2014, 2018). The first concept denotes the situations where oppressed people have come to believe what oppressors say about them to be true and perceive themselves as having less value than the oppressing group, while the second refers to the inclination of oppressed people to prefer that which is inconsistent with or nonconductive for their basic flourishing. Such limitations manifest in other dimensions such as that of 'power with' and 'freedom from' as well. It is as a result of limited consciousness/internalised sexism, for instance, that Momo, Cynthi and Amena regard other women in a sexist light and exemplify double standards with regards the behaviour of men and women. Amena for instance is more understanding of domineering attitudes and arrogance from men, but strongly condemns the same behaviour in women. Cynthi, despite her strong awareness of sexism born of her own life experiences, still believes women ought to be held to higher moral standards as she attributes sexual harassment of students to female students who are "weak". In fact, the language she uses in her narrative reveals that she blames herself more for her own exploitation at the hands of the man who promised to support her education if she got pregnant for him.

My mother was educated up to standard 6 and so she cautioned us, advising us that the pride of a woman is when she conserves herself. When you keep away relationships, that there is no hurry in life, when you comport yourself something big and better will come your way. I was always besides my mother, I stuck to what she told me, but after my Ordinary Level, I fell prey to a certain temptation. Now there was no one to help. My father's leg had been amputated and though he was a civil servant but then It was so difficult for me to go to school, every money was tilted towards the care, him being In the hospital added to house chores...life was so, so difficult. So I met a boy who was so interested in me and he said he wanted to help me. I said the only thing you can do is to give me money for my education. If you really love me, then make me a woman of status. He said he had one condition: if you accept that you will have a baby for me then I will assist you. Now because I was so eager to pursue my education, I said ok,

a child is not a problem, my problem is the education. I accepted and got myself pregnant.

In related fashion, Momo reveals prejudice against her fellow female students at Soa on the grounds of her internalised moral standards for women.

When I got to Soa, I noticed that the girls don't go to school, that there was a lot of cohabitation, I saw girls getting pregnant and being beaten by their boyfriends, and most of these guys would live with the girls in her room. It is like you guys are married. So they would sleep with you, you cook for them and don't go to classes. Especially the Anglophones, the Anglophone girls. They don't go to school. They are there focusing on their boyfriends.... when I think on it, maybe I would have been beaten by my boyfriend too and gotten pregnant. Maybe my own luck was that I did not know to cook. Because when you know to cook, you attract those boys to your room. That is what they want. Some of us did not know how to cook [laughs]...since I grew up with a single mother who worked and did not spend time with us, I did not grow up with a father and mother to know that this is what a mother is supposed to do as a wife in the house. No, I was just there. And recently it occurred to me that I should organise an event in Soa for Soa girls to sign a pledge. A pledge to pursue their education and not to go to school and come back with babies.

These instances reveal that these women not only continue to be victims of sexist oppression but also perpetrators of it. Amena and Cynthi would pass their sexism on as 'lessons' in the classroom. Momo relates that she plans to set up an organisation for young women where she would advise them; in this way they would be using what 'power over' they have not to change the inequitable system which oppresses women but to preserve it. The African-feminist Capability Approach regards this as evidence that they lack considerable empowerment as what they have is not adequate for either individual or collective transformation.

It follows from this that the majority of participants are yet to acquire satisfactory 'power from' by which they can unlearn the social conditioning which keeps them subjugated and ensures they partake in the subjugation. It is worth noting that the social conditioning which must be unlearned is not limited to sexist socialisation which renders them willing subjects to patriarchy, insecure physically, and emotionally in need of being liked and

validated. It likewise applies to the conditioning which ensures these women believe that; their domestic labour is undervalued in comparison to work in the productive sphere, that the colonial languages they speak are superior to their own, that what is foreign is more respectable, and that belonging to certain fields of knowledge depicts more intelligence and more.

Momo illustrates that she needs ‘freedom from’ Western/globalised definitions of physical beauty when she expresses her lack of self-confidence because of her size and darker skin tone. Almost all the women illustrate disregard for the value of their domestic labour and some even disregard manual labour altogether. Dija described herself as unemployed because she has not succeeded at government recruitment exams, she does not really consider her small-scale tailoring work a business, and plans to leave the country for Turkey because a foreign country would be better. Amena and Cynthi both remark that they feel impressive and are impressed by the ability to speak ‘good English’ as opposed to their local languages even though they are aware as historians that such views are rooted in colonial policies. Furthermore all participants relayed belief in the epistemic superiority of science subjects over arts subjects; while some hinged their worthiness on their being science-inclined. Others remarked that their choice of arts subjects was hinged on ideas that such subjects are ‘easier’ and more suitable for women.

In such ways, the women demonstrated ingrained beliefs in patriarchy and coloniality by which they either restrict themselves or defend the external restrictions of their freedoms and powers. In the same way that Adichie (2017) has linked the need for likability to sexist socialisation, Amaazee (2011) and Mougoué (2015) detail the pressures on Cameroonian women to conform to ideals of beauty and product value as framed by coloniality. From Oyewumi (1997) to Khader (2018) and Switzer (2018), scholars have affirmed that the relegation of work done by African women is tied to Western and neoliberal notions that domestic and manual labour does not count as work, ideas that they must work and earn a salary to be of value, and that formal education in certain languages makes them ‘better’ than others. Given their lack of ‘freedom from’ such deep-seated indoctrination, a critical look at these women would determine them significantly disempowered. As earlier mentioned, employing an African-feminist Capability Approach lens to consideration of

these women's empowerment would require that one interrogates what they actually value in addition to their ability to attain that valued end. That women like Amena value being regarded as servile, and women like Oulimata, Yoyo and Momo define their self-actualisation based on the ability to attain a near impossible superwoman standard set by society shows that without freedom and critical agency from such values they will remain disempowered irrespective of what other power they may acquire.

Assumptions of these women's empowerment on account of their level of education are typically grounded in the expectations of their 'power to'. It is assumed that they would be able to access wider opportunities, have more options, financial freedom and generally live a more preeminent life as a result of their higher education. And indeed, these women attest to their increased capacity to do and be what they have reasons to value, yet it is the limitations to their 'power to' which these women recognise the most as well. Considering the assortment of their values and the empowerment needs they would need to address, the majority of these women lack sufficient 'power to' live more empowered lives. This is evident in the fact that the majority of the women are unemployed or underemployed, dependent on others for sustenance, and by default under their beneficiaries' authority. The assumptions of their empowerment fail to consider the fact that even if a woman like Oulimata is qualified for further studies abroad, even though she may have the financial support to pursue those ambitions, that 'power to' is limited by her identity as a potential immigrant from a highly-indebted poor country and she remains at the mercy of immigration officers.

As the stories of Anne, Dija and Yoyo illustrate, these women's 'power to' is insufficient to overcome the collective deficiencies of the country. Dija notes that she cannot study what she would have preferred because the Adamawa region, being one of the most underdeveloped, does not offer many options. In order to do what she values and feels capable of doing she would have to leave her home region and that possibility is further hindered by her religious and cultural dictates which confine her to the home. Unless married, it would be unheard of for her to leave to Yaoundé, for instance to rent on her own. The collective mismanagement in the country which accounts for the lack of employment opportunities and the dependency-inclined higher education policies are

also overwhelming barriers to exercising of 'power to'. It is near impossible for students to work and go to school simultaneously as per the pedagogical structures of most higher education programmes, and even when students manage to do both by working odd hours, setting up small-scale trading, and skipping some classes as Anne and Yoyo attest to, the system of corruption plays against them. They graduate with little experience in their own fields, and are left unable to make use of the 'power to' which their academic programme gave them to secure a well-paying job. That these women's 'power to' is shallow is highlighted by remarks made by Anne and Yoyo with regards to their capacity to secure gainful employment which they value for financial autonomy. Anne expressed resignation at the fact that her higher education is only as good as who she knows:

In Cameroon, no matter how good you are, someone who is not as smart can get the job you want because they know the right person. When you leave school, you have to hustle like you never went to school. It doesn't matter whether you have a Master's in biochemistry, you are looking for work at a pharmacy so you are the same as the other person who has just an HND from Bianca.⁶²

Additionally, Yoyo shared her job-seeking experience, saying:

When I later got my Bachelor's in 2015, I went back home. I knew that, with my degree, I would find a good job with a good position, and maybe a salary of even 200,000. So, when the first opportunities came and I was offered 30,000 francs... Mtchew! In my head, I was like, "No, I can't have gone as far as Bandjoun for studies just to come back and be offered 30,000." I didn't know that logic was stupid. I could have started with that, then evolved, because that's what the country offers. What we've come to understand about the country is that when you're offered something, you take it first. Then, when you find something better, you go for it. The proof is that, after turning down those offers, I ended up spending almost a year at home without finding anything else. I had to fall back to my old job, which was trading. I sold for a year. I sold food with my mother.

⁶² Bianca is the popular name of a local school for nursing aids and midwives which is reputed for being a 'last option' higher education institution where students who did not have good enough grades go to make it into the University of Buea.

As these excerpts testify, these women's capacities are insubstantial in the face of corruption and Cameroon's beleaguered economic state.

Alternatively, Oulimata's narrative offers a valuable take on limitations to 'power to' when she makes it clear that in a context where worth is defined by the number of children one has, no amount of power she can acquire would suffice for her to be deemed worthy when she has been diagnosed as infertile.

By such accounts, it is evident that though they have recognisable 'power to' as graduates, these women note that it is not enough to differentiate them from less educated women when it comes to accessing certain opportunities and meeting desired ends. In this respect, these women are clearly not empowered.

In another light the women exhibit limited 'power over' their circumstances and ability to change underlying systems. Amena, Anne and Hope, for example, assert that there is little they can do with regards to the Anglophone crisis which plagues them. They are caught in the middle of a war between the government and secessionists and helpless to advocate for peace. As Amena said:

As an Anglophone if I was really given power, I would have the chance to talk concerning this issue, what is happening to us with this crisis now. I could have been at least been able to talk on this issue. Because for me, from my own perspective I don't see any reason why we should keep on fighting against one another...There are so many... killing people, destroying and all the like. So I know as a Cameroonian woman if I had the opportunity or if I was given the chance to be able to stand and talk on this issue I think with my knowledge of History I could have been able to say something that would change this issue. Because for me I don't see any reason why they should be fighting. There is no need for it.

Amena's statement shows that despite her consciousness and capacity to help, she has limited opportunity [freedom for] and influential capacity [power over] to address the socio-political crisis.

Concurrent with Nnaemeka's (2004) Negofeminist argument, these women's possession of 'power over' is often illustrated by way of their ability to negotiate for necessary change

and navigate oppressions to realise their fulfilment. However, though negotiating requires power it also denotes a lack thereof; that these women have had to make deals with their oppressions is evidence of their lack of 'power over'. Momo, who acknowledges Anglophone marginalisation, shares that she and other students attended preparatory classes for a government recruitment exam into the state school for administration and magistracy (ENAM) and were encouraged to answer questions in French to increase their chances because the examination questions are often poorly translated from French to English, putting Anglophone candidates at a disadvantage.

...even this preparatory classes that I am attending, the lecturer told us that, he told us that we should take note, that because ENAM they always give the questions in French and then they give the translated questions, so what happens is...the translations are not actually the direct translations so you are going to be misled. That is why it is always good to follow the French questions. Because the translation would give you something else. Imagine...imagine that kind of a thing... So, you see, we must understand the French.

When Momo navigates the systemic inequity against Anglophones in this way, or Cynthia has to pay for extra classes taught in English by Anglophone Master's students because the courses at the 'bilingual' University of Yaounde I are not accessible to her, they display both the power to negotiate and attain desired ends in spite of oppression but also considerable lack of power to transform their circumstance by addressing the oppression. In this regard, African-feminist negotiation must not be romanticised.

Hope provides a poignant example of how superficial her other powers and negotiating 'power over' is, even in the running of her household.

In my own home, I think that my education has helped me... My husband and I are able to sit and agree on certain things and what I put on the table is what is taken into consideration. And equally the fact that I am not financially dependent at all times... I must not always depend on him... but I cannot say I am a 100% empowered because of traditions and the rest of the family...the traditions still set in no matter your level of education... Let me give you an example; I mentioned having a babysitter, well she was brought to me by my mother in-law and the agreement was I was going to send her to school in exchange for her serving me. I was really going to be happy to do that, but she began misbehaving. She gets up and she leaves the house at will and things like that. And since I was

about to leave the Northwest to come to Buea for the Master's, I was scared. That babysitter is somebody's child. If I bring her here and something happens to her, I will be answerable to it. So I told my mother in-law that I will not like to take this child with me. I will preferably take her to her parents and tell them that this is the situation. Then I can support her school to whatever level I can but she stays with them. So that I won't be held responsible for what happens to her. Because the girl is not willing to obey me. My mother in-law told me directly that 'okay, let's listen to what your husband has to say'. Later, when I asked my husband, he said his mother has refused that the child is not going. I said I will not have her... He asked me what did I want him to do? He cannot oppose his family because of me, and whatever I say does not matter to them unless he is backing it. What my in-laws don't realise is that the payment of that child is on me. I asked her to get the child and I was going to pay for the services she has rendered to my baby... but that is none of their business. They think the decision has to come from the man.

As Hope's example reveals, the compromise which African-feminists recognise as a medium of women's agency is often born of limitations to their power. Hope navigates patriarchal dictates by having her husband resonate her voice so she can be heard, but she only does so because she has no power to be heard on her own. Despite the fact that she has the financial power to employ help for domestic work, that power is limited because who she can employ or fire is out of her hands. Having to navigate her subordination as a daughter in-law by using her husband to amplify her voice, despite the fact that she is the one financing the service in question, makes it clear that her ability to navigate is a limited power.

Finally, these women's lack of 'power with' is the form of disempowerment which most participants failed to recognise and that which the African-feminist Capability Approach considers strong evidence of their lack of empowerment. The majority of women in this study often regarded their fellow women as rivals or intimidators and [as has been discussed earlier] displayed tendencies to judge fellow women according to higher moral standards and have greater regard for male opinions. Amena's narrative provides several examples of this; one can note her gratification at being told she is not like other girls, that she is better by being more servile, more decently dressed, and a better home-maker than her cousins.

Most of my friends were just males... throughout my university years, from level 200 right up to level 600 where I am now, many of my friends are mostly boys. I don't have friends who are girls. And you know the reason is just because of my way of dressing... They believe that just from the way I am dressing I would start preaching to them. Or I will start influencing them to be dressing like me. So they don't come nearer me. Majority of people who come to me are men. Men would say to me 'just from the way you are dressing, I can see you are wife material, it's just that you are a Muslim'. I have had so many boys tell me such, they say "look at you, in short I enjoy the way you are, always very calm, always dressed like a serious wife". On campus my way of dressing made me a unique somebody. In my Faculty, in my Department, everywhere I go to even in the classroom. All my lecturers knew me from my dressing. Yes and one thing I like about it is that whenever I am entering any office in the university I am always, in short treated very well. Yes because all the lecturers, I am entering they say "hey Haija you are welcome, what is your problem," they attend to me. Yes because of my presentation. Yeah so that has really helped me, because I was always distinct from other students and normally many of them they would always tell me that, "oh just from your dressing we know that you can be a very good somebody. Because there are so many Muslims here they are not dressing like you. If you dress like this, it means that you really know what you are doing." And so they appreciated me because I was not like the other girls.

In the same light, the women often recount instances of being antagonised by fellow women in situations where they would attempt to enjoy certain freedoms or object to certain oppressions. Hope shared her experience of speaking with friends about her anger at unequal distribution of domestic work and gender inequities in general.

When I sit with my friends, I would ask: in your home who does what? I used to bring these kinds of arguments to the table. And they will say things like 'this is what happens to them when they go to school, they forget about the fact that the woman's place is in the kitchen' There are some statements that you get when you say something [about gender equality] that make you know that this person is not comfortable...like 'na dis ova book di wori wuna' or 'hummm don't mind her is that her book' such statements...

African-feminist scholarship makes it clear that women's empowerment is to be achieved through transformation for gender justice and this is a collective enterprise requiring both women's solidarity as well as men's involvement (Ebunoluwa 2009). That women like

Oulimata, Momo, Jesurelle, Amena, and Hope have enjoyed the support from men in their lives towards their education and employment is empowering and definitely a form of 'power with' as per this application's consideration. However, such support serves to foster their individual capability building and not their collective transformation. The 'power with' that these women need for dismantling systematic inequalities on the basis of their gender requires empathy, solidarity with and from other women. As long as they continue to perceive other women as competition and hold themselves and other women to account with double standards, this transformation and hence collective empowerment is impeded (AWDF 2006).

It is the lack of this 'power with' and the limitations to the various dimensions of power and freedom identified as necessary by the African-feminist Capability Approach which gives reason to these women being considered more disempowered than empowered in the face of their collective oppression.

10.2.3 Even more clearly conditional

The findings presented and discussed in previous sections indicate that from an African-feminist Capability Approach, these Cameroonian women graduates are clearly empowered but also disempowered. Empowerment is complex, complicated, dynamic and contested. There are transformative and reproductive elements operating all at the same time. What this application's perspective makes even clearer is that whether these women can be considered empowered or not is contingent on the intersection of multivariate factors. Despite the commonalities in their gendered oppression and their familiar empowerment as higher-educated women in this context, an African-feminist Capability Approach asserts that the extent to which these women can be considered (dis)empowered is dependent on a combination of their identifiers, life experiences, socialisation, formal education and more.

As stated earlier on in this work, how one experiences Cameroon would depend on certain identifiers; gender, linguistic group, religion, region of origin and residence, family structure, economic class, and much more. Similarly, the extent of these women's

(dis)empowerment would be influenced by these identifiers. Their identities as either Muslim, Christian or traditionalist would greatly affect what ‘freedom for’ they have, and how much ‘freedom from’ they need (Segueda 2015). For instance, Hope, Anne and Jesurelle, being Catholic Christians, would have considerably more opportunity to experience life outdoors and freedom to express themselves publicly than Muslim Diya, Fatima and Amena, who would have restricted ‘freedom for’ on grounds of Islamic dictates for the seclusion of women from public observation (Van Santen 2010). These differences would mean Anne and Jesurelle have more individual experiences and chances to assert themselves in public as Anne was often left in charge of her mother’s market stall after school and Jesurelle was able to take up the position of class prefect in a co-ed school. Even more exceptionally, Hope had ‘freedom for’ which permitted her to take up a pre-university opportunity for a cultural exchange trip to Germany as a nominee of her diocese, something her Muslim counterparts could not consider. The difference which the intersection of religious identity and gender make in the summation of (dis)empowerment is illustrated by Diya, who notes that upon returning to her family from the orphanage, she would find that talk about menstruation and reproductive health during puberty with her mother was discouraged, whereas her Christian foster mother had already given her some counselling on these matters at the age of ten by. As a result of this restrictive religious setting, Diya had less ‘freedom for’ and ‘power to’ to share about her sexual assault.

Family structure and economic class either augments or lessens the limitations to their freedoms and power. Oulimata, though a Muslim woman, is from a monogamous and relatively wealthy family with very supportive parents. Though her religion and community are extremely restrictive, she enjoys considerably more ‘freedom for’ than Diya, Amena or Fatima. The women’s narratives reveal that the intersection of family structures and class produce variations in (dis)empowerment. Diya, Cynthia, Yoyo [who all have had experiences with polygamous unions] and Momo [whose family is disjointed with her father’s multiple marriages after her parents’ divorce] displayed more apparent lack of solidarity with other women or ‘power with’, and more rivalry. Diya recognises this as a consequence of her family structure when she said:

Living in a polygamous home is not easy. You really, really need to be strong... especially for us from the North... I have two sisters with whom I share a room. Well, we do get along, but not very well. It's not easy. Everyone favours their mother's side. When you are in a polygamous home, especially us Muslims, children tend to look at what the other's mother does to theirs, and children side with their parents. So, there are fights every day because such should have done such and such; father bought such clothes for the other's mother, why didn't he buy any for my mother? So you want payback on your mother's side. It's not easy. Or with school: when you are successful in school and the other person's child is not, it becomes a problem. How did such and such succeed and how did such fail? As we tend to say in the North, we tend to blame things on marabouts⁶³, the next conclusion will be that such and such has certainly bewitched her husband. So, it's not easy; problems are the order of the day. Now that father is dead, and there's the issue of inheritance, the family is fighting; it is a tug-of-war. And since my mum has more children - three boys and one girl, that is me - and the other has only two, there are a lot more problems: my mum is the last wife and is the one with the most children. So, the co-wives have problems. "Why should such have such, whereas I have children and the number of children must be taken into account before the inheritance is shared?"

Cameroonian sociologist Nsamenang captures the power of family structure to aggravate or alleviate women's (dis)empowerment when he asserts that one family type which may vary by composition, culture and socioeconomic class "would in turn affect the tolerance level or parenting policy, permission of children's participation, peer group sociability, and protection" (2008, p. 213). In this way this identifier would define these women's personas, agency and the dimensions of their freedoms and powers. Amena and Cynthi's stories resonate this influence. Cynthi, as a child of a polygamous family, is one of many daughters and her father's sexist parenting policy which had a cut-off point for his daughters' education, made her vulnerable to advances from the man who offered to support her in furthering her studies. Amena, despite being from the same socioeconomic class as Cynthi and a presumably more 'restrictive' Muslim religion, did not have that problem as her parents are of a monogamous union and she is the only daughter of their three children.

⁶³ A Muslim hermit credited with mystical powers

Similar to their family structure, these women's residential area would undoubtedly define their social interaction, level of exposure, and the quality of education they would eventually get, the strength of gender bias and ultimately the extent of their freedoms and powers. Being born and raised in small farming villages in the Northwest Region meant that Amena, Cynthi and Hope experienced more underdevelopment with considerably less access to amenities like potable water, regular electricity, quality infrastructure and social care services than Momo or Jesurelle or Oulimata did. While Oulimata and Jesurelle may have enjoyed extracurricular activities courtesy of the towns they resided in, Amena, Cynthi and Hope recount working on farms after school. The impact of this identifier is apparent in the difference found in what these women need 'power to' to do. Amena, Cynthi and Hope feel they require vast financial and political power to effect developmental change in their communities. Oulimata is more sensitive to Islamophobia and Momo more sensitive to the moral upbringing of young girls.

One's linguistic group is arguably the strongest identifier following gender in Cameroon, based on its development across all agents of socialisation and its strength as a conversion factor. In Cameroon, one is first woman, then an Anglophone/Francophone woman, then an Anglophone/Francophone woman who is of a certain region and tribe, then by their religion and so on. I put gender first as linguistic identity itself is gendered (based on patrilineal origins), which explains why Dija describes her son as an Anglophone [his father's linguistic identity] despite the fact that she is a Francophone Northern Muslim woman. Hence, linguistic group is the main factor by which this application captures the conditionality of these women's (dis)empowerment, as being part of a certain linguistic minority would compound their oppressions differently. Based on their linguistic group, Cameroonian historian Walter Nkwi (2004) suggests that Amena, Cynthi, Momo, Hope and Anne, as Anglophone girls, would find that their first problem is that of identity within a cultural milieu which is 85% Gaullic/Francophone, while Jesurelle, Oulimata and Dija would be affirmed by belonging to the majority group. Likewise, research shows that gendered conditioning differs in what is deemed 'morally' acceptable for women between the Anglophone and Francophone linguistic groups. A study by Cameroonian feminist Jacqueline-Bethel Mougoué, notes that Anglophone women are

socialised to perceive Western dressing, drinking alcohol, visiting bars, wearing of wigs, skin lightening and more as signs of sexual immorality and are encouraged to compare themselves as better than their Francophone counterparts based on the idea that they are more modest. Social expectations of women's chastity, support for children, effective household management, humility and submission to men define and shape women's respectability in one linguistic group more than the other (Mougoué 2015). This is apparent in how their mothers' warnings about the necessity of chastity for respectability feature in the stories of Amena and Cynthi, and how Momo's narration paints her mother as a failed woman for her inability to fulfil these societal expectations. Differences in these women's linguistic identity would therefore translate to differences in the 'freedom for', what they needed 'freedom from', 'power to' and their ability to attain 'power from within'.

Moreover, these women's life experiences contributed to either alleviating or amplifying their oppressions. Three of the women here recounted childhood sexual assault, three others recounted domestic abuse, and four shared emotional issues with belonging and harassment, among other experiences. Dija in particular had several traumatic experiences; abandonment shortly after birth and subsequent fostering in an orphanage for the first decade of her life, an abrupt separation from her foster mother and return to her Muslim family, rape at age 14, followed by teenage pregnancy. Variations in their experiences tend to amplify the need for certain dimensions of power or freedoms. While all these women would require "power to" to attain financial independence and to access desired opportunities, those who have been abused, like Dija, require specific power to access services to help deal with trauma, "freedom for" for exposing abuses/abusers, and 'freedom from' self-blame attached to such experiences.

Finally, assumptions of Cameroonian women's empowerment on the basis of their educational attainment fail to appreciate the difference in content and quality of education which these women would receive, and its effect on the extent of their presumed empowerment. Perhaps the greatest effect which difference in linguistic identity has had on these women's (dis)empowerment, is its determination of which formal education subsystem they would receive their education in. Differences in the Anglophone and Francophone educational subsystems discussed earlier on, coupled with the

geographical context of the institutions, indicate that it is highly unlikely that these women's education would have been equal in quality. Amena shares in her narrative that her primary education left her speaking more of the local language, Lamnso, than English and she was accordingly in awe of those who could speak the language properly. This suggests that for some time Amena had less 'power to' articulate herself publicly than women like Oulimata or Momo who were able to attend more privileged schools. Most relevant to the problem at hand, is the varying degrees of (dis)empowerment which would result from differences in the higher education these women received. As noted before, despite Amena and Cynthi both having received higher education which qualifies them to teach history, the quality they received would have differed considerably, given how one attended a professional teachers' training institute and another an academic university. Alternatively, the entrepreneurship courses offered by some universities empowers women like Yoyo and Anne in a way that Jesurelle and Momo could not enjoy, because they did not receive instruction in such courses. Likewise, these women's (dis)empowerment would be contingent on their formal education, given that for some of them it was a site of their oppression [such as Amena and Oulimata's experiences with their lecturers' sexual propositions] or the reinforcement of their marginalisation [such as Momo and Cynthi's experiences as Anglophones in presumably bilingual state universities]. Jesurelle, in particular, remembers her undergraduate experience as being characterised by disparaging comments made by lecturers to students, and she affirms that these experiences amplified the fragility of her self-esteem.

...I think my mother unfortunately influenced me a lot negatively in that she pushed me into a shell. Then I got to ESSTIC where all the time I heard stuff like; 'you're hopeless, you don't know anything, you really will not make good journalists, you are mediocre journalists'. Never a word of encouragement. So, every time, I would tell myself, "I suck anyway... It took me a long time to learn to tell myself, 'okay, Jesurelle, you're brave. Jesurelle, you can do this. Jesurelle, it sounds impossible, but you can do it'... Because, we'd also be told stuff like: 'You're really not cultured. One wonders the kind of journalists you'll make. Anyway, you're the type to go and put up fake news in the media'. And stuff like: 'You suck, this is nonsense'! To spend the night working, and have a lecturer come and shred your work to pieces in front of you is demoralising! For example, we produced a paper and our lecturer came over and said it was unworthy even

for his toilet. Work we had spent sleepless nights on, just for him to come and say something like that, it's... even if you later felt like doing something, the words stick to your subconscious. Unconsciously, it's stored there and at some point, it feels like it's dogging you. And if you don't truly fight it - to this day, there are things that I have to open my mouth and tell myself, "Jesurelle, you can do it", before I can manage to do. Because you're in fact thinking of what they said to you, thinking that 'Well, I can't do it. It's for others'. And this stems from what you've been told from childhood and then through school until now.

Jesurelle's account indicates that while education may have given these women some degree of 'power to', it may likewise have left them with some oppressions they require 'freedom from'.

This section has elucidated African-feminist Capability Approach findings that these women's oppression is more complex than general gendered subordination, and so their empowerment cannot be presumed on the grounds of their higher education. The extent of disempowerment each faces and correspondingly the power they require to be empowered, is reliant on multivariate factors ranging from identifiers to formal education, which may either compound their oppression or enhance their freedoms. To this end, the following section answers the second part of research question two which asks how, if at all, the African-feminist Capability Approach considers higher education as empowering for these women; offering the theoretical perspective in contrast to participants' accounts the previous chapter.

10.3 Did their higher education empower them?

As put forward in the previous sections, to be empowered from an African-feminist Capability Approach perspective is to have attained adequate levels of the dimensions of power and freedoms as is necessary for transformative change towards both individual fulfilment and collective social [particularly gender] justice. Based on such a delineation of what empowerment entails, this application posits that an empowering higher education would be that which enables the attainment of those dimensions of power and freedoms necessary for transformative change towards both the individual fulfilment and collective social [particularly gender] justice for these women. As per the empirical

findings of this study, higher education did enable some dimensions of power and freedom for these women, but failed to deliver several expected and desired aspects of empowerment.

10.3.1 How it empowered them

Based on participant accounts, the African-feminist Capability Approach perspective acknowledges that higher education proffered ‘freedom for’ with regards to the opportunity it presented to escape parental authority and more restrictive environments. Yoyo attests to this by saying:

Speaking of my time at university, I can say that is where I probably learned to do a lot of things. How so? It wasn't easy living at home: I was under my older sisters' scrutiny, under Mom's scrutiny. But when I went to Bandjoun, I was in an environment where I was my mother, my older sisters, and my own family at the same time, because I had no one there with me. I lived alone. So I was free to go and come at whatever time I pleased, without being asked “why are you coming back at such and such hour? Who were you with?” and all that. I can say that that's where I experienced many things and decided for myself whether I liked it or not. That's where I first drank beer and decided what suited my taste... I would go dancing with friends, partake in organising events...I was able to discover many villages in the West Region that I would never have known about. When anyone we knew around was bereaved, we would travel for the funeral, just because we wanted to discover villages.

By providing students with the liberty to explore new places, have experiences outside of their cultural normal, and be their own authority with respect to their daily tasks and choices, educational institutions enable growth and develop students' personalities. In this way, the ‘freedom for’ which is observed in participants' higher education experiences further enables other dimensions of power such as ‘power to’, ‘power with’ and ‘power from within’.

Jesurelle's narrative provides a lucid example of how the ‘freedom for’ that university offered her enabled her to partake in extracurricular training where she interacted with more diverse people and which developed her consciousness [power from within] considerably.

Besides God, the most impactful thing for me during this time has been the seminars I've taken part in, because I've been to quite a few seminars. I took part in two editions of the Nana Awards. The first edition was that of discovery. The theme was "The Courage to Dare". I saw young girls, eight-year-old girls who create applications, travel, go to the United States. I saw small girls, maybe not too small, but 16- and 18-year-olds, who are doing a lot of things, who are out there... There's a girl who was in high school, she must have been 16 or 15. She'd been raped. Now, she has created a movement where she campaigns to support rape victims in the country's regions - I think she is from the South-West - to support rape victims in Buea. She goes to schools, raises awareness. And, when I looked at this, I said "Wow! God! What am I doing while all these people are working?" But, that year, I did nothing. The second year, when I took part in this seminar again, I went there with a project I developed. I was among the top 10 finalists, and I was last. And, when my name was read last, I said in my heart, "I am last today, but tomorrow I will be first."

As a result of these experiences which Jesurelle had the opportunity to attend only through her status as a higher education student, she now shows remarkable consciousness of social justice issues which her privilege would have otherwise shielded her from. Despite never having lived in any other region but the West and Central, Jesurelle as a Francophone displayed profound awareness of and willingness to advocate on issues such as French neo-colonialism, Anglophone marginalisation, the war on terrorism in the northern regions, and Cameroon's refugee crisis. For many of these women, higher education was a site for development of consciousness. Whether intentional or unintended, whether positive or negative, higher education experiences would served to develop participants' 'power from within' through personal encounters with oppressions, class lessons, or exchanges with colleagues, staff or friends.

Additionally, higher education can be credited with enabling their 'power with' as Jesurelle, Dija and Fatima all recognised their networking power as a by-product of their university experience. Fatima would have the freedom to interact with single women and people out of her religion and linguistic group, developing solidarity out of her cultural circle for the first time. Jesurelle and Dija also report their membership in associations with colleagues from higher education. Through their associations they either advocate

for political and social justice issues or leverage collective power for opportunities in their community, thus displaying development in 'power with' which was previously unavailable to them. As Dija asserts of her association:

Lately, I've had a lot of friends because I'm a member of an association. It is made up of girls and boys, so we get along a lot. Our association centers a great deal on youth, what we are currently experiencing in life. It has many students as members, as well as workers and unemployed youth. So it's a mix. We are mixed, but there is harmony. For example, when you have a problem, we help you, we support you, visit you. If you are sick or have a problem, you bring it up, we look for a solution together. I get along well with these friends because I feel like myself, everyone tries to understand me. I can say they're my second family... Thanks to the association, I've met a lot of people. The Lamido of Ngaoundere is my uncle, my dad's younger brother, and he is the coordinator of the association. He does a lot. He puts us in touch with people. For example, when a minister visits, he puts us in touch with them. He complains a lot when there are - he has gotten jobs for two members of the association - he tries to help us. We are in harmony, and the association is not for Muslims only. We accept Christians, Muslims, girls, boys. We mix... It's living together. Wherever you are, you have to be united; not just consider people on the basis of whether they are family, or Muslim, or Christian. We have the spirit of living together. We are very united.

Of course, it is most apparent that the women were empowered by their higher education with regards to the 'power to' it enabled. Course content and the degrees they attained, qualified them for employment, rendered them better able to articulate and contribute ideas, and widened their access to other opportunities such as higher degrees, trainings and increased social value. Aside from women like Cynthi and Fatima, who are now certain of government recruitment, women like Hope and Amena attest to change of status through employment they secured as holders of first degrees. It is worth noting, however, that the course content these women particularly appreciated was mainly graduate studies content. The entrepreneurial course Anne and Yoyo appreciated is mandatory for graduate students as institutional policy at the University of Buea and Ngaoundere. Amena asserts that she is more confident about her current educational psychology graduate studies than her undergraduate studies and Momo feels that her graduate studies will be of greater use to her. Upon consideration it is clear that for a

majority of these women, higher education began offering them more substantial 'power to' at graduate level.

10.3.2 How it failed to empower them

Despite the above discussed empowering attributes of higher education, my African-feminist Capability Approach consideration of these women's higher education experiences reveals that in many ways their higher education failed to live up to its purpose and potential.

First and foremost, what was valued was not delivered. As Tsikata and Darkwah's (2014) similar study carried out in Ghana affirms, the primary reason students pursue higher education is to be able to secure employment for financial independence. As the majority of these women are still financially dependent and recount difficulties with securing gainful employment despite their qualifications, it is obvious that higher education was not as empowering as it should have been. Participants' narratives report un/underemployment and resulting financial dependency and this is evidence of higher education's failure. Surprisingly similar to arguments made by scholars Assié-Lumumba (2006) and Bateman (2008), Jesurelle notes that her degree programme content lacked pragmatic knowledge and they often felt like they were being educated for somewhere other than Cameroon.

Soon after I started I was a bit - how do I put it? - I was a bit out of phase with the courses I was being taught, with the quality of the knowledge I was receiving. I told myself that it wasn't that bad, but I had hoped that the training would be more professional. However, the further I go, the more I realise how theoretical it is. I realise that it's still a bit speculative because we're discussing theories: "so-and-so said such, such, and such". And I have the impression that I can find all that on the Internet. Then, I would be like: what am I really doing here?... Sometimes I felt like I was wasting my time, and maybe that's why... during the current semester, which is ending, I didn't really attend all the lectures regularly. My frame of mind, when I missed a lecture, was that I would take a classmate's notes to read and, what I didn't understand therein, I would look up on the Internet to understand. I was like, "what's the point of attending lectures when they don't really meet my needs?" It's like they are training us for some other place.

Similarly, Anne and Hope's accounts of their higher education experience attests to their poor training and lack of familiarity with the instruments of their field as a result of poorly resourced laboratories. As mentioned earlier, Anne saw some laboratory equipment she had studied as an undergraduate student for the first time while doing an internship as a graduate student and found it hard to recognise and make use of it. Hope shared the difficulties she experienced in trying to access limited resources in the communications lab, saying:

When I was in the second year at the undergraduate level we had this course on research and we needed to work in a communication research lab. We were 102 students in class. You know how difficult that will be. We had just three computers in the research centre. And for you to be able to participate and actually see what is being done was not an easy task. Now I took upon myself and joined the boys overnight in school so we entered campus at 6 pm and left at 6 am... that course pushed me to that point. Data entry had been taught but I did not see myself entering data without sitting on the computer to see how it is done, it is not something you can learn just by hearing...I was the only girl and the boys kept saying this is our powerful woman.

That Hope was praised as powerful and resilient for her effort denotes that what she did is extraordinary. Most girls would have had more limitations on their ability to take the steps Hope did; living in restrictive homes or more fearful for their safety on campus within a confined space with male classmates. In this way, such examples show how higher education fails to sufficiently enable women's 'power to' to practice their professions in this context.

In another sense, it could be argued that higher education institutions in Cameroon fail to empower from the onset by failing to consider what prospective students value. Several participants' narratives attest to their lack of educational counselling prior to enrolment and this can be linked to the meagre value they derived from their undergraduate experiences. Similar to how Momo pursued a degree in law for its 'broad base', Fatima recounts that the choice to study geography was made upon recommendations by her husband that it was the only science subject which would make her eligible for multiple

civil service recruitment exams as opposed to the science subjects she was more interested in.

With such limited counselling, the women were constrained in their thinking about employment possibilities upon completion of their studies. The absence of educational and career counselling services in Cameroonian higher education institutions can be seen as a failure of the institution to enable students to acquire 'power within' and 'power to'. That several students are unable to use their undergraduate degrees to secure gainful employment and that many return to higher education out of resignation, is proof that they were not adequately equipped by their higher education. With the exception of Jesurelle and Hope who chose to pursue graduate studies to upgrade their skills in work they had been doing already, all participants returned to higher education out of a lack of something better to do and in the hope of gaining better employment. Cynthi, Dija, Momo and Fatima pursued civil service recruitment, not graduate studies per se, because having a government matricule [civil service recruitment] outweighs having a degree. Dija and Momo were unsuccessful with the civil service recruitment exams and so, like Anne, Amena, Ouilamata, and Yoyo, they returned to higher education for graduate studies for lack of alternatives. Yoyo recalls that it was following her regret at not taking minimum wage jobs she was offered when she completed her undergraduate (see section 9.2.2) that she decided to pursue graduate studies.

It was during this time that an elder told us [she and her mother]: 'Instead of staying idle while looking for work, you can upgrade your knowledge by enrolling at ENSAI in Ngaoundere'. That is how I got the idea to do a Master's.

This suggests that if higher education institutions ensured that students' undergraduate experience was satisfactorily empowering, these women would not have felt the need to further their studies. In recent years [as of 2015], Cameroon's ministry of higher education has instituted student fairs where higher education institutions advertise their programmes. Unfortunately, the organisation of these fairs is centralised so they take place in urban hotspots and information is rarely accessible to the masses. Prospective students continue to rely on information received from friends and secondary school teachers in the absence of campus tours and open day events. This lack of awareness

continues when they are enrolled in university and results in graduates having limited perspectives on employment options. Amena's cousin, who took the liberty to change Amena's academic choices on her application form from 'just history' to 'curriculum studies and teaching/history', recognised that the latter was better because it would equip her for where she would likely end up as a graduate of history, i.e. teaching.

Some universities have acknowledged their students' lack of 'power to' and 'power within' to meet desired ends upon graduation, instituting mandatory entrepreneurial courses for graduate students. In line with proponents of the entrepreneurial university model (Clark 2004; Khalil 2015), this strategy aims to encourage students to create employment for themselves rather than depend on the availability of employment opportunities. Despite the appreciation of such courses by the participants whose institutions have the policy in place, this application recognises this strategy as one of the ways these women's higher education contributes to disempowering them. In her segment at the Quartz 2015 African entrepreneurship summit, Ory Okolloh Mwangi, one of Kenya's top tech innovators, stated that:

I'm concerned about what I see is the fetishization around entrepreneurship in Africa. It's almost like it's the next new liberal thing. Like, don't worry that there's no power because hey, you're going to do solar and innovate around that. Your schools suck, but hey there's this new model of schooling. Your roads are terrible, but hey, Uber works in Nairobi and that's innovation. During the Greek bail out, no one was telling young Greek people to go and be entrepreneurs. Europe has been stuck at 2% or 1% growth. I don't see any entrepreneurship summit in Europe telling them you know, go out there and be entrepreneurs. I feel that there's a sense that oh, resilience and you know, innovate around things - it's distracting us from dealing with fundamental problems that we cannot develop. We can't entrepreneur our way around bad leadership. We can't entrepreneur our way around bad policies. Those of us who have managed to entrepreneur ourselves out of it are living in a very false security in Africa... I think sometimes we are running away from dealing with the really hard things.

In agreement with Mwangi's perspective, this approach recognises the mandatory entrepreneurial courses as a coping mechanism rather than a truly empowering contribution. That the courses are made available for graduate students only is already evidence of the fact that the institutions recognise that the students have been unable to

use their undergraduate knowledge. By offering them entrepreneurial knowledge as a supplement, these institutions refuse to acknowledge that their programmes have failed to adequately equip students and/or address systematic issues which contribute to limiting students' 'power to'. The entrepreneurial strategy equally encourages the idea of individual capacity building for employment [and hence empowerment] over collective transformation and 'power with', which this approach posits as truly empowering.

Next, this approach perceives that higher education has done little to meet its potential to empower these women with respect to the dimension of 'freedom from' and 'freedom for'. The majority of participants recount experiences of sexism passed on through instruction, institutional policies and/or the lack thereof. Anne, for instance, alludes to the University of Buea's dress code policy which is biased against female students and gives security guards the right to harass them if they deem the student as being dressed 'immorally'. She also notes how teachers would warn female students in class not to focus so much on their education that they forget to get married.

The lack of equitable institutional policies and quality assurance measures [or failure to enforce them] contributes to reinforcing of oppressions such as Anglophone marginalisation, sexual harassment and corruption in academic practices. All participants shared accounts of having been harassed as students, practicing and/or witnessing some form of academic corruption, experiencing marginalisation based on linguistic/ethnic background and more. From this it is clear that Cameroonian higher education institutions are indeed "complex sites of cultural politics, production and reproduction of generationally unjust social relations" (Switzer 2018, p. 13). That these higher education institutions lack policies which recognise such oppressions, or enable the social climate necessary for learning as a marginalised group, or offer a way for students to safely report incidents, means they cannot be considered truly empowering institutions.

The African-feminist Capability Approach recognises that given that the oppression of Cameroonian women is often passed on through socialisation and internalised, what we must learn is as important as what we must unlearn. A truly empowering higher education would therefore facilitate that unlearning for the development of 'power from within' and

‘freedom from’. As Murphy-Graham and Lloyd (2016, p. 561) assert, an empowering education “should explicitly challenge the norms and practices that lead to social exclusion at the local and global level” and expand ability to “take on and push the boundaries of the cultural constraints that limit them from achieving their full potential”. As these institutions have not directly recognised this need nor developed strategies for fostering these required freedoms and powers, they cannot be considered empowering overall. On the contrary, higher education here can be recognised as enabling the formation of citizens who will behave accordingly with the inequitable system already in place. This reproduction is manifested by Amena who is now a vector of sexism via hidden curriculum⁶⁴ just as she had been a receptor of it when a student. She would not consider the advice she gives her students in class wrong, because it is so normalised.

Yet again, these women’s higher education illustrates its inability to truly empower them given the apparent epistemic injustices and the lack of harmonisation between institutions. With regards to the former; epistemic injustice is understood here as unfairness in the generation of knowledge, such as how it is communicated and how it is understood (Fricker 2007). Participant narratives reveal that they had very little influence/control over what they learned, how they learned it and what was considered knowledge. Participants like Momo and Cynthi highlight their need to respond to questions in the way Francophones do so as to pass a certain course; to do otherwise would ensure they fail, meaning that alternate Anglophone structures of response would not be considered valid knowledge. In a related manner, Jesurelle recounts an incident of disempowerment where she was defending her undergraduate research paper at the higher institute of journalism.

...my digital journalism lecturer was my supervisor and he was most hated by his colleagues; not because he’s mean, but I think it’s because he’s upright. He’s the kind of person who is strict in his principles. And usually, when you are upright in the midst of people who are false, they don’t like you because you become like a foil to their falseness in the eyes of others. Consequently, he wasn’t liked...Unfortunately, during my defence, it was as if I became the target of the

⁶⁴ Defined as ‘what is implicit and embedded in educational experiences in contrast with the formal statements about curricula and the surface features of educational interaction’ (Sambell and McDowell 1998 pp. 391–392)

arrows aimed at him. Because defences often last an hour, but my defence went on for almost two and a half hours. It was basically torture. And I couldn't even say much, they were belittling me as they wanted to attack him... even my family who don't really understand my field was somewhat offended, they could not understand.

This account substantiates research which criticises higher education in Africa and Cameroon in particular for the lack of quality assurance measures (Mukwambo 2016), the lack of student involvement in educational processes, and the need for more learner centred approaches which do not discount students' contributions to knowledge creation. This account equally affirms that these women had limited 'power over' in and through higher education, and in so doing it failed to empower in the ways it should and could have.

Finally, the lack of harmonisation in and between institutions in higher education systems in Cameroon serves to disempower Cameroonian women and illustrates that their higher education cannot fulfil their necessary empowerment. Given how diverse and imbalanced the Cameroonian context already is, the lack of equity in deliverables across higher education institutions and the absence of policies for quality standards serves to amplify inequalities. While differences between universities and the *grand écoles* are understandable as the latter are professional institutes, the differences between state programmes running the same academic degree programmes presents a harmonisation issue.

For instance, while Anne and Yoyo [both students of state universities] will have to take mandatory courses in entrepreneurship, Anne as a student of the University of Buea would have also had mandatory courses in introductory French, introductory English, as well as a civics and ethics course. The University of Buea, an institution registered and monolingual in its pedagogy, is the only university with mandatory courses which promote bilingualism. Correspondingly, Momo asserts that she found herself at a disadvantage as a graduate student in IRIC because, unlike her classmates, she is unfamiliar with research writing given that the University of Yaounde II (Soa) did not require undergraduates to complete a research project. Such examples sustain the

disempowerment of participants in higher education and provide grounds for questioning the assumptions of Cameroonian women's empowerment through higher education.

10.4 Analytical reflections and inference

Thus far analysis has responded to my study's query into whether these women would consider themselves empowered and whether they can be considered by scholarship to be empowered using empirical data from participants as well as from the perspective of the research's theoretical standpoint. Empirical findings here have unearthed the interconnection between the body of literature which purports that education is both intrinsically and instrumentally good, is life-changing, has direct returns, and empowers (Nussbaum 2004), and that body of literature which reveals that education is "not necessarily agency or well-being enhancing" (DeJaeghere 2020, p. 17).

In the two-sided response to the overarching research question; each side's understanding of what empowerment entails for women in this context has been presented and used as basis for interrogation of the empowerment potential of higher education. By both takes, i.e. the participants' point of view and the African-feminist Capability Approach interpretation, it is clear that although higher education has enabled some empowerment for Cameroonian women, it has not proffered the desired and required powers and freedoms to address these women's empowerment needs.

Data here has affirmed that higher education has the potential to and does considerably enhance women's ability to do and be what they value. However this same data revealed that higher education as it is offered to Cameroonian women is severely limited in its ability to equip them with what they need to overcome their unique oppressions. From the empowerment needs of Cameroonian women presented in this research, higher education would have to offer more relevant, pragmatic and locally mediated knowledge and tools to its women students for it to adequately enable their resistance to constraining norms and ability to tackle structural oppressions. And it would need to attend to the institutional ethos, curriculum and pedagogical arrangements which work to entrench gender injustices.

Analysis thus far comes to three interrelated conclusions. The first is in line with Audre Lorde's well-known declaration that "the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house". The second is a consideration of 'imperfect empowerment' in line with Khader's (2018) arguments for 'non-ideal' gender justice. The third is a reflection on the differentiation of embodied and inhabited agency as underscored by intersectionality here.

In Lorde's renowned essays she says:

...Survival is not an academic skill. It is learning how to stand alone, unpopular and sometimes reviled, and how to make common cause with those others identified as outside the structures in order to define and seek a world in which we can all flourish. It is learning how to take our differences and make them strengths. For the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house. They may allow us temporarily to beat him at his own game, but they will never enable us to bring about genuine change. And this fact is only threatening to those women who still define the master's house as their only source of support." (Lorde 2017, p. 91)

Cameroonian education in general and higher education specifically is constructed on a bedrock of coloniality and has yet to be critically assessed for its applicability to the contextual needs of Cameroonian society. In this way, our higher education system is still our colonial masters' tool. And while this tool is useful to navigate a world which is still steeped in coloniality, it cannot [as it is now] be an instrument for the transformative change necessary to dismantle the 'masters' houses' of patriarchy and coloniality as is necessary for comprehensive empowerment. The higher education offered to Cameroonian women as examined here may enable them to meet certain valued ends, to enjoy certain degrees of freedoms and powers – and this is important. But higher education seems to enable only just as much as is permissible within the set ideological, structural and material boundaries. On this I would counter Lorde's take that 'survival is not an academic skill'; it is. Surviving is all that our education enables us to do, just survive; not live, not thrive, just survive.

Yet, while the master's tools cannot be used to bring down the master's house, it definitely does enable understanding of the need to bring it down and provide the necessary

capacity to survive in that house while contemplating its dismantling. As Capabilitarian scholars argue, higher education, as with all education, is fundamental to enhancing other capabilities and is thus a means to other ends as much as an end in itself. So, even if we cannot say attaining a higher education empowers Cameroonian women to required and presumed extents, empirical data shows that attaining a higher education has begun the dismantling process by increasing awareness of the boundaries the 'master's house' imposes on freedoms and powers. To this end, we can argue that higher education here enables an imperfect empowerment for Cameroonian women as part of what Khader (2018) terms 'non-ideal conditions'. What is inferred from this analysis is that: although higher education does not meet ideal (what is expected and hoped for by participants and society) nor normative (what this theoretical take prescribes) baselines, it cannot be discounted altogether because higher education remains significant in its ability to enable access to greater freedoms and enhance other powers. The takeaway here, therefore, is that we must look at higher education not as an empowerment-delivering exercise but merely a ***potentially empowerment-enhancing mechanism***. This perspective acknowledges both the ability of higher education to enable aspects of empowerment and the limitations on its ability to do so, given pertinent implementation issues and non-ideal conditions. Above all, looking at higher education in this way will impede assumptions of Cameroonian women's empowerment through higher education.

As a result of my original African-feminist Capability Approach, this study has been able to highlight the fallacy of assuming that graduate level Cameroonian women would have acquired the knowledge and power necessary to be considered empowered as projected in the common phrases 'too much book' and 'long crayon'. The fused theorisation in this study reveals that thinking of Cameroonian women's empowerment cannot be de-linked from contextual reality, nor assessed without an idea of desired results, and must allow for a critical appreciation of variations in the process. That is to say; to consider empowerment we must take into account individual and collective contexts (conversion factors and structural constraints), to assess its delivery we must be well-informed on what the desired end is for participants, and finally we must be able to balance criticism

and appreciation for nonconventional ways by which these women conceptualise, pursue and achieve empowerment. Switzer (2018, p. 5) cites Mahmood (2005), saying:

“If the ability to effect change in the world and oneself is historically and culturally specific (both in terms of what constitutes as “change” and the means by which it is affected), then the meaning and sense of agency [and empowerment] cannot be fixed in advance, but must emerge through analysis of the particular concepts that enable modes of being... in this sense, agentival capacity is entailed by not only those acts that resist norms but also in the multiple ways in which one inhabits norms”.

Mahmood's (2005) assertion illustrates an acknowledgement of Nnaemeka's (2004) negofeminism and the array of ways by which women may enjoy freedoms or enact powers enabled by their non-ideal higher education in non-ideal conditions. Switzer (2018, p. 5) connects this to education where she suggests that we observe the agency [and empowerment] of educated African girls and women in relation to their contexts. She says they may not perform and enact agency [their empowerment] in established and classical liberal ways. They may not be fully autonomous, act with free will, resist and reject dominant oppressions in overt fashion, but they “inhabit and embody a repertoire of negotiative strategies” in confronting limitations to their freedoms and powers.

This last inference has two lessons. First, an appreciation of context, desired ends and forms of negotiation enables understanding of what empowerment may look like here and rejects pre-conceived and normalised notions of what society thinks it is. By normalised neoliberal notions, these women would be considered as empowered by their educational qualifications, delayed child-bearing, market participation and rights to vote. Yet their real ability to enjoy freedoms and enact powers is revealed here as complex and uncertain at best.

Next, the consideration of women as empowered relative to context and appreciation for an array of ways that empowerment is embodied and inhabited equally poses a risk in being too convenient for evaluation. As earlier mentioned, this analysis reveals that we must be critical in our appreciation of imperfect empowerment and non-ideal empowering higher education. This means, while we must not reject higher education's empowering value on the basis of its inability to meet ideal and normative standards, we must also be

wary of over-excusing it. Cameroonian women's empowerment must not be judged based on classical liberal/explicit ways alone, but it "should be judged at least partly in terms of whether there is an increase in status [of freedoms and powers] of these women vis-à-vis a historical baseline" (Khader 2018, p. 118) Similarly, the assessment of higher education's contribution to women's empowerment must neither be based on fixed generalised notions of what higher education delivers, nor should assessment be so laissez-faire that the bare minimum which higher education ought to have given should qualify it as satisfactorily empowering. In interrogating these women's empowerment through higher education, therefore, we must judge it based on if and how it improved these women's status [of freedoms and powers] with the baseline of their individual and contextual histories.

To do this will both emphasise the complexities of varied women's empowerment needs [based on varied individual histories and baselines] and variations in the suitability of what their higher education enabled them with. Above all, however, it would reveal how higher education must improve and will reveal core features it must have to be empowering for women. The following chapter of analysis will focus on this.

11. EMPOWERED ENOUGH FOR HIGHER EDUCATION TO BE CONSIDERED EMPOWERING?

Previous analysis chapters offered a sequential response to the first two research questions and to the overarching research query on whether the women in my study consider themselves and could be considered empowered, and empowered specifically by their higher education as is assumed. The final research question asks:

3. What factors serve to enhance or hinder the empowerment of Cameroonian women through higher education and how would higher education need to improve to foster Cameroonian women's empowerment?

This question requires that responses in the previous chapters be elaborated on to clearly outline what factors contributed to facilitate or obstruct the empowerment of participants and how higher education could have been more empowering.

As such, with this final level of theorising, I put forward an argument for consideration of individual and collective historical baselines to assess how empowering higher education is for Cameroonian women. I also postulate what an empowering higher education would be for Cameroonian women based on the African-feminist Capability Approach. Theorising here therefore posits that for higher education to be considered empowering it ought to have considered certain factors and must fulfil certain core features which would advance the enabling of dimensions of freedoms and powers put forward by the African-feminist Capability Approach.

11.1 Consider the baseline

The idea of empowerment and the belief that education enables it, rests by default on the assumption that someone or some people are disempowered or lack consciousness which can [and must] be 'corrected' (Thomson-Bunn 2014). As such, I theorise that any assessments of women's empowerment and all education which is credited with the enabling of it must first answer the questions: 'empowerment from what?' and 'empowerment to what end'? That is to say, there must have been a baseline, a range of

reference points of relative (dis)empowerment, by which we know the standard that was (or was not) elevated by higher education. My methodological choice for life-stories in this study aimed at enabling a longitudinal perspective of participants' empowerment for this reason. Given limitations on time and noting that if and to what degree Cameroonian women are (dis)empowered is conditional on multivariate factors/identifiers, life-story data enables participants to present the range of their unique lived experience by which we can assess progression over time and the particular contribution of higher education.

In this way, each participant's life-story provides a baseline. On one end, the point at which the woman now presumed to be empowered was disempowered; with regards to this study that would be who participants were prior to higher education. I term this end of the baseline as 'Point Zero'; the experiences and values participants had prior to higher education defined to a great extent what they needed of it for empowerment. Conversely, the other end of the baseline which I term 'Near-Ideal Empowerment' would be a depiction of what empowerment of these women would look like based on a combination of their conceptualisation and African-feminist Capability Approach theorisation. At this point of near-ideal empowerment, Cameroonian women would enjoy and possess sufficient degrees of the dimensions of freedoms and powers to consider themselves and be considered as empowered.

By way of African-feminist Capability Approach interrogation, this method of assessing higher education's contribution to Cameroonian women's empowerment using the breadth of participants' life-stories enables more than a comparison between where they were before higher education and what they became by way of it. Tracking progression from Point Zero to Near-Ideal Empowerment equally points to the factors that defined empowerment needs (shaped aspirations), enabled and/or hindered the women's empowerment in and through higher education. In this way, consideration of the baseline reveals the complexity of push/pull factors or conversion factors/structural constraints which we should give attention to when considering women's empowerment.

11.1.1 No linear progression from 'Point Zero' to 'Near-Ideal Empowerment'

One can use both the Capability Approach and African Feminisms to defend that the reality for many children of the Global South is being born into certain forms and varying degrees of disempowerment; socioculturally, economically, geographically and politically. As the earlier chapter on the Cameroonian context illustrates, limits to these women's freedoms and powers had already been predetermined given the setting. As noted in the African Feminist Charter, their "current struggles are inextricably linked to diverse pre-colonial contexts, slavery, colonization, liberation struggles, neo-colonialism, globalization, etc." (AWDF 2006, p. 7). Correspondingly, the Capability Approach with use of the concept of structural constraints explains that the institutions, policies, laws and social norms that these women encountered as children would have a great deal of influence on their conversion factors (Robeyns 2017), and in turn their empowerment needs and/or ability to attain empowerment.

This indicates that at Point Zero of the baseline for these women is their historical disadvantage, normalised power inequalities, as well as their national and cultural structural constraints. As each woman's narrative reveals, despite variations in extent, they were disempowered as a result of situational circumstances prior to higher education. As girls raised in Cameroon, all these women experienced similar normative influence with regards to their gender roles and the extent of their freedoms. Cameroon is a patriarchal state and the range of institutions, from legal to religious, socialise both boys and girls to expect and accept the subordination of women (Atanga 2012; Taoyang 2012). These women would have internalised a gender-based distribution of labour not only from their assigned chores at home, but likewise from tasks given their parents in places of worship, and the way their teachers divided tasks at school (FAWE 2010). Cameroonian feminist scholars note that the women would have been enculturated with the idea that their value lay in their caregiving and domestic work, that taking on certain roles at the expense of their primary role as caregiver, was wrong (Mougoué 2015; Taoyang 2012). Though the extent depends on other factors, they would generally be raised to; aspire for marriage, fear their sexuality as a source of potential 'ruin', crave likability and to see other women as their competition for that likeability. As a result Point Zero illustrates struggles with an inferiority complex. We observe strains of this

socialisation in the stories of Hope, Fatima, Dija, Cynthi and Jesurelle who all recount unequal labour distribution and feelings of inferiority based on their parents' preferential treatment of their brothers.

Aside from the commonality of their socialisation for gender subordination, the women's Point Zero is equally compromised by individual (dis)empowering factors. Factors like; whether or not they identify with disadvantaged/stereotyped religious and linguistic groups, belong to a family of poor socioeconomic status, have certain biological (dis)advantage and what they have personally experienced or been exposed to. It is the combination of these aspects of collective and individual (dis)advantage that make each woman's Point Zero different and the response to the question 'empowered from what' unique. And given the uniqueness of each woman's Point Zero, they required corresponding distinct factors to enable access to and attain empowerment through higher education.

The stories of two distinctly different participants, Anne and Dija, were presented in full re-storied form earlier. As the reader should be most familiar with them, one of their stories (Anne's) is used here to illustrate what enables and hinders empowerment in and through higher education.

Anne's story

At Point Zero Anne was born and raised into two marginalised identities, female and Anglophone, but she was empowered by her family's support of her education and her father's financial status was temporarily good enough for her to attend a reputed mission school. At Point Zero she demonstrated considerable 'power from within' in her navigation of her parents' opposition to her studying the STEM subjects on account of her gender. Still, she was powerless to protect herself and her mother from her father's abuse; lived in fear and had to sneak out of the house for her lessons. At Point Zero Anne was able choose what she studied, but limited in means and without the benefit of counselling, she made a random choice after failing the medical school entrance exam in the hope that she would somehow be able to switch to medicine in future. Anne's Point Zero is notably

characterised by her: i. fear of men as a result of witnessing her mother as a victim of domestic abuse, ii. struggles [which persist till date] with inferiority when dealing with people in general, and iii. considerable value of employment and financial independence because in her household the only person who could speak back to her father was her older brother. She had recognised that *his* voice was stronger because he was employed and living in Yaoundé, independent of their father. Anne's access to and success in higher education was first hindered by her parents' inability to afford accommodation for her, as she later noted that her ability to reside on her own enabled her to perform better and take on part-time work to supplement the little financial support she received from home. She often had to choose between work and school and eventually stopped working in her final year for fear of failing and also because of the Anglophone crisis which made working on the streets dangerous. As a student in higher education, Anne was able to take on the role as class prefect embodying 'power from within' and ability to negotiate as the post meant she was exempt from paying for the majority of recommended reading handouts. Yet, Anne observed disadvantage in her higher education. Her class prefect position exposed her to the reality of what she described as 'sexually transmitted marks' and she witnessed that the more economically viable classmates leave the country in large numbers and recounts feeling like one of those left behind after the apocalypse. She was often mocked and scorned for her part-time work and she experienced discrimination when applying for an internship to the local state refinery on account of her lack of fluency in French and was side-lined for on-campus jobs due to lack of a 'god-father' to facilitate her selection. As Anne completed her undergraduate studies, with increased knowledge but limited in practical laboratory experience due to under-resourced labs, she was able to apply for the Master's programme in her department with her savings from part-time work. Yet, she only did so because she had little hope for gainful employment with the escalation of the Anglophone crisis, her inability to migrate to French zones for better chances, and her fear of returning to her parents' home.

This being Point Zero for Anne, consideration of Anne's conceptualization of empowerment and African-feminist Capability Approach theorization posits that at the point of Near-Ideal Empowerment, she should have addressed several needs/overcome

a number of barriers. For one, she should be able to secure gainful employment without having to leave the Anglophone regions and assimilate into the Francophone system, or be able to finance migration to the Francophone regions if she chooses to go there for better opportunities. Empowerment through higher education for Anne would mean she could work and go to school, that she could report incidents of discrimination and her observation of academic corruption via student-teacher relationships through a safe medium and be sure that her university had the power to address these [as opposed to the decision being made by the minister in the capital]. Empowerment for Anne would mean being financially autonomous and able to voice her opinions without financial and other abuse from her father. Being empowered for Anne would mean she would be able to secure employment within her field of interest [as opposed to underemployment as a telecom marketer] on her own merit without a 'god-father'. Being empowered for Anne would mean she would have increased self-confidence, and would be able to overcome her internalised subordination and fear of men. Being empowered for Anne would mean she is more confident in her knowledge of her field and is able to use that knowledge to pursue her desired end in whichever avenues of the medical field she chooses. Being empowered for Anne would mean increased consciousness of and/or access to opportunities such that her choice of furthering her education would not be made out of lack of alternative, but rather if she chooses to further her studies, she does so because it is in line with her aspirations and valued ends.

With this exercise it is clear to see what factors facilitated and impeded Anne's access to and empowerment through higher education. Determining if higher education was empowering for Anne rests on if and how her higher education enabled her ability to address her impediments, whether it further contributed to it and ultimately its contribution to her progression towards her near-ideal empowerment. It follows from this that Anne's higher education could have better enabled Anne's empowerment if it considered collective disempowerment and individual empowerment needs which Cameroonian women like Anne are likely to have. This exercise may be applied to each woman – and with each turn a consideration of the baselines would reveal different push/pull factors and empowerment needs. In this way, this exercise proves the importance of considering

the baseline in developing higher education's capacity to enhance the freedoms and powers of its women students. The following section presents what this would look like.

11.2 Consider core conditions to deliver dimensions of freedoms and powers

When asked how, if at all, they feel their higher education could have been better, the women said things like:

"I think students should have proper orientation prior to starting at the university so they make the right choices" - Momo

"Higher education should address everyone about social problems, we all need to know how cultures oppress, if everyone is not conscious we [women] will still not be free" - Hope

"Schools should do more to educate the masses on the hindrance of traditions and make sure that women in local communities are not left back" - Cynthi

"The system needs to be reviewed. They need to include subjects on entrepreneurship, leadership, make it practical and encourage change in society" – Jesurelle

"They should help connect you to work opportunities... and more internships" – Anne

"If there is something that needs to be improved in the training over there, it would perhaps be to revisit, to add some prerequisites so that those coming from a general education system can level up. Some prerequisites should be added for students with a general education background, there is a lot of confusion. They need orientation too" - Yoyo

"I think things are equal for men and women at the university. They are given the same opportunities to do the same courses. The treatment is not really very different. Except, where lecturers easily approach girls to suggest that they could get grades the easy way, you understand. It doesn't happen with male students. You will see that there are few cases where a male student will tell you "I had to deal with this issue". But if you ask ten female students, for example, you may

get eight out of ten who will tell you: 'Yes, a lecturer approached me to offer me grades in exchange for sex'. That needs to change." - Oulimata

"One should feel comfortable speaking one's language, and not have to speak someone else's language because of where they are schooling. That's what I can suggest as - that's what I've observed as an issue. A person must feel at ease speaking their language no matter where they are, and favouritism should be avoided." - Fatima

"Higher education should be improved, in several ways. In Ngaoundere, university lecturers are currently on strike because they have not been paid. Let's say you have the will to further your education, then you end up in an institution where lecturers are on strike for lack of pay, this penalises you since you have already paid your fees. This is why I dropped out... I would like another improvement...talking about my city, there are courses that are not taught there. If you want to study English, for instance, you have to go to Buea. If you don't have anyone in Buea, you have to spend whereas there is an institution up there where a lot can be improved. There are many courses which are not available here... look at the Higher Teacher Training College: one has to go to Maroua for that, meanwhile Ngaoundere is a big city; everything can be done there. This will empower students further in Ngaoundere." - Dija

"Well I think things have improved, when I started the Master's we had faculty orientation. So a woman introduced herself and said she is in charge of students' affairs. If you have a problem you can go to her, she said that she is just like our mother in the campus... If it was there when I had my own experience it would have helped me. So I think things are improving but one thing I have been thinking about... if I had the voice also as far as education is concerned I would encourage those curriculum planners in education that at least they should include religious studies at all levels right up to the higher level of education for everyone because it has a great impact in the life of a student. Because, just look at what is happening to us in Cameroon now." - Amena

As the above responses show, participants believe there is considerable room for improvement in the higher education they are offered with regards to relevance, quality, freedoms, security from sexual harassment, and more. The African-feminist Capability Approach perspective likewise affirms that for higher education in Cameroon to meet its

goal of contributing to gender equity as the government asserts in its educational sector plan (Doh 2012), higher education institutions need to address certain disempowering features embedded in institutional systems and abide by certain principles which would precipitate the enhancement of women's empowerment.

As mentioned earlier in this work, Murphy-Graham and Lloyd (2016) operationalise their theorising of what an empowering education for girls would entail by way of a 'Capabilities and Empowerment Framework' (see chapter six, section 6.2). Their work posits that for education to be considered empowering, it must have met certain core conditions and delivered certain core competencies.

Alternatively, this study presents an empowering higher education as one which enables the key dimensions of freedoms and powers identified by the African-feminist Capability Approach. Though inspired by the framework Murphy-Graham and Lloyd (2016), I develop a slightly different operationalisation – not of core conditions, but rather of practical deliverables by which higher education can be assessed – or guided – for its enabling of empowerment via the African-feminist Capability Approach's dimensions of freedom and power. This adapted operationalisation is illustrated in figure 15 below. The graphic presents two columns; the first column lists the dimensions of power and freedom by which women's empowerment is assessed in the African-feminist Capability Approach, and each dimension opens brackets to the second column which list practical features by which higher education [may] enable said dimensions.

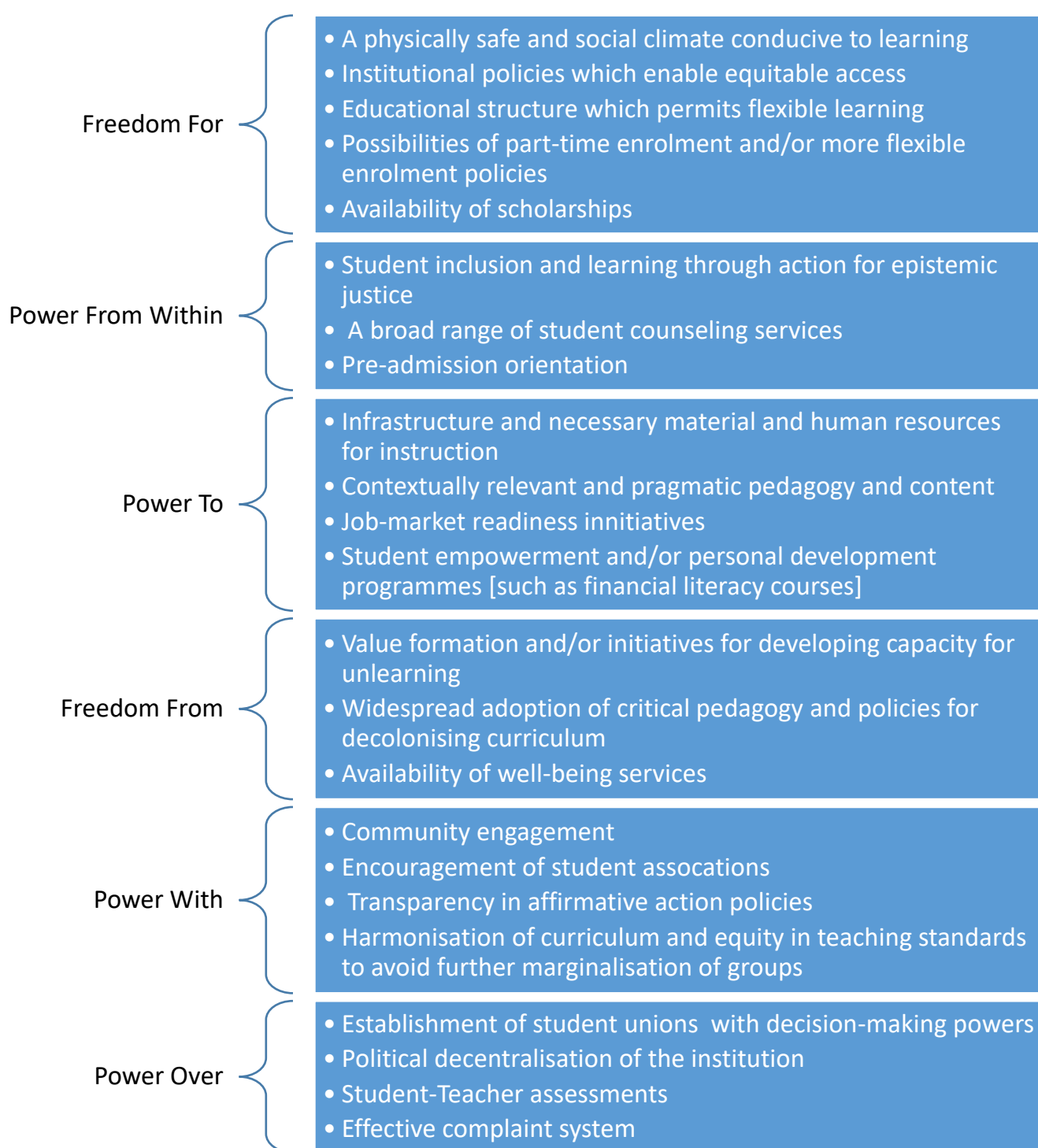


Figure 15: African-feminist Capability Approach operationalisation of an empowering education [adapted from Murphy-Graham and Lloyd's (2016) Capabilities and Empowerment Framework]

While there is merit in a simpler framework such as that presented by Murphy-Graham and Lloyd's (2016). I found it necessary to adapt their operationalisation for two reasons; first their core conditions do not encapsulate all that the African-feminist Capability Approach deems necessary for empowerment and are thus replaced by the dimensions of powers and freedoms this approach puts forward. Next, the competencies they present are still too broad for assessing the specific contributions of higher education institutions to women's empowerment. The more detailed list of attributes corresponding to each dimension in the above operationalisation facilitates a more nuanced and practical interrogation of higher education. Based on the detailed list, one can pinpoint what higher education institution ought to do or are failing to do can do to enhance a specific/desired dimensions of power and freedoms.

In summary, it has been shown that higher education – as it is now - does not and cannot sufficiently empower Cameroonian women to tackle the multivariate oppressions they face. Theorisation in this chapter developed a way to ensure empowering higher education for women in this context from previous considerations of what empowerment would mean for Cameroonian women as put forward by participants and as theorised by the African-feminist Capability Approach. Overall, analysis of empirical data suggests that although higher education has the potential to empower Cameroonian women, what it offers is the bare minimum as a result of quality issues and lack of intentionality with respect to women's empowerment. Until the potential of Cameroonian higher education is developed to sufficiently enhance the freedoms and powers Cameroonian women need and value for addressing their multivariate oppressions, societal assumptions that higher education empowers them to the point of 'too much' are invalid and misleading.

12. CONCLUSION

I keep asking myself in whatever I do or say:

Will this change women's lives in the long term?

Will this alter power relations? – Everjoice J. Win

In introducing this thesis, I described it as a presentation of a storied study. I have attempted to make clear the story of how I researched Cameroonian women's empowerment through higher education, as well as addressing the problem using new and established literature/stories.

The thesis opened with Part I, which consisted of five chapters. The introductory chapter told the story of the birth of this research idea, outlined the problem I recognised and the preliminary commitments I made to address it. The following four chapters in that part detailed the research design and described the research context to meet academic standards. Part II, consisted of chapters six to eight, uses literature - both secondary data and first-hand co-authored narratives generated empirically through my research - to further develop the story of the research problem. In this way the chapters in the second part meet requirements of scholarship by acknowledging what is known and identifying what is left unknown with regards to higher education, women's empowerment and Cameroonian women assumed to be empowered through higher education. Lastly, three chapters (nine to eleven) in Part III of this thesis presented empirical-based responses to the guiding research questions to achieve the overarching research objective. With this final chapter 12, I conclude the storied study presented in this thesis by:

- Recapitulating the research and highlighting its key findings,
- Reflecting on the original contributions of this research and the corresponding implications for theory and practice,
- Acknowledging the limitations of this research, advancing suggestions for future research development, and finally
- Offering my own testimony and positioning myself alongside participants here with a closing commentary

The subsequent sections are developed out of the above outlined chapter objectives.

12.1 The research recap

This study originated with my observation of Cameroonian women being dissuaded from pursuing certain levels of higher education on account of the widespread assumption that education empowers women. This assumption insinuates that the more educated a woman is, the more empowered (and hence more threatening) she will be – and hence undesirable in a patriarchal society. This dissuasion was registered through personal experiences and the common use of expressions like ‘too much book’ and ‘long crayon’ directed at women. My observation led me to question the validity of the underlying assumption of Cameroonian women’s empowerment through higher education. I recognised that this local assumption is endorsed by a wealth of Global North led international development initiatives which advance the educating of girls and women as a panacea for development and a pathway to empowerment in the Global South (Nussbaum 2004; Walker & Unterhalter 2007; Switzer 2018). Considering this, I wondered if the higher education offered to women in Cameroon could be considered as empowering as it is assumed to be if assessed from the perspectives of Global South (particularly African-feminist) scholarship and Cameroonian women themselves. With this question, my study’s objective was to: *Unearth a more nuanced and empirically-based conceptualisation of empowerment by and for Cameroonian women informed by the African-feminist Capability Approach. And to use the more-fitting conceptualization for investigating if and how higher education enables what is necessary for these women to consider themselves and be considered empowered as society assumes they are.*

Having identified a problem and purpose for the study, I explored already established research to register how this confirmed or denied my observations, what answers had previously been provided for questions similar to mine, and what research perspectives/frameworks have been employed in considering this problem. Reviewing established knowledge on the purpose and/or probable outcomes of higher education for women, the conceptualisation of women’s empowerment, the Cameroonian context, and the nature of suitable research designs revealed that several themes and outstanding issues must be considered with regards to the components of this research’s problem.

Reviewed literature affirmed prior observation of social deterrence of women's higher education and the belief that certain levels of education is 'enough' for women. Scholarship (see Montique 2017; Atanga et al. 2013; Clabaugh 2010; Kamau 1999) from across the globe suggests that assumptions of women's empowerment, ideas that higher-educated women are intimidating and a resulting opposition of such women on account on their higher education, is not limited to Cameroon.

Other literature (see Walker 2018; Ongera 2016; Kinge 2014; Bhatti 2013; Mejuini 2013; Spark 2011; Malik & Courtney 2011; Fonkeng & Ntembe 2009; Adelabu & Adepoju 2007) recognises that higher education promises and has a purpose to contribute to human and social development which demands and suggests that higher education institutions play a role in addressing social injustices and empowering women students. Still, a growing body of knowledge registers the conditionality of higher education's prospects of fulfilling its promise and the necessity of interrogating whether education meets the needs/expectations of women in contexts such as this (see Swai 2010; Switzer 2018; Walker 2017).

Correspondingly, literature on the conceptualisation of women's empowerment communicates the fluidity of the concept, noting that it must be contextualised, and raising issue with the depreciation of the concept over time (see Calvès 2009; Batliwala 2007; Drydyk 2013; Unterhalter 2015). My exploration of previous studies which asked questions such as mine divulged that many scholars (see Bhatti 2013; Spark 2011; Mejuini 2013; Malik & Courtney 2011; Walker 2018; Kinge 2014; Adelabu & Adepoju 2007; Fonkeng & Ntembe 2009) have associated women's attainment of higher education with: increased awareness, confidence, personal growth, consciousness of gender inequality, greater employability and higher socioeconomic status, a willingness to take matters to court in order to defend their rights, as well as an expansion of civic engagement and aspirations, all of which are considered as characteristics of 'empowerment'. Nonetheless, other research findings present the potential of higher education to empower women as inconsistent and posit the necessity of questioning higher education outcomes for Cameroonian women. Scholars note that women's empowerment through higher education is neither guaranteed nor always tangible, is

dependent on the quality of education and context, and requires consciousness and intentionality in policy and practice (see Dejaeghere 2020; Kwachou 2015; Mejuini 2013; Spark 2011; Assie-Lumumba 2006; Mama 1996).

In addition, an examination of the socio-political and economic history, the higher education experience and the status of women in Cameroon exposed several contradictions between what is assumed and what the actuality is. Based on Cameroonian scholarship and development reports, the structural constraints on women in this context are not only deeply ingrained and historically consolidated, but they also vary vastly pertaining to religion, region of origin, linguistic group and more (Taoyang 2019; Djapou-Fouthe 2017; Endeley 2001; Nana-Fabu 2006). Similarly, established knowledge asserts that Cameroonian higher education has substantial quality issues and underscores reservations to assumptions of women's empowerment through higher education (see Yeba 2015; Kwachou 2015; Fielding 2014; Levto 2014; FAWE 2013; Mejuini 2013; Spark 2011; Endeley & Ngaling 2007; Ouendji 2000).

Finally, the literature review stage of this research enabled my identification of theoretical frameworks and methodology advanced as suitable for this study. Scholarly work on women's empowerment and empowering education revealed the weaknesses of Capability Approach conceptualisations (Keleher 2007), the underdevelopment of the African-feminist perspective (Chisale 2017) and in so doing it clarified the need for a more combined and participant-engaged approach.

The wealth of literature reviewed consolidated my problematising of Cameroonian women's empowerment through higher education, enabling me develop a thesis statement from the identified gaps in knowledge for the unique Cameroonian context within which this research is situated. This study's thesis statement posits that: *precipitating an accurate assessment of Cameroonian women's empowerment through higher education, requires the engagement of Cameroonian women themselves in the conceptualisation of what that means for them. Likewise, that the multivariate oppressions, diversity in Cameroonian women's experience of womanhood and education necessitate the layering of frameworks (such as the African feminisms and*

Capability Approach used here) for a more contextually relevant and intersectionality-sentient appraisal of women's empowerment and the interrogation of higher education's ability to enable it.

I proceeded to develop and employ my original Capabilitarian application to induce a more contextually-relevant re-conceptualisation of empowerment by and for Cameroonian women by which a more accurate evaluation of higher education's contribution to their empowerment could be generated. This application, termed the African-feminist Capability Approach, closes the open-ended Capability Approach framework using African-feminist thought (as opposed to mainstream Western feminist thought which has been used to engender it thus far). In line with the thesis statement, I equally opted for primary data collection by engaged-narrative inquiry. That is, in addition to individual life-story interviews with twenty women graduate students, participants were engaged in the development of the second data collection method - the participatory analysis workshop. I then proceeded to analyse selected data (from ten of the twenty participants) in a three-part response to the study's guiding research questions.

In response to the question: *How do diverse Cameroonian women graduates conceptualise empowerment, and how do they (if at all) consider themselves empowered on account of their higher education?* Data from the life-story interviews and participatory analysis workshop was thematically examined for a bottom-up understanding of what empowerment means for Cameroonian women, presenting their opinions on if/how their higher education enabled them to consider themselves as empowered.

In response to the question: *What does an original African-feminist and capability approach theorisation contribute to the understanding of Cameroonian women's empowerment and how does this theorisation consider the empowerment of these women by their higher education?* An African-feminist Capability Approach re-conceptualisation of women's empowerment was presented and operationalised by an adaptation of Rowlands' (1997) types of power. The definitive considerations put forward by the application were then used as apparatus for interrogating life-story interview data

to assess if/how higher education offered the dimensions of freedoms/powers necessary for participants to be considered as empowered.

Finally, in response to the question: *What factors serve to enhance or hinder the empowerment of Cameroonian women through higher education and how would higher education need to improve to foster Cameroonian women's empowerment?* Analysis of life-story data is used to illustrate the divergence in Cameroonian women's experiences of womanhood, (dis)empowerment, and education. Further deliberation reflects how these differences translates to variance in their empowerment needs and reveals how higher education needs to be improved to achieve desired and expected empowerment ends for diverse women.

In the end, by asking different questions the study disinters that presumptions of Cameroonian women's empowerment through higher education are unduly elevated given the complexity of attaining women's empowerment and weaknesses of higher education in Cameroon. The specific research conclusions, that is, the empirical knowledge developed as a result of the study's scientific process, is reported in the following subsection.

12.1.1 Summary of main research findings

Based on the experiences and voices of the diverse Cameroonian women who participated, this study found that:

1. To Cameroonian women, empowerment must be additive, multi-dimensional and requires a delicate balance.

Participants' conceptualisations of empowerment affirmed conceptualisations in established literature with similarities in aspects such as voice, decision-making power, financial independence, knowledge, recognition, self-confidence and more. However, from their responses this research equally found that being empowered for these women is not merely attaining these aspects singularly. As these women's accounts suggest, there is a need to possess multiple aspects concurrently for actual empowerment, a need for certain aspects to take shape in a specific way, and a need for balance between

aspects of empowerment. Conceptualisations here differ from those elsewhere in that they denote that a Cameroonian woman would have to possess at least three aspects like financial autonomy *and* freedom from control, *and* self-confidence concurrently to be able to leave her hometown to pursue her ambitions in another region. Possession of one aspect without the other; such as income without self-authorisation, results in little empowerment. In this regard, findings also suggest that the weight of the various aspects of empowerment are not equal in this context; some are more valuable than others and as a result, aspects must be balanced and negotiated for their fulfilment in non-ideal real-world contexts.

2. A joint African-feminist Capability Approach offers a more appropriate conceptualisation of empowerment in this context.

Findings affirmed, as the thesis statement posited, that use of the joint African-feminist Capability Approach unearths the intersectionality of oppressions and underscores the depth and variety of needs which are often underappreciated. Questions asked by this original application went beyond those typically asked by the Capability Approach and African-feminist thought on their own, enriching interrogation of higher education's capacity for empowerment. This approach not only offered a more nuanced conceptualization of empowerment with the layering of frameworks and triangulation of meanings of empowerment, but it also enabled a more robust interrogation of what has been assumed by society of Cameroonian women and the women of themselves. In this way, the approach proved necessary for a truthful and useful assessment of Cameroonian women's empowerment through higher education. The difference made by the African-feminist Capability Approach is most apparent in the increased perception noted in responses to the participatory analysis workshop exercises following an introductory lesson to the theoretical framework.

3. Higher education in Cameroon does not sufficiently enable aspects necessary for women to consider themselves and be considered by scholarship as empowered.

Considering how both Cameroonian women and the African-feminist Capability Approach conceptualise empowerment, bilateral analysis here reveals that the higher education that Cameroonian women are offered does not sufficiently enable the necessary aspects for

women's empowerment. Whether regarded from the women's lay-perspectives or from the more normative theoretical standpoint, higher education fails to adequately facilitate the sort of empowerment which these women value and which scholarship recognises they need.

4. Cameroonian women's empowerment through higher education is conditional and assumptions that higher education guarantees empowerment should be reconsidered.

This research revealed the unpredictability of Cameroonian women attaining empowerment in and through higher education. Conclusions drawn from analysis affirm that the prospect of higher education being empowering for a Cameroonian woman is dependent on a variety of factors: internalised values, practical and strategic needs, oppressions, freedoms, quality of education, aspirations and more. And these are often linked to identifiers beyond gender, such as religion, class, family structure, linguistic group, etc. which intersect to either expand or diminish the prospects of higher education's capacity to empower. For this reason, assumptions should not be made of the Cameroonian women's empowerment through higher education without due consideration of what empowerment needs higher education ought to have met for them. Their empowerment needs reveal what power deficiencies each woman required empowerment to overcome and/or what aspirations they require power and/or freedoms to attain.

5. There is a need to improve higher education in Cameroon, particularly through decolonising.

Though findings in this study affirm the potential of higher education to contribute to (human) development and women's empowerment, analysis also reveals that in its current state, Cameroonian higher education institutions fail to fulfil their potential and can contribute to disempowering their students. As such, this research concludes that higher education in Cameroon must be more intentional and improve its quality in order to better empower Cameroonian women. As the English adage suggests, 'an unchecked virtue is a flaw'. Similarly, Cameroonian higher education, although obviously beneficial, must be properly evaluated to assess its strengths and weakness, particularly with regards to coloniality. Given that African women's disempowerment has been linked to both

coloniality and patriarchy, decolonising the academy is just as crucial as engendering it is to ensure that what is taught/learned is constructive for African women.

If African-feminist scholarship sustains that Western imperialism widened the gender gap in African contexts, how then can we expect educational systems which remain unrefined products of that imperialism to help close the gap it magnified? Arising from my study, we should be asking questions such as these:

- If our education is enabling African subservience within a coloniality-based world-order,
- If we are equipping women to be 'superwomen' rather than addressing the villainy in patriarchy that requires such super-powers,
- If our educational systems promote knowledge attainment over (co)production,
- If products of our higher education institutions require more freedoms and powers to survive in this context.

12.2 Original knowledge contribution and implications for theory and practice

This investigation of Cameroonian women's empowerment through higher education is unique by way of my original Capabilitarian application and my employing of participatory and story-telling methods. Consequently, the study makes original conceptual and empirical contributions to scholarship, Afrocentric research practice, and national/international education and gender development initiatives.

Conceptual and empirical contribution to the literature

My research contributes most significantly to the development of bodies of academic literature- those on African-feminisms, the Capability Approach, higher education and empowerment in Cameroonian/Sub-Saharan African settings. First, few empirical studies have employed African-feminist thought and operationalised it as has been done here. This study enriches African-feminist thought with the necessary language for thinking about empowerment and gender justice in higher education. It equally expands the applicability of African-feminist thought by its formulation of a unique categorisation of powers/freedoms necessary for African women's empowerment adapted from Rowlands'

(1997) Global North work in a productive but not subservient South-North knowledge conversation.

Similarly, this study contributes to addressing criticisms of Capabilitarian accounts of feminist issues. Until recent work by Dejaeghere (2020), the open-ended Capability Approach has been closed by predominantly liberal-feminist feminist thought, and up until this study, the Capability Approach has not been informed by African-feminist thought. In this regard, the study breaks ground and enhances Capabilitarian scholarship as the joint African-feminist Capability Approach developed herein practically demonstrates the construction of a Capabilitarian application as put forward by Robeyns (2017). With limited studies of the Cameroonian context employing the Capability Approach, this research makes a substantial contribution to highlighting the value of this perspective in investigating Cameroonian issues of human development and gender justice.

Though the body of knowledge on empowerment is extensive, the re-conceptualisation of empowerment unearthed by this study adds a new perspective in that it is grounded in both empirical and conceptual findings in the Cameroonian context, where this has not been previously explored. This research's bilateral interrogation of what empowerment would be in this context allows for an understanding of empowerment by Cameroonian women and for Cameroonian women. In like manner, the African-feminist Capability Approach developed and employed here enables this research to capture intersections of oppressions, freedoms and needs often overlooked in assessments of women's empowerment. This adds to conceptualisation of empowerment by revealing the aspects and conversion factors that define, enable or hinder Cameroonian women's empowerment.

As the dearth of empirical data on higher education experiences (particularly gendered) in Africa is firmly registered in scholarship (for example Morley 2005, 2011; Doh 2012; Ongera 2016), this study's empirical data on higher education experience in Cameroon cannot be underestimated. Through participant narratives and their workbook evaluations of their higher education institution's contributions to their empowerment, this study provides evidence to affirm and/or deny opinions of higher education outcomes for

women. The rich qualitative data ensures more nuanced understanding of Cameroonian higher education's potentials and problems, underscoring how it can both reproduce inequalities and enable women's powers and freedoms. By providing such contextually-relevant knowledge, the study serves to stimulate broader discussions on women's empowerment and higher education's contribution to it in African (specifically Cameroonian) contexts.

Methodological contribution to research practice for epistemic justice

Mainstream Western research practice has been criticised for the power imbalances between researchers and participants and various aspects of unfairness in the generation of knowledge, such as how it is communicated and how it is understood and who gets to be a credible and legitimate theoriser. With regards to the research of African issues and African contexts, mainstream research theory and practice has been found particularly wanting as Afrocentricity asserts that most research is constructed within a system of Western coloniality necessitating the re-centring of African thought and experiences in the examination of African subjects. In agreement with the above criticisms, this research illustrated the need for methodological and theoretical collaborations for contextually-suited knowledge production.

First, this study's layering of the perspectives of the Capability Approach and African feminisms study re-centres African thought through collaborations in theoretical framing. Next, the research makes a valuable methodological contribution by virtue of its engaged-narrative design. As mentioned earlier, research participants, particularly African subjects, are often de-centred and dislocated in research carried out for and on them. Narrative research is already acknowledged and recommended as an empowering and decolonising method on the basis of its ability to challenge long-standing assumptions of women's lived experiences (Hamdan 2009). By adopting an engaged-narrative methodology, this study went further and was able to foreground both African epistemology and centre African women not merely as subjects of African-feminist research but equally as co-constructors in knowledge production as a result of researcher/participant cooperation in the development of the participatory analysis workshop as a research method.

Likewise, by educating participants on theoretical frameworks and including them in the analysis of their own data, I demonstrated the disruption of epistemic injustice (particularly hermeneutic injustice) by “sharing the tools of social interpretation” so that these women were equally able to “make sense of their distinctive and important experiences” (Fricker 2007, p. 6). In this way, the study not only counters ‘Ivory tower analysing’ but equally enhanced participants’ narrative capability to articulate their conceptualisation of empowerment, experiences of oppressions and valued beings and doings. All this illustrates how joint ventures in methodology or method or both effect better epistemological research practice.

The participants of this study were graduate students who were involved or would soon be involved in their own research for their higher degrees. For this reason, most of them expressed interest in the research methodology, as well as appreciation at the lesson on theory and engagement in analysis at the workshop. As a result, this study’s methodological contribution is significant not only for amplifying participant voices but equally for its transformative potential.

Contribution to development and education practice

Knowledge generated by research is the basis of development efforts, as verifiable data is crucial to the construction of effective policies, reforms and strategies implemented for sustainable development. The rich conceptual and empirical data which this research generated reveals the weaknesses of pre-existing conceptualisations of empowerment, offers detail into the experiences, values and needs of Cameroonian women students in higher education, and provides critical insight into factors that either encourage or impede women's empowerment. In this way the study contributes to improving the discernment of what empowerment and an empowering higher education would be in this context, facilitating the development of more suitable curriculum and educational policy for women’s empowerment in Cameroon.

Given Cameroon’s formal commitment to the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), the critical role that higher education institutions have to play in achieving the SDGs, and given how central women’s empowerment is to the SDGs, this study makes

a significant contribution to furthering national development efforts in multiple ways. The re-conceptualisations put forward by this research contributes to the widening of the informational basis for public perception and impedes incorrect assumption of women's empowerment through higher education which actually limits women's aspirations and sustains gender inequalities. Finally, operationalisations of women's empowerment and empowering higher education developed in this study serve also to offer development practitioners a more contextually-suitable apparatus for evaluating Cameroonian women's empowerment and quality of Cameroonian higher education.

Implications

Based on the above-outlined knowledge contributions, this study has implications for both theory and practice.

For one, the study implies the need for and/or benefits of decolonising research methodology. By advancing decoloniality, underscoring African-feminist epistemologies, employing narrative and participatory methods for engaging participants, maximising the transformative potential of knowledge production, centring the African woman and more, this research demonstrates what Mama (2011) asserts is necessary for doing feminist research in Africa properly. Given the complexities of (dis)empowerment factors unearthed as a result of the methodological choices made by this research, this study indicates that without layering the frameworks for better theoretical perception of intersections, without re-centring African epistemology and employing participatory approaches, it is unlikely that one would arrive at trustworthy conclusions in research on African issues.

Participants' narratives and evaluations of their higher education institutions denote specific areas by which higher education not only fails to empower but also serves to disempower. As a result, this study submits evidence which indicates the need for higher education reforms ranging from decolonising and engendering to more general quality issues by way of pedagogical development and learner-centred approaches. Theorisation here further recommends how to begin considering the way higher education can be

improved; questions to ask and features to look for and/or implement in order to enable the powers/freedoms deemed necessary for Cameroonian women's empowerment.

Similarly, the study's conceptual and empirical contributions advance the need for effective and locally-grounded quality assurance measures for the regular assessment of Cameroon's higher education institutions. Though this research falls short of developing a fully formed diagnostic tool (given its exploratory nature), it clearly signposts the need for a framework which higher education scholars/practioners can use as a guide for the engendering and overall improvement of higher education in Cameroon for more sustainable development outcomes.

12.3 Limitations and directions for future research

While this thesis makes significant contributions to improving understandings of Cameroonian women's empowerment through higher education, I recognise that the boundaries, applicability and consequently the overall impact of this research are restricted in a number of ways.

To begin, as a result of the size and profile of the research sample, findings of this study cannot be representative of the general demographic of Cameroonian women. Though the study made an effort to assure that the participants of this study are Cameroonian women of varying backgrounds across linguistic and ethnic lines, I acknowledge that the purposive sampling of Master's students resulted in participants falling within the age range of 22 and 36 years old. This means the input of older women has been excluded, and it is likely that the conceptualisation of empowerment by older women would likely differ on account of their longer life experiences.

Other sampling-related limitations include this study's intentional exclusion of Cameroonian men's perspectives despite the fact that gender and education scholars, particularly African-feminists, assert that explorations of gender inequality issues such as women's (dis)empowerment should include male participants for balance. However, this study does not make a claim to represent gendered opinions on women's empowerment but rather sought to give the Cameroonian women about whom assumptions are made a

platform to voice their opinions of their assumed empowerment. Nonetheless, I acknowledge that including men as participants would have enabled a broader and more comparative viewpoint of what makes higher-educated Cameroonian women to be considered empowered.

The research sample was also limited given that participants were required to commit to attending the participatory workshop. This inadvertently excluded potential participants who could not to travel to Yaoundé where the workshop was held. In this way, the research amplified the disempowerment of some women. In addition, the scope of the study was further demarcated by its focus on only state-owned universities and institutions in Cameroon. This study reasoned that although private higher education in Cameroon is currently thriving in Cameroon, public universities remain most popular and accessible to Cameroonians as a result of their being more affordable to the average Cameroonian and the institution which guarantee government recruitment. Still, given the proliferation of private higher institutions on account of the more 'pragmatic and professional' instruction they claim to offer to students (Doh 2012), findings may have been different if not for this limitation.

Next, this study is limited by its context-specific nature. Though nuance and specificity enable better understanding of the intricacies of intersections to be considered in conceptualisations and evaluations of empowerment for Cameroonian women, this specificity restricts the generalisability of the dimensions of necessary freedoms and powers identified in this study. As such, the findings of this study may contribute to reasoning of women's empowerment and higher education issues, but similar research carried out elsewhere may require that adaptations be made to the research design and that the dimensions be re-defined to suit other research contexts.

In addition, I must acknowledge that my development of the African-feminist Capability Approach is imperfect. My use of the modular format oversimplifies the intricacies of reconciling two broad frameworks into one application. Although generally accepted, what I present as the core principles of the Capability Approach as presented by Robeyns (2017) could be debated. Likewise what I conclude upon as the principles of African-

feminisms as identified by Davies and Graves (1986, as cited in Silva 2004, p. 137) and affirmed in the Charter of African Feminists (AWDF 2006) does not recognize outliers in African-feminist thought. In this way, the simplicity of the construction process reduces the two broad frameworks of African-feminist epistemology and Capabilitarian thought to a brief selections pieced together into Robeyns' (2017) diagram. I recognise that a more in-depth engagement with the variety of strands of African-feminist thinking (p 32-34) would have highlighted debates and disputes which may contributed to developing the African-feminist Capability Approach for wider applicability particularly its contribution to contemporary issues (such as queer theory, green politics, African postcolonial theorising). An elaboration on the development of the approach from the variety of African feminisms will be a focus of future work.

I also recognize that this work fails to sufficiently present the argument for decolonization earlier in the research process. I did not theorize decoloniality in depth as my methodological choices; informing of the Capability Approach with African-feminist epistemology, use of narratives, and participatory methods were all attempts at decolonizing the knowledge production process. In retrospect, however, this work could have better presented the decolonising nature of the African-feminist Capability Approach and made more substantial analysis of the need for decolonizing higher education if the theoretical framing addressed it clearly earlier on. While it can be argued that decoloniality is partially achieved in the construction of this application merely by the use of African-feminist thought, it was necessary to elaborate on how and to what extent the merged application is declolonial.

Due to its qualitative nature, the study also sets limits on the applicability of its operationalisations to the evaluation of women's empowerment through higher education. Although the participants took part in these proposed exercises which generated quantifiable data depicting their measurements of their own empowerment, I as the researcher, did not calculate participants' empowerment and neither did I attempt to override participants' self-evaluation of their empowerment. Assessment of participants' empowerment in the study uses life-stories as a method for tracing progression or decline in the women's empowerment and did not actively compare one participant's

empowerment against another for ranking purposes. In this regard, the operationalisations put forward here will not be applicable to studies which deem to measure women's empowerment, but conceptualisations provided here may be otherwise developed to be applied in that way.

Above all, given that this research was a three-year PhD project carried out following institutional guidelines, I was constrained with regards to time, funding, specific objectives, presentation, language and more. Due to limited time and funding I could not opt for collecting longitudinal qualitative data on the empowering process for Cameroonian women in higher education. Fortunately, the reiterative process of conceptualisation (in life-story interviews and then at the workshop) established some reliability and enabled data collection at two different points. To meet PhD requirements, I had to make choices which could be depicted as disempowerment of some participants (choosing whose story is told here, telling some stories and not all) and denote the inescapable nature of coloniality (the language and manner of presentation in this thesis). Yet again, I was bound to analyse data in keeping with the guiding research questions of the thesis. As a result, I was unable to delve into related and interesting findings which emerged in the course of the study, nor could I offer a more robust analytical take on some findings such as participant's assessments of their higher education institutions via the report-card workbook activity.

Nevertheless, there are opportunities here also for future writing and research.

For instance, future research may amplify the transformatory potential of this study by addressing the exclusion of men. Such a study would have strategic engendering impact by enabling Cameroonian men's understanding of intersectionality in oppression and their role in women's (dis)empowerment.

Likewise, this study takes a step in the direction of decolonising research methodology with African-feminist thought. Future research may take the necessary next steps to investigate issues such as authenticity in the co-authoring of participants' narratives (re-storying) in narrative research, the impact of research language and academic standard

on the African knowledge production, as well as the further operationalisations of individual branches of African feminisms.

The data I could not present and analyse here show that this research may be expanded in multiple directions. Although these ideas are not yet fully formulated and put forward very tentatively, recommendations for future research include:

i. Negative Capability

Alluding to its historical usage in literature scholarship, Unterhalter (2017) uses the concept of 'negative capability' to denote the need to acknowledge, reflect on and delimit what is measurable and what remains uncertain in education practice. In the course of this study, I came to recognise such negative capability as well as consider possibly different interpretations of this concept. Findings here denote a paradox; while some participants' disadvantage contributed to their empowerment, some participants' 'advantage' contributed to their disempowerment. This paradox points to a negative capability in efforts to research empowerment given that researchers must determine what sort and extent a negative (i.e disadvantage) served to motivate individual empowerment or hindered it. Alternatively, I considered that the concept of negative capability could be interpreted as an ability born out of negative circumstances; such as the extraordinary drive one develops as a result of their disadvantage, or the abilities fostered due to the necessity and absence of what should have been provided. Given this emancipatory role of lack, it can be regarded as a negative capability which fuels empowerment. Correspondingly, some participants' responses pointed at yet another possible interpretation of negative capability. In line with the adage 'ignorance is bliss', they insinuated that their ability to know and the knowledge of certain things becomes a negative capability given that their consciousness of inequalities is not readily matched by the power to address them. As a result, the knowledge derived through higher education renders them discontent from the inability or limits within which they can apply and act on what they know. These findings suggest possible directions for research on the conceptualisation and application of negative capability in Capabilitarian research and education practice.

- ii. Cameroonian women's identification with and/or demonstration of forms of African-feminisms

This thesis presents some illustration of African-feminist thought such as Complementarity and Negofeminism by Cameroonian women. Building on this, future research could map out the everyday practice of various forms of African feminisms. If expanded in this direction, this study would develop African-feminist scholarship with empirical data to support/critique conceptualisations of African feminisms ranging from Snail-sense feminisms to Muslim-African-feminism.

- iii. The comparative value of academic higher education institutions and *grand écoles* in Cameroonian context

This research highlights how variations in these Cameroonian women's empowerment is linked to differences in the nature and experience of higher education across institutions, but it fails to present and analyse data on the comparative value of the different categories of Cameroonian higher education institutions. Given that there is a considerable gap in the literature with regards to the comparative value of and outcomes of academic higher education institutions and government professional institute or *grand écoles*, this would be an interesting dimension to investigate in future research.

- iv. Redefining Cameroonian higher education quality for social justice and development

In the end, this study establishes the need for extensive higher education reform for more effectiveness towards Cameroonian women's empowerment. It notes specific needs for decolonising and engendering Cameroonian higher education, harmonisation across the educational subsystems and the development and implementation of quality assurance measures. With the establishment of this necessity, studies going forward ought to explore how these specific needs would be addressed, thereby re-conceptualising quality higher education for social justice and development in Cameroon.

12.4 Closing thoughts: the personal is academic and the academic is personal

Having come to the end of this study, I am reminded of how it begun with observations on my own lived experiences. In a paper titled 'I didn't Interview Myself: The Researcher

as Participant in Narrative Research', Kirkman (1999) asserts the importance of the researcher's own story in narrative research. She denotes the role the researcher's story and identity plays, as participants' accounts are transformed by the presence of the researcher through her retelling and analysis and also how the researcher herself experiences transformation as she theorises the stories told to her vis-a-vis her own life. In line with Kirkman's (1999) views, I have been explicit about the influence as a researcher. I did this, first, by sharing my own life-story with participants prior to their one-on-one interviews, then by foregrounding my motivation and positionality as a 30 year-old single Cameroonian woman and doctoral candidate in a foreign institution who is deemed intimidating and assumed to be empowered on grounds of my higher education. This undoubtedly enabled better rapport with participants for data collection and analysis of their data.

Yet, I also note that sharing my story, considering participants' perspectives and theorising in the course of this study, has been akin to 'interviewing myself' as it enabled me hold a mirror up against myself with a profound effect on me as a researcher, as Kirkman (1999) asserts. Conversations with participants and theorising helped me consider that although criticisms of my pursuit of higher education by older women may be born out of patriarchy, in some cases, it may also be a negotiation of it. As I recognised that empowerment in this context requires a woman to 'have it all', I came to appreciate that the aunts who admonished my desire to pursue yet another degree for anticipated negative effects on 'marriageability', were not necessarily saying that my ambitions are not valid. Rather, they, like some of my participants, are suggesting I negotiate in the manner they do to attain that perception of an empowerment being one who is both worker and wife. Similarly, as some participants used me as an example of an 'empowered woman', or one who they feel is more empowered than they are (despite hearing my story), they enabled me to reflect on my own privilege, on what is seen and not seen by people who would pass judgement on my status and quality of life.

This latter reflection began during a post-interview conversation with Hope, where I said to her⁶⁵:

I am well educated, earn an income, speak more than one language, I am eligible to vote and articulate my thoughts. I am so empowered... So much so that I can worry about my dressing and change three times before leaving my house. So much so that a 'sorry' starts nearly every other sentence I make. So empowered that I can't wear a pant-suit and gain entrance to certain government buildings in my own country. So empowered that I mentally debate word choice so I am not perceived as rude, unladylike, and unlikable. So empowered that I use my mom, or an imaginary partner as an excuse to fend off unwanted advances. So empowered that I walk around with pepper spray. So empowered that I know all these ways to survive. And yet, so obviously disempowered because I need all these ways to survive.

Since then I occasionally find myself doing this mental exercise where I calculate the weight of my advantage against my disadvantage and consider the extent of my freedoms and powers. By this self-appraisal, I assess that: I am empowered in my ability to write as a form of resistance, yet consciousness of my disempowerment and fear of the consequences ensures that I publish my most resistant pieces anonymously. I have considerable advantage by virtue of my educational experiences to be eligible for travel and residency in foreign countries, and yet my educational qualifications alone cannot guarantee me employment. Despite considerable power which comes with my socio-economic class, my ability to be safe is always limited; be that because of the ongoing Anglophone Crisis in my part of Cameroon or violence against black women globally.

This practical self-analysis calls to mind the phrase 'the personal is political' which is renowned as a rallying slogan of second-wave Western feminism culled from a popular essay by Carol Hanisch (see Hanisch 2010). The phrase has since been interpreted in different ways by a variety of scholars, all interpretations generally convey a connection between women's individual/personal experiences and the political status quo. While some interpretations connect the dots beginning from politically sanctioned oppression which generate personal problems between an individual woman and her individual man,

⁶⁵ I published a think-piece on this with African is a Country which can serve as source. See here: <https://africasacountry.com/2019/10/are-you-safe-please-stay-safe>

others suggest the connection begins with women's personal ideas and behaviour which subsequently manifest politically. I consider that both interpretations are justified. Either way, the personal problems are political problems and political problems beget personal problems. As an African-feminist scholar, I also believe that there is a similar connection and need to connect the dots between the personal and the academic.

Feminist scholarship has repeatedly rejected the idea of objectivity in science, arguing that not only is it impossible to create valid and valuable knowledge within a political or sociocultural vacuum, but it is equally necessary to acknowledge that those who research/construct knowledge are humans with pre-existing beliefs and attitudes which colour their epistemology. It is from this standpoint that I build my argument that the personal is academic. It is our personal perspectives which validate certain issues as worthy of academic attention, thereby making personal problems academic ones, and in turn it is flaws in scholarship that often induce problems in individual personal realities, thereby making academic problems personal ones.

To conclude, it is these lessons that I hope readers retain from this thesis: That it is of great import to consider individual realities with regards to evaluations of quality of life since the examples here, mine included, illustrate that aspects of quality of life such as empowerment are not easily surmised and assessments disavow broad generalisations. Also that there is a need for more consciousness in research, knowledge production and transfer, that is mindful of the impact which it makes on individual realities. As is well known, for over three decades the development of higher education received little regard in Sub-Saharan Africa, with institutions experiencing gross neglect from global agencies like the World Bank, based on the notion that higher education had a less significant rate of return compared to other educational levels (Doh 2012). This notion was the result of research which should have been more conscious, and the dire impact which that research had on African higher education is the perfect illustration of how the personal is academic and the academic is personal.

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APPENDICES

A: Institutional ethics approval and national research permits



Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences

21-Nov-2018

Dear Ms Monique Eleanor Kwachou Tangah

Ethics Clearance: "Too much book": a capabilities and African-feminist based investigation of Cameroonian women's empowerment through higher education

Principal Investigator: Ms Monique Eleanor Kwachou Tangah

Department: Centre for Development Support Department (Bloemfontein Campus)

APPLICATION APPROVED

With reference to your application for ethical clearance with the Faculty of Economic & Management Sciences, I am pleased to inform you on behalf of the Ethics Committee of the faculty that you have been granted ethical clearance for your research.

Your ethical clearance number, to be used in all correspondence is: UFS-HSD2018/1315

This ethical clearance number is valid from 21-Nov-2018 to 20-Nov-2023. Should you require more time to complete this research, please apply for an extension.

We request that any changes that may take place during the course of your research project be submitted to the ethics office to ensure we are kept up to date with your progress and any ethical implications that may arise.

Thank you for submitting this proposal for ethical clearance and we wish you every success with your research.

Yours Sincerely

Dr. Petrus Nel

Chairperson: Ethics Committee Faculty of Economic & Management Sciences

Economics Ethics Committee

Office of the Dean: Economic and Management Sciences

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REPUBLIQUE DU CAMEROUN
Paix-Travail-Patrie
 MINISTRE DE L'ENSEIGNEMENT SUPERIEUR
 SECRETARIAT GENERAL



REPUBLIC OF CAMEROON
Peace-Work-Fatherland
 MINISTRY OF HIGHER EDUCATION
 SECRETARIAT GENERAL

M 8 N° 08096 /MINESUP/SG/-

Yaoundé, le 24 SEPT 2018

The Secretary General

To: Ms Monique Kwachou

Doctoral Research Fellow

SARCHI Chair in Higher Education and Human Development Research Group
 University of the Free State,
 Room 214 Benito Khotseng building,
 Bloemfontein (9300), South Africa.

RE: Request for Research Permission

I, the undersigned, Secretary General at the Ministry of Higher Education (MINESUP) Cameroon, do hereby acknowledge that Ms Kwachou Tangah Monique Eleanor, a Cameroonian doctoral candidate with the University of the Free State, South Africa, has made a successful request for permission to approach Cameroonian institutions of higher learning for research purposes.

Ms Kwachou, proposes to carry out a study involving twenty adult female graduate (Masters) students registered at four higher education institutions (University of Ngaoundere, University of Yaoundé I, University of Buea and ENS Bambili) across the country. These institutions are encouraged to permit her access to their students on condition that she provides ethical clearance from her host institution and meets respective institutional requirements.

This document is presented to serve as evidence of due process wherever necessary.



Pour le Ministre
 et par Délégué
 Le Secrétaire Général

Winfred NYONGBET GABSA
Professeur

Winfried GABSA NYONGBET
 Secretary General

B. Information sheet and consent forms (English and French)



RESEARCH STUDY INFORMATION LEAFLET AND CONSENT FORM

DATE

Data collection for this study shall be carried out from January 28th 2019 to May 31st 2019

TITLE OF THE RESEARCH PROJECT

"Too much book": a capabilities and African-feminist based investigation of Cameroonian women's empowerment through higher education

PRINCIPLE INVESTIGATOR / RESEARCHER(S) NAME(S) AND CONTACT NUMBER(S):

Monique Kwachou

2017448339

+270834290795/+237677229039

FACULTY AND DEPARTMENT:

*Faculty of Economics and Management Sciences
Centre of Development Studies*

STUDYLEADER(S) NAME AND CONTACT NUMBER:

*Prof Melanie Walker
+27 (0)764348820*

WHAT IS THE AIM / PURPOSE OF THE STUDY?

This study aims to: offer a more suitable African-feminist and human development based conceptualisation of empowerment for Cameroonian women, investigating if and how higher education enables the empowerment they strive for and so doing contributes to human development in Cameroon? The following research questions indicate the objectives of the study: i. How do diverse Cameroonian women themselves conceptualise empowerment, and what do they perceive as their most valued capabilities/functionings? ii. How does higher education empower Cameroonian women with the necessary capabilities to consider themselves and be considered by others as empowered? iii. What conversion factors serve to enhance or hinder the empowerment of Cameroonian women through higher education and how would higher education need to improve to foster Cameroonian women's functionings and capabilities for empowerment? iv. How does an innovative and original African-feminist and capability approach theorisation contribute to understanding of women's empowerment and the development of Capabilitarian theory?

WHO IS DOING THE RESEARCH?

The primary researcher for this study is Monique Kwachou, a Cameroonian doctoral research fellow with the Higher Education & Human Development Research Group headed by the SARChI Chair at the University of the Free State, South Africa.



HAS THE STUDY RECEIVED ETHICAL APPROVAL?

This study has received approval from the Research Ethics Committee of UFS. A copy of the approval letter can be obtained from the researcher.

Approval number: UFS-HSD2018/1315

WHY ARE YOU INVITED TO TAKE PART IN THIS RESEARCH PROJECT?

To achieve the aim of this study, the researcher is targeting twenty (20) female graduate students from four (4) government higher institutions across Cameroon who can offer in-depth perspective into their higher education experiences, if and how their higher education has empowered them.

Participants are invited to participate in this study given that they fit the following criteria;

- Be adult female Cameroonians (aged 18 or over and able to offer their legal consent)
- Duly registered graduate students having completed at least one semester at one of the following state higher institutions (University of Yaoundé I, University of Buea, University of Ngaoundere, ENS Bamili)
- Be willing and available to commit time for a life-story in-depth interview of roughly 3-4 hours (with breaks over the course of one day) as well as attend a focus group session at a later agreed upon date.

Following a recruitment call made on campuses with the permission of relevant administration, participants' are invited to contact the researcher to express their interest and will be then contacted on a first come-first served basis.

WHAT IS THE NATURE OF PARTICIPATION IN THIS STUDY?

Participants will be asked to:

1. You will be asked to give your formal consent for participation in this research. This research uses both life-story interviews and interactive focus groups for the collection of data. All biographical information you share will remain between you and the researcher. When the researcher writes about the study a pseudonym will be used in place of your real name so no one will be able to identify you. Participation in this research is voluntarily. Should you find, in the course of the interviews, that you do not want to continue, you may stop your participation at any time and withdraw consent. If you become unhappy with the way the research is being conducted, you are welcome to contact and discuss it with my supervisor, Professor Melanie Walker via email (walkermj@ufs.ac.za). Should any personal issues arise during the research, I will try by all means to refer you to someone who is qualified to help you.
2. Be required to make time for and actively partake in life-story interviews. These interviews will take place at a location you determine you would be most comfortable. Given the breadth and depth covered by life-story interviews, the complete interview may take three to four hours to complete. However, the participant is welcome to call for breaks in the course of the interview. During the interviews you will be asked to share your life story, particularly with regard to your experiences of higher education.
3. Be required to participate in a focus group session with other research participants. Later, at an agreed upon day, time and place a focus group session with all twenty participants will be held where

you will be expected to actively participate. Personal information shared during the life-story interviews will NOT be shared during this session. Focus group activities shall aim at understanding similarities and differences in life experiences, influence of higher education and conceptualisation of empowerment.

4. Be asked to receive compensation for ONLY their cost of transportation, meals provided and displacement fee for the duration of their participation in the study.

CAN THE PARTICIPANT WITHDRAW FROM THE STUDY?

Participation in this study is voluntary and the research shall in no way coerce participants to take part. Should they decide to take part, a copy of this information sheet will be theirs to keep and in addition to their signing a written consent form. You are free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason and there is no penalty or loss of benefit for non-participation.

WHAT ARE THE POTENTIAL BENEFITS OF TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?

Participating in this study will offer female graduate students an opportunity to evaluate the benefits of their higher education towards their personal development and empowerment.

Participants shall equally be telling their own stories in their own words and contributing to the development of research which promises to influence educational policy and widen the informational base from which public opinion is drawn

WHAT IS THE ANTICIPATED INCONVENIENCE OF TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?

Participating in this study may result in schedule inconvenience for participants (the research shall work with your schedule and at your convenience to mitigate this). Participants may also experience discomfort in sharing their life-stories with the researcher. However the researcher can confirm that all life-stories will be shared in a private space where the participant feels comfortable and all information shared shall be protected and bound to confidentiality and anonymity in research presentation.

WILL WHAT I SAY BE KEPT CONFIDENTIAL?

Data collected from both life-story interview sessions and the focus group will be digitally recorded, possibly transcribed in real time (using a text-to-speech application) and the data stored electronically on a password protected machine with only the primary researcher (Monique Kwachou) having this password. Participant responses may only be reviewed by people responsible for making sure that research is done properly, including the transcriber, and members of the Research Ethics Committee. Irrespective of if transcription is done in real time or not, the researcher will manually review transcription and send to participants for their verification, confirmation and any additional info as recommended by Atkinson (2002).

Participants' identities will be protected in the reporting of the research results by use of pseudonyms and no one will be able to connect participants to the answers they give. While every effort will be made by the researcher to ensure that you will not be connected to the information that you share during the focus group (all members of the focus group will sign an undertaking to respect

confidentiality), there is no absolute guarantee that other participants in the focus group will treat information confidentially. The researcher, by way of the signed undertaking shall, however, encourage all participants to do so. For this reason it is advised that participants preferably disclose personally sensitive information in one-on-one sessions.

HOW WILL THE INFORMATION BE STORED AND ULTIMATELY DESTROYED?

Hard copies of focus group activities will be stored by the researcher for a period of five years in a locked filing cabinet in case of any future research or academic purposes. After this period all hard copies will be destroyed by shredding. Data collected from life-story interviews will be stored electronically on a password protected computer. Future use of the stored data will be subject to further Research Ethics Review and approval if applicable. These measures of data protection are taken to ensure no potentially embarrassing information on participant's life experiences are disclosed to the discomfort of the participant.

WILL I RECEIVE PAYMENT OR ANY INCENTIVES FOR PARTICIPATING IN THIS STUDY?

Participants shall receive compensation for ONLY their cost of transportation, meals provided and displacement fee for the duration of their participation in the study. This stipends shall not surpass 20 USD to avoid coercing unwilling participants nor influencing the decisions of those who choose to partake in the study.

HOW WILL THE PARTICIPANT BE INFORMED OF THE FINDINGS / RESULTS OF THE STUDY?

If you would like to be informed of the final research findings, you are welcome to contact Monique Kwachou via email at: monique@gmail.com and KwachouTangahME@ufs.ac.za. The findings will otherwise be accessible in the form of the researcher's doctoral dissertation as of December 2020.

Thank you for taking time to read this information sheet and for participating in this study.

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY

I, _____ (participant name), confirm that the person asking my consent to take part in this research has told me about the nature, procedure, potential benefits and anticipated inconvenience of participation.

I have read (or had explained to me) and understood the study as explained in the information sheet. I have had sufficient opportunity to ask questions and am prepared to participate in the study. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without penalty (if applicable). I am aware that the findings of this study will be anonymously processed into a research report, journal publications and/or conference proceedings.

I agree to the audio recording of the *life-story interviews and interactive focus group session*.

I have received a signed copy of the informed consent agreement.

Full Name of Participant: _____

Signature of Participant: _____ Date: _____

Full Name(s) of Researcher(s): _____

Signature of Researcher: _____ Date: _____

FORMULAIRE DE RENSEIGNEMENTS ET DE CONSENTEMENT VIS-À-VIS DE L'ÉTUDE

DATE

La collecte de données au titre de cette étude se déroulera du 28 janvier au 31 mai 2019

TITRE DU PROJET DE RECHERCHE

"Too much book": a capabilities and African-feminist based investigation of Cameroonian women's empowerment through higher education [« Trop d'études » : une enquête basée sur les capacités et le féminisme africain, portant sur l'autonomisation des femmes camerounaises par le biais des études supérieures]

NOM(S) ET NUMÉRO(S) DE CONTACT DU(DE LA) CHERCHEUR(SE)/ENQUÊTEUR(-RICE) PRINCIPAL(E) :

Monique Kwachou

2017448339

+270834290795/+237677229039

FACULTÉ ET DÉPARTEMENT :

*Faculté des Sciences économiques et de Gestion
Centre de recherches sur le développement*

NOM ET NUMÉRO DE CONTACT DU (DE LA) RESPONSABLE DE L'ÉTUDE :

*Pr Melanie Walker
+27 (0)764348820*

QUEL EST L'OBJECTIF/LE BUT DE CETTE ÉTUDE ?

La présente étude a pour objectifs : proposer aux femmes camerounaises une conceptualisation plus appropriée de l'autonomisation/l'émancipation de la femme basée sur le féminisme africain et le développement humain ; déterminer si et de quelle façon l'enseignement supérieur permet l'autonomisation pour laquelle luttent ces femmes et contribue ainsi au développement humain au Cameroun. Ces objectifs sont portés par les questions de recherche suivantes : I/ Quelle conception se font différentes femmes camerounaises de l'autonomisation et que perçoivent-elles comme constituant leurs capacités/fonctionnements les plus importantes ? II/ De quelle façon les études supérieures habilitent-elles les femmes camerounaises dotées des capacités nécessaires à se considérer et à être considérées par les autres comme autonomes/émancipées ? III/ Quels sont les facteurs de conversion qui contribuent à renforcer ou à entraver l'autonomisation des femmes camerounaises par le biais des études supérieures et de quelle façon l'enseignement supérieur doit-il s'améliorer afin de favoriser les modes de fonctionnement et les capacités des femmes camerounaises aux fins de l'autonomisation ? IV/ De quelle manière la théorisation d'une approche novatrice et originale basée sur le féminisme africain et les capacités contribue-t-elle à la compréhension de l'autonomisation des femmes et au développement de la théorie des capacités ?

QUI EFFECTUE LES RECHERCHES ?

La chercheuse principale dans le cadre de cette étude est Monique Kwachou, une chercheuse doctorale camerounaise au sein du Groupe de recherche sur l'enseignement supérieur et le développement humain dirigé par la chaire SARCHI de l'Université de l'État libre (UFS), en Afrique du Sud.

L'ÉTUDE A-T-ELLE FAIT L'OBJET D'UNE APPROBATION ÉTHIQUE ?

Cette étude a reçu l'approbation du Comité d'éthique de la recherche de l'UFS. Une copie de la lettre d'approbation peut être obtenue auprès de la chercheuse.

Numéro de l'approbation : *insérez le numéro de l'approbation*

POURQUOI VOUS INVITER À PARTICIPER À CE PROJET DE RECHERCHE ?

Afin d'atteindre les objectifs de cette étude, la chercheuse cible vingt (20) étudiantes du troisième cycle inscrites dans quatre (4) établissements publics d'enseignement supérieur au Cameroun, lesquelles peuvent offrir une perspective approfondie de leurs expériences avec l'enseignement supérieur, et dire si et comment leurs études supérieures ont contribué à leur autonomisation. Les participantes sont invitées à participer à cette étude parce qu'elles correspondent aux critères suivants :

- être une femme camerounaise adulte (âgée de 18 ans et capable de donner son consentement légal) ;
- être étudiante de troisième cycle inscrite en bonne et due forme et ayant effectué au moins un semestre dans l'une des institutions supérieures suivantes : Université de Yaoundé I, Université de Buéa, Université de Ngaoundéré, ENS Bamili ;
- être disponible et disposée à consacrer du temps à un entretien de récit de vie approfondi d'environ trois à quatre heures (réalisé en une journée avec des pauses) et à participer à une séance de groupe de discussion à la date convenue.

À travers un appel à participation lancé sur les campus avec l'autorisation des administrations concernées, les participantes sont invitées à contacter la chercheuse pour manifester leur intérêt et seront ensuite contactées suivant leur ordre d'arrivée.

EN QUOI CONSISTE LA PARTICIPATION À CETTE ÉTUDE ?

Les participantes devront :

1. donner leur consentement formel pour participer à cette recherche. Cette recherche se sert à la fois des entretiens de récit de vie et des groupes de discussion interactifs pour la collecte de données. Toute information biographique partagée restera entre vous et la chercheuse. Dans les écrits de la chercheuse portant sur l'étude, un pseudonyme sera utilisé à la place de votre vrai nom pour que personne ne puisse vous identifier. La participation à cette recherche est volontaire. Si, au cours des entretiens, vous souhaitez ne plus continuer, vous pouvez interrompre votre participation à tout moment et retirer votre consentement. Si vous n'êtes pas satisfaite de la façon dont la recherche est menée, vous pouvez contacter ma directrice de recherche, la professeure Melanie Walker, par courriel (walkermj@ufs.ac.za) et en discuter avec elle. Si des problèmes personnels surviennent pendant la recherche, je mettrai tout en œuvre afin de vous adresser à une personne qualifiée qui



pourra vous aider.

2. prendre le temps de participer activement aux entretiens de récit de vie. Ces entretiens se dérouleront à l'endroit où vous jugerez être le plus à l'aise. Compte tenu de la portée et de la profondeur des entretiens de récit de vie, l'entretien en entier peut prendre de trois à quatre heures. Cependant, la participante peut demander des pauses au cours de l'entretien. Au cours de ce dernier, il vous sera demandé de partager l'histoire de votre vie, notamment en ce qui concerne vos expériences avec l'enseignement supérieur.

3. participer à un groupe de discussion avec d'autres participantes à la recherche. Plus tard, à un jour, une heure et un lieu convenus, une séance de groupe de discussion avec toutes les vingt participantes sera organisée et vous devrez y participer activement. Les informations personnelles partagées lors des entretiens de récit de vie NE SERONT PAS PARTAGÉES au cours de cette séance. Les activités du groupe de discussion auront pour but de comprendre les similitudes et les différences entre les expériences de vie, l'influence de l'enseignement supérieur et la conceptualisation de l'autonomisation.

4. être invitées à recevoir une compensation UNIQUEMENT pour leurs frais de transport, les repas fournis et les frais de déplacement pour la durée de leur participation à l'étude.

LA PARTICIPANTE PEUT-ELLE SE RETIRER DE L'ÉTUDE ?

La participation à cette étude est volontaire et la chercheuse ne doit en aucun cas contraindre les participantes à y participer.

Si elles décident de participer, une copie de cette fiche de renseignements leur sera délivrée ainsi qu'un formulaire de consentement écrit qu'elles devront signer. Vous êtes libre de vous retirer à tout moment sans avoir à vous justifier et il n'y a pas de pénalité ou de perte de bénéfice résultant de la non-participation.

QUELS SONT LES AVANTAGES ÉVENTUELS D'UNE PARTICIPATION À CETTE ÉTUDE ?

Participer à cette étude offrira aux étudiantes de troisième cycle l'occasion d'évaluer les avantages que procurent leurs études supérieures en ce qui concerne leur épanouissement personnel et leur autonomisation.

Les participantes pourront également raconter leurs propres histoires en leurs propres mots et contribuer au développement de recherches qui promettent d'influencer la politique en matière d'éducation et d'élargir la base des informations qui influencent l'opinion publique

QUELS SONT LES INCONVÉNIENTS AUXQUELS L'ON PEUT S'ATTENDRE EN PARTICIPANT À CETTE ÉTUDE ?

Au cours de cette étude, des désagréments peuvent survenir relativement au calendrier des participantes (la chercheuse devra organiser les activités en fonction de votre emploi du temps et à votre convenance afin d'atténuer ce problème). Les participantes peuvent également éprouver une certaine gêne à partager le récit de leurs vies avec la chercheuse. Cependant, la chercheuse peut confirmer que tous les récits de vie seront partagés dans un espace privé où la participante se sentira à l'aise. Par ailleurs, toutes les informations partagées seront protégées, la confidentialité et l'anonymat étant garantis dans la présentation des résultats de la recherche.



KwachouTangahME@ufs.ac.za

Lesdites conclusions seront par ailleurs accessibles sous la forme de la thèse de doctorat de la chercheuse à partir de décembre 2020.

Merçi d'avoir pris le temps de lire ce formulaire de renseignements et de votre participation à
cette étude.



CONSENTEMENT EN VUE DE LA PARTICIPATION À CETTE ÉTUDE

Je soussignée, _____ (nom de la participante), confirme que la personne qui sollicite mon consentement en vue de ma participation à cette recherche m'a informé de la nature, de la procédure, des avantages éventuels et des inconvénients potentiels de ma participation.

J'ai lu (ou reçu une explication à propos) et compris l'étude telle qu'elle est présentée dans le formulaire de renseignements. J'ai eu l'occasion de poser des questions et je suis prête à participer à l'étude. Je comprends que ma participation est volontaire et que je suis libre de me retirer à tout moment sans encourir de pénalité (le cas échéant). Je suis consciente de ce que les résultats de cette étude seront traités de manière anonyme et présentés dans un rapport de projet de recherche, des publications scientifiques ou des actes de conférence.

Je marque mon accord pour l'enregistrement audio des entretiens de récit de vie et de la séance de groupe de discussion interactif.

Une copie signée de l'accord de consentement éclairé m'a été délivrée.

Nom et prénoms de la participante : _____

Signature de la participante : _____ Date : _____

Nom et prénoms de(s) la chercheuse(s) : _____

Signature de la chercheuse : _____ Date : _____

C. Life-story interview guide



RESEARCH STUDY INSTRUMENTS

I. Guide for Life Story Narratives

According to McAdams (2008) 'The life story model of adult identity is one of a number of new approaches in psychology and the social sciences that emphasize narrative and the storied nature of human conduct'. This Life-Story Interview is tailored following a template developed by Professor McAdams of the Foley Centre for Life-Story Research (see McAdams and Guo (2014 p.17).

Introduction

This is an interview about the story of your life as a Cameroonian woman with particular focus on your experience with higher education; its contribution or lack thereof to your empowerment. As a social scientist, I am interested in hearing your story, including parts of the past as you remember them and the future as you imagine it. This being a narrative inquiry, my main goal is simply to hear your story and your task is simply to tell me about some of the most important things that have happened in your life and how you imagine your higher education has contributed or failed to contribute to your life experiences as a Cameroonian woman.

There are structured questions in this interview and therefore no right or wrong answers. Your narration of your life-story will only be guided by topic sections (see A to E below) to encourage you to focus on key elements of the life story- characters, ideas and experiences which have shaped you. I may, however, ask that you 'say more' on something or the other for clarification and elaboration. Your story may be selective; you need not include everything that has ever happened to you. This is, in the end, YOUR story. This guided only serves to ascertain that your narration covers what this research requires and is completed in about three hours or less. Do you have any questions?

A. Life Chapters

Please begin by thinking about your life as if it were a book or novel. Imagine that the book has a table of contents containing the titles of the main chapters in the story. To begin here, please describe very briefly what the main chapters in the book might be. Please give each chapter a title, tell me just a little bit about what each chapter is about, and say a word or two about how we get from one chapter to the next. As a storyteller here, what you want to do is to give me an overall plot summary of your story, going chapter by chapter. You may have as many chapters as you want, but I would suggest having between about three and eight of them. We will want to spend no more than about 30 minutes on this first section of the interview, so please keep your descriptions of the chapters relatively brief.

B. Key Scenes in the Life Story

Now that you have described the overall plot outline for your life, I would like you to focus in on a few key scenes that stand out in the story of your life as Cameroonian woman and graduate student. Consider a key scene to be a moment in your life story that stands out for



a particular reason – perhaps because it was especially good or bad, particularly life-changing, or contributed a great deal to who you are or who you would like to become. For each key event we will consider, I ask that you describe in detail what happened, when and where it happened, who was involved, and what you were thinking and feeling in the event. In addition, I ask that you tell me why you think this particular scene is important or significant in your life. What does the scene say about you as a person? Please be specific.

C. Future Script

Your life story includes key chapters and scenes from your past, as you have described them, and it also includes how you see or imagine your future. Please describe what you see to be the next chapter in your life. What is going to come next in your life story? Please describe your plans, dreams, or hopes for the future. How have they been shaped by the key scenes and previous chapters you mentioned? Do you think your previous chapters- particularly higher education experiences will enable you to accomplish what you hope to in the future? How so?

D. Challenges

Looking back over your entire life, please identify and describe what you consider to be the greatest challenges you have faced in your life. Please limit the challenges to no more than five. For each, you would state: What is or was the challenge or problem? How did the challenge or problem develop? How did you address or how are you presently dealing with this challenge or problem? What is the significance of this challenge or problem in your own life story?

E. Personal Ideology and Reflection

Now, I would like you to share with me your fundamental beliefs, values and reflections on your status as a Cameroonian woman.

As you share, please what you feel is important to you for living a life of value. What guides your approach to life, your approach political and/or social issues? Are there particular social issues or causes about which you feel strongly? Would you describe yourself as empowered or not? Please explain.

What else can you tell me that would help me understand your most fundamental beliefs and values about life and the world? What else can you tell me that would help me understand your overall philosophy of life?

Looking back over your entire life story with all its chapters, scenes, and challenges, and extending back into the past and ahead into the future, what would you say has contributed most to your current status and personal ideology? Has your higher education had any influence? Please explain.

Finally, I'm wondering if you might reflect for one last moment about what this interview, here today, has been like for you. What were your thoughts and feelings during the interview? How do you think this interview has affected you? Do you have any other comments about the interview process?

OUTILS DE LA RECHERCHE

I- Guide de narration des récits de vie

Selon McAdams (2008), « le modèle de récit de vie axé sur l'identité d'adulte relève d'un certain nombre d'approches nouvelles en psychologie et en sciences sociales qui mettent l'accent sur la narration et la nature du comportement humain construit autour de récits ». Le présent Entretien de récit de vie est basé sur un modèle développé par le professeur McAdams du Foley Center for Life-Story Research (cf. McAdams et Guo, 2014, p. 17).

Introduction

Le présent exercice est un entretien sur l'histoire de votre vie en tant que femme camerounaise, avec un accent particulier sur votre expérience avec les études supérieures ainsi que la contribution ou non de celles-ci à votre autonomisation. En tant que chercheuse en sciences sociales, je suis intéressée par votre histoire, y compris certaines parties du passé dont vous vous souvenez et l'avenir tel que vous l'envisagez. Ceci étant une enquête narrative, mon objectif principal est simplement d'écouter votre récit et la tâche qui est la vôtre consiste simplement à me parler de certaines des choses les plus importantes qui se sont passées dans votre vie et de la façon dont les études supérieures ont contribué à ou entravé vos expériences de vie en tant que femme camerounaise.

Cet entretien est composé de questions structurées, il n'y a donc pas de bonnes ou de mauvaises réponses. Votre narration portant sur votre récit de vie ne sera guidée que par des sections thématiques (cf. A à E ci-dessous) afin de vous permettre de vous concentrer sur les éléments clés du récit de vie : les personnages, les idées et les expériences qui ont fait de vous ce que vous êtes. Cependant, je pourrais vous demander de m'en « dire plus » au sujet d'une chose ou d'une autre pour avoir des éclaircissements et des précisions. Votre histoire peut être sélective ; vous n'avez pas besoin d'inclure tout ce qui vous est déjà arrivé. Après tout, il s'agit de VOTRE histoire. Ce guide ne sert qu'à s'assurer de ce que votre récit couvre les éléments requis pour cette recherche et que l'entretien soit terminé en trois heures environ, voire moins. Avez-vous des questions ?

A. La vie en chapitres

Commencez par envisager votre vie comme un livre ou un roman. Imaginez que le livre contient une table des matières comportant les titres des principaux chapitres de l'histoire. Pour commencer, veuillez décrire très brièvement ce qui pourrait constituer les principaux chapitres dudit livre. Veuillez donner un titre à chaque chapitre, parlez-moi un tout petit peu de la teneur de chaque chapitre et dites-moi un mot ou deux sur comment intervient la transition d'un chapitre à l'autre. En tant que narratrice ici, il faudra chercher à me donner un résumé général de votre histoire, chapitre après chapitre. Vous pouvez diviser le récit en autant de chapitres que vous le désirez, mais je vous suggère d'en avoir entre trois et huit. Il serait préférable de ne pas consacrer plus de 30 minutes à cette première partie de l'entretien, veuillez donc à ce que vos descriptions des chapitres soient relativement brèves.

B. Moments clés du Récit de vie

Les grandes lignes de l'histoire votre vie ayant été décrites, j'aimerais que vous vous concentrerez sur quelques moments clés qui se démarquent dans le récit de votre vie de Camerounaise et d'étudiante de troisième cycle. Un moment clé pourrait se définir comme un moment qui se démarque dans l'histoire de votre vie pour une raison particulière (peut-être parce que l'expérience était particulièrement bonne, mauvaise, bouleversante ou a contribué de manière significative à la construction de votre personnalité ou de la personne que vous souhaitez devenir). Pour chaque événement clé que nous envisagerons, veuillez décrire en détail ce qui s'est passé, quand et où l'événement s'est produit, qui était impliqué et ce que vous pensiez et ressentiez au cours de l'événement. De plus, je souhaiterais savoir pourquoi vous pensez que cette scène en particulier est importante ou significative dans votre vie. Que révèle cette scène à votre sujet en tant que personne ? Soyez précis s'il vous plaît.

C. Script sur l'avenir

Votre récit de vie comprend des chapitres et des scènes clés de votre passé, tels que vous les avez décrits, ainsi que la façon dont vous envisagez ou imaginez votre avenir. Veuillez décrire ce que vous pensez être le prochain chapitre de votre vie. Quelle est la prochaine étape dans l'histoire de votre vie ? Veuillez décrire vos projets, vos rêves ou vos espoirs pour l'avenir. Comment ont-ils été façonnés par les scènes clés et les chapitres précédents que vous avez évoqués ? Pensez-vous que les chapitres précédents, en particulier les expériences liées aux études supérieures, vous permettront d'accomplir vos rêves dans le futur ? De quelle manière ?

D. Défis

En repensant à toute votre vie, veuillez identifier et décrire ce que vous considérez comme les plus grands défis auxquels vous avez été confrontée. Veuillez limiter le nombre de défis à cinq au plus. Pour chacun d'eux, pourriez-vous dire : Quel est ou était le défi ou le problème ? Comment ledit défi ou problème a-t-il évolué ? Comment avez-vous fait face ou comment gérez-vous actuellement ce défi ou ce problème ? Quelle est l'importance de ce défi ou de ce problème dans l'histoire de votre propre vie ?

E. Idéologie et réflexion personnelles

Maintenant, je voudrais que vous partagiez avec moi vos croyances fondamentales, vos valeurs et vos réflexions sur votre statut de femme camerounaise.

En partageant, veuillez souligner ce que vous estimez être important pour vous en ce qui concerne vivre une vie digne. Qu'est-ce qui sous-tend votre approche à la vie, aux questions politiques ou sociales ? Y a-t-il des questions sociales ou des causes spécifiques qui vous tiennent particulièrement à cœur ? Vous décririez-vous comme autonome/émancipée ou pas ? Veuillez expliquer.

Que pouvez-vous me dire d'autre pour m'aider à mieux cerner vos croyances et vos valeurs les plus fondamentales concernant la vie et le monde ? Que pouvez-vous me dire d'autre qui m'aiderait à comprendre votre philosophie générale de la vie ?

En regardant toute l'histoire de votre vie avec tous ses chapitres, ses moments clés et ses défis, en remontant dans le passé et en vous projetant dans l'avenir, qu'est-ce qui selon vous a le plus contribué à votre statut actuel et à votre idéologie personnelle ? Vos études supérieures ont-elles eu une influence sur cette vie ? Veuillez expliquer.

D. Participatory-analysis workshop workbook

"Too Much Book": A Capabilities and African-Feminist Based Investigation of Cameroonian Women's Empowerment Through Higher Education

Accompanying Workbook for
Participant Engagement and
Analysis Workshop of Saturday
30th March 2019

Pseudonym of Participant

"Too Much Book": A Capabilities and African-Feminist Based Investigation of Cameroonian Women's Empowerment Through Higher Education By Monique Kwachou (2017448339 @UFS)

Executive Summary of Research

In Cameroon, the Pidgin-English phrase *'too much book'* is often used to capture the notion of being overeducated to one's detriment particularly with regards to women. While enrolment figures show that general education is valued for both genders in most of the country, Cameroonian women soon meet with an invisible line that determines that they have had 'enough' education. This line typically falls at the end of a woman's first tertiary qualification; a woman's education is seen as acceptable and adding value till postgraduate level at which point succumbs to a law of diminishing returns.

This notion of *'too much book'* rests on the aggrandizement of ideas advanced by international development agencies in promoting initiatives to meet global education targets. These initiatives which paint all educated women as 'empowered' women lend credence to the stereotype that a woman with *'too much'* education would be a threat to men and traditional society as a whole (Atanga, Ellece, Litosseliti, & Sunderland, 2013, p10). However, research shows that the empowerment of women by higher education is conditional and not guaranteed. Likewise, the empowerment itself is a fluid concept that must be contextualized and cannot be assumed. The assumption of Cameroonian women's empowerment through higher education, therefore,

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generates two problems; it promotes the limitation of young women's aspirations and an incomplete informational basis for government (and public) judgement of higher education outcomes to women.

This research takes on this problematic assumption by proposing an exploration of what empowerment means for Cameroonian women and the potential of state universities in Cameroon to enable the empowerment they have reason to value. Using the modular format of Capabilitarian applications forwarded by Robeyns (2017) The study develops a unique construction of an African-feminist application of the Capability Approach to unearth a more nuanced conceptualization of empowerment for Cameroonian women which would enable a more adequate answer to the overarching question: 'Can higher education provide Cameroonian women with the necessary capabilities to consider themselves empowered and be considered empowered'?

While the blended application of an African-feminist framework and the Capabilities Approach (which has been predominantly engendered using mainstream western feminist thought) serve as the conceptual frame for this exploration, the following sub-questions drive the study indicating its objectives:

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- i. How do diverse Cameroonian women themselves conceptualise empowerment, and what do they perceive as their most valued capabilities/functionings?
- ii. How does higher education empower Cameroonian women with the necessary capabilities to consider themselves and be considered by others as empowered?
- iii. What conversion factors serve to enhance or hinder the empowerment of Cameroonian women through higher education and how would higher education need to improve to foster Cameroonian women's functionings and capabilities for empowerment?
- iv. How would an innovative and original African-feminist and capability approach theorisation contribute to the understanding of women's empowerment and the development of Capabilitarian theory?

Given the research objectives, the ontological and epistemological beliefs to which the researcher subscribes (i.e of the Afrocentric and transformative paradigms), this study is designed as a narrative inquiry with participants engaged in the both the telling and analysis of their narratives through one-on-one life-story interviews and a group analysis workshop. Participants for the study are a purposively targeted collective of twenty Cameroonian female graduate students from four higher institutions (five from each institution). This is done in a bid to capture levels of intra-gender diversity as well as reflect variations in

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higher education experience across Cameroon's multidimensional higher education system.

This study promises several significant outcomes. By questioning the very conceptualisation of one assumed outcome of higher learning- empowerment – it encourages us to examine what is valued prior to proclaiming its delivery and unearths a ground-up definition of this term which is being widely applied to women in developing countries like Cameroon. With the creation and operationalisation of an original capability application from the merging of the African-feminist and Capabilities Approach (which has been predominantly engendered using mainstream western feminist thought), the study precipitates a more unique line of questioning and answering. Likewise, by engaging the participants in the development of the research methodology (workshop content and analysis of their own narratives) the study raises consciousness in these graduate students as per standards of the transformative paradigm. Finally, the research offers a rare look at African women's higher education experience and an understanding what empowering education entails, supporting this with empirical evidence of participant narratives. In all these ways it would be enriching international literature in this field whilst underscoring how Cameroon's higher education can be improved to best enable the empowerment of Cameroonian women for human development.

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Introduction of workshop

Hello there!

Welcome and thank you for joining me- Monique Kwachou- in this second phase of the investigation of the concept of 'too much book' and the assumption of Cameroonian women's empowerment through higher education.

As you ought to know by now, this research is an academic endeavor aimed at my attaining a Ph.D. in Development Studies. My research questions the popular sentiment that it is good for a woman to be educated, but not 'too much'- this fear or disdain for 'too much book' has been linked to assumptions that the more education received, the more 'empowered' women become and this becomes problematic.

In the first part of this study, you were invited to share your life-story with emphasis on your empowerment or lack thereof over time and through education. This second part of the study invites you to reflect on what you shared with me following an introduction to the theoretical frameworks I'll be using in this study. Why is this important? Well, academia in general- western scholars particularly- have been criticized for the practice of collecting indigenous knowledge (such as the original perspectives you shared with me) and returning to their 'ivory towers' to assess that information with no appreciation for context and little engagement with nor benefit to those who provided that

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information. As an African-feminist scholar, I wouldn't want to repeat such a practice. I am thus inviting you to learn about the theoretical frameworks guiding my research so you are privy to the same information I am and can equally contribute to the analysis of your life-story and the extent of higher educations impact with this new knowledge/consciousness. The aim of this workshop is therefore threefold;

- i. First to introduce you to knowledge of African Feminisms and the Capability Approach- theoretical frameworks which I am using to interrogate the problem at hand and examine the information you shared with me to determine what empowerment means to you as a Cameroonian woman, as well as if and how the education you received has impacted you in a way that can be considered empowering.
- ii. Secondly, the workshop aims to engage you in the research process with use of this workbook and participation in exercises which you all suggested at the end of your one-on-one interviews.
- iii. Last but not least, by bringing together all twenty of you- participants from different universities varying educational, linguistic, religious and economic backgrounds- this workshop attempts to create a space for discussion on what similarities and differences abound in our experience of being women- higher educated women in Cameroon.

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As you all are graduate students either engaged in your own research studies or about to be, I hope you can learn from participating in my study in this way. Thank you once more for your willingness to participate

Rules of Workshop Engagement

As per consent forms signed earlier on, you are all participating in this second stage of the research willingly. Please be reminded of the following rules stipulated for participation at this stage:

1- Please note that personal information shared during the life-story interviews will NOT be shared during this workshop. You are not called upon to share any details of life-story here. You are to reflect on your life-stories individually, making notes in this workbook following exposition to the research frameworks being employed in this study.

2- Please note that as per the ethics of this study, participants' identities are to be protected as much as possible. At your one-on-one interviews each of you proposed pseudonyms you would like to be identified as, you are encouraged to use those pseudonyms to introduce yourself at this workshop if you prefer (write them on the name tags and the cover of this workbook). Nevertheless, no

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personal information need be shared here to precipitate concern for identification.

3- Each of you are expected to respect this workshop as a co-learning space where all questions and answers are welcome. No discrimination, abuse or disrespect of fellow participants will be tolerated.

4- This workshop is to run from 9:30 am to 4pm (GMT +1) on Saturday 30th March 2019. You are expected to pay attention to the lesson introducing you to concepts for analysis and actively engage in exercises so we respect time and complete the workshop successfully.

5- Finally, you are to note that as participants you shall receive compensation for cost of transportation/displacement, a stipend for time sacrificed to the workshop, and meals. This stipend is not a 'salary' to avoid influencing the decisions of those who choose to partake in the study.

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Workshop Programme

9:00am – 10:00 am

I. Introduction

- a. Arrival of participants and sign-in
- b. Renewed confirmation of consent, reading of introduction to workshop and rules of engagement over breakfast.
- c. Introduction of facilitators
- d. Icebreaker exercise

10:00am – 11:30am

II. Presentation/Lesson on Research Methodology and Theoretical Frameworks

(You are encouraged to jot down any thoughts/questions that come to you in the course of the presentation)

- a. Presenting the Research Blueprint
- b. An Introduction to African Feminisms
- c. An Introduction to the Capability Approach
- d. The Significance of merging both and the Birth of an African-feminist Capability Application

11:30am – 1:00 pm

III. Group Discussion, Self-Reflection and Analysis

- a. In pairs or groups, discuss what you've just been introduced to. Issues you may have with it, practicality of the knowledge etc.

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Record your observations under the Activity 1 section of this workbook (pg.8).

b. Self-reflection and analysis: Try to recall what you shared in your life-story interview; the details of your experiences as Cameroonian woman, your experiences in higher education and your perspective of empowerment. Consider the new concepts and theoretical frameworks you have been introduced to today to carry out your own analysis in the Activity 2 response section of this workbook (pg.9 -10). Please use examples that can be identified from your life story.

c. Reconceptualizing Empowerment: considering your new knowledge of African Feminist thought and the Capability Approach, would you like to review the definition of empowerment you gave at your interview? (Respond in Activity 3 section- pg. 11)

1:00- 1:45pm

IV. Lunch Break

1:45- 3:40 pm

V. Participant Suggested Exercises

Assorted Written, Oral and Visual Exercises Suggested by Participants for Deliberation on women's empowerment, 'over-education' and the higher education experience in Cameroon.

1:45- Ice Breaker – Line Game (Activity suggested by participant)

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Activity 4:

Use the timeline to map your life journey noting points of disempowerment and empowerment and what contributed to those high/low points.

Activity 5:

Grading your empowerment. Using the infographic figure in Activity 5, depict how empowered you perceive you are and to what you attribute your empowerment or the lack thereof.

Activity 6:

Using the figures in Activity 6 section outline the different types of power you recognize and value– fill in each figure to represent how much of each power you perceive you have.

Activity 7:

In pairs or groups, discuss your experiences of inequality? In activity section 7 outline what you similarities and differences you observed. Outline in what ways are you less or more empowered than another? Coloring in the figures illustrate what forms of inequalities are most common to you

Activity 8:

Use the 'report card' in activity section 8 to evaluate the higher education you have received.

3:45- 4:00pm

VI. Conclusion and Disbursement of Stipends

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Activity 1 Response Section:

What issues, thoughts, questions or observations were raised in your group discussion

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Activity 2 Response Section:

Using your new knowledge on African feminisms and the Capability Approach, do a
brief analysis of your empowerment through higher education vis a vis your life story
and experiences

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Example of life experience	
Under an African feminist lens	Considered from a Capability Approach perspective

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Activity 3 Response Section:

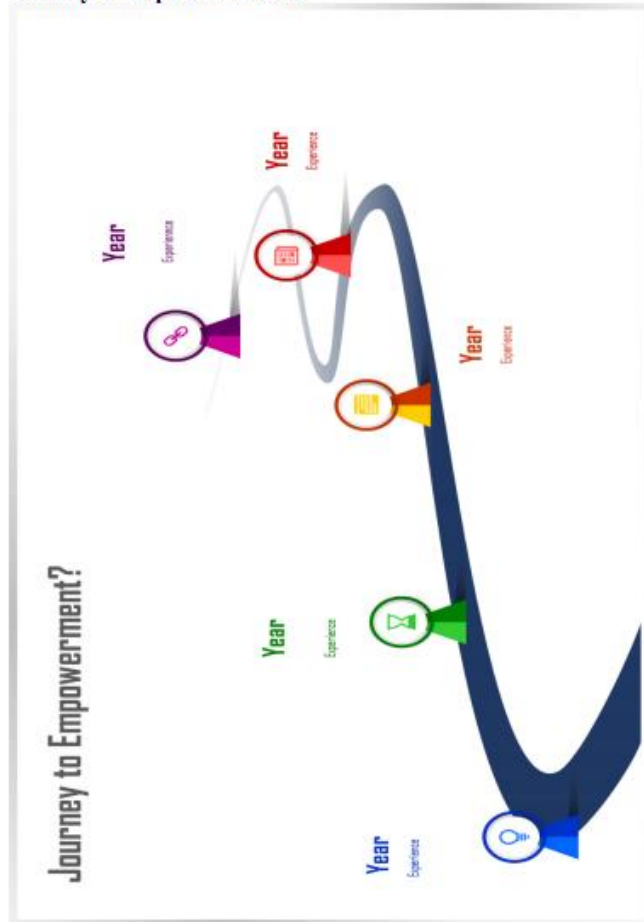
Considering your exposure to African feminist thought and the concepts of the Capability Approach, how would you define empowerment now? What stands out for you?



A new definition?

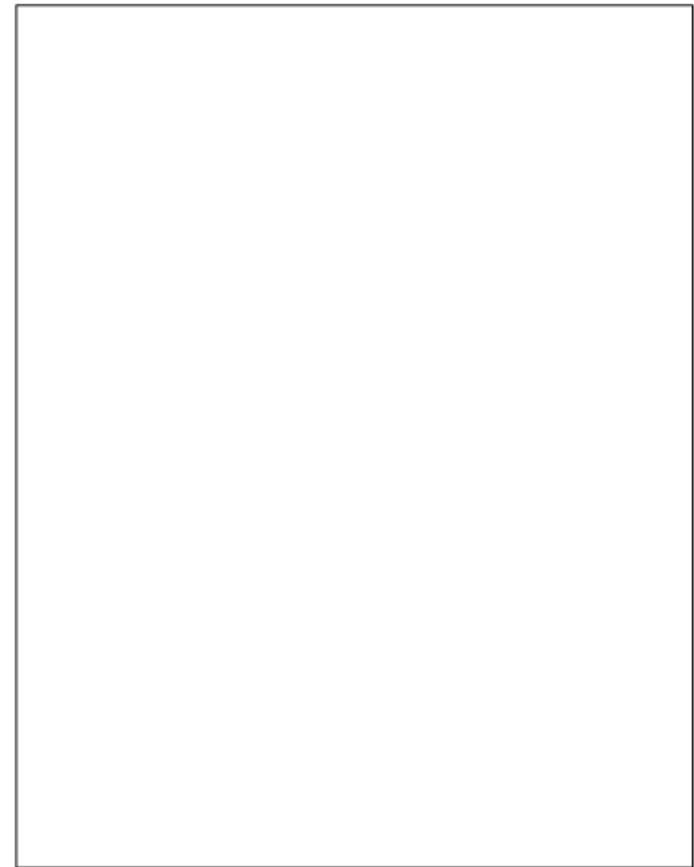
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Activity 4 Response Section:



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In case you need more room for your timeline...



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Activity 5 Response Section:

How would you grade your level of empowerment?
Illustrate using the infographic



_____ %

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Activity 6 Response Section:

Because its not Black/White


Perhaps you feel empowered in one way and not the other. Identify some types of power and assess your level of attaining each

Type of Power	Assessment
Power:	_____ %
Power to	_____ %
Power	_____ %
Power to	_____ %


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Activity 7 Response Section: Experience of Inequalities



In what ways are you more/less empowered than each other?



Similarities

Differences

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Because We're not Monolithic

Though we are all women, our experience of inequalities range depending on other aspects of our identities. Outline what sort of inequalities you identify/experience regularly. Illustrate and use percentages to the underscore which form of inequality/oppression is most frequent.


Type of Inequality/Oppression


_____ **Inequality:**


_____ **Inequality**


_____ **Inequality**

_____ **Inequality**









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Activity 8 Response Section: Grading Cameroon's Higher Education

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
1. The university education I received adequately prepared me for the job market	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. My university education and experience lived up to my expectations	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. The content of my degree program(s) were relevant and effectively taught	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. As a university graduate I experience less/I am better able to handle oppression and inequalities.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. My university education has precipitated other desired/beneficial opportunities for me	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. My university experience has been crucial to my self-development/maturity	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. Attending university has made me more socially, politically conscious/active	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8. If given the choice I would attend the same university/ study the same program	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9. I would say the education I have received thus far is sufficient to attain my desired ends.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
10. Considering my definition of empowerment, I would say my higher education has enabled my empowerment	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Additional Thoughts/Analytical Points:

[illegible]

E. Example of narrative coding: Dija's story

Table 1: Synopsis/Plotting of Life-stories				
<i>Bio data</i>	<i>Childhood to HE</i>	<i>Initial HE Experiences</i>	<i>Post-Initial HE/Graduate Experience</i>	<i>Current Stance & Future Ambitions</i>
Pseudonym: Dija Age: 27 R/S: single LG: Francophone HEI: University of Ngaoundere Field: History Faith: Muslim Parents occupation: mother is a petty trader	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - In 1992, Dija was born into a polygamous Muslim family in Ngaoundere. She was the first child to her mother who was the third wife, but the fourth child in the family at the time and the third girl. Upon her birth, she is told, her mum wasn't feeling well. So a mere seven days later, Dija was taken to an orphanage called "Foyer de Charité" (Charity Shelter) and left there. - Dija would spend her childhood in the orphanage as she would be there for ten years before going back home to her parents. She was aware she wasn't an orphan however, as her parents would occasionally visit her there, particularly her father. - As one of the kids of orphanage, Dija was enrolled at a Catholic Mission primary 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Dija was admitted into the University of Ngaoundere to study for a B.A in History. - Going to the University was a big deal for her. Though she was still in Ngaoundere, she was staying in a student room on her own and for the first time in her life. This was the first time she felt at home and independent. - Most of what she recounts as notable experiences from her undergraduate years are related to the independence is offered her. She could decide if to cook or not, what to cook, whether to go to class or not. She drew up her own schedule and followed it. - She notes the inhibitions; she was still in a society that made judgements on her if she dressed inappropriately, and she still had limitations as to where she could go and what she could participate in given her financial status. But 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Dija recounts that after her time at the university, she 'felt bigger; she felt that she had taken a step forward, another step forward. So she really felt intimidating. As people had suggested she would be'. - She returned home with her first degree and began applying for public exams for direct recruitment or entrance exams into professional institutions which would ensure her employment like ENS. She wrote several for a few years and gave up, doing nothing but her seamstress work for a while - She then applied for a Master's program to at the same University so she could get a higher degree and apply for even more entrance exams. But she soon had to 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Today Dija having dropped out, occupies herself as a seamstress. She still lives in their family compound. Though her father passed away earlier in 2019. - She shares a room and the kitchen with her two half-sisters while the boys all have their own rooms. - While she shares with her sisters, she cannot say they are close as the children tend to be dragged into the disagreements between their mothers who are co-wives. For instance, the family is currently going through a battle over inheritance following her father's death. Her mother and stepmothers are arguing over who how the inheritance should be shared, based on which wife

	<p>school. And raised by a woman who was a Christian from the South region of Cameroon. The orphanage however invited a Muslim Imam as it did a Catholic priest to hold religious services for the children depending on the faith of the child's family.</p> <p>- In 2003, the orphanage had to close down and with that the woman who raised Dija at the orphanage decided to move down south. She and Dija had developed a mother-daughter bond and Dija called her mother. Dija's foster mom asked for permission to take Dija with her. To adopt her as her own. But was denied and with that, Dija had to return to her parents now 10 years old and in Class 5 (with one more year of primary education to go).</p> <p>- Returning to her parents was a sudden and difficult transition. Dija felt physically ill and couldn't eat for a while. Her foster mum had been her 'all she had known' and she didn't know her biological parents at all. But she learned to adjust</p>	<p>her time at university made her feel bigger and more grown.</p> <p>- With regards to her academic experiences, Dija just recounts that this stage was a switch to something specific. She expected and feels that the university experience would train her on something specific which she could use to get a means of livelihood. That is all that made it different from previous levels of education- this freedom to choose what subject one would like to establish their career with. She learned a lot about one thing- history.</p> <p>- She feels the quality of her education was fine as her teachers seemed learned enough. She however notes that her education was constantly interrupted by strikes as teachers frequently protested their unpaid salaries.</p>	<p>give up and drop out. She regrets having to give up and says she would have gone farther educationally if she could but she needs financial sustenance and can't just continue being a student. So she is devoting her time to her seamstress work and will try the public exams when she is able to afford it.</p> <p>- From her brief experience with graduate studies, she says "undergraduate studies are very different from Masters'. The first cycle is a sort of training. You're trained with a view to obtaining something. In any case, that's what I think. It also enables you to grow: to open up your mind, even open up to the world." The next cycle she suggests is a lot more concentrated and self-led.</p> <p>- It is at this point of her education that she perceived quality issues with the limited course options offered at the University of Ngaoundere. Students can only choose from what is available unless they are able to move to the</p>	<p>had more children and not who is oldest.</p> <p>- Either way, Dija knows her brothers will inherit not her. Depending on what they inherit they would support the running of their own part of the household as her brothers (though younger) now have the status on Man of the house in place of her father and Dija is under their care.</p> <p>- Dija supports herself through her seamstress work and has joined the youth-development association with members of both genders and different faiths led by her uncle- the Lamido. She considers this youth association her second family as they understand and support each other as young people of that society.</p> <p>- Still, outings are not allowed every day as per the Muslim social norms, so Dija doesn't go out much and when she does she needs to ask for permission. It is much more permissible on weekends as</p>
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	<p>and managed to complete the last year of primary school.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - As of her entry into secondary school, Dija's health began to fail and she attributes it to the trauma of being suddenly removed from where she was being raised as Christian, then placed in a Muslim home overnight and having to adjust. - Due to her poor health and financial difficulties, she would have to stop school for some years and resume later. Despite the on and off nature of her school attendance, she did well in examination classes and passed the BEPC on her first try. - Dija struggled to adjust at home but found it difficult to bond with the mother who had left her at the orphanage and whom she had barely seen for her first decade. Her mother had birthed 3 more children- all boys and Dija couldn't relate to them either. - As is often the case with polygamous homes, relationships between the wives and their children was tense and Dija struggled to 		<p>capital or another region to study English for instance, or to Maroua in the far north to study at the Teachers' Training College there.</p>	<p>she and her sisters can go out to braid their hair or visit a family member. Except, in some cases, they use the take the opportunity of going to campus for a class to see friends this is how they have fun, because parties or the like are not really allowed.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Dija hopes to either get recruited to a steady job or to develop her tailoring business such that she can have a shop and train other girls. She says nothing about marriage. But she mentions the need to be financially viable so she can handle her responsibility as a mother - She still has a difficult relationship with her mother. She says till date her mother has yet to give her an acceptable response to how she could abandon her at the orphanage a mere week after delivery and why she treated her brothers differently. Dija has equally asked her uncles to speak to her mother, asking her why she treats Dija with less concern compared to her
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	<p>adapt to the family dynamics which meant she couldn't form close sisterly bonds with her half-sisters as well.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- A lot of this time involved adjusting to this new environment, the dictates of the Muslim religion and the feeling of unbelonging and not being understood. During school holidays, she would cry to be taken to her foster mother who resides in Mbalmayo. She- her foster mom- understood Dija much better as Dija's mother couldn't bring herself to. So Dija would regularly call her foster mother when she need difficulties or problems.- One holiday, when Dija was 14 years old a distant relative of Dija's father asked that Dija come stay with him for a weekend. Dija's father was reluctant but the uncle claimed that he would feel his request was denied because he didn't have kids of his own. During that weekend, while this uncle's wife stepped out he snuck into Dija's room where she was having a nap and raped her.			brothers. The mother claims the boys are more affectionate towards her.
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	<p>- This uncle then threatened that if Dija spoke, she would have problems. At 14-year-olds and given her feeling of unbelonging with her family, Dija was already scared. In her own words "I was not like today's 14-year-olds, who are woke. So, I was too scared. I kept quiet and didn't talk." Despite not talking the rape had a physical toll on her and she fell ill. The uncle bought her antibiotics, which she took in silence and then let her return home.</p> <p>-Dija would not say anything of the rape to her family upon return. She and her mother weren't that close and she had already learned that sex and things related to it weren't freely discussed in Muslim spaces. For instance, she recalled that she couldn't even bring up seeing her first period with her mother. Her mother never discussed it. Rather, Dija's foster mother had already given her some info on menstruation by the age of 10 when she left her care.</p>			
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	<p>- So it would not be until the age of 19, that Dija would inform her parents of the rape. That year, Dija was in the junior year of high school and found herself pregnant for her boyfriend. Dija's mother's reaction was worse than her fathers. Her mother raved against her, threatened to disown her and send her away to the foster mother. She was surprised that it was one of her stepmothers who pleaded for Dija not to be disowned. What seemed to have changed the tide in Dija's favor was that when asked if the father of the child was the one who had 'deflowered' her, Dija then confessed to her uncle's rape to the shame and dismay of her parents.</p> <p>- Dija's final year of high school was spent pregnant. As a teen mom in a very conservative Muslim society, Dija was constantly mocked. It was, in her opinion, the lowest point in her life and she was made to feel so disgraceful that she couldn't bear to go out of the compound at times. The other</p>			
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	<p>wives and relatives mocked- not only Dija- but her mother as well. They taunted Dija's mother asking if this was the result of the education she kept claiming her daughter would have.</p> <p>- Dija's boyfriend who had gotten her pregnant came to see her father to present himself and agreed to take responsibility. As per customary dictates, however, he had to make a choice to either marry Dija or take the child. He opted to take the child.</p> <p>- Hence, Dija continued her education after nursing her child and giving him to his father. The child would be sent to her for visits but stay away from her.</p>			
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Table 2: Mapping (Dis)Empowerment

<i>Participant</i>	<i>Valued Capabilities</i>	<i>Self- Identified Periods of</i>		<i>Structural Constraints</i>	<i>Conversion Factors</i>
		<i>Disempowerment</i>	<i>Empowerment</i>		
Dija	Independence Belonging Financial sustenance	Being abandoned at the orphanage at 1 week old Being uprooted from her foster mother to stay with	Empowered by her childhood at the orphanage where she bonded with people of different faiths, went school from an early age,	Lack of child protection services Muslim Social norms particularly constrained	Presence of an orphanage Policies which encouraged the

		<p>her family away from all she'd known like childhood best friend, the way of dressing and freedom she enjoyed etc.</p> <p>Being raped at 14 by her father's friend</p> <p>Disempowered by the polygamous nature of her family, having to struggle to belong and being dragged into the discord between her mother and coo-wives</p> <p>Getting pregnant out of wedlock at 19 and being ostracized</p> <p>Disempowered by Fatwa that dictated that the man who got her pregnant either marries her or takes the child but not both.</p> <p>Disempowered by limited choices at the only reputable higher education in her region</p> <p>Disempowered by social dictates that limit her movement and freedoms in general</p>	<p>had pre-adolescent lesson on menstruation, had freedom to dress in trousers and play outside etc.</p> <p>Empowered by her foster mother who has remained a constant in her life, who raised her lovingly and who she could communicate with at all times. Who she could visit occasionally and trust understood her.</p> <p>Empowered by her education which took her out of home and enabled her meet her childhood best friend again in secondary school.</p> <p>Empowered by father and stepmother who decided to let her stay at home rather than disown her when she got pregnant.</p> <p>Empowered by her undergraduate studies where she experienced independence for her first time and could feel at home in her own room.</p> <p>Empowered by her tailoring skill which she now does business from</p> <p>Empowered by the youth development association which she belongs to and enables her make new friends and get the understanding and support she needs</p>	<p>in the Lamido community where she moved to</p> <p>Regional imbalance in development and thus limited institutions and options to study</p> <p>Lack of academic/career counselling</p> <p>Lack of access to comprehensive sex education and sexual/reproductive health services</p> <p>Lack of transparency in public recruitment</p>	<p>increasing practice of educating girls in Muslim communities</p> <p>Youth development association set up by the Lamido</p>
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Table 3: Evaluations of (Dis)Empowerment

<i>Participant</i>	<i>Self-Efficacy</i>			<i>Recognition</i>	
	<i>Self-identified oppressions/inequalities</i>	<i>Self-identified Power</i>	<i>Self-ranked empowerment</i>	<i>Empowered enough to...</i>	<i>Disempowered so much...</i>
Dija	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Identified her feeling of abandonment and unbelonging - Identified her lack of agency as a child following her abuse - Identified her gender inequalities. - Identified the limitations of opportunities in her city. - Identified many restrictions and inequalities that disempowered her as a result of moving back into her Muslim family 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Identified her privilege in getting an education - Identified power to speak up for herself as compared to when she was younger and abused. - Identified power to support herself with a trade 	75%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Empowered enough to recognise gender inequalities and the various ways her religion and society oppress her as a Muslim woman - Empowered enough to recognize her need to support herself and to make a trade from her skill - Empowered enough to encourage education for others - Empowered enough to pose as a 'threat' because of her ability to speak up for herself and make her displeasure known 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Disempowered so much she can't move out of the region she's in nor apply for more suitable training, and is limited to applying for government recruitment exams - Disempowered so much she has no hopes of getting custody of her child - Disempowered so much she requires permission from her younger brothers to make a move. - Disempowered so much she has given up on her masters - Disempowered so much she accepts what she knows is wrong as norm and perpetuates gender stereotyping in who she would train if her business expands as a seamstress. - Disempowered so much that she must feign excuses to leave the house and see a sick friend.

Table 4: For Re-storying

<i>Participant</i>	<i>Storr plot Type</i>	<i>Participants Narrating Style/Choice of Narrating Voice/Format</i>	<i>Points of Hesitation in narration</i>	<i>Points of Emphasis/Thick description</i>	<i>Other major characters</i>
Dija	Disillusionment tale OR Voyage/Return. Tales of wandering and the experiences conquered them/ rather than they conquering the circumstances. Disillusionment tale speaks of resignation learned from experience	Confessional- as though she is not supposed to say it, but is resigned to doing so any way	Efforts to downplay the bad things. E.g “we are fine and doing well, no complaints, we thank God. But then her recounting the inheritance battle and sharing a room with sisters she is not truly close with	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Difference between neighborhood where the orphanage was and the Lamido community she moved to when returning home. - Description of independence she valued in university - Her asking her mom how she could abandon her after having experienced labour pains herself - Description of how she and her sisters find ways to meet their friends 	Foster mom, parents, step mothers and sisters, father of her child, Father’s friend,

Table 5: For Analysis of Narratives

<i>Identified Themes</i>	<i>Recurrence in Participant Stories</i>	<i>Examples/References of Identified Themes</i>
Warned against further education/ too much book	Amena, Cynthi, Dija, Frida, Oulimata, Anne etc.	
Perceived as intimidating/treated as a threat	Fifi, Frida, Sasha, Anna, Oulimata, Cynthi, Amena	
Schooling for the government matricule	Dakima, Cynthi, Momo, Frida, Anna	
Over-protection/restricted freedom	Dija, Dakima, Anne, Oulimata, Fatima	

Unintentional/Coerced/Misguided academic choices	Anne, Amena, Momo, Frida, Anna, Yoyo etc.	(Excerpts of raw data too long to be included here)
Corruption in Academic institutions	Momo, Anne, Fifi, Cynthi, Amena etc.	
Restrictions of Sexual and Reproductive Health Choices	Momo, Dija, Frida	
Self-restrictions/ Shrinking in relationships/fears of empowerment/Being too much/Usurping	Amena, Dakima, Frida, Fatima, Oulimata	
Belonging	Momo, Fifi, Dija, Jesurelle	
Need for likability and External Approval/Recognition of virtues	Amena, Momo, Jesurelle, Frida	
Differential treatment with degree	Amena, Jesurelle, Anna, Fatima, Cynthi etc.	
Sexual harassment/advances from teachers or fellow students	Dakima, Amena, Anne, Frida, Jesurelle etc.	
Sexual harassment/assault out of school	Momo, Dija, Jesurelle	
Fear of the word feminism/feminist tag	Amena, Dakima, Anne,	
Benevolent sexism	Momo, Jesurelle, Anna	
Religious influence/ differences	Fatima, Amena, Dija, Frida,	
Coloniality based notions of intelligence and superiority (E.g. arts<science, colonial languages> mother tongue)	Momo, Amena, Dija, Frida, Jesurelle, Anna,	

Linguistic and/or Ethnic identity struggles/marginalization	Momo, Anne, Cynthi, Anna, Fifi etc.	
Economic-class discrimination	Dija, Amena,	
Furthering education out of Unemployment/ as an escape route	Dija, Anne, Momo, Yoyo,	
Domestic violence	Anne, Blessing,	
Fear of STEM for Girls	Anne, Frida, Anna	
Faith defined/consolidated/found via higher education	Anna, Momo, Amena,	
White collar vs Blue Collar work/ trained for the servitude/the office mentality	Jesurelle, Dakima,	
Quality education issues: Irrelevant/impractical academic content	Anne, Frida, Jesurelle	
Entrepreneurship for sustenance “Hustle like you no go school”	Dija, Jesurelle	
Superwoman expectations	Dakima, Oulimata, Momo, Jesurelle etc.	
Hidden curriculum (from teachers and through themselves)	Amena, Dakima, Anne,	
Problems with harmonisation	Momo,	
Problems with standardisation	Dakima, Anne, Frida	
Adjusting or adapting for survival/respect/acceptance	Amena,	

Seeing other women as Competition/not like other girls	Dakima, Momo, Amena, Fanny, Frida	
Adaptive preference	Momo, Oulimata	
Increased aspirations	Amena, Anne, Frida, Fatima, Oulimata	
Marriageability, Wife material, Family Pressure to marry	Amena, Anne, Fatima, Oulimata	
Desiring degrees/titles for respect	Fanny, Fatima, Oulimata, Sasha	
Cookies for 'good men'	Hope, Oulimata, Fanny, Fatima	
Negotiation	Amena, Dakima, Diya,	
Mother/daughter tensions	Diya, Momo, Fifi, Blessing, Fanny etc.	
School as a place for solace/escape	Oulimata, Anna, Blessing, Fanny	
Aha moments from school content	Jesurelle, Blessing, Amena, Oulimata,	

F. Participant profiles

	Participant + Age	Linguistic Group	Region of origin	Higher Education Institutions Attended	Field of Studies	Faith	Family structure	Economic Background	Employment Status	Current Relationship status
1	Amena (33)	Anglophone	Northwest	University of Buea	CST-History + Educational Psychology	Muslim	Monogamy	Relatively impoverished	Unemployed	Single
2	Anna (22)	Anglophone	Northwest (dad) + Western Region (mom)	University of Yaoundé I + Catholic University-Bamenda + IRIC	Biochemistry + Accounting + International finance	Christian	Single mother/ married father	Upper middle class	Underemployed	Single
3	Anne (22)	Anglophone	Southwest Region	University of Buea	Biochemistry	Christian	Monogamy	Lower middle class	Underemployed	Single
4	Blessing (24)	Anglophone	Northwest	ENS	Geology	Christian	Divorced	lower middle class	Employed	Single
5	Caitlyn (23)	Francophone	Littoral	University of Ngaoundere	Industrial chemistry	Christian	Monogamy	Relatively impoverished	Unemployed	Single
6	Cynthi (32)	Anglophone	Northwest	ENS Bambili+ UNIYAO I for 1 year	History (teaching)	Christian	Polygamous	Relatively impoverished	Employed	Single + 1 Child
7	Dakima (29)	Anglophone	Northwest	University of Buea for 1 year + ENS Bambili	Chemistry (teaching)	Christian	Divorced	Relatively impoverished	Employed	Married + 3 children
8	Dija (27)	Francophone	Adamawa	University of Ngaoundere	History	Muslim	Polygamous	Lower Middle Class	Underemployed	Single + 1 child
9	Fanny (28)	Francophone	West	University of Buea	Bilingual letters + Translation studies	Christian	Single mother	Middle class	Unemployed	Single
10	Fatima (28)	Francophone	West Region	UNIYAO I + ENS Bambili	Geography	Muslim	Polygamy	Lower middle class	Employed	Married + 2 children
11	Fifi (29)	Francophone	West Region	ENS Bambili + UNIYAO I for 1 year	Geography (teaching)	Christian	Monogamy (adopted family)	Middle Class	Employed	Single

12	Frida (25)	Francophone	Adamawa	University of Ngaoundere	Sociology	Muslim	Polygamy	Upper middle class	Employed	Single
13	Hope (31)	Anglophone	Northwest	University of Buea	Journalism + Gender Studies	Christian	Monogamy	Lower middle Class	Unemployed	Married + 1 child
14	Isabelle (26)	Francophone	Littoral	UNIYAO I + IRIC	Bilingual letters + International Marketing	Christian	Monogamy	Poor/lower middle class	Unemployed	Single
15	Jesurelle (25)	Francophone	West	University of Dschang + ESSTIC + IRIC	Bilingual letters + Journalism + International Communication	Christian	Monogamy	Middle class	Employed	Single
16	Kelly (25)	Anglophone	Northwest	University of Bamenda + University of Buea	Agriculture + Animal husbandry	Christian	Orphan raised by grandmother/unmarried uncle	Relatively impoverished	Unemployed	Single
17	Momo (31)	Anglophone	Southwest	UNIYAO II + IRIC	Law + International humanitarian action	Christian	Divorced	Upper middle class	Unemployed	Married + 3 children
18	Oulimata (26)	Francophone	Adamawa	University of Ngaoundere + IRIC	Law + International cooperation	Muslim	Monogamy	Wealthy/Upper middle class	Unemployed	Married
19	Sacha (27)	Francophone	Far North	University of Ngaoundere	Geography	Christian	Monogamy	Relatively impoverished	Unemployed	single
20	Yoyo (26)	Francophone	Littoral	University Institute of Technology - Bandjoun + University of Ngaoundere	Industrial mechanics	N/A	Polygamy	Relatively impoverished	Unemployed	Single