

“Wonders and Miseries of a Woman Who Refuses to Be a Woman”:

The Transnational Lives of a Pan-African Feminist

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Abstract: This work explores the life of Cameroonian feminist Thérèse Sita-Bella, who was a professional triple-threat: she was Africa's first female filmmaker, journalist, and pilot. I argue that through her professional and personal pursuits, Sita-Bella was a pioneering Pan-African feminist, integrating diverse political ideas to imagine a more egalitarian world. Born in the 1930s in French Cameroons, she studied in France and became a journalist for La Vie Africaine (African Life), a Pan-African magazine promoting African cultures and politics. Through her experiences, Sita-Bella embraced African feminism, advocating for women's unique needs. Defying norms, she championed gender equality and increased political involvement for African women.

Thérèse Sita-Bella is the protagonist of this historical tale, rife with challenges but also many triumphs. Her life story echoes the tales of many legendary figures who achieved great heights while overcoming hardships. Sita-Bella was a Cameroonian woman feminist who etched her place in history by becoming Africa's first female filmmaker, journalist, and pilot. Born in French Cameroons, she studied in 1950s France and lived in Paris for a decade, primarily working as a journalist. In the 1950s and 1960s, she was a key contributor to *La Vie Africaine* (African Life), a Pan-African magazine promoting African cultures and politics.¹ Her work for the magazine inspired her to embrace African feminism, advocating for African women's unique needs and experiences.² Paris radio stations were captivated by her personality, leading to her employment as a freelance journalist for media outlets like Deutsche Welle (German wave) and BBC Africa. As a journalist, Sita-Bella traveled extensively across Africa and beyond to report on political matters, meeting people from all backgrounds, including presidents. These encounters shaped her Pan-Africanist views as she promoted solidarity among individuals of African descent. Subsequently, Sita-Bella focused on gender issues and criticized European powers and African leaders in her politically charged writings. However, Sita-Bella did not limit herself to journalism. As Sita-Bella's niece, Josépha Mbida Mintsá, avowed in a 2025 interview in Cameroon, while pursuing her journalism career, the multi-talented Sita-Bella also earned her income through modeling, being in theater shows and playing the guitar—passions she would continue to engage in throughout most of her adult life. Sita-Bella also became the first African-born

woman to fly an aircraft, obtaining her pilot's license. After directing a documentary that received acclaim, she also became Africa's inaugural female filmmaker.³

Upon her return to Cameroon in the late 1960s, Sita-Bella continued to pursue her passion for journalism, establishing *Stars*, a newspaper covering culture and entertainment. Despite her remarkable achievements, her outspoken nature led to conflicts with male politicians during her tenure in Cameroon's Ministry of Information. In addition, Sita-Bella was criticized by her family for defying traditional gender norms by choosing to remain unmarried and childless throughout her life. She passed away in 2006 due to colon cancer. At the time of her death, close friends revealed that Sita-Bella was in the process of writing her autobiography in French, titled "Wonders and Miseries of a Woman Who Refuses to Be a Woman."⁴

This article examines Sita-Bella's life through the lens of transnational history, which traces ideas and peoples across borders.⁵ I follow her political beliefs and actions as she navigated symbolic and actual boundaries, shedding light on her multifaceted, transnational lives. I argue that through her professional and personal pursuits, Sita-Bella was a pioneering Pan-African feminist, integrating diverse political ideas to imagine a more egalitarian world. As a feminist journalist, she championed gender equality and increased political involvement for women across Africa, encouraging unity across national boundaries. Sita-Bella defied societal norms by living as a feminist in a time when few African women embraced feminism or entered male-dominated fields like journalism. As noted by Cameroonian journalist Dibasse Tande in his famed blog on Cameroonian history, she was an "avant-garde feminist who confidently bestrode a male-dominated world like a colossus at a time when the African woman was largely . . . confined to the kitchen or the farm."⁶

Sita-Bella was a political activist and participant in an African cultural renaissance and various intellectual movements. Influenced by the Négritude movement, she opposed French colonial rule and aimed to rejuvenate Black pride through her writing and filmmaking.⁷ Pan-Africanism also heavily influenced her political viewpoints, promoting solidarity among individuals of African descent.⁸ Originally from Francophone Cameroon, she expanded her Pan-Africanist perspective to include not just French-speaking Africa but also English-speaking Africa, with the goal of bridging the gap, at least on ideological, political, and cultural levels, between these two regions. Sita-Bella's story challenges commonplace assumptions about how Pan-Africanism operated and calls scholarly divides between Anglophone and Francophone Africa into question.

My sources engage with various spatial, temporal, and linguistic contexts, including biographies, interviews with Sita-Bella's family and Cameroon-based journalists, obituaries, social media, and her journalistic writings. Archival materials from France and the United States, particularly *African Life* from the Herskovits Library, were especially valuable.⁹ I also reference her interviews with French magazines and African American print media in 1959 and 1960, when she traveled across the United States to study women's organizations for her master's thesis on sociology at the Sorbonne. This research informed her columns in *African Life*.¹⁰ Throughout her interviews, Sita-Bella

discussed themes of race, Black unity, gender, and family background, often sharing more personal details with the African American print media, reflecting her comfort in Anglophone environments. A Black American journalist noted that her interviews were “in English . . . fluently but with a strong French accent.”¹¹

I adopt a feminist biography approach in this work, as defined by historian Susan Ware. In so doing, I examine Sita-Bella’s complex transnational life and her embrace of varied political ideologies in envisioning a more egalitarian world. This analytical framework emphasizes the importance of gender in understanding a woman’s life and recognizes that conventional narratives of men’s accomplishment and success often overlook the hurdles women must overcome relating to issues of education, employment, and societal expectations. Therefore, feminist biography focuses on the interplay between a woman’s personal and professional lives, as exemplified by Sita-Bella’s choices and obstacles.¹²

Like Sita-Bella’s perpetual physical movement, I have organized this article to reflect her numerous transnational existences and mobility. I explore the ups and downs in her personal and professional life by examining the accomplishments, joys (the “wonders”), and obstacles (the “miseries”) at which the title of her unpublished autobiography hints, showing the complexity of being a trailblazing woman who refused to conform to long-standing gender norms. Sita-Bella possessed multiple talents unexplored in her contemporary profiles by other authors. Her focus was mainly on her professional endeavors in journalism and filmmaking, putting her pursuits in modeling and music on the back burner.¹³ Thus, in this article, my attention is directed toward her more explicitly politically charged transnational lives. I begin by elucidating her historical relevance, and then I explore her multifaceted lives across various geographical boundaries. Spanning from the culturally rich capital of Yaoundé, Cameroon, to the vibrant City of Light in France, her life traversed diverse landscapes, leaving an indelible impact on each domain she ventured into. In this audacious manner of living, Sita-Bella defied societal constraints, ultimately soaring toward her aspirations. She took her place in the pilot’s seat as the aviator of her dreams, navigating through clear and turbulent skies.

Why Sita-Bella?

Sita-Bella’s life presents numerous important historical perspectives to consider. Examining her life through feminist lenses contributes to the burgeoning scholarship on African feminist history, a subfield of African history that examines African women’s lives through gendered and feminist lenses.¹⁴ Sita-Bella’s life illustrates the evolution of African feminism. Her writings contributed to a distinct African feminist ideology that combines Pan-Africanism with insights into African women’s diverse experiences. Her progressive transnational feminist views merge traditional African beliefs about gender roles, particularly the importance of motherhood, with global perspectives on gender equity, highlighting how African feminism often prioritizes motherhood and

wifedom over Western feminist ideals.¹⁵ Her ability to synthesize diverse ideologies into her praxis demonstrates the complexity and hybridity of her feminist articulations. Despite never fulfilling the conventional roles of mother or wife, Sita-Bella still held these positions in high regard, as shown in her journalistic writings, demonstrating a feminist perspective that prioritized established gender norms regardless of her own circumstances.

However, Sita-Bella was not the sole African-descended feminist to engage with transnational or internationalist politics like Pan-Africanism during the twentieth century. Her early contemporaries included Adelaide Casely-Hayford, who was a leader in women's education in Sierra Leone and promoted both Pan-Africanism and feminist ideas in the early 1900s in West Africa and the United States, and Amy Ashwood Garvey who, along with her husband, Marcus Garvey, was a founding member of the Universal Negro Improvement Association in her native Jamaica and also promoted women's concerns in the Caribbean and West Africa.¹⁶ But while women like Sita-Bella, Casely-Hayford, and Garvey were influential Black feminists, specifically Pan-African feminists, they largely disappeared in historical scholarship on Pan-Africanism, which mostly focuses on their male counterparts.¹⁷ While Sita-Bella did not interact with Casely-Hayford and Garvey, their stories indicate that Pan-African feminism has a long and rich history, often neglected in broader accounts of African political ideologies and decolonization in the mid-twentieth century.

Unlike Casely-Hayford and Garvey, who did not live to see Africa's advance toward independence, Sita-Bella's formative years were during the decolonization era. This allowed her and a small group of educated women to influence this process through their careers. Her contemporaries included trailblazing African women like Senegalese filmmaker Safi Faye, the first African woman to direct a commercially distributed film in the 1970s, and Ghanaian playwright Efua Sutherland, active from the 1960s to the 1980s.¹⁸ Many, including Sita-Bella and Sutherland, aimed to revisit and revitalize African cultural traditions through their work.¹⁹

A growing emphasis on solidarity within the African diaspora characterized the period in which Sita-Bella and her contemporaries flourished. Previous scholarship has predominantly focused on organized movements and institutional structures in the struggle for global solidarity among Black individuals and women of color. Scholars have highlighted the collective (transnational) efforts of women of different African descent who have resisted racial oppression and supported liberation struggles globally.²⁰ For example, historian Rose Ndengue shows how the Democratic Union of Cameroonian Women, an anticolonial organization in the French Cameroons, played a crucial role in international diplomacy and drew inspiration from feminist ideologies. In the 1950s members developed emancipatory speeches and practices within the nationalist movement, advocating for equality within the family.²¹

However, unlike many of her African-descended counterparts, Sita-Bella operated mainly outside of organized political organizations, instead reaching people through her words. Thus, by examining her transnational politics and life, we can expand our

understanding of the unique political perspectives and actions of individual African women worldwide. This analysis explores the viewpoints of those women not engaged in larger movements like Sita-Bella, illuminating how they navigate daily life while pursuing personal and professional aspirations and expressing their unique political views across Africa and internationally.

From Cameroon to France: Sita-Bella's Elite Journey

Sita-Bella, originally known as Thérèse Bella Mbida, was born in 1933 in the French Cameroons.²² After Germany lost control of Cameroon after World War I, Cameroon was ruled by the British and the French, with separate regions called the British Cameroons and the French Cameroons. These regions united in 1961 to form an independent federal republic with two states—one English-speaking and the other French-speaking.²³

Sita-Bella's family background and education significantly shaped her professional skills and interests. She received primary and secondary education in the French Cameroons under the guidance of Catholic missionaries, culminating in her graduation from Leclerc High School in Yaoundé.²⁴ She came from a well-off family, as she received a formal education when boys had more access to it than girls in the Cameroons.²⁵ During European rule, her family belonged to the growing Christian-educated literate elite class in the Global South that worked in white-collar or professional positions.²⁶ In a 1960 interview with the *Baltimore Afro-American*, a prominent African American newspaper on the US Atlantic coast, Sita-Bella shared that her father served as a magistrate, her mother was a dressmaker, and her brother was a lawyer.²⁷

Sita-Bella demonstrated a strong determination to pilot her own future from a young age. In high school she excelled academically while adhering to her family's wish for her to become engaged to be married as a teenager.²⁸ During the 1950s nationalist movements in French and British Cameroons, Sita-Bella chose to study in France while many Anglophone peers went to Nigeria or the United Kingdom.²⁹ Initially directed by the French authorities toward nursing instead of her desired pediatrics, she changed her academic path and broke off her engagement, defying gender norms.³⁰ In the 1960 interview with the *Baltimore Afro-American*, she revealed that while she had no problems with her fiancé, she was delighted to receive a scholarship to study in Paris, which enabled her to pursue her career and happily end her engagement.³¹ In an interview with the *Chicago Defender* in 1960 she revealed that "for two miserable years . . . she stayed in nurses' training before rebelling . . . and obtain[ing] her bachelor's degree in philosophy."³² Thereafter, Sita-Bella was accepted into the French Overseas Broadcasting Company (SORAFOM), a newly established school near Paris.³³

The vibrant city of Paris provided fertile grounds for a Pan-African feminist mindset to blossom, making Sita-Bella a distinctive global figure who came of age internationally. Paris was home to a rich intellectual community of diverse African-descended peoples from Francophone Africa, the Caribbean, and the United States.³⁴

During the 1930s, Paris became a hotspot for African American expatriate writers, artists, students, and Caribbean and African-born intellectuals. Many participated in Négritude, a Francophone literary movement that aimed to protest French colonial rule and assimilation policies by celebrating Black and African culture, heritage, and identity through such art forms as literature and film. Well-known figures in the Négritude movement were Léopold Sédar Senghor (Senegal) and Aimé Césaire (Martinique). Proponents of Négritude examined Western culture and values with a critical eye while concurrently reevaluating African cultures. After World War II, Paris remained a hub of attraction for Black students and intellectuals from former colonies, who contributed to the expansion and growth of Négritude.³⁵

While Négritude focused on Blackness and cultural unity among people of African descent, Pan-Africanism in the late 1950s and 1960s prioritized the pursuit of political independence.³⁶ This approach aimed to foster unity and cooperation among individuals of African heritage, regardless of their geographical location. But most works tend to center men's involvement in the Négritude and Pan-African movements, disregarding women's experiences, who, although not great in number, did influence these movements. For example, individuals like Suzanne Lacascade (Guadeloupe) and Suzanne Roussi Césaire (Martinique) played crucial roles in the Négritude movement, often leading the way.³⁷ Further, works by such individuals as French and Francophone Studies scholar Annette Joseph-Gabriel show that during the 1960s, following the rise of independence movements across Africa, Francophone African women played a crucial role in shaping discussions on Pan-Africanism, including the women journalists of *Awa: The Black Woman's Magazine*.³⁸ As we will see, Sita-Bella's upbringing in a country with a dual European colonial history gave her a unique Pan-African perspective, challenging the Anglo-Francophone divide surrounding this concept.

After graduating from SORAFOM, Sita-Bella decided to remain in Paris instead of returning to Cameroon. No doubt, the multitalented, multiscurious Sita-Bella had much to occupy her in an animated Paris buzzing with the activities of diverse, overlapping African diasporas. Thus, she sought to remain in an intellectually and culturally rich Paris after graduating from SORAFOM (date unknown). Fortunately for her, an internationally recognized magazine called *African Life* was recently established in Paris, and the founders invited her to contribute to their publication in 1959.³⁹ Thus, the twenty-six-year-old Thérèse Bella Mbida embarked on a print and radio journalist career, adopting the pen name "Sita-Bella" for her work.

Trailblazer: Sita-Bella's Impact as a Black African Journalist

African Life, a monthly magazine publication created by Senegalese A. Baye Fall and produced in France, had a readership of around 10,000 during its six-year existence between 1959 and 1965. The magazine has been acknowledged as "the first joint Eurafri-can Journalistic venture."⁴⁰ However, while the magazine had both white European journalists and staff, it was mostly workers of African descent whose reach extended

across Africa and throughout the diaspora.⁴¹ The magazine constituted information on sports, women's issues, and diverse aspects of social, cultural, and economic life for Africans on the continent and in the European diaspora. The magazine's main audience consisted of nurses, military personnel, office workers, politicians, writers, and teachers of diverse Francophone African backgrounds in Africa and Europe. However, the magazine also attracted readers not part of this privileged group, allowing them to learn about such professions as journalism, teaching, or medicine. Therefore, readers saw the magazine as a valuable resource for expanding their knowledge and achieving upward social mobility.⁴²

African Life strove to be Pan-African and promote the idea of a united African continent, serving as a platform for political discourse during the dynamic period of decolonization. But as the independence movements progressed, the magazine and other such similar Francophone African magazines as *Awa*, a Senegalese women's monthly magazine that existed between 1964 and 1973, and *Bingo*, the first African-owned pictorial magazine established in 1953, increasingly focused on a specific country's political situation. They often included subheadings showing readers' origins and addresses, more so in *African Life* than *Awa* and *Bingo*, and readers saw themselves as active members dedicated to constructing new African states. In 1964 about 52 percent of the letters published in *African Life*, *Awa*, and *Bingo* came from Africa-based readers. France-based readers of African descent also contributed substantially to the magazines, with approximately one-third of the contributions received by *African Life* originating in France.⁴³

African Life stood out for including well-known female journalists and specialized sections for women. Initially with twenty writers, including Sita-Bella as the only African woman, the magazine soon expanded to include more Francophone women of African descent like Colette Lacroix, Géraldine Faladé, Géraldine Rabemananjara, Thérèse Kuoh, and Thérèse Diop. These pioneering journalists were dedicated beyond their professional success, with Kuoh even becoming the first woman to write a novel in Francophone Africa. *African Life's* unique combination of political content and emphasis on women set it apart from other magazines like *Bingo*.⁴⁴

Sita-Bella enthusiastically embraced the employment opportunity provided by *African Life*, making her the first female journalist from Francophone Cameroon.⁴⁵ Her initial excitement waned as she ventured further into the realms of print and radio journalism, and she soon realized that these fields were heavily male-dominated. Sita-Bella's colleague Thérèse Kuoh remarked on her personal website that early challenges for African women journalists stemmed from unclear responsibilities and status in communication roles. Kuoh explains, "the role and status of women communication agents were still poorly defined and poorly understood."⁴⁶ Although white French women had been involved in reporting and publishing news since the nineteenth century, they too were the minority in journalism and faced continual sexism in the newsroom, including during the 1960s and onward.⁴⁷

Sita-Bella's and Kuoh's race also created challenges, considering they were among a small number of African-born female journalists in Paris during the 1960s. Upon first impression, Paris appeared to be a color-blind paradise to some individuals of African heritage, like African American expatriates. However, over time, they understood the harsh truths of their existence in the city. Studies on the experiences of African migrants in France have revealed that they grappled with deeply ingrained racism in French society, a persistent issue that continues to impact them today.⁴⁸ In the early 1960s an influx of African immigrants from French-ruled Africa to France caused anxiety among French officials, leading to surveillance efforts and suspicion of foreign-born populations.⁴⁹ Despite early instances of interracial violence, violent actions by the French state against African immigrants became rare after 1960, and the state adopted more subtle approaches to monitoring and controlling them.⁵⁰ Thus, many migrants of African descent struggled with Black subordination and became more cognizant of racism in France during the 1950s and 1960s.⁵¹

But Sita-Bella proceeded with enthusiasm as she confronted gendered and racial boundaries in France and beyond. One of her biographical profiles discloses her attitude and composure upon entering the white- and male-dominated world of journalism: "Without aggression or shyness, she does not hide her desire to learn the profession and quickly understands that an African, in this jungle, will have to assert herself."⁵² Her unique position also helped Sita-Bella form a strong bond with other such African female journalists as her colleague Géraldine Faladé, from Benin. Both women were brought together by their employment at *African Life* and remained lifelong friends (Faladé later authored the 2020 profile on Sita-Bella in *Unruly! African Women Who Were Ahead of Their Times!*).⁵³ Faladé attested that because Sita-Bella was the first female African journalist to join *African Life*, she commanded respect and admiration from her experienced white European counterparts, solidifying her position as a formidable Black colleague.⁵⁴ Despite this, Sita-Bella did not simply conform to the norms. She collaborated with Faladé to push for change. Fueled by a common desire to confront male dominance, both women bravely tackled the press industry by supporting female journalists and breaking racial barriers in France.⁵⁵ Faladé fondly remembers saying in a 2021 interview with *Le Monde*, a French newspaper, "We were the only two African [female] journalists. . . . We were all fired up. We went wherever we wanted, no one bothered us, we were even given tips [on newsworthy events]."⁵⁶

As for Sita-Bella, she first voiced her opinions and perspectives in the dedicated women's sections she created in *African Life*. Her use of the women's section to stoke women's political involvement mirrored the practices of other women journalists of the time who used pseudonyms in France and beyond.⁵⁷ In Africa, women journalists similarly developed and used their dedicated women's sections to rally women's support for various political causes and organizations.⁵⁸ Thus, it is probable that Sita-Bella, who referenced Cameroonian newspapers in her writing in France, was inspired by dedicated newspaper women's sections in Cameroon, like Clara Yondo's "Letters to Auntie Clara," which was influenced by Theresa Ogumbiy's column in the *Daily Times*, a newspaper

from Nigeria (Ogumbiy's column addressed topics of interest to women, like fashion and infant care, similar to Sita-Bella's columns, and received reader letters).⁵⁹

Sita-Bella, like many of her African counterparts, genuinely believed that the dedicated women's section of *African Life* would provide a crucial platform for women to shape Africa's future alongside men. In the inaugural March–April 1959 issue she encouraged women to actively participate in the newly established women's columns and express their political views. She also discussed women's ongoing struggles and emphasized the importance of African women's active participation in shaping a Black Africa, maintaining that women should not passively accept the information the press provided but rather should assert their own perspectives. Sita-Bella thus urged her female readers to take advantage of opportunities like the women's section in *African Life* to show their presence and contribute to Africa's future.⁶⁰

However, Sita-Bella diverged from many of her Africa-based contemporaries by specifically advocating for equality rather than solely focusing on women's rights. For instance, unlike many of her Cameroonian counterparts who did not identify as feminists, she brazenly expressed her feminist viewpoints.⁶¹ Scholarship on African feminism reveals that many West African women avoid feminist ideology due to the negative stereotypes associated with it in African popular culture.⁶² But Sita-Bella saw feminism's empowerment potential. It is possible that her feminist journey began when she confidently echoed US President John F. Kennedy's statement during his official visit to France in 1960 with his wife, stating as she reportedly entered the *African Life* newsroom, "I am the guy who accompanied Jackie Kennedy."⁶³ Sita-Bella's comments point to how her unique positioning at the time provided her with opportunities to engage with feminist ideas that were not as readily accessible to her peers in Cameroon. At the time, she was a journalist in Europe and part of a predominantly male profession and exposed to various politicized ideas about gender. In quoting JFK's statement, she gestures to her admiration for his readiness to openly support his wife and thus challenge conventional gender norms for men. This specific instance significantly influenced Sita-Bella and was recognized by her confidante and former colleague Faladé as a possible catalyst for her embrace of feminism.⁶⁴

Sita-Bella the Feminist Journalist

Regardless of the source of her feminist beliefs, Sita-Bella demonstrated her commitment to feminism by advocating for women's education and involvement in politics as a means to progress and equity. In *African Life*'s inaugural issue, Sita-Bella addresses "young African women," emphasizing the importance of education and seizing the numerous opportunities available to them. Although she explained that there had been a significant gap between male and female access to education, she noted that great "progress [was] made in recent years." She opined: "Many African men have succeeded . . . in assuming a leading role in their country. . . . How many women until now have had the opportunity to do the same? Very few. . . . Is it because of a lack of interest in

the future of Africa? No. It is more often due to lack of training and information. . . . New rights, possibilities that many did not even suspect, are theoretically offered to everyone. . . . Young African women, let's take advantage of it!"⁶⁵ As she further detailed, "African women must know how to go beyond strictly feminine concerns, and think about the role they have to play in the social and cultural promotion of Africa. Building the Africa of tomorrow is not a privilege reserved for men! . . . Why are management jobs almost exclusively reserved for men? Women must have access to them!"⁶⁶ Therefore, Sita-Bella advocated that women defy societal norms by veering away from such traditionally female-dominated roles as nursing and instead aspire to enter male-dominated fields like executive positions, suggesting this approach to achieve gender equality.

In additional columns, Sita-Bella also conflated women's voting with progress and equality in Africa as it gained independence. In her May–June 1959 column, she chronicled the history of women's rights struggles from a global feminist perspective. She inserted photographs depicting African and French women fighting for suffrage in their respective countries in the 1930s and 1940s. In so doing, she underscored women's shared experiences and challenges across racial backgrounds worldwide. Sita-Bella also stressed how the enthusiastic acceptance of women's civil rights by Africans demolished the belief of "the black woman [as] a sort of depersonalized slave within the African society, dedicated by man to obedience and work." She thus highlighted the importance of women's activities to society and male-dominated political organizations: "In recent years, several African countries have had universal suffrage: women vote in the same way as men; they campaign within political parties. . . . Finally, more . . . local women are involved in union activities and some are even running as candidates on the electoral lists. But 'the active ones' are so small in number, [women] voters [only] number in the tens of thousands."⁶⁷ She thus wholeheartedly encouraged women to liberate themselves further and exercise their voting privileges, and she asserted her individual power as a journalist to spread this message.

In subsequent columns, Sita-Bella continued to advocate for women's voting to promote progress and gender equality in newly liberated African nations. In an October–November–December 1960 column, "Independence of African Women and Liberation of African Women," she examined the condition of African women who, despite being citizens of independent republics, are not truly "free." The columnist emphasized the growing political awareness among women in urban and rural areas. Sita-Bella spotlighted Amouna Diara, president of a Chadian political group, who mobilized members to discuss voting rights, exemplifying African women's drive to raise political awareness. But Sita-Bella noted that women's liberation was not exclusive to Africa, pointing to ancient Greece and Rome as examples of civilizations that had historically suppressed women.⁶⁸ She thus connected African women's struggles with those of elsewhere, again situating Africa as a part of, rather than apart from, the globe. She ended the column on a positive note, praising African women for their social and political advancements thus far, as they had "already overturned certain barricades that

were erected against the affirmation of their personality. They have their right to vote and can use it to assert their desire for liberation and emancipation.” Such achievements, however, were not enough, and she resolved: “In conclusion, if Africans are to achieve their independence, African women must fight for their liberation so that they can better fulfill their triple role as citizens, mothers and understanding wives.”⁶⁹ In journalistic writings like this one, Sita-Bella used her platform to push for social and political change.

Sita-Bella’s columns demonstrate that the feminism she embraced did not advocate for a complete rejection of long-standing African gender norms. Instead, she emphasized the importance of women’s emancipation through equal access to opportunities while also, in her words, recognizing their “role[s] as citizens, mothers and . . . wives.” In the magazine’s February 1962 women’s column, Sita-Bella showcases the importance of motherhood with a photo of a woman carrying a baby on her back, honoring a long-standing African practice. She reveals that the woman captured in the photograph is Sophie Tarpilga, “teacher, activist of the World Movement of Mothers, whose Congress was held recently in Abidjan [Ivory Coast].”⁷⁰ By using a striking photo of a prominent Ivorian woman carrying a baby on her back, Sita-Bella conveyed a feminist message stressing the link between women’s political power and their roles as wives and mothers. Her feminist stance focused on women achieving liberation through equal opportunities to men and embracing marriage and motherhood. The vivid depiction of women in political actions across Africa reinforced her support for women’s unity and visually conveyed her Pan-African vision.

Indeed, as the February 1962 photo of the Ivorian woman shows, Sita-Bella demonstrated a transnational feminist perspective through both her writings and her travels across Africa, literally and figuratively. Subsequently, her works and travels reflected her increasing focus on Pan-Africanism and African unity. She underscored the magazine’s important role in forging African unity in a June 1961 issue, where she explained, “When everyone talks about unity, it is good that a newspaper like ours bears witness to it, giving the word ‘unity’ the meaning of a collective and fraternal effort.” She added, “When everyone is talking about African solidarity, it is useful to involve in the writing of this newspaper Africans from all walks of life . . . who were not, in the past, used to working together . . . it is not bad to demonstrate it through a newspaper like this.”⁷¹ Sita-Bella saw the magazine as a platform to unite Africans, regardless of location, and individuals who had not previously collaborated.

Sita-Bella showcased her Pan-African focus by emphasizing African women’s political activities and solidarity, as seen in her news reports and firsthand coverage across the continent. The columnist’s extensive research included consulting newspapers from various parts of Africa, enabling her to tap into local, continental, and global knowledge. In a January–February 1960 column, she expressed her satisfaction with “the increasing importance currently given to the women’s problem in Black Africa” and asserted that addressing women’s problems should be prioritized “before considering . . . true national independence within . . . young African states.”⁷² She

referenced various local newspapers to exemplify her point, like *The Cameroonian Effort*, which organized interviews and surveys to explore Cameroonian women's roles. This inspiration showcases Sita-Bella's strong connections to her homeland even while residing in the diaspora, and stresses her individual work to inspire women, sometimes to political action.

Sita-Bella also summarized diverse viewpoints on women's plights from various newspapers across the continent, highlighting her Pan-Africanist perspective. Asserting that the *African Life* magazine may "also have information of great interest to African feminists," she notes its reporting on the social revolution in Adioukrou, Ivory Coast, where customary laws were changed to benefit women's rights such as freedom of marriage choice. Additionally, Sita-Bella discussed the meeting held by the Women's Union from Senegal, where leaders debated the resolution on women's rights and children's education. Aïchatou Diop, president of the Women's Union of Senegal, stressed the importance of gender equity, stating that "the refusal of equality between women and men is not acceptable."⁷³ By sharing gathered information from throughout the continent, Sita-Bella aimed to expand her readers' perspectives and foster a connection to a wider African community. Readers, particularly those with Pan-Africanist sentiments, may have felt they had traveled and gained deeper insights into women's political activities across Africa.

As a journalist for *African Life*, Sita-Bella also physically traveled throughout Africa, shaping her transnational feminist perspective. Her reports included interviews with successful women from different professions, serving as inspiring role models.⁷⁴ For example, in a May–June 1960 column, she shared an interview with Jane Vialle, a mixed-race woman born in French Equatorial Africa (Central African Republic). Vialle moved to France for education, eventually entering a career as a journalist, politician, and women's rights activist. She was a member of the French Resistance during World War II and one of the first two Black female senators in France.⁷⁵ By publishing interviews with such diverse women, Sita-Bella provided a platform for women from across Africa to share their endeavors to promote progress and advancement for women. Further, she sought to present her audience with the everyday realities of African women who dared to challenge varied gender and political boundaries.

Bridging Histories: Sita-Bella's Anglophone Columns

During the era of rapid decolonization, Sita-Bella's attention gravitated toward the pressing concerns of nationalism and independence in Africa, indicative of *African Life's* increasing focus on these issues by the early 1960s.⁷⁶ Despite remaining dedicated to women's rights, Sita-Bella's contribution to women's columns decreased as she shifted her focus toward writing about decolonization in *African Life*, aligning with the magazine's primary focus. As Sita-Bella dedicated more energy to Africa's decolonization, her female colleagues assumed greater responsibility for overseeing the women's section of the magazine.⁷⁷

While her feminist views were universal, focusing on global gender equality, her Pan-Africanist ideas aimed to better represent the continent in *African Life*. This particular emphasis became apparent in the June 1961 edition when Sita-Bella introduced a revamped version of the magazine. In her explanation, she proclaimed that they had taken a significant stride toward the genuine “Africanization” of the magazine “and in the broadening of its conception and its influence.”⁷⁸ Sita-Bella promised that the magazine’s staff would prioritize coverage of North Africa and Madagascar while increasing content related to non-French-speaking African countries. While the magazine had previously focused on Francophone Africa, Sita-Bella committed to covering Anglophone Africa, contributing to its growing Pan-Africanist objective.

Sita-Bella extensively traveled across Africa, documenting independence movements with a focus on Anglophone decolonization politics. She authored a series in 1962 and 1963 titled “This Anglophone Africa That We Know So Poorly.” The series was based on her travels through various modern-day countries like South Africa, Ghana, Uganda, Malawi, Zimbabwe, Kenya, and Tanzania. In the series, Sita-Bella explored historical and political contexts and the struggles of Anglophone Africans in different locations. For example, in a 1962 column she discussed the impact of colonialism, local struggles for independence, and the emergence of Black nationalism in Kenya.⁷⁹

Sita-Bella’s Cameroonian heritage uniquely qualified her to write a series focusing on Anglophone Africa due to her birth country’s dual colonial legacy from the British and the French. Her writing on Cameroon covered Francophone and Anglophone politics, demonstrating her ability to perceive these issues broadly. She probed into the politics of both Francophone and Anglophone Cameroon, exploring nationalist movements among the country’s youth while also underlining the problems they faced, as seen in a December 1963 column.⁸⁰ Sita-Bella dedicated a 1961 column on Cameroon’s political history and the current regime. She spotlighted the role of groups like the Union of the Peoples of Cameroon (UPC), mentioning key figures like UPC founder Ruben Um Nyobé. She also discussed the challenges of reunifying British- and French-ruled Cameroon, highlighting tensions between Cameroonian leaders and students studying in France. She concluded that unless Cameroonian students supported the government’s political opinion, “they will continue to have problems” and “not be very keen to return home” due to fear of punitive measures. Sita-Bella also mentioned corruption and ethnic conflicts within the government, with some of Francophone President Ahmadou Ahidjo’s former Anglophone supporters criticizing his authoritarian rule.⁸¹

The aforementioned columns and others demonstrated Sita-Bella’s ongoing engagement with Cameroonian public affairs from abroad, showcasing a Pan-Africanist perspective. Unfortunately, her views on Cameroonian politics in France had unintended consequences upon her return to Yaoundé in the late 1960s. While she found greater comfort in articulating her opinions in the French political landscape, she encountered resistance and opposition to her varied political ideologies in her home country. This situation underscored the limitations individuals face in enacting societal and political change.

Notwithstanding the obstacles she faced due to her writing, Sita-Bella's work highlights the importance of journalism in breaking down the barriers between Anglophone and Francophone African histories. Contrary to the prevailing belief that Pan-Africanist intellectuals are primarily from English-speaking backgrounds and practitioners of Négritude are from the French-speaking world, Sita-Bella's writing and life choices broke these boundaries in terms of language, culture, and geography. Although Négritude is viewed as a French-speaking "archenemy or offspring of Pan-Africanism," Sita-Bella, a multilingual journalist based in France, bridged Anglophone and Francophone worlds through her work, skillfully navigating linguistic and political differences.⁸² This is particularly noteworthy in an era where the academic study of Anglophone and Francophone Africans is often restricted by linguistic divisions, symbolizing the distinct scholarly communities and research dedicated to these regions.⁸³ However, Sita-Bella's journalistic work defiantly traversed these disciplinary boundaries. Despite her identification as a Francophone African, Sita-Bella's Pan-Africanist viewpoint extended to Anglophone Cameroonian politics and history, illustrating her efforts to foster a broader sense of unity and camaraderie through her journalism.

However, by 1963, Sita-Bella had developed a preference for other professional pursuits, as suggested by issues of *African Life* that list her simply as a correspondent. Records from the magazine indicate that by October 1964 she was no longer on the editorial board. The evidence suggests that by 1964, her interests had shifted to cinema and aviation.

Sita-Bella, the Filmmaker and Civil Servant

Journalism did not fully engage Sita-Bella's attention; her life post-*African Life* illustrated the ongoing struggles of being a professional African-born woman. Her interests varied widely, as her friend and colleague Géraldine Faladé captured in a 2020 profile: "Sita-Bella refuses to be confined in an exclusively feminine world. Attracted by aviation, she took lessons and obtained her pilot's license" in the early 1960s (the exact dates are unclear).⁸⁴ While evidence indicates that Sita-Bella did not embark on a career as a pilot after getting her license, her feat was enough to secure a place as the first Cameroonian woman to fly an aircraft.

However, Sita-Bella is best remembered as a filmmaker in academic sources and in Cameroonian national memory. According to her official obituary, she "developed a taste for audiovisual" work while pursuing her studies at SORAFOM.⁸⁵ While exploring the vibrant African communities of intellectuals and artists in 1960s Paris, her passion for film grew even stronger. She formed friendships with many of these individuals, many of them former SORAFOM classmates from Cameroon and other parts of Africa, deepening her connection to the African diaspora in France. Although Sita-Bella lacked formal training in filmmaking, she was fortunate enough to cross paths with influential African figures in African cinema like Paulin Soumanou Vieyra, Ousmane Sembène, Blaise Senghor, and Désiré Écaré.⁸⁶ Sita-Bella's involvement with

African Life likely also fueled her enthusiasm for African cinema. The special focus on cinema in the June 1961 issue of the magazine undoubtedly contributed to her deepening knowledge, appreciation, and love for filmmaking.⁸⁷ Sita-Bella would soon get to put her love of camerawork into action.

In 1963, Cameroon's National Dance Company toured Paris and performed at the Sarah Bernhardt Theater. Sita-Bella traveled with the group and boldly grabbed her camera, capturing the essence of dance in her groundbreaking documentary, *Tam-Tam à Paris (African Drums in Paris)*.⁸⁸ The thirty-minute film explored the intricate connection between drumming and dance and is considered one of the earliest films made by an African woman.⁸⁹ After completing the film, Sita-Bella gained recognition as the first female filmmaker in Cameroon and Africa.⁹⁰ During the first African film festival held in 1969 in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, her short film was chosen and shown alongside the works of prominent African filmmakers.⁹¹

Sita-Bella's work in filmmaking aimed to promote African cultural pride through such performance art as dance. Film studies scholars like Beti Ellerson and Alexie Tcheuyap have highlighted how African women filmmakers in the 1960s and beyond played a crucial role in preserving cultural heritage through film, contributing to nationalist endeavors.⁹² Sita-Bella's film *Tam-Tam à Paris*, screened at festivals in Burkina Faso and Algeria, is only accessible to the public at the National Center for Cinema and the Moving Image in France.⁹³ Despite appearing twice in the documentary, Sita-Bella herself did not own a copy of the film. The film profiled Cameroonian dancers—over a dozen, including men and women—who wore traditional costumes reflecting Cameroon's cultural diversity. In Paris, they changed outfits from the Sahelian costumes of northern Cameroon to attire representing the Central, Southern, and Eastern regions.⁹⁴ The assortment of clothing spotlights Sita-Bella's Pan-Africanist work in a different form; it embodied Pan-African sentiments by nurturing cultural pride and visually showcasing the diverse practices of her country, including dance and clothing.

After the film's completion, Sita-Bella continued her career as a journalist in France, serving as a Paris correspondent for various media outlets, including German Wave, News Bulletin from Italy, BBC Africa, Voice of America, and the French broadcasting corporation Office de radiodiffusion-télévision française (ORTF), which was responsible for public radio and television service in the 1960s and 1970s. Further, she worked as a freelance journalist for Radio Television Luxembourg and Radio Cologne in Germany. While living in France, Sita-Bella maintained her passion for the arts and helped create cultural projects focusing on Africa. For example, she spent six months at the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization and aided in developing radio programs for Africa.⁹⁵

But Sita-Bella soon tired of life in Paris and eyed a return home to Yaoundé by the late 1960s. One Cameroonian newspaper explained her decision to return: "The call of the land, too strong for her, brought her back to Cameroon. It is in her country that she decides to spread her wings."⁹⁶ Although Sita-Bella lived in Paris for ten years, it was Yaoundé, in Cameroon, that lured her back, as her Pan-Africanist spirit sought her ancestral homeland.

Sita-Bella returned to Cameroon in 1967, entered the civil service, and took on various political roles related to Cameroon's culture and cinema.⁹⁷ She found employment in the Ministry of Information and Culture, where she took on different roles of responsibility. At first, she served as the director of Cinematography Development, using her expertise in the field. Later, her skills and dedication earned her a promotion to the deputy head of the ministry's Documentation Department.⁹⁸

Despite her appointment in the Ministry of Information, Sita-Bella's career was marked by ups and downs as she struggled to find opportunities to use her skills and express her political ideas. Her friend Faladé shared in a 2022 interview that Sita-Bella faced obstacles in her career in Cameroon, partly due to her past criticism of influential Cameroonian men from their time as students in Paris. Being in Europe had allowed Sita-Bella to express her political opinions as a journalist, giving her freedom to be more vocal and assertive. However, translating this freedom into a new cultural context was difficult. As a result, she developed a reputation for being outspoken and determined, which caused discomfort among those in influential positions in Cameroon. Faladé attested that Sita-Bella's "articles had cost her dearly. She had criticized certain men who later became influential figures. When she returned to Cameroon, they did not help her showcase her skills or climb the ladder. . . . Since she did not come from a powerful family, she wasn't able to insert herself into the circles of power."⁹⁹ Thus, Sita-Bella's birth into a well-off family did not offer any advantages in navigating the political landscape due to her inability to establish connections with influential individuals.

Sita-Bella regularly faced antagonism from the Cameroonian government and her male colleagues, which hindered her from fully utilizing her wide range of talents, including aviation and filmmaking.¹⁰⁰ Despite her prominence as a filmmaker, Cameroonian women continued to be underrepresented in film, hindering her from producing more cinematic works. She also faced barriers due to the lack of media support, being absorbed into Cameroon's cultural bureaucracy and labeled a "polemicist" for rejecting roles that she felt demeaned her talent.¹⁰¹ Consequently, Sita-Bella faced marginalization in the Cameroonian film industry and could not direct films. She acknowledged these difficulties, stating, "Camerawomen in the 1970s? At that time we were very few. There were few West Indians, a woman from Senegal called Safi Faye and I. But you know cinema is not a woman's business."¹⁰²

Despite her support for women achieving political power, Sita-Bella's later experiences shed light on the underrepresentation of women in political structures across Africa, particularly during the early postindependence era. While women wielded social and political authority in their local communities through various local women's organizations, very few women reached the highest echelons of political power in the country's national political structure. In the 1960s and 1970s, female politicians and civil servants in Cameroon were rare, with those in positions often limited to women's and domestic affairs. Additionally, women who entered formal political roles commonly faced gender-based prejudice from their male counterparts.¹⁰³ Consequently, Sita-Bella's journey was an ongoing struggle within a male-controlled environment,

including during her tenure as a civil servant. Her friend Faladé remembers hearing that Sita-Bella's male colleagues wished she had "less 'mouth,'" saying "Ah! If she had had less 'mouth,' we will hear."¹⁰⁴

Despite personal and professional obstacles, Sita-Bella never lost her passion and drive to fulfill her literary and cinematic aspirations. She left behind a collection of film scripts and an autobiography she never had the opportunity to bring to fruition.¹⁰⁵ As she revealed in a 1998 interview with *Amina*, a French-language magazine catering to African women in the Francophone world, "Don't forget that I'm a filmmaker. I have a lot of unfinished scripts that I would like to direct. I'm going to retire in a while and filmmakers don't have an age."¹⁰⁶ She also began a magazine named *Stars*, a monthly publication centered around Cameroonian cultures and entertainment, which was short-lived due to financial constraints.¹⁰⁷ One obituary reveals that she collaborated with young journalists during the creation of *Stars* magazine.¹⁰⁸ Indeed, she mentored aspiring female journalists, including Cameroonian Denise Epote, who became a notable figure in African journalism as the former director of *TV5 Monde Afrique*. Sita-Bella, a friend of Epote's father, served as a generous godmother to her. "Sita, which means 'big sister' in several Bantu languages, taught me to assert myself and not to feel inferior because of my status as a woman," Epote attested in a 2022 interview.¹⁰⁹ Such mentoring of young people allowed Sita-Bella to continue making a difference in women's lives.

Despite pursuing these passions, life in Cameroon was not easy for Sita-Bella. Her refusal to conform to societal expectations and familial pressures through marriage and motherhood compounded these challenges.¹¹⁰ Géraldine Faladé explained in a 2022 interview, "Her relatives saw her as having failed to respect the code that society imposes on women. That's why they didn't provide her with the support usually shown to the elderly as a sign of respect."¹¹¹ Thus, she endured a solitary existence in her later years, particularly after retiring in 1996. Despite family offering to house her, Sita-Bella was obstinate, refusing and insisting on preserving her independence. As a retired civil servant, the government provided Sita-Bella with low-rent lodging in Yaoundé where she lived and continued to maintain her autonomy. Though she faced ongoing financial struggles, family members, such as her niece Josépha Mbida Mintsa, helped financially support her. Nevertheless, as a 2024 documentary on her life disclosed, Sita-Bella was mostly estranged from her family toward the end of her life.¹¹²

Sita-Bella's troubles were compounded when she was suddenly evicted from her government-provided accommodations (interviews with former colleagues and friends suggest this was due to political retribution). She ultimately sought shelter in a seniors' center managed by Catholic nuns and continually refused family members' offers to lodge her. Unfortunately, her health deteriorated after admittance. Cameroonian government authorities finally intervened and had her admitted and treated for colon cancer at the Yaoundé Central Hospital. Tragically, she passed away on February 27, 2006, at the age of seventy-three. The following month Sita-Bella was laid to rest at the Mvolyé Cemetery in Yaoundé, a cemetery primarily for the country's most elite.¹¹³

As her 2022 profile in *Le Monde* concluded, “After a lifetime of squeezing her way into unlikely places, Thérèse Sita-Bella’s final resting place seems fitting. . . . It’s a rare privilege for someone who spent her life on the margins.”¹¹⁴

Sita-Bella’s Afterlives

Like many past legends, Sita-Bella was initially forgotten. Despite being a trailblazer for women in Cameroon and beyond, Sita-Bella died in obscurity, virtually unknown to the Cameroonian public. Even her official 2006 obituary inferred that very few Cameroonians knew of her and her accomplishments, asserting that Sita-Bella “dies in poverty and indifference.”¹¹⁵ In a 2022 interview, Narcisse Wandji, a Cameroonian filmmaker, asserted, “I didn’t know who she was. . . . I didn’t even hear any reports about her when she died.”¹¹⁶ However, many Cameroonians have not forgotten Sita-Bella. One clear example is Ama Tutu Muna, a politician who served as the minister of arts and culture from 2007 to 2015, who successfully persuaded the Cameroonian government to create a project honoring Sita-Bella. As a result, in 2015 a theater at the Cameroon Cultural Center in Yaoundé was dedicated to her and named the Sita-Bella Room.¹¹⁷ Her memory was also visually invoked during the 2023 Miss Universe pageant, where the representative from Cameroon donned a costume featuring portraits of renowned and prominent female figures hailing from Anglophone and Francophone Cameroon, one of which was purportedly Sita-Bella.¹¹⁸

Despite being a prominent figure in history, her public profiles demonstrate that Sita-Bella’s life and achievements remain largely invisible. Even those who advocate for her increased visibility in national memory struggle to find information about her, showing her erasure from the country’s history. My research revealed that even images of her were often incorrect and were of someone else. For example, during the 2023 Miss World pageant, a supposed image of Sita-Bella was actually of another accomplished West African woman, Efua Sutherland, a Ghanaian playwright and filmmaker in the 1960s–1980s.¹¹⁹ Despite this error, memories of Sita-Bella continue to resurface in the Cameroonian media and beyond, showcasing her enduring impact as a Pan-African feminist who transcended national boundaries even in death.¹²⁰

Indeed, the life and work of Sita-Bella serve as a powerful example of how an early Pan-African feminist actively translated her political beliefs into tangible action across borders. While living in Paris during the 1950s and 1960s, Sita-Bella was inspired by Pan-Africanist and feminist ideologies, embodying her beliefs through her work as a journalist, filmmaker, and aviator. Sita-Bella’s time at *African Life* and interactions with diverse individuals and activists in Europe and Africa solidified her transnational viewpoints on egalitarianism. Her life, activism, and writings challenge our understanding of African feminism by embracing a conservative form centered on wifehood and motherhood, despite not marrying or having children herself. Sita-Bella’s global feminist rhetoric promoted women’s unity across Africa and emphasized the significance of motherhood in women’s social and political spheres, irrespective of her

personal circumstances. She personally journeyed to the countries she wrote about, physically manifesting her transnational ideologies.

Ultimately, Sita-Bella's story reminds us of the power of individual agency in striving to effect social and political change. She is a unique example of how African women worked outside of collective structures to create change in postcolonial Africa. Emanating an undeniable fervor, Sita-Bella fearlessly embarked on a multifaceted mission to champion her convictions, employing her written expressions, penetrating investigative journalism and cinematic ventures, and ultimately taking flight to manifest her dreams—varied lives—in tangible forms.

Notes

¹Coumba Kane, "Cameroon's Thérèse Sita-Bella: The Little-Known Legacy of a Trailblazing African Journalist," *Le Monde*, August 21, 2022.

²Simidele Dosekun, "African Feminisms," in *The Palgrave Handbook of African Women's Studies*, ed. Olajumoke Yacob-Haliso and Toyin Falola (Palgrave Macmillan, 2021), 3–5.

³Kane, "Cameroon's Thérèse Sita-Bella"; Beti Ellerson, "African Women in Cinema: An Overview," *Gaze Regimes Film and Feminisms in Africa*, ed. Jyoti Mistry and Antje Schuhmann (Wits University Press, 2015), 2; André-Marie Pouya, "Interview with Thérèse Sita-Bella," *Amina* 233 (September 1989): 44; and Kevin Gaines, *American Africans in Ghana: Black Expatriates and the Civil Rights Era* (University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 5, 10, 13. Enoch N. Tanyi, interview with Josépha Mbida Mintsu, Yaoundé, Cameroon, November 13, 2025.

⁴Géraldine Faladé, *Unruly! African Women Who Were Ahead of Their Times* (Présence Africaine Éditions, 2020), 199.

⁵Fiona Paisley and Pamela Scully, *Writing Transnational History* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2019), 1.

⁶Dibussi Tande, "Sita Bella: The Final Journey of a Renaissance Woman," in *Scribbles from the Den: Essays on Politics and Collective Memory* (Langaa RPCIG, 2009), 143.

⁷Crystal Campbell, "Sculpting a Pan-African Culture in the Art of Negritude: A Model for African Artist," *Journal of Pan African Studies* 1, no. 6 (2006): 28–42, 33.

⁸Gaines, *American Africans*, 5, 10, 13.

⁹All references to *La Vie Africaine* (African life) come from the Melville J. Herskovits Library of African Studies, Northwestern University, Evanston, Illinois.

¹⁰It was reported in a 1960 *Chicago Defender* interview that "while in this country, she [Sita-Bella] also collected material on Negro business and professional women to use in *La Vie Africaine*." Ernestine Cofield, "Women Are Emerging as Leaders in New African Country, Says Editor," *Chicago Defender*, January 16, 1960, 14; see also "French African Girl Impressed by U.S. Men," *Baltimore Afro-American*, January 2, 1960, 12.

¹¹"French African Girl Impressed," 12.

¹²Susan Ware, "Writing Women's Lives: One Historian's Perspective," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 40, no. 3 (Winter 2010): 413–435, 417.

¹³Kane, "Cameroon's Thérèse Sita-Bella."

¹⁴For example, Sara Rahnama, *The Future Is Feminist: Women and Social Change in Interwar Algeria* (Cornell University Press, 2023).

¹⁵Dosekun, "African Feminisms," 7.

¹⁶Adelaide Cromwell, *An African Victorian Feminist: The Life and Times of Adelaide Smith Casely Hayford 1848–1960* (Howard University Press, 2013), 1, 136–152; Anneka Marshall, "Pan-African Feminism in Britain: Future Directions for Solidarity and Equity," *Contemporary Journal of African Studies* 8, no. 1 (2021): 21–34, 22; and Robbie Shilliam, "Theorizing (with) Amy Ashwood Garvey," in *Women's International Thought: A New History*, ed. Patricia Owens and Katharina Rietzler (Cambridge University Press, 2021), 158–178.

¹⁷For examples of historical scholarship on Pan-Africanism that mostly centers on men, see: Harry Odamtten, *Edward W. Blyden's Intellectual Transformations: Afropolitanism, Pan-Africanism, Islam, and the Indigenous West African Church* (Michigan State University Press, 2019); Jeffrey S. Ahlman, *Living with Nkrumahism: Nation, State, and Pan-Africanism in Ghana* (Ohio University Press, 2017).

¹⁸Gabrielle Kelly and Cheryl Robson, *Celluloid Ceiling: Women Film Directors Breaking Through* (Supernova Books, 2014), 20–21; and Beti Ellerson, "African Women in Film, the Moving Image, and Screen Culture," *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of African History*, Published April 26, 2019, <https://oxfordre.com/africanhistory/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780190277734.001.0001/acrefore-9780190277734-e-496>.

¹⁹Suzanne Crosta, Sada Niang, and Alexie Tcheuyap, Introduction to *Francophone African Women Documentary Filmmakers: Beyond Representation*, ed. Suzanne Crosta, Sada Niang, and Alexie Tcheuyap (Indiana University Press, 2023), 1.

²⁰For instance, Keisha Blain, *Set the World on Fire: Black Nationalist Women and the Global Struggle for Freedom* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019).

²¹Rose Ndengue, "Deprovincializing the Feminine/Feminist Cameroonian Nationalism of the 1950s: The UDEFEC and Pluriversal Black Feminism," *Journal of Women's History* 35, no. 3 (2023): 62–80, 63–64, 69.

²²Faladé, *Unruly!*, 193; and Kane, "Cameroon's Thérèse Sita-Bella."

²³Jacqueline-Bethel Mougoué, *Gender, Separatist Politics, and Embodied Nationalism in Cameroon* (University of Michigan Press, 2019), 2–3.

²⁴Jean François Channon, "Sita Bella est Morte," *Le Messager*, no. 20274, February 28, 2006, 1, 7.

²⁵Mougoué, *Gender*, 50.

²⁶Christof Dejung, David Motadel, and Jürgen Osterhammel, "Worlds of the Bourgeoisie," in *Global Bourgeoisie: The Rise of the Middle Classes in the Age of Empire*, ed. Christof Dejung, David Motadel and Jürgen Osterhammel (Princeton University Press, 2019), 1–40, 25.

²⁷"French African Girl Impressed," 12.

²⁸"French African Girl Impressed," 12.

²⁹Mougoué, *Gender*, 104.

³⁰“French African Girl Impressed,” 12; and Cofield, “Women Are Emerging as Leaders,” 12.

³¹“French African Girl Impressed,” 12.

³²Cofield, “Women Are Emerging as Leaders,” 12.

³³Faladé, *Unruly!*, 194.

³⁴Kenneth Janken, “African American and Francophone Black Intellectuals During the Harlem Renaissance” *Historian* 60, no. 3 (1998): 487–505. See also, Tyler Stovall, *Paris Noir: African Americans in the City of Light* (Houghton Mifflin, 1996).

³⁵Félix Germain, *Decolonizing the Republic: African and Caribbean Migrants in Postwar Paris, 1946–1974* (Michigan State University Press, 2016), xxi, 1, 5, 12.

³⁶Germain, *Decolonizing the Republic*, 17.

³⁷Tracy Sharpley-Whiting, *Negritude Women* (University of Minnesota Press, 2002), 14–17, 79–80.

³⁸Annette Joseph-Gabriel, “Beyond Négritude: Francophone African Women’s Pan-Africanism” *Black Perspectives* (blog), October 1, 2016, <https://www.aaihs.org/beyond-negritude-franco-phone-african-womens-pan-africanism/>.

³⁹Faladé, *Unruly!*, 194.

⁴⁰Dolores C. Leffall, “La Vie Africaine,” *The Journal of Negro Education* 29, no. 1 (Winter 1996): 56.

⁴¹Kane, “Cameroon’s Thérèse Sita-Bella”; and Ruth Bush and Claire Ducournau, “‘Small Readers’ and Big Magazines: Reading Publics” in *Bingo, La Vie Africaine, and Awa: la Revue de la Femme Noire*, *Research in African Literatures* 51, no. 1 (2020): 45–69, 48; Leffall, “La Vie Africaine,” 56.

⁴²Bush and Ducournau, “‘Small Readers,’” 54.

⁴³Bush and Ducournau, 48–49, 52, 54.

⁴⁴Kane, “Cameroon’s Thérèse Sita-Bella”; Thérèse Kuoh, “Communication,” *Thérèse Kuoh’s Website*, accessed February 11, 2024; Cheryl Toman, “At the Heart of African Francophone Women’s Writing: A ‘Rencontre Essentielle’ with Thérèse Kuoh-Moukoury,” *French Review* 77, no. 6 (2004): 1103–1112, 1103; and Bush and Ducournau, “‘Small Readers,’” 48.

⁴⁵Tande, “Sita Bella.”

⁴⁶Kuoh, “Communication.”

⁴⁷Mary Stewart, *Gender, Generation, and Journalism in France, 1910–1940* (McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2018), 200; and Eugénie Saitta, “France: A Nuanced Feminisation of Journalism,” in *The Palgrave International Handbook of Women and Journalism*, ed. Carolyn Byerly (Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 238–252, 238–239.

⁴⁸Peter Fysh and Jim Wolfreys, *The Politics of Racism in France* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 3.

⁴⁹Gillian Glaes, “Policing the Post-Colonial Order: Surveillance and the African Immigrant Community in France, 1960–1979,” *Historical Reflections* 36, no. 2 (2010): 108–126, 108.

⁵⁰Glaes, "Policing," 112.

⁵¹Tyler Stovall, "Solidarity or Difference? African Americans and the Making of Black France," in *The Black Populations of France: Histories from Metropole to Colony*, ed. Tyler Stovall, Sylvain Pattieu, and Emmanuelle Sibeud (University of Nebraska Press, 2021), 193.

⁵²Faladé, *Unruly!*, 194.

⁵³Kane, "Cameroon's Thérèse Sita-Bella"; and Gladys Marivat, "Géraldine Faladé, Guardian of the Memory of Africa's Pioneers," *Le Monde* July 3, 2021.

⁵⁴Faladé, *Unruly!*, 194.

⁵⁵Kane, "Cameroon's Thérèse Sita-Bella."

⁵⁶Marivat, "Géraldine Faladé."

⁵⁷Kuoh, "Communication."

⁵⁸For instance, Mougoué, *Gender*, 21, 42.

⁵⁹Cameroun Rétro—Photos du Passé, "Auntie" Clara Yondo Tama (1932–2017)," Facebook post April 3, 2021, <https://www.facebook.com/camerounretro/photos/a.719358215601117/824468318423439/?type=3>.

⁶⁰Sita-Bella, "Space for Women," *African Life* 1, March–April 1959, 15.

⁶¹Mougoué, *Gender*, 17–18, 67, 90–91, 194.

⁶²Stephanie Newell, *West African Literatures: Ways of Reading* (Oxford University Press, 2006), 149.

⁶³Faladé, *Unruly!*, 195.

⁶⁴Faladé, *Unruly!*, 195.

⁶⁵Sita-Bella, "Space for Women," 14.

⁶⁶Sita Bella, "Space for Women," 14–15.

⁶⁷Sita-Bella, "The Struggle of Women," *African Life* 2, May–June 1959, n.p.

⁶⁸Sita-Bella, "Independence of African Women and Liberation of African Women," *African Life* 9 (October–November–December 1960), 16–17.

⁶⁹Sita-Bella, "Independence of African Women," 17.

⁷⁰Sita-Bella, "Between Women," *African Life* 22 (February 1962), 27.

⁷¹Sita-Bella, "A New African Life," *African Life* 15 (June 1961), 3.

⁷²Sita-Bella, "The Woman in the Nation," *African Life* 5 (January–February 1960), 22.

⁷³Sita-Bella, "The Woman in the Nation," 22.

⁷⁴Kane, "Cameroon's Thérèse Sita-Bella."

⁷⁵Sita-Bella, "The Woman in the Nation," *African Life* 7 (May–June 1960), 34–35.

⁷⁶Bush and Ducournau, “Small Readers,” 54, 56.

⁷⁷For example, by late 1962 the magazine noted in the issue’s women’s column, “This Women’s Magazine has been produced under the direction of Colette Lacroix, with the collaboration of Géraldine Rabemananjara and D’dee,” “Something New for Our Baby,” *African Life* 28 (August–September 1962), 30.

⁷⁸Sita-Bella, “A New African Life,” 3.

⁷⁹Sita-Bella “This Anglophone Africa That We Know So Poorly,” *African Life* 30 (November 1962), 14–15.

⁸⁰Sita-Bella, “Where Is Cameroonian Youth Going?” *African Life* 42 (December 1963), 31–32; and Sita-Bella, “The Mysterious Mr. Foncha,” *African Life* 24 (April 1962), 16–18.

⁸¹Sita-Bella, “The Unified Cameroon,” *African Life* 21 (January 1962), 16, 19.

⁸²Campbell, “Sculpting a Pan-African Culture,” 33.

⁸³William Martin, “The Rise of African Studies (USA) and the Transnational Study of Africa,” *African Studies Review* 54, no. 1 (2011): 59–83, 65; and Offiong Erete Ebong, “Overcoming the Francophone and Anglophone Dichotomy in the 21st Century to Promote African Unity,” *Pinisi Journal of Art, Humanity and Social Studies* 2, no. 2 (2022):107–114, 109.

⁸⁴Faladé, *Unruly!*, 197.

⁸⁵Channon, “Sita Bella est Morte,” 7.

⁸⁶Faladé, *Unruly!*, 197.

⁸⁷Sita-Bella, “A New African Life,” 3.

⁸⁸Faladé, *Unruly!*, 196–197.

⁸⁹Crosta, Niang, and Tcheuyap, “Introduction, 1–2”; and Kathleen Sheldon, *Historical Dictionary of Women in Sub-Saharan Africa*, 2nd ed. (Rowman & Littlefield, 2016), 105.

⁹⁰Olivier Tchouaffé, “Women in Film in Cameroon: Thérèse Sita-Bella, Florence Ayisi, Oswalde Lewat and Josephine Ndagnou,” *Journal of African Cinemas* 4, no. 2 (October 2012):191–206, 195.

⁹¹This festival eventually transformed into the Pan-African Film and Television Festival of Ouagadougou.

⁹²Crosta, Niang, and Tcheuyap, “Introduction,” “1”; and Ellerson, “African Women in Film.”

⁹³Paulin Soumanou Vieyra, “Le Cinéma Au 1er Festival Culturel Panafricain d’Alger,” *Présence Africaine*, no. 72 (1969): 195.

⁹⁴*Tam-Tam à Paris* is accessible at the National Center for Cinema and the Moving Image in Paris, France.

⁹⁵Pouya, “Interview with Thérèse Sita-Bella,” 44; and Ellerson, “African Women in Film.”

⁹⁶Bertin Onana, “Sita Bella: Journalist and Jack of all Trades,” *Journal du Cameroun*, March 9, 2017, <https://fr.journalducameroun.com/sita-bella-journaliste-touche-a/>.

⁹⁷Ellerson, "African Women in Film."

⁹⁸Pouya, "Interview with Thérèse Sita-Bella," 44; and Channon, "Sita Bella est Morte," 7.

⁹⁹Kane, "Cameroon's Thérèse Sita-Bella."

¹⁰⁰Clarisse Juompan-Yakam, "History: 'Unruly' African Women Who Made Their Mark on the Continent," *The Africa Report*, May 18, 2021, <https://www.theafricareport.com/89163/history-unruly-african-women-who-made-their-mark-on-the-continent/>.

¹⁰¹Tchouaffé, "Women in Film in Cameroon," 196.

¹⁰²Tande, "Sita Bella."

¹⁰³Mougoué, *Gender*, 29, 91–94; and Emmanuel Konde, *African Women and Politics: Knowledge, Gender, and Power in Male-Dominated Cameroon* (Edwin Mellen Press, 2005), 87, 132, 155–56, 168–169.

¹⁰⁴Faladé, *Unruly!*, 199.

¹⁰⁵Faladé, *Unruly!*, 199.

¹⁰⁶Pouya, "Interview with Thérèse Sita-Bella," 44; and Sarah Fila-Bakabadio, "Racially Imprinted Bodies: The Black Feminine Press in Contemporary France," in *The Black Populations of France: Histories from Metropole to Colony*, ed. Sylvain Pattieu, Emmanuelle Sibeud, and Tyler Stovall (University of Nebraska Press, 2021), 158, 162–169.

¹⁰⁷Channon, "Sita Bella est Morte," 7.

¹⁰⁸Serges Olivier Okole, "Cameroon: Sita Bella Is Dead," *Cameroon Tribune*, February 28, 2006.

¹⁰⁹Kane, "Cameroon's Thérèse Sita-Bella."

¹¹⁰Faladé, *Unruly!*, 197–199.

¹¹¹Kane, "Cameroon's Thérèse Sita-Bella."

¹¹²*Sita Bella, la Première*, directed by Eugénie Metala and Jean-Marie Teno (2024; Cameroon: Bandjoun Film Studio), DVD.

¹¹³Tande, "Sita Bella"; and Kane, "Cameroon's Thérèse Sita-Bella." Enoch N. Tanyi, interview with Josépha Mbida Mintsá, Yaoundé, Cameroon, November 13, 2025.

¹¹⁴Kane, "Cameroon's Thérèse Sita-Bella."

¹¹⁵Channon, "Sita Bella est Morte," 1.

¹¹⁶Kane, "Cameroon's Thérèse Sita-Bella."

¹¹⁷Faladé, *Unruly!*, 199.

¹¹⁸Evelyn Ndi and Washira Helene, "Princesse Issie Pays Tribute to Cameroonian Women in Miss Universe National Costume," *Mimi Mefo Info*, November 18, 2023, <https://mimimefoinfos.com/princesse-issie-pays-tribute-to-cameroonian-women-in-miss-universe-national-costume/>.

¹¹⁹Ellerson, "African Women in Film"; and Kelly and Robson, *Celluloid Ceiling*, 20–21.

¹²⁰For instance, Onana, "Sita Bella."