

MAGIC AND LOVE ON THE ROAD TO HIGHER EDUCATION ⁽¹⁾

by

Lisbet HOLTEDAHL
Professor at the University of Tromsø
Norway

Summary : *In this article, I undertake an analysis of the role that Western education plays in two young Cameroonian women's lives: Fanta is Muslim, Therese is Christian. Through an analysis of their narrative about their own education and careers and of the cultural conditioning of their search for higher education. I try to grasp how Western education as a global field of knowledge is coordinated with the local systems of knowledge. In this perspective Western education is currently constructed as a new kind of local «magic» i.e. technique for the assurance of a new legitimate social position for women. This new position is less dependent on subordination to fathers and husbands than the existing positions for married Muslim and Christian women. The analysis also reveals aspects of the process of transformation that affects the female identities as well as local women's networks. The young women are striving with loneliness and they are being confronted with the challenges of the construction of new kinds of women's networks.*

Résumé: *Dans cet article j'entreprends une analyse du rôle que l'éducation occidentale joue dans la vie de deux jeunes camerounaises: Fanta est musulmane, et Thérèse chrétienne. A travers l'histoire racontée de leur éducation et de leurs carrières, des effets culturels sur leur quête pour l'enseignement supérieur. J'essaie d'appréhender comment l'éducation occidentale prise dans sa globalité comme un domaine de la connaissance est coordonnés avec les systèmes locaux de la connaissance. Dans cette perspective l'éducation occidentale est actuellement conçu comme un genre de «magie» local, c'est-à-dire une technique pour garantir une nouvelle position social légitime pour les femmes. Cette nouvelle position dépend moins de leur dépendance vis à vis de leurs pères et de leurs époux que des positions actuelles des épouses musulmanes et chrétiennes. L'analyse révèle aussi des aspects de la méthode de transformation qui affecte les identités féminines aussi bien que des groupes de femmes. Des jeunes femmes s'efforcent dans la solitude et se trouvent confrontées aux défis de la construction de nouveaux groupes de femmes.*

Introduction

People try to coordinate various fields of knowledge, local and global⁽²⁾, while living their everyday life. The construction of images of formal Western education⁽³⁾ and of visions of what such education might mean to the individual and to society is a complex issue. In the West and in the Third World a multitude of images of formal Western education can be found. Most people today either interact with people who are involved in the new formal system of knowledge or they are directly involved themselves. This article gives an example of such image-construction through the life and educational careers of two cameroonian women, Fanta and Therese. They are both born in the town of Ngaoundere, they are both fighting to get higher formal education. They currently experience a very difficult life in Germany and Belgium, where they are living. Still, their families at home think they live in great luxury in the white man's land. The two young women have not been back to Cameroon to see their families for more than two years.

In order to illuminate the cultural conditioning of Fanta's and Thérèse's educational careers I start by giving some information about the recent transformation of Ngaoundere society. Second, I describe Fanta's and Thérèse's educational careers in order to show how these young women acquire formal education. This helps us to understand the differences between the two female careers⁽⁴⁾ We find some common traits : at a certain level their fates are quite alike. For both Thérèse and Fanta there are two local fields of knowledge and so also interpretation⁽⁵⁾ which have a special influence on their acts, search for higher education and, finally, on their careers: The first is the field which concerns one's control with one's position in the society. Most of this knowledge would most probably be included in the Western term «magic» in an effort to translate from the Cameroonian context to the Western one, as well as in most anthropological literature⁽⁶⁾. The other field of knowledge is the one which concerns male - female relationship including the criteria for the establishment of a legitimate husband and wife relationship. In most western anthropological literature the category which is used to translate this field is "marriage". But today, and it is one of the arguments in this article, one could as well propose the western term "love"⁽⁷⁾.

Finally, I discuss the careers in the light of contextual factors which influence their life careers as Cameroonian women who pursue higher education⁽⁸⁾. The examination of the impact of Western education and how the formal education and knowledge are changing the perceptions and the concrete lives of the two young women should reveal to us images of Western education that are constructed by Therese and Fanta and their families. It also represents an interesting approach to the study of the transformation of

Cameroonian women's identities today. As is evident, Fanta's and Therese's acquisition of higher education implies conflicts in as well as disconnection from the local traditional networks. This includes women's networks, in which their identities are anchored. The young women experience many dilemmas as they struggle to convert their search for higher education to a social position which allows new legitimate identities and the creation of alternative networks.

Ngaoundéré town - recent developments in the relationship between social stratification and transfer of knowledge

The local principles of stratification as well as ideas about womanhood and manhood in Ngaoundéré are changing. This change can be seen as part of the current redefinition of values attributed to various resources. Different kinds of knowledge that people have and can be offered on the new market of knowledge⁽⁹⁾. Certainly people's own experience from trying to convert their old and new competence on this market will have a feedback effect on their strategies and careers. So will the current redefinitions of access rules to this market that people meet.

Ngaoundéré⁽¹⁰⁾ is today the center of the Province of Adamaoua in the northern part of the Republic of Cameroon. By the end of the last century the dominant ethnic group in Adamaoua, the Mboum population, and other agricultural groups as the Ndi and the Gbaya⁽¹¹⁾ which were animists, had slowly been subjected to the hegemony of the expanding Muslim Fulani⁽¹²⁾. A strongly hierarchical society was created where control over other people's access to the knowledge of Islam was necessary for being on top of the society⁽¹³⁾. Apart from the formal, written religious knowledge transmitted in the Arabic texts of the Koran and other scriptures controlled by the Fulani through their religious specialists, the educational systems and cultural reproduction of all the groups were based on oral transmission.

From the beginning of our century Ngaoundere town has experienced progressive Islamization and Christianization colored by various traits of syncretism. The German and the French colonizations were followed by Protestant and Catholic missionary activities. The social stratification processes before and after independence have been strongly influenced by the introduction of a formal Western system of education⁽¹⁴⁾. Some of the former subordinate groups, the Gbaya and the Ndi, who got the lowest position under Fulani hegemony, were the first to acquire this form of knowledge because their poverty made them the target groups of the missions⁽¹⁵⁾. Male Christians, who were also the first to acquire higher education, quickly got access to the new power positions in the bureaucracy of the young state. In this transformation process the former power resources of the Muslim elite :

Religious knowledge, economic resources and political control, have been weakened as have the access they gave to influential positions⁽¹⁶⁾.

It is important to note that whereas formal Western education 10 to 15 years ago resulted in well paid jobs, today more and more young people with formal Western education do not get jobs⁽¹⁷⁾. Very few Christian women from Ngaoundéré have acquired higher education : that is to say, formal education above the primary level. The number of Muslim women with higher education can still be counted on one hand.

In Muslim as well as in Christian contexts people make extensive use of the knowledge that Westerners and anthropologists usually designate by the term 'magic', in other words, 'Supernatural'⁽¹⁸⁾ knowledge. As we shall see, 'magic' constitutes a field of knowledge which strongly articulates with the developing images of Western knowledge. 'Saafi', 'bindi', 'lekki', 'siiri', 'deeraaku', 'kaaramaaku'⁽¹⁹⁾ are Fulani words for several of these techniques and competences. They are used by people in their interpretation and handling of events and relationship. Other people's success, accidents, jealousy etc., are thus often interpreted as 'signs' of somebody's use of these various knowledge, in Sum, "magic". Thérèse's and Fanta's narratives should be interpreted from this background.

When a person interprets something as caused by "saafi", for instance, he himself either identifies the person behind the evil, or he gets help from various specialists and "mallum'en"⁽²⁰⁾. Often, if persons do not manage to realize their obligations as they want - they go to the "mallum" in order to get help. The persons who have these various kinds of magical knowledge also enjoy certain social rights and privileges : they are feared and respected. "Magic", then, is the field of knowledge which concerns one's social position and well being. Another field of knowledge of great importance to the current construction of Western education is the one which concerns male-female relationship and marriage which Westerners are tempted to call the field of love until recently, the meaning of the local term "yiide", "love"⁽²¹⁾. Until recently the meaning of the local term "yiide", "love", concerned platonic adoration between a man and a woman⁽²²⁾. But "yiide" did not at all concern the local ideas about marriage. Marriage was seen as a means for the reproduction of social positions.

The meaning of "yiide" is changing rapidly, though. "Yiide" is more and more often put on the agenda by young people as the quality to look when talking about marriage. Popular are today the songs sung about the suffering from "yiide" as a basis for partnership. The meaning of marriage also changes. There is an increase in clandestine, temporary and informal

relationships between men and women, the so-called "deuxième bureau"⁽²³⁾. There is a significant increase in women-headed households. But still, for most of the ethnic groups in the Adamaoua, marriage⁽²⁴⁾ must be based on the decisions of the parents and it concerns reproduction of social position⁽²⁵⁾. Marriage is related to parent's choice, love is considered an individual matter. As we shall see, it is while negotiating the legitimacy of higher education that parents and children refer to these emergent differences in perceptions of the criteria for the establishment of marriage. "Magic" and "love" are two different fields of local knowledge which are exploited in people's current interpretation of local events and social relationships. And they are continuously being transformed by people when they meet new opportunities like Western education. The current challenge is to coordinate these global and local fields of knowledge. Formal education transforms people's notions but not necessarily in ways one is tempted to believe.

The Islamic Setting : Fanta

Fanta is born in a traditional Muslim Fulani⁽²⁶⁾ family⁽²⁷⁾. Her father, who has four wives and 20 children, is the local Imam and so has a very powerful position within the traditional Muslim society of Ngaoundéré⁽²⁸⁾.

Fanta was sent to the Koranic school at four years. She loved to study; and at 8 years she had already finished the first step of Koranic teaching ('yottini'). By the time she finished the Koranic school, several of her brothers went to the local public school⁽²⁹⁾. She also wanted to go to that school. But her father did not accept, as Muslim girls were not allowed to go to school. One day, however, as Fanta's father came back from Mecca, he said he accepted. He had seen that Muslim people in Saudi Arabia accepted that their girls go to public schools. Everything worked out well until she reached the age of 14 which is the age of marriage.

One day Fanta's father told her mother that Fanta should marry a rich man from another town. From that day everything changed in Fanta's life; in the life of her mother and of her sisters and brothers⁽³⁰⁾. She did not want to marry that man. He already had two wives and Fanta would not accept polygamy, nor did she like him. Her father insisted that her mother should convince her; it is a mother's responsibility. The future husband did not pay attention to the fact that Fanta did not want to marry him.

The mother and Fanta started to do what they could to work against that marriage. They regularly consulted a marabout in order to have the future husband forget about the marriage. This did not seem to work. He continued to come and plan the concrete details with the father. Then they had another

marabout work directly on the father so that he would change his mind. But he did not. Instead the marabout's 8 year old son died, an event which was interpreted to be the consequence of the father's magic being stronger.

The mother was forced by the father to prepare the marriage. All the food was prepared, the gifts collected, etc. Fanta however went away to hide when the 'suitor' arrived with his family. They waited for her to return, but she did not. The man had to go home with his family. This event was a great dishonor to Fanta's father. But as Fanta knew the Koran, she also knew that he could not force her to marry against her will. If he did, he himself would be punished. From that time she could not speak to her father for many years, and the candidate she presented to her father for marriage was told by her father that he was not acceptable. Fanta's mother suffered a lot as she was considered responsible for her husband's dishonour. He told her that she had not given Fanta the right upbringing. She was constantly fearing that he would divorce her; and force her to leave her children⁽³¹⁾. Her own family live far away.

A new future ?

After all Fanta finished high school. And this was accepted by her father. The situation at home was very bad. Fanta's mother had grown gradually more nervous; her co-wives showed less and less respect towards her, and at the same time they seemed to become gradually more and more jealous about Fanta's success at school. The mother was now progressively perceiving Fanta's potential future possibility to get higher education as the only possibility of entering an alternative legitimate position. If this was possible the mother could ask for a divorce and Fanta would take care of her.

Fanta's mother constantly told her about how the co-wives spent their money to use magic against Fanta's success at school; how they used magic to make her sick. Fanta, however, believed that since they did not know what formal education is all about, their magic could not possibly touch her. She tried to convince her mother about that but it did not help. The mother was constantly sick. Fanta had to take her to the hospital repeatedly, although they did not manage to cure her. Since Fanta had refused the marriage, the father refused to pay the expenses at the hospital. The situation worsened : the mother's cattle had been reduced because of all the expenses to hospitals, for medicine and counter-magic against the jealous co-wives. Fanta could not even mention her own problems to her mother without her becoming even more sick. Since there were no possibility of a legitimate marriage, further studies were the only alternative to staying at her father's house entirely under his authority.

Fanta went through a difficult period. But she finally got a scholarship to go to Belgium to study mathematics. By that time she was in love with a man somewhat older than herself. He was working as a teacher at a college. They decided to marry before she left for Europe without her father's acceptance. He said he would accept that she complete her studies abroad. But when she came back after the first year at university in Belgium, he insisted that she should stay in Cameroon. She interpreted his insistence as meaning that he did not love her. "How can a man say he loves a woman and still not accept that she does what she wants ?" she asked. Fanta had now come to realize that she had to possess more Western knowledge to obtain a social position which would not be totally subordinate to men: to avoid the father's control, to avoid marriage with a man she did not love - or who did not love her. By that time she lost her scholarship. Her scholarship had been given to the son of one of the Ministers. Her mother said it was because of the magic used by the co-wives.

Fanta's mother now had to sell some of the cattle that Fanta owned so that she could continue to study. Whenever she came home for holidays she had to sell some cows. Fanta could not talk to her father. He never gave her a penny. He never helped her. Fanta and her mother became both very poor ; they had no cattle left and in Belgium Fanta worked as a housemaid in order to make ends meet. For two years Fanta did not have enough money to go home. A new African boyfriend would not accept a 'monogamous' relationship, an attitude which Fanta says is proof that he did not love her enough either. Everyday life was a constant struggle. But her belief in Allah helped her not to lose her courage. She knew she needed prayers to get along. In addition she sent her mother some money so that she continues to get some help from a marabout at home.

Her mother became increasingly nervous about the future results of Fanta's stay abroad. But the father and the other family members continued to believe she live an easy, Western life, and that she would come back with diplomas and earn a lot of money as a civil servant. Fanta said that she did not have a great interest in the studies she followed, but that she saw it as her only choice to continue to study. She saw a future position as civil servant in Ngaoundéré as the only legitimate alternative to marrying a man of her father's choice. On the other side, as she said, nobody would want to marry a highly educated Muslim woman, as Western education and a position in the public service was contradictory to the image of the subordinate wife⁽³²⁾.

The image of higher education in Fanta's narration

From the background of what has been said about the urban social context of Ngaoundéré and from Fanta's narration we see that "magic" and "love" are local fields of knowledge which are very central in Fanta's perspectives when considering her past, present and future life. The image of formal education that is found in Fanta's narration seems to be "moulded by" these perspectives, or incorporated into them. "Magic" and "Love" strongly influence the construction of the image of Western education.

Fanta's road to formal education is being built in a recent Muslim cultural context in the nineteen eighties. Fanta's story gives us some insight into how family-life, social obligations, gender roles, love and magic are intertwined in her mind. There are several reasons why Fanta entered higher education. Evidently, she was interested in going to school like her brothers. But since there is a cultural barrier to Muslim girls' higher education (i.e. the importance of early marriage), the fact that she managed to continue her education needs an explanation. Other explanations might be found in the special difficulties between the matrices of the household. There is a rather fierce competition and jealousy between the co-wives⁽³³⁾. The potential magic outcome of her new experience seemed to threaten the other mothers in the household whose daughters did not go to school. These reactions reinforced her willingness to continue. Through her experience at primary school Fanta herself also gradually developed images about the magic effect of her future diplomas on her own social position. She also developed an image of a future for herself which was different from her mother's always suffering from great tensions between co-wives and dissatisfaction in relation to the husband. This image combined autonomy, love and loyalty in monogamy in new ways. So, her father's choice of husband and time for marriage did not at all suit her. Her opposition to her father's decisions also pushed her into the road to higher education. Normally only marriage decided by the father could lead to proper adult status for woman. However, further education, after all, sanctioned by the father, was tried out as a means to postpone marriage while keeping the necessary social respect.

When she opposed her father it was interpreted by her mother and mother's co-wives as if her education represented a new and strong magic. Fanta's mother who saw herself as suffering from the mercilessness of polygamy, fed the image of a new opportunity for herself as well: if Fanta's education could give a social legitimate position independent of marriage and a husband's economic support, then Fanta would be able to support her mother in the future.

Fanta and her mother, however, had to succeed in a very delicate balancing of strategies in order to avoid being expelled by the father. At what costs? The father knew how to sanction the dishonour he suffered. His refusal to accept other marriages, of economic support, etc., enhanced the necessity for Fanta to further her studies. However, most recently, he accepted schooling in Europe, and this certainly gave social legitimacy to a new social status "unmarried, Muslim, School girl above the age of 14".

An important differentiation was developing respectively in Fanta's and her mother's image of formal education: whereas the mother saw the co-wives' use of magic as a serious threat to Fanta's success, Fanta perceived of "new magic", higher education, as being so strong as not to be able to be threatened at all by the local magic. But Fanta and her mother both perceived of the necessity to continue to collaborate in the use of traditional, local magic to assure a successful future for Fanta - at least for as long time as it took to get the final diplomas. Diplomas in hand, with or without a "loving", monogamous husband, with or without a salaried job at home, having a legitimate social position, would enable her to take care of her mother who would then be able to leave her husband.

Fanta was so embedded in these family relations and conflicts that to her formal education was incorporated into her management of knowledge as an equivalent of other kinds of (local) magic - but as a stronger one. She said herself that she was not at all interested in the new knowledge, i.e. mathematics, as such. She was interested in its potential effect vis-à-vis her relatives and other members of the local society of Ngaoundéré, on their use of local knowledge, their magic. So even though she knew that the possibilities for a person with higher education to get a job have been radically reduced, there were other important reasons to continue studying aside from an improved future income.

The Christian Setting : Thérèse

Thérèse was born in an agricultural village close to Ngaoundéré in a Protestant Gbaya⁽³⁴⁾ family with five children. The three brothers were still attending primary school and a sister worked as a secretary. In this village most people have been converted to Christianity. Thérèse's father whose parents are Muslim felt himself that converting to Christianity had implied difficulties : on the one side it was difficult to leave his parent's religion ; on the other side he was bitter for not having got the support he expected from the Protestant missionaries whom he joined at a young age to further his studies. He has remained a " plain catchiest", as he saw it, «missionaries say you do not need to have a high education". However, his job as a catechist

assured a regular income. Thérèse's father also initiated new and successful strategies for the production of new imported vegetables for sale. For that reason he was accused by people in the village of using magic in order to improve his own position. In the Gbaya society there were many kinds of magic and the missionaries have tried hard to stop people from using it; Thérèse said.

Thérèse's mother was even more bitter than the father. She was always working very hard; and she cared not only of all the housework, cultivation in the field, children, etc., she also cared for her own parents. She had never got the necessary economic support from her husband to feed the children and give them clothes and cover the school fees.

However, in Thérèse's family the question of whether the children should go to school has never been asked. Thérèse's parents were both very serious about her school education, but in different ways. " My father scolded me if I did not get good results at school; I was even beaten if he thought that I did not take school work seriously! But he did not pay the school fees". Thérèse's mother tried to encourage Thérèse by saying to her that it was the only way to avoid the sufferings that she had been through herself: for example of depending on a husband who never took the economic responsibility he was supposed to. She even paid Thérèse small gifts when she had good results at school. The mother earned some small money by selling cookies.

About her life at school, Thérèse said that she always felt very lonely and in conflict with the world. Right from the beginning people also showed great jealousy, she said, of her success at school. Already at primary school level her parents were accused of using magic to assure her success at school. Today she explained her own motivation for working hard at school as being related to a dream of becoming a good Christian. "I have always been very interested in Christianity and in reading the Bible, I also decided very early to study theology and never to marry".

Because of the father's work the family had to move around a lot when Thérèse was a child, and when she was 10 the family moved to Ngaoundéré. When, after a couple of years her father was asked to go to Meiganga by the Mission, she had to stay behind at the Protestant College and sleep at the dormitory. She had very good marks and she had scholarship and support from the missionaries.

At college Thérèse fell in love with a young boy, Michel. Even though it was prohibited, they stayed together and initiated a love relationship. She

loved him very much, she said, but she continued to work hard at school where she had only one close friend: a girl named Marie Claire. The other students always kept away from her. This was because they feared the magic that gave her success at school. It gave her a lot of pain, she explained.

Whereas Thérèse was not trying to hide that she had a lover, Marie Claire was hiding a similar relationship. Thérèse was living in conflict with her parents as well as with the Protestant Mission. Her mother was primarily angry because, as she said, "you first marry a job, then, afterwards, a husband". Her father was angry because Michel did not show him respect. "The mission, considering sexual relationships among high school students a serious sin, felt threatened in their religious efforts by my sinful behaviour, she said." After a while, Thérèse became pregnant. But she continued to work hard at school. Then Marie Claire all of a sudden did not manage school work so well and she progressively got physically weak and started behaving very unfriendly to Thérèse and accusing her of using magic. Thérèse said that she did not practice it.

But one day it was even written on the board at school that Thérèse was using magic against Marie Claire. Marie Claire used all her time to go to the various specialists in order to protect herself against the evil she thought Thérèse caused.

Then things suddenly went really wrong: one day Thérèse and Marie Claire were called upon by the missionaries. The missionaries asked the two girls to explain the rumours they had heard about Thérèse's use of magic. They had long discussions. Marie Claire accused Thérèse of using magic; Thérèse denied that she had anything to do with her friend's experience. After a while Thérèse got a letter from the school which said that she could not continue to attend school⁽³³⁾. A month later everybody found out that Marie Claire was also pregnant. Thérèse supposed that the missionaries now believed that she had not used evil forces against Marie Claire. Marie Claire had her child which died shortly afterwards. Nobody really knew why - if she killed it herself or not. But rumours said Marie Claire had become insane.

Thérèse had her child - and a year later she gave birth to a second child all the while Michel continued at school. After a while Thérèse's mother started breast feeding the child for Thérèse who managed to go back to school temporarily. She did not, however, pass her exam nor did Michel. When Thérèse wanted to try again Michel refused. He said that if she insisted on continuing she revealed that she neither loved nor wanted to obey her husband. If one of them got the exam, he said, one of them would die. «I got

so scared that I did not dare! «Thérèse explained. «His family is very active and competent within the field of magic!"

Thérèse's parents were depressed. Her father said that she could always have found another man, but that she would never again get the opportunity to get a higher education. «He even cursed and said that he wanted to make a malediction on me".

After a while Thérèse married Michel. They both got small jobs at the Mission library. They did not earn much. Thérèse was disappointed that not even her husband had succeeded at school, and she was getting more disappointed in her job. She said that she felt that the Missionaries were neither interested in promoting local people's higher education nor their knowledge about Christianity. After a couple of years, when Thérèse asked the Mission for a scholarship to further her education within the field of theology, she found that they responded by offering a scholarship to her husband, Michel. The mission could not offer scholarships to both husband and wife and not only to the wife, she was told. She had to wait.

Thérèse then got very angry. Her husband was jealous and might have used magic, she says. She said the one to ask for the scholarship. She was the one who had good marks at school. But he was the one to receive the scholarship. She was supposed to wait and go to Germany to cook for him while he was studying. When he left, Thérèse insisted on a divorce. As a consequence she could not stay at the Mission any more - and she could not get another job either. The religious affiliation had assured her access to a job.

A new future.

Today Thérèse is studying theology in a university in Germany: She finally left her children behind with her parents with whom she gradually had got on better terms, and she decided to try to manage all on her own to get access to the university. She has suffered a lot. To survive and get the necessary courses to get access to the University, she had to work for two years as a housemaid. She little by little succeeded in the various entrance tests for university and she now studies and works very hard to make ends meet.

Today Thérèse thinks she must complete her university studies and she thinks that 'love' nearly spoiled her life and educational career: She feels that because she fell in love, she was exploited by her surroundings. She was exploited by Michel who insisted on her not getting more knowledge than he had been able to acquire himself. She even continues to ask herself how come

that she fell in love with him when she had been so convinced never to marry?
Did he use magic ?

Thérèse now reads the bible everyday; she says that she finds all the encouragement she needs there. "Nothing and nobody can exploit me anymore. The 'love' I am looking for does not relate to male - female relationship. She does not need local magic to protect herself. because "God's words will guide her in life and my sufferings have a meaning to God". She now thinks that her Western education, love for God and independence of men will guarantee a position from which she can protect her children and her mother in the future.

The Image of Education in Thérèse's narration

Thérèse is considered a privileged young women who like Fanta controls' a new kind of magic. Since she started going to school she has experienced classmates and neighbours interpretation of her success as caused by local magic. These accusations made Thérèse feel lonely and "in conflict with the world"; but the accusations seemed to confirm that she has got hold of some strong "magic": She believed in the effect of the new knowledge, Christianity, as well as higher education, on her future social position. And as it was the case with her father, she saw the reluctance of those who withhold the knowledge she wanted as an expression of oppression. When the missionaries as Thérèse saw it - accused Thérèse of using magic to hurt her best friend and told her to leave school, Thérèse interpreted this as a confirmation of her being too clever in their eyes. However, what might have been involved in the missionaries' interpretation of Thérèse's situation at school and of her relationship to Marie Claire, was her lack of shame for having a lover. This must have been seen by the Protestant school teachers as the opposite of the image of the Protestant woman that they try to promote. She showed an image of a woman feeling free to make love, to acquire formal education and to use these to her advantage.

As we have seen, Thérèse first obeyed ' the orders' from the teachers and then from Michel. But when she did not get the scholarship she wanted, she chose to oppose mission as well as husband. As Fanta saw a new legitimacy in the status of an educated woman confirmed by her father, Thérèse found that the status as a highly educated woman was legitimized by the missionaries. They only thought that She did not merit the higher education.

Once she took the decision, she did not perceive of any other possible road to a legitimate social position but by furthering her higher education, even if this mean leaving her children in the care of her mother and being

without them for a long period of time. As is the case with Fanta, she entered the road of no return. She could not possibly come back without a diploma. Where her surroundings had interpreted her excellence at school as the result of her father's use of local magic, she herself has gradually developed an image of formal education as the one and only 'magic' which assured independence and social position. In the process Thérèse has also gradually become more religious and pious : "human beings may well interpret the Bible in the wrong way. They may be sinful, but God is ever-present". This is her perspective. Her religiousness would also give future legitimacy in the Christian milieu which she related to, she thought. She aimed at an independence of emotional dependency to men and sexual desires, at peace with God - and she wanted to be able to be nurturing to the world.

Transformations of local fields of knowledge : 'Magic' and 'Love'

Fanta and Thérèse were both subjected to magical activities managed by their closest friends and relatives. The sudden changes caused by modern education; the potential social differentiation which it might lead to; the potential hierarchical relations; the potential loss for those who did not get the new knowledge; everything seemed to be moulded in the mould of magic, i.e. local magic was used in an effort to control the effects of the new knowledge. This was one of the ways in which the global knowledge, western education, was put into articulation with local knowledge by local people. Thérèse and Fanta, who were living in the west, were both progressively constructing a new perspective on their own life settings through the tough experiences they lived. They were delving into their respective religious worlds and even become more fervent than the people in their local social contexts. They saw their religious belief together with their acquisition of higher education, i.e. diplomas, as a means of potential control with their own life conditions, locally. For Fanta and Thérèse, formal education in this context became just a new element in the local field of magical knowledge, a new 'magic'.

Local ideas of love and marriage were also transformed. To Fanta and Thérèse 'love' was not only in conflict with parent's or other authorities' politics ; since men, as they saw it, preferred control with women to 'love' of women, they constructed an image of 'love' as representing a barrier to the acquisition of the new "magic", Western knowledge. Western knowledge was the only means of obtaining an alternative social position to that of subordinate wife in the local urban society. May be Fanta and Thérèse were in the process of constructing new ideas of acceptability and convenience as to what partners to choose for marriage - if marriage will be a future option for them. And these ideas do not necessarily put great weight on "love"...

Concluding remarks

I hope to have shown the necessity of differentiating formal Western education on the one side and the various images of formal education which are constructed and vehiculed in different cultural contexts on the other, if one wants to understand the current transformation processes that formal Western education induces in young states. It is easy to believe that the introduction of a Western kind of competence will lead quickly to a Western kind of society, and so that the same concepts will be given the same interpretations, in the West as in the third world: democracy, freedom, love, etc.⁽³⁶⁾. The radical change in the careers that we have witnessed do not confirm this theory. The local cultural traditions are actively incorporated in the transformation process so as to create new social forms - different from Western societies.

The new social forms which we have found so far in our analysis are the entirely new female careers, new female statues and the transformed female identities. To go back to the question of women's organizational forms, these will have to be grasped at the interface of women's identities and women's networks. Fanta's and Thérèse's careers reveal how new acts, new competence and knowledge are categorized in local women's networks. We have seen how the two mothers so to say push their daughters into the new experience because they believe it will make them able to avoid the sufferings they have experienced. In this way higher education is seen by local women as a means to reduce men's control and as a weapon against polygamy⁽³⁷⁾. But we have also seen how the young women's acquisition of formal education generates conflicts between co-wives in a Muslim household and between school-mates in a Protestant school. Fanta's and Thérèse's acquisition of a new and unknown kind of competence and knowledge seems to give some women a feeling of loss of control. Through their search for higher education Thérèse and Fanta are seen by local women to spoil stability and equality between co-wives and girl friends. At an analytical level what happens is that Fanta and Thérèse break the tacit rules for management of local female identity, for behaviour in women's networks as well as in the local society in general.

In the Christian as well as in the Muslim family the young girls' search for higher education also implies a radical change in the mother-daughter relationship: In the Muslim family the daughter took new kinds of responsibilities towards her mother, and she has promised to take care of her in her old age. In the Christian family it was the other way round: the mother took new responsibilities: she had two new school children to care for where she was supposed to get progressively more and more assistance from her

daughter and children⁽³⁸⁾. In a way the new educational career can be said to draw the young women out of the wider local women's community. As they are both living abroad we can only guess what will be the difficulties for Fanta and Thérèse in establishing an alternative women's network when they come home; for the time being an identity dilemma and a kind of loneliness has emerged. It is in this background that Fanta and Thérèse are going to try out what kinds of social position that their new 'magic', higher Western education, will give access to.

Notes

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- ¹. Thanks to Fanta and Thérèse for warm friendships through years and for their courage and interest in narrating their own experiences to increase other people's knowledge about women's life. I am grateful to Siri Gerrard, Mahmoudou Djingui, Harald Eidheim, Inger Altern, Marianne Gullestad and Eva Rosander for comments to an earlier draft of this article.
- ². See Friedman, J. 1992.
- ³. In this article, I talk about the processes that take place in the articulation between institutions for higher education and local communities as they are expressed in people's lives. When I say "Western" I mean the complex of institutions developed on the basis of Western educational systems whether they are localized in the Third World or in the West. With 'formal' I mean institutionalized transfer of knowledge based on the work of professionals possessing special competence sanctioned by public institutions.
- ⁴. See also Rudie 1985 and 1994, and Gronhaug 1978 for the theoretical approach that I apply in this article.
- ⁵. Altern & Holtedahl 1994.
- ⁶. Keesing says "magic" represents human attempts to manipulate chains of cause and effect between events that to us are unrelated, in ways that to us are irrational. Magic, like prayer, works in the eye of the believer because the system of belief contains an explanation for both success and failure....". Keesing 1985
- ⁷. "Marriage" as concept and "marriage as a field of knowledge has mostly been used in contexts where a husband-wife relationship was obligatory for women and men to acquire legitimate status as adults in society. Since the transformation processes that we are dealing with here among other things imply a total change in the role of marriage and that this runs parallel to an increasing importance of 'love' as a basis for male-female relationship, I choose the word "love" as a name for this field of knowledge. See Holtedahl 1993 for

- further documentation of the transformation and Barth 1987 for the choice concept in the process of translation.
- ⁸ The material is based on fieldwork in Ngaoundere which I have been doing regularly since 1982. See Holtedahl 1993 for a more thorough description of the urban society of Ngaoundere in the eighties and for a presentation of my analytical approach. See also Fardon 1985 for theoretical considerations about knowledge and power.
 - ⁹ See Holtedahl 1993 for the analysis of women's possibility to use their traditional and new formal knowledge in the various formal and informal sectors of Ngaoundere town.
 - ¹⁰ Ngaoundere town has around 60 000 inhabitants.
 - ¹¹ For the Mboum population see Faraut 1981 and Eldridge Mohammadou, 1981, for the Gbaya see Burnham 1980 a.
 - ¹² Eldridge Mohammadou, 1981, Azarya 1978.
 - ¹³ Hino 1993.
 - ¹⁴ Other important change-agents were the railway in 1970 and the air connection in the eighties. See also Geschiere 1982 for a description of the consequences for the Maka people in South Eastern Cameroon of the development of the "évolués", i. e. the new elite which possesses the new formal knowledge.
 - ¹⁵ See Geschiere 1986 and Burnham 1980 a.
 - ¹⁶ See Azarya 1978, Burnham 1980 b, Eguchi & Azarya 1993 and Holy 1991.
 - ¹⁷ Geschiere and Koenings 1993.
 - ¹⁸ I indicate this reservation to the concept of supernatural to indicate that it is an emic category. As will be discussed later when one compares the processes of coordination of two systems of knowledge, i.e. the Western educational system and the local system of reproduction of knowledge at the level of individuals, the concept of "supernatural" must be seen as entirely emic and in the anthropological translation one would have to find a concept related to notions about "cause-effect" - sequences. I also want to make reference to Barth 1987, where he says that "this analysis of OK has thus radically changed my own ideas of what can be the object of a cosmology, and the way our concept may serve to mediate between reality and self as much as between objective constructs. «In the analysis of the articulations of systems of knowledge that I am presenting here I will say that my ideas about what is natural have been changed.
 - ¹⁹ "Saafi", conjurer, indicates the use of "powers" to transform materials, change places; "bindi" is the liquid made out of ink washed off from a wooden tablet on which selected 'strong' verses from the Koran have been written. To have an effect, it must be consumed at specific moments following the instructions of the "mallum'en" who prepared it; "lekki" means medicine and indicates all kinds of mixtures of ingredients which have positive or negative effects on oneself or other people; "siiri", "deeraaku" and "kaaramaaku" are various forms of sorcery which hurt people. See also Bocquené 1986 and Gluckman 1966.
 - ²⁰ "Mallum" is the less prestigious Koran teacher who does not have as much knowledge of the Koran as the moodibbo, and who uses "magic" knowledge.
 - ²¹ When I use the concept "love" to signify this local field of knowledge in this article, it must be seen as an anthropological effort (Barth 1987). The word "gender", for example, does not to my opinion indicate to a sufficient degree the

aspect of the quality of the male-female relationship which is so central in the local debates.

²² Mahmoudou 1993

²³ Holtedahl 1993

²⁴ Since the divorce rate is extremely high especially in the Muslim milieu, what is said here concerns "first marriage" which is considered necessary for a girl at adolescence. Second and third marriage do not involve parents/ families in the way described. They are considered more as love-marriages as well by the partners as by others. See Bovin & Holtedahl 1975 for an analysis of the role of marriage in women's lives in Nigerian Bornou.

²⁵ Mahmoudou 1993 a and b.

²⁶ The Fulani people are spread in the Sudan-Sahalien area from Senegal to Sudan. Marguerite Dupire (1970 : 13) estimates their numbers to be around 6 million. They have a common, language and origin (Stenning 1959). But having gradually spread, adapted to, been submitted to or conquered other populations, the Fulani people manifest a great variation of socio-economic organizational forms (Dupire 1970). Today most Fulani are Muslim and more so the more they are sedentarized. In the beginning of the 19 Th. century Muslim Fulani nomads spread into northern Cameroon and the Adamaoua plateau. They conquered many ethnic groups through Jihad, holy war. Other groups were submitted to the Fulani through more "peaceful" negotiations.

²⁷ The house is old-fashioned; electricity has not been installed.

²⁸ See Holtedahl and Mahmoudou forthcoming for a presentation of the transformation of the relationship between local Islam and Western education.

²⁹ The local public schools are all offering the Western kind of formal education. In addition to state schools there are three kinds of private schools offering formal education. These are the schools organized by the Protestant and the Catholic missions and, since 1988, by the Muslims of Ngaoundere.

³⁰ Sisters and brothers of the same mothers.

³¹ The Muslim marriage rules give all rights in children at divorce to the father.

³² This narrative and the one which follows are highly "edited" versions of the way in which Fanta and Thérèse have described their lives. I have known the families for ten years.

³³ See Cohen 1971, Smith 1955, Holtedahl 1993, Bovin and Holtedahl 1975, for further information on relationship between co-wives in urban Hausa, Fulani, Kanuri settings in Niger, Nigeria and Cameroon.

³⁴ The Gbaya people, which count 500.000, live in the Central African Republic and in the eastern part of the Adamaoua plateau in Cameroon. They were originally animistic but today most Gbaya are Christians, a minority is Muslim (Burham 1980:2a).

³⁵ This is how Thérèse experienced the missionaries' reactions. The missionaries would not necessarily agree with her interpretation.

³⁶ Copans 1993, Kabou 1992.

³⁷ Van Santen 1993.

³⁸ See Holtedahl 1993, and Parkin & Nyamwaya 1987.

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Adresse de l'auteur : Lisbet HOLTEDAHL, Professor at the University of Tromsø Norway