

Magic and Love on the Road to Higher Education in Cameroon

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INTRODUCTION

People try to coordinate various fields of knowledge, local and global (cf. Friedman 1992), while living their everyday lives. The construction of images of formal western education¹ 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.²

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1. 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 the institutionalized transfer of knowledge based on the work of professionals possessing special competence sanctioned by public institutions.
 2. Thanks to Fanta and Thérèse for warm friendships through the years and for their courage and interest in narrating their own experiences to increase other people's knowledge about women's lives. I am grateful to Siri Gerrard, Mahmoudou Djingui, Harald Eidheim, Inger Altern, Marianne Gullestad and Eva Evers Rosander for comments on an earlier draft of this article.

They were both born in the town of Ngaoundéré and are both fighting to get higher formal education. They currently experience that life is very difficult in Germany and Belgium, where they are living. Still, their families at home believe 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 Ngaoundéré society. Secondly, 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 women's careers.³ We find some common traits: at a certain level their fates are quite similar. For both Thérèse and Fanta there are two local fields of knowledge, so also interpretation (Altern & Holtedahl 1994) which have a special influence on their acts, their search for higher education and, finally, on their careers.

The first is the field which concerns one's control of one's position in 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.⁴ The other field of knowledge is the one which concerns male-female relationships 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*.⁵

3. See also Rudie 1985 and 1994, and Grønhaug 1978 for the theoretical approach that I apply in this article.

4. 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)

5. "Marriage" as a concept and "marriage" as a field of knowledge have 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 implies 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 relationships, 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 of concept in the process of translation.

Finally, I discuss the careers in the light of contextual factors which influence their life careers as Cameroonian women who pursue higher education.⁶ The examination of the impact of western education and how formal education and knowledge are changing the perceptions and concrete lives of the two young women should reveal to us images of western education that are constructed by Thérèse 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 Thérèse's acquisition of higher education implies conflicts with 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.

NGAOUNDÉRE 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 viewed as part of the current redefinition of values attributed to various resources. Different kinds of knowledge that people have can be offered on the new market of knowledge (Holtedahl 1993). Certainly people's own experience of 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 the access rules to this market which people meet.

Ngaoundéré⁷ is today the centre 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 such as the Ndi and the Gbaya⁸ who were

6. The material is based on fieldwork in Ngaoundéré, which I have been undertaking regularly since 1982. See Holtedahl 1993 for a more thorough description of the urban society of Ngaoundéré in the eighties and for a presentation of my analytical approach. See also Fardon 1985 for theoretical considerations about knowledge and power.

7. Ngaoundéré town has around 60,000 inhabitants.

8. For the Mboum population see Faraut 1981 and Mohammadou 1981, for the Gbaya see Burnham 1980 a

animists, had slowly been subjected to the hegemony of the expanding Muslim Fulani (Mohammadou 1981; Azarya 1978). A strongly hierarchical society was created, where control over other people's access to the knowledge of Islam was necessary for being at the apex of society (Hino 1993). 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, Ngaoundéré town has experienced progressive Islamization and Christianization coloured by various traits of syncretism. The German and 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.⁹ Some of the formerly subordinate groups, the Gbaya and the Ndi, who had 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 (Geschière 1986 and Burnham 1980a). 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 has the access they have to influential positions (Azarya 1978; Burnham 1980b; Holy 1991).

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 (Geschière and Koenings 1993). 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 the fingers of one hand.

In Muslim as well as in Christian contexts, people make extensive use of the knowledge that Westerners and anthropologists usually designate

9. Other important change-agents were the railway in 1970 and the air connection in the eighties. See also Geschière 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.

by the term *magic*, in other words, *supernatural*¹⁰ 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*¹¹ are Fulani words for several of these techniques and kinds of competence. They are used by people in their interpretation and handling of events and relationships. Other people's success, accidents, jealousy etc., are thus often interpreted as signs of somebody's use of these various fields of knowledge. In sum, *magic* is, then, the field of knowledge which concerns one's social position and well-being. Another field of knowledge of great importance is the one which concerns male-female relationships and knowledge.

Marriage is related to parents' 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. 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.

10. I note 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.

11. *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.

THE ISLAMIC SETTING: FANTA

Fanta is born in a traditional Muslim Fulani family. Her father is a member of the court at the palace of the *Lamido*, the Sultan of Adamaoua Province. He is the personal religious advisor to the Sultan.

I was sent to the Koranic school at four years. I loved to study; and at 8 years I had already finished the first step of koranic teaching ("yottini" in Fulani). By that time we were already many children in the house. In addition to my mother, my father had three other wives.

By the time I finished the koran, several of my brothers went to the primary school. I also wanted to go to school. But I had to fight for it. One day, when my father came back from Mecca, he suddenly said he accepted it. He had seen that Muslim people in Saudi Arabia accepted that their girls go to school. At that time only one or two Muslim girls in our town went to school. One of them was my friend. I very much enjoyed going to school, and everything worked out well until I reached the age of marriage.

One day my father came and told my mother that I was going to marry a rich man from another town. From that day everything changed in my life; in the life of my mother and of my sister and brother. I did not want to marry that man. I did not like him. My father insisted that my mother convince me; it is a mother's responsibility. The man did not seem to bother about my opinion.

My mother and I started to do what we could to work against that marriage. We addressed a clever marabout regularly in order to have the "future" husband forget about the marriage. This did not seem to work out. He continued to come and plan the concrete details with my father. Then we had another marabout work directly on my father so that he should change his mind. But he did not. Instead the marabout's eight year old son died because my father's magic was stronger.

My mother was forced to prepare for the marriage. All the food was prepared, the gifts collected, etc. I went away to hide when the "husband" arrived with his family. They waited for me, but I did not show up. The man had to go home with his family.

This event was a great dishonour to my father. But as I knew the Koran, I also knew that he could not force me to marry against my will—and that if he did—he himself would be punished. From that time I could not speak to my father for many years. Whatever candidate I might eventually accept who presented himself to my father for marriage, would be told by my father that he could not accept this.

My mother suffered a lot as she was considered responsible for my father's dishonour. He told her that she had not given me the right education. She was constantly fearing that he would divorce her; she would not know how to be able to leave her children.¹² Her own family lives far away. This was my

father's revenge.

After some years I finished high school. The situation at home was awful. My mother had grown gradually more nervous; her co-wives showed less and less respect towards her. At the same time they got gradually more and more jealous about my having succeeded at school. My mother was now perceiving my potential future possibility of earning money, i.e. get higher education, as the only possibility to get away from a terrible situation. If I earned money, she could ask for divorce and I would take care of her.

My mother constantly told me about how the co-wives spent their money to use magic against my success at school; how they used magic to make her sick. I tried to convince her that they did not and that they did not understand what formal education was all about. Neither did she. But it did not help. She was constantly sick. I had to take her to the hospital again and again, but they did not manage to help her. After my refusal of the marriage, my father refused to pay the expenses at the hospital.

The situation developed, I could not even mention my problems to my mother without her getting even more sick. I had to get an opportunity to further my studies. My mother's cattle had been reduced because of all the expenses for hospitals, medicine and counter-magic against the jealous co-wives.

I went through a difficult period. But I finally got a scholarship to go to Belgium to study. By that time I was in love with a man somewhat older than me. He was working as a teacher at a college. We decided to marry. He said he would accept that I complete my studies abroad first. But when I came back after the first year at university, he insisted that I marry and stay in Cameroon. So I realized he did not love me. How can a man say he loves a woman and still not accept that she does what she wants?

Then I lost my scholarship. My mother says it is because of the magic used by the co-wives. But I am sure it is because my scholarship has been given to the son of one of the Ministers. This is how scholarships are distributed in Cameroon.

My mother sold some of the cattle that I owned so that I could continue to study. Whenever I came back on holidays I also sold some cows. In Belgium I worked as a housemaid in order to make ends meet. I could never talk to my father. He would never give me a penny. He would never accept to help me. My mother started selling off her cattle. Now we are both very poor; we have no cattle left.

For a period I have been living in Belgium with a man I am in love with. But I did not even try to have my father accept him as my husband. For the time being I have left my friend, since he will not accept a "monogamous" relationship. He doesn't love me enough either. Everyday is a struggle. But since I believe in God, I do not lose my courage. I know the prayers I

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

need to get along. In addition, my mother still gets some help from a marabout at home.¹³

The Image of Higher Education in Fanta's Narration

From the background of 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 1980 Muslim cultural context. There are several reasons why Fanta entered higher education. Evidently, she was interested in going to school like her brothers. 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 rather fierce competition and jealousy between the co-wives.¹⁴ The potential magical 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 magical 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, who is always suffering from great tensions between the co-wives and dissatisfaction in relation to her husband. This image combined with autonomy, love and monogamous loyalty in new ways. So, her father's choice of husband and time for marriage did not suit her at all. 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 a proper adult status for a woman. However, further education, after all, sanc-

13. This narrative and the one which follows are "edited" (by me) versions of the way in which the young women have described their lives. I have known the families for ten years.

14. See Cohen 1961; Smith 1955; Holtedahl 1993; Bovin and Holtedahl 1975, for further information on the relationship between co-wives in urban Hausa, Fulani and Kanuri settings in Niger, Nigeria and Cameroon.

tioned 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 her a socially 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 or provide 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, schoolgirl above the age of 14".

An important differentiation was developing in Fanta's and her mother's respective 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 the "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 of continuing to collaborate in the use of traditional, local magic to assure a successful future for Fanta—at least for as long a 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 is born in an agricultural village close to Ngaoundéré. Her family is Gbaya¹⁵ and her father has worked his whole life in close connection with the Protestant Mission as a catechist.

My father was very serious about my school education. I was sent to school and told that I had to work. My father even gave me money when I had good results at school. He was very authoritarian and I was beaten if I did not take school work serious. He had got his own formal education because he had been a Christian and strongly involved in the Norwegian Protestant Mission from the early years. In this way, he was assured of a regular income. He has worked as a catechist in several villages, so we moved around when I was a child. But when I was ten we moved to Ngaoundéré. When, after a couple of years my father was asked to go to Meiganga by the Mission, I had to stay behind at the Protestant college and sleep in the dormitory.

Ever since I was a child I have felt in conflict with the world. Already at primary school level I was accused of sorcery because I was successful at school. I did not have many friends. And I was interested in Christianity. From the Bible I learned that it is bad to use evil powers. My father being a successful "entrepreneur" who in addition to working for a modest salary managed to initiate new and successful strategies for the production of vegetables which he sold, was accused by people in the village of using magic. In the Gbaya society there are many kinds of sorcery and magic.

At college I fell in love with a young boy. Even though it was prohibited we stayed together as lovers. I loved him very very much. I continued to work hard at school where I had only one close friend: a girl from Bertoua. But whereas I was not trying to hide that I had a lover, she was hiding that she had one. My own parents were very angry and by that time I was in great opposition to them and the Mission. The Mission considers lover-relationships among schoolchildren as a serious sin.

After a while I got pregnant. But I continued to work hard at school. My friend all of a sudden got very unfriendly to me and accused me of sorcery. I said that I did not practice it. It was even written on the board at school one day that I was a sorcerer. My friend used all her time to go to the various specialists in order to protect herself against the evil she thought I caused. She did not get the time to do her school work. I continued to improve my results.

Then things suddenly went really wrong: I was fetched by the missionaries. My friend also. They asked us about what they had heard. We had long discussions. I refused to have anything to do with the evil which my friend saw.

15. The Gbaya people, who amount to 500,000, live in the Central African Republic and on the eastern part of the Adamaoua plateau in Cameroon. They were originally animistic, but today most Gbaya are Christians, while a minority is Muslim.

She got weaker and weaker. After a while I was thrown out of school. The missionaries said that I used the evil forces.

After a month, everybody found out that my friend was also pregnant. The missionaries realized that I had not used the evil forces. I had my child and I got another one while my lover continued at school. But he did not pass his high school exam.

Our parents were depressed. My father said that I could always have found another man, but that I would never again get the opportunity to get a higher education.

We got married. We both got small jobs at the Mission library. We did not earn much. I was disappointed that my husband did not succeed at school. I was disappointed in my job. I asked the Mission for a scholarship to further my education. After a long time and many fights with the Mission, they offered a scholarship to my husband. I was supposed to follow him on his study trip to Germany with the children.

But it did not develop like that. The day we were going to leave and the house was let out, the missionaries said that there was not enough money for me to follow.

I got very very angry. I was the one to ask for the scholarship. I was the one who had good marks at school. He was jealous. But *he* got it. Then I had to wait and eventually only got the opportunity to go to Germany to cook for him while he was studying. When he left I insisted on a divorce.

Now Thérèse is studying at the university in Germany. She finally left her children behind with her parents with whom she gradually had got on better terms and 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.

Little by little she passed the various access tests for the university and she now studies *and* works very hard to make ends meet.

Thérèse misses her children. She thinks that God will help her. She feels that she has been exploited by *love* since her openness about her sexual relationship caused so much troubles. Her husband got all the possibilities, she none. She now thinks that sexual life threatens independence. She seriously feels that because she fell in love and accepted her physical sexual feelings, she was exploited by her surroundings.

Now she wants to complete her studies. She also reads the Bible where she finds all the encouragement she needs as she says. "Nothing and nobody can exploit me anymore. Love does not relate to physical relationships or to gender", she says. She would never use magic or sorcery to protect herself. She "knows" that God's words will guide her in life and that her suffering has a meaning to God.

The Image of Education in Thérèse's Narration

Thérèse is considered to be a privileged young woman 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. As in the case with her father, she saw the reluctance of those who withheld 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 the other girl, 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 the husband. But when she did not get the scholarship she wanted, she chose to oppose the mission as well as her husband. As Fanta saw the 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 meant 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 to which she related, she thought. She aimed at an independence of emotional dependence on men and sexual desires, at being at peace with God, and she wanted to nurture 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 shaped in the mould of magic. They were delving into their respective religious worlds and even became 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 over 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 parents' or other authorities' politics; since men, as they saw it, preferred control over 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 being a subordinate wife in the local urban society.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

I hope to have shown the necessity of differentiating formal western education on the one hand and the various images of formal education which are constructed and articulated 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 quickly lead to a western kind of society in which the same concepts will be given the same interpretations, in the West as in the third world:

democracy, freedom, love, etc. (Copans 1993; Kabou 1992). 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 status 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, 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 (Van Santen 1993). 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 the 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 shouldered new kinds of responsibilities towards her mother and promised to take care of her in her old age. In the Christian family it was the other way around. The mother took new responsibilities: she had two new school children to care for while she instead could have expected to get progressively more and more assistance from her daughter (Holtedahl 1993; Parkin & Nyamwaya 1987). 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 against this background that Fanta and Thérèse are going to try to find out what kinds of social position to which their new magic, higher western education, will give them access.

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Résumé:

Magie et amour sur la route vers l'enseignement supérieur au Cameroun

Lisbeth Holtedahl

Dans le nord du Cameroun, comme ailleurs en Afrique, l'enseignement occidental a été jugé de manière très différente, pour être finalement accepté et adopté par divers groupes, plus ou moins à contre-cœur. La façon dont ce «nouveau savoir» influence la vie, la carrière et la position sociale des femmes a déjà été l'objet d'un article. Dans celui-ci, je souhaite centrer l'intérêt sur la façon dont les jeunes femmes accèdent à ce «nouveau savoir».

La découverte de l'effort fourni par les femmes pour acquérir ce «nouveau savoir» pourrait éclairer les contraintes spécifiques qu'elles rencontrent. On peut aussi en tirer des informations importantes sur la façon dont leur place dans la société détermine leur actuelle transformation d'identité.

Nous allons rencontrer deux jeunes femmes qui luttent pour accéder à un enseignement supérieur. L'une est chrétienne, l'autre musulmane et toutes deux ont à affronter la jalousie, la magie et l'agressivité des hommes qui se sentent menacés. Les expériences subjectives de la Chrétienne et de la Musulmane sont cependant différentes, et elles ne suivent pas obligatoirement les mêmes chemins. L'une des deux réussira-t-elle, ou peut-être les deux?